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**A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE ON THE GREEK MYTHOLOGY :**  
**REWRITINGS OF GREEK MYTHS BY CONTEMPORARY WOMEN WRITERS .**  
**A SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE PENELOPIAD BY MARGARET ATWOOD.**

**Dissertation Submitted to the Department of English in Partial Fulfillment of  
the Requirements for the Masters Degree**

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## **Dedication**

This work is dedicated to:

to my beloved mother who has supported me throughout the process of studying. Thank you for your unconditional support with my studies.

**Yassamina BRAHIMI**

## **Dedication**

This work is dedicated to:

my family and friends

**Asma BEN DJOUDI**



## Abstract

Since the dawn of humanity mythology has played a significant role in both shaping and depicting the values, norms, and aspects of people's cultures. It has been passed down from one generation to the next one through numerous means and is still present in different cultural aspects till nowadays. However, the archetypes in these myths have helped to oppress women personally and socially and have forced them to adopt identities which actually contradict their nature. Encouraged by the feminist movement, many thinkers and female writers especially have attempted to revise, deconstruct, and rewrite these myths from different points of view to uncover the ideology beneath them and to lay bare the reasons and consequences of this systematic oppression women have endured for ages. In so doing, they enabled women to speak their genuine experience through female characters in these myths. *The Penelopiad* by Margaret Atwood is considered as an archetype to the rewritings of Greek myths by contemporary female writers. The novella shows how *The Odyssey* is a male-focused text that has been read primarily without consideration of how gender affects the poem and its characters. Therefore, our focus of interest, in this research, is to explore the attempt to break away from the male-oriented myths so as to rewrite female experience. By rewriting the original work, *The Penelopiad* by Atwood does not only voice the genuine female experience but also paves the way for the creation of new myths which would celebrate female identity and freedom. It is also our intention to discuss the portrayal of women within a number of important ancient Greek myths and to focus on the examination of the rewritings of mythical female types under the light of feminist ideologies of identity. In this respect, concentrated on the emergence of new woman types out of old mythical female types, the study aimed to subvert the male-defined female character and her role in myths, and expressed the transgression of stereotypical roles that are prescribed by men.

**Keywords:** Feminism, Greek mythology, Rewriting, The Penelopiad.

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## General Introduction

Greek mythology has had influence on the culture, the art, the literature and remains part of western heritage and language. Greek mythology had been very influenced in western culture, particularly its art and literature. Early Greek writers produced long epic poems, romantic poetry, and some of the world's most famous stories. Literature as we know it in Western history has its origin in ancient Greece, which is a great source when it comes to myths of gods and heroes. These myths are a big part of Western literary inheritance, and they have served as a great inspiration for authors through all ages. Moreover, one of the oldest surviving works of the great Greek epic poetry are *the Iliad* and the *Odyssey* written by Homer around 800 BC.

*The Iliad* and *the Odyssey* tell stories that are part history, part fiction, and part mythology but represent how the Greeks remembered their past and understood their world. These two stories are also some of the most widely read books in the modern world because they set standards for storytelling, such as the characteristics of a hero's journey. However, the archetypes in these two myths particularly have helped to oppress women personally and socially and have forced them to adopt identities which actually contradict their nature.

Therefore, some authors have decided to take a feminist approach by rewriting these tales from a female point of view. The *Penelopiad* which is a novella written by the Canadian author Margaret Atwood. It is retelling of Homer's famous epic, *The Odyssey*, from the perspective of Penelope, Odysseus's wife, and her maids. The novella shows how *The Odyssey* is a male-focused text that has been read primarily without consideration of how gender affects the poem and its characters. It is considered as an archetype to the rewritings of Greek myths by contemporary female writers.

For this reason, a considerable number of the researchers have studied and interpreted the novel in different ways Julie Vandamme through his rewriting of the Penelope myth in Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad explores Penelope's portrayal in the Odyssey*, paying special attention to the description of her

character, the reunion between herself and Odysseus and the gender role she embodies as well as the portrayal of the maids in Homer's work. Whereas the researcher Sara Segura Arnedo in her thesis *Rewriting The Odyssey: Margaret Atwood's The Penelopiad* .discusses how Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad* gives voice to those unheard in the original work (*The Odyssey*) by means of the creation of a revisionary and postmodern rewrite of the classic myth of Odysseus and Penelope. So there was not much attention given to the theme of Mythology.

As for our research, We attempt to discuss the portrayal of women within a number of important ancient Greek myths and to focus on the examination of the rewritings of mythical female types under the light of feminist ideologies of identity . In this respect, concentrated on the emergence of new woman types out of old mythical female types, the study aimed to subvert the male-defined female character and her role in myths, and expressed the transgression of stereotypical roles that are prescribed by men.

The objective of this study is to explore the attempt of female writers and in particular Margaret Atwood to break away from the male-oriented myths so as to rewrite female experience. Our thesis aims, Firstly, to investigate the portrayal of women in ancient Greek myths. Secondly, It is also our aim to explore the deconstruction of the mythical female types represented by the characters of Penelope and the maids in Margaret Atwood's *the Penelopiad*. And Finally to reveal the postmodern techniques that the author adopted to highlight the feminist voice of her novella.

For that reason, the main questions that we will try to examine are:

- How has ancient Greek mythology portrayed women in its myths?
- What are the different strategies the author adopted to highlight the feminist voice of her novella?

To answer the research questions, we shall formulate the following hypotheses:

- Women in Greek mythology were commonly portrayed as devious, manipulative, hazardous to men, and deceitful.
- the novella *The Penelopiad* acquires its feminist nature when Margaret Atwood adopted feminist narrative voice

Since the main focus of the study is on the feminist perspective, this thesis will be conducted within the framework of feminist Theory. To conduct our research, we will rely on a number of volumes;

books, articles, dissertations, and memoirs that discuss the selected work such as *Containing the Kalon Kakon: The Portrayal of Women in Ancient Greek Mythology* by Meehan Dossa and *Rewriting the Odyssey in the Twenty-First Century: Mary Zimmerman's Odyssey and Margaret Atwood's Penelopiad* by Suzuki, Mihoko ..., as well as many others.

Thus, This work is divided into two chapters; The First chapter sheds light on the etymology, content and meaning of myths with a special attention to the Greek mythology. this chapter also discusses a number of important ancient Greek works such as Hesiod's and Homer's works and the portrayal of women within them. then, it gives an overview of feminism. and Finally, the First chapter closes with a presentation of a Feminist Criticism of women portrayal in Greek mythology. The Second chapter aims to analyze *the Penelopiad* by Margaret Atwood as an example of rewritings of Greek myth by contemporary women writers. Then, it sheds light on the postmodern techniques that Atwood used in order to transform *the Odyssey* as a 8th century BCE male narrative into *The Penelopiad* as a postmodern feminist narrative. and Finally it shows how Margaret Atwood depicted women in her novel "*The Penelopiad*".

## **Chapter One**

### **Myths as Ideological Tools of Patriarchal Systems**

#### **Introduction**

Since the beginning of time many Cultures in different parts of the world have emerged within distinct civilisations and each Culture has left its own Mythology. Moreover, Mythology represents a vital link between culture and myth; myths reflect society and, in turn, eternalized societal relationships apparent within the mythology. The ties between mythological portrayals of human characters reflected the patriarchal society, to which the myths belonged. The antique Greek mythology may be a well-known mythology which has influenced the western culture, art, literature and remains part of western heritage and language. Like all stories, Greek myths are entertaining, morally instructive, intriguing, inspirational. and Above all they are fascinating. This is why we invite you to follow us on a journey into Greek Mythology and Myths.

This chapter deals with the etymology, content and meaning of myths. Then, it sheds light on the most well known works in the Greek mythology literature and it is also our intention to discuss the portrayal of women within these works. And Finally, we will ,as an attempt, present a feminist criticism of women portrayal in Greek mythology.

#### **1. Myths in the Historical Context**

Etymologically speaking, The word myth is derived from the Greek word mythos, which means speech, tale, or story. Generally Myths are passed down orally from one generation to another generation, and they are depicted in a variety of ways, including stories, poems, paintings, architecture, dances and many others. (Morford and Lenardon, p3). Despite the challenge of creating a single definition of myths due to the fact that the meaning of myths differs from one culture to another. Scholars have developed

elaborate theories on the meaning and interpretation of myth. In their book *Classical Mythology*, Morford

Mark P. O and Robert J Lenardon say:

The impossibility of establishing a satisfactory definition of myth has not deterred scholars from developing comprehensive theories on the meaning and interpretation of myth, often to provide bases for a hypothesis about its origins. One thing is certain: no single theory of myth can cover all kinds of myths. The variety of traditional tales is matched by the variety of their origins and significance; as a result, no monolithic theory can succeed in achieving universal applicability. Definitions of myth will tend to be either too limiting or so broad as to be virtually useless. In the last analysis, definitions are enlightening because they succeed in identifying particular characteristics of different types of stories and thus provide criteria for classification. (Morford and Lenardon, p3)

Before the invention of the printing machines, some myths were handed down initially as a portion of an oral tradition which resulted in multiple spoken versions of the same myth and in some cases oral traditions vanish. And it was until the invention of printing machines stories were collected and printed as a single document which helps in preserving myths from vanishing and keeping only one version of a given myth (Parker, Stanton, p11). Moreover, in some cultures myths were and still regarded as important stories. Before the era of science and technology, humans were not aware of the reasons behind the occurrence of natural phenomena such as drought, sunset, flood and so on. Therefore, myths were created in many civilizations in order to explain the Earth's natural phenomena and life's mysteries in a way that made sense to the people at that time. For example, Greek and Roman mythology served as science and religion for centuries in both cultures (Joshua J, par 2). Up till now myths continue to play an important role in cultural studies, and their importance spread out also in various fields of study including literature, philosophy, history and many other parts of human life. Over centuries, poets, writers, dramatists, and musicians have used myths. And by the time of scientific rationalism appeared, myths were discarded, but they continued to serve as a point of reference for metaphysical and psychological problems. Myths were at risk of being degraded to fairy tales of non-existent gods and monsters due to the Christian religion, but as the science of psychology grew, myths found a new status and a new cause to exist. Freud as an example, is one of the major scientists who attempted to elucidate the story of Oedipus Rex, who murdered his father and slept with his mother. Though the first passion of Greek myths faded, Greek myths reclaimed their place in history and people's hearts and became more popular in the world again.

The term Greek Mythology in particular refers to the set of mythical stories, legends told by Ancient Greeks. They existed long before the Romans, with evidence pointing to their existence as early as 2000 BC. The myths cover a wide range of topics, including the origins of human practices and rituals, the laws of nature, gods and heroes, and so on. Many myths describe the origins of the universe and the creation of man. The Greek myths also have a pantheon of gods and goddesses who rule and order the universe, the most notable are the Olympians, the gods and goddesses who live on Mount Olympus. It is unarguable that the most widely used elements of myth in fiction are from Greek mythology, especially its gods and goddesses. It was also regarded as the foundation of their spiritual and religious beliefs, as well as their cultural activities. Most of these Ancient Greek myths survived till today because they have been included in the works of famous writers and historians (Cartwright, par1).

## **2. Greek Mythology Literature**

As the Greeks were fond of myths and stories, it is no surprise that they created great works of literature. The history of Greek mythology literature may be traced back to the time of the first well-known Greek poets, Homer and Hesiod. Early Greek writers produced long epic poems, romantic poetry, and some of the world's most famous stories and tales. Among the earliest Greek writings are two great epic poems, *the Iliad* and *the Odyssey*, by the poet Homer, who stands out as the most important cultural figure in ancient Greek history (Norman). In his article entitled *Ancient Greek Literature*, Donald L. Wasson refers to Greek literature as :

Greek literature has influenced not only its Roman neighbors to the west but also countless generations across the European continent. Greek writers are responsible for the introduction of such genres as poetry, tragedy, comedy, and western philosophy to the world. These Greek authors were born not only on the soil of their native Greece but also in Asia Minor (Ionia), the islands of the Aegean, Sicily, and southern Italy. (Wasson, par 1)

Moreover, Homer's two famous 8th-century BC epic poems, *the Odyssey* and *the Iliad*, like most epics, both poems describe the achievements of great heroes. *The Iliad* is considered to be the earliest work in the whole Western literary tradition, and one of the best known and loved stories of all time. It recounts the Greek siege of the city of Troy in the Trojan War. *The Odyssey* describes the obstacles that the Greek

hero Odysseus faced on his way back from the Trojan war. For 10 years after the war ends, Odysseus tries to get home, but many challenges stand in his way. He has to fight his way past dreadful monsters, powerful magicians, and angry gods. Both *the Iliad* and *the Odyssey* are great tales of adventure. But to the Greeks *Homer's* poems were much more than just entertainment. They were of significant importance to ancient Greek education. People memorize long passages of the poems as part of their lessons and admire heroes described in them as symbols of Greece's great history. *Homer's* poems influenced modern writers. They copied his writing styles and borrowed some of the stories and ideas he wrote about in his works (Norman).

Just like *Homer*, *Hesiod* was interested in poetry. However, *Hesiod* lived after *Homer* and both run parallel when learning about classical mythology. *Hesiod* is known as the "Father of Greek Didactic Poetry." while, *Homer* is well-known for his epic poetry, but when it comes to ancient didactic poetry, *Hesiod* reigns supreme. The distinction is that epic poetry is usually a narrative poem that recounts the story of a hero or event, while didactic poetry is intended to teach a moral lesson while still entertaining the reader. Nevertheless, it is important also to shed light on *Hesiod's* survived works *Theogony* and *Works and Days*. *Theogony* tells the story of the universe's journey from nothingness and Chaos to what is it on today, and stories of Gods and Goddesses who came out from Chaos and it also accounts how Zeus became supreme and organized the Olympian pantheon, and *the Works and Days*, describing peasant life (Morford and Lenardon 666-8).

As one can see most of Greek poets were men, however the first feminist lyric poet was a woman named *Sappho* (7th – 6th century BCE). *Sappho* represents the apotheosis of Greek lyric poetry. Her poems were beautiful and emotional. Most of her poems were about love and relationships with her friends and family. In her *Hymn to Aphrodite*, *Sappho* used the image of Homeric warfare to describe her emotions (197).

Despite the fact that just a limited portion of ancient Greek literature has survived. Yet it remains so important that it was preserved for millennia and contributed to the formation of modern European culture. Ancient Greek authors left significant legacies, including literary styles and themes, early mythologies and histories, and, of course, words to describe important aspects of life.

### 3. Greek myths as patriarchal narratives

Despite the fact that women in mythology are well-documented and discussed, they are reflected through a male discourse. As most of the Greek myths are recorded by men, Women in the ancient Greek myths had a little honorable representations comparing to their male counterparts. In his article entitled *Women in Ancient Greece*, Mark Cartwright states:

As in other ancient male-dominated literature, women are often cast as troublemakers, from jealous Hera to Aphrodite employing her charms to make men lose their wits. Myths and literature abound with female characters trying their best to derail the plans of male heroes, from the supreme witch Medea to the deadly, if lovely, Sirens. (Cartwright, par 4)

Furthermore, The study of Greek mythology demonstrates that these narratives established two categories of women. On the one hand, women are denied subjecthood and autonomy, and in the most of cases, they are passive agents. For example, in the greatest epics of Western literature, *the Iliad* and *the Odyssey*, which are also among the main sources for Greek myths, female characters are invariably described in relation to men; they are spouses, mothers, slaves, sisters, daughters, or lovers. Moreover, these women are obedient to patriarchal rules. For example, in the famous epic, Penelope, Odysseus's wife, is portrayed as the epitome of loyalty. According to the patriarchal ideal, she exhibits the typical characteristics of a good wife and woman: humility, fidelity, obedience, and excellence in household tasks. In addition to these representations of mortal women through the lens of patriarchy, in the Greek pantheon, the immortals reflect the phallogentric assumptions of Greek culture; that is, in Greek myths, goddesses, for example Hera, Hestia, Athena and Artemis, are either wives or virgins who are in perfect accord with patriarchal values and customs. Furthermore, while these goddesses are depicted as formidable females, their power is essentially masculine. For example, Athena is the most well known female figure with good reputation and this can be justified in the fact that she was born out of Zeus' head and never knew a mother. Athena exhibits no distinctively feminine traits, as a result of which, she is counted on the male side (unknown, par 3). In Greek mythology, on the other hand, those women figures that do not conform to the patriarchal norms are presented as “femme fatales”, “seductresses” or “witches” like figures such as

Helen, Circe and Medusa. To put it briefly, women in Greek myths are portrayed according to patriarchal assumptions.

In very clear terms, women in Greek mythology were depicted very differently comparing to their male counterparts; they were often less significant characters compared to male characters. And they adopted roles of villains and victims. They were seen as inferior beings (caleighbrussard, par3). Examples of such female characters in Greek mythology include: Pandora. According to *Hesiod's Theogony*, Pandora, the first mortal woman to be created in Greek mythology, is cast as a troublemaker and the one who introduced trouble in the lives of men. As she opened the box containing all the evils of the world, she allowed them all to escape and earned women the designation of troublemakers. Pandora's curiosity and folly in opening the box were eternally considered as typical female characteristics, presumably justifying their inferiority to males. They also gained a reputation as cunning, crafty temptresses who would haphazardly complicate men's life. Women were linked with deception, while men were famed for their power and strength (unknown, par1). On the contrary, in Greek mythology, men are portrayed as heroic heroes who preserve the world from the evil that women bring about. The Greek myth of *Prometheus and the Theft of Fire* is one of the many examples of the Greek patriarchal narratives which highlights the male heroic deeds. In this myth Prometheus is presented as a great, brave hero who felt pity for humans and who took a risk of his own life in order to help humans. Another male character is Hercules, who is introduced to the audience as a great hero and the world's strongest man, who was tricked by the goddess, Hera, to kill his own family, as a result of which he had to do all of the 12 Tasks to atone for his terrible actions. One of Hercules' responsibilities was to fight the Hydra, a nine-headed monster (ushistory.org, par12). Along with Prometheus and Hercules, Odysseus is presented as a great hero and husband who tries hard to refrain from the seduction of women whom he encounters during his journey to return to his own wife and family.

Besides, In the famous Greek myth of *the Odyssey*, Homer employs the patriarchal themes to distinguish between the two genders. The main concern of the poem is to discuss Odysseus' struggle to get home. Throughout *the Odyssey*, women serve as a great obstacle on his journey. Throughout the poem, women are represented as a source of temptation. First, Odysseus is trapped on an island by the nymph Calypso. Because she is a woman, Calypso's power is based on seduction rather than physical might. The

Goddess's erotic attraction kept Odysseus Occupied, which prevented him from continuing his journey home. When he finally escapes Calypso, Odysseus find himself obliged to deal with another female trickster,Circe .Circe tricks Odysseus' men by poison their beer, turning them into pigs, and making them forget about their homeland.When her tricks fail to entice Odysseus, she seduces him into her bed, and once more,the man is succumbed to the seduction of woman. Circe continued to use her feminine charm to distract Odysseus and his men from their journey for a year. as they continue on their path,They are faced by yet another female adversary in the form of the Sirens.These women use their lovely, enticing song to draw in passers-by.The lovely singing of the Sirens tortures Odysseus' naked ears as his ship passes past.Odysseus is driven insane by longing by this song, and his men must tie him to the ship side to prevent him from succumbing to temptation.The Sirens could have caused Odysseus' ship to crash on the rocks ,If it were not for his men(unknown,par2).

As previously stated, Odysseus' trip home to Ithaca is interspersed by encounters with female characters who strive to prolong his journey and win his devotion.Despite the fact that these women use their feminine charms to entice men, they are ultimately reliant on men's and gods' actions and orders.As independent and controlling as these women appeared to be,their social rank limited their ability to exercise complete autonomy.Athena is the only Greek female figure with power.however, even she must first consult her power with the most powerful male figure in Greek mythology,Zeus, before she can do anything. The immortal female figure Calypso, manages to keep Odysseus on her island for seven years, however,Hermes' appearance puts an end to Calypso's possession.Even though she is able to influence Odysseus for a time via her sex appeal, Zeus keeps power over her through the messenger god Hermes.Circe's schemes are also thwarted by Hermes, who gives Odysseus a medication that renders him immune to her poison.When her plotting potion fails to work on Odysseus, she supplicates him, thereby recognizing his power over her.This demonstrates that women's feminine wiles can only go them so far before they have to yield to men.The Sirens are a perfect example of the powerless female manipulating men with her attractiveness.Despite the fact that their seductive singing is enough to drive men insane, these women's physical portrayal is emblematic of their ultimately inferior status.The Sirens can project their singing out into the sea, but they can't move since they're stuck to the rocks.by doing so,*Homer*

reveals through their picture that ancient women could endeavor to improve their situation and sometimes exert control over males, but they were not independent(unknown,par4).

To conclude,there is no wonder why Greek mythology has been regarded as patriarchal and demeaning to women.as one can easily recognize the non equivalent representation of both genders in Greek myths.Many of the most famous male characters are dominant,for example the gods are envisioned as a patriarchal family, with Zeus as the head of the family and supreme authority, whereas for female characters are typically either "woman-ish" and associated with women's roles or tricky and wicked, and a source of misery and suffering for their male partners (Gough,par1).Therefore,it may be argued that patriarchy has employed the negative representation of women in ideological narratives throughout centuries.

#### **4.Feminist Criticism of Women Portrayal in Greek Mythology**

Although there is no such thing as feminist myth critique, most theorists and writers discuss the nature of myths and their impact on society and literature.They highlight the androcentric aspect of myths, which interpret the world through the lens and discourse of males.In recent decades and thanks to the feminist movement's influence , a resurgence of feminist studies has been witnessed in various domains of social sciences, including anthropology, archaeology, and even theology.As a result, mythologies are being examined from a feminist perspective; male-oriented elements of these narratives are being investigated, and the suppressed or unvoiced women of mythologies are being tracked.Feminist critics point out that in myths, women are defined first and foremost by their household responsibilities and by their relationships with males, whether as daughters, husbands, lovers, or mothers.Culture, and consequently civilization, is depicted in myths as a product of men, while women's functions are relegated to the private sphere(Dörschel,p97).The article written by *Dessa Meehan* ,entitled,*Containing the Kalon Kakon: The Portrayal of Women in Ancient Greek Mythology* ,on *Armstrong Undergraduate Journal of History* ,provides a useful background and extensive review of the various depictions of women in the ancient Greek world.

Before addressing this issue, however, we need to take an overview on feminism and its key concepts.So before everything else,the term Feminism refers to a wide spectrum of political, intellectual,

and social movements whose common purpose is to define, establish, and achieve gender equality in politics, economics, personal life, and society. Feminism's core premise is to pursue equality and justice for women in all aspects of life, as well as to provide possibilities for women to receive resources that men may obtain for free. Feminism includes a wide range of topics, including the history of women's oppression and potential strategies for overcoming "author's anxiety" by creating its own literary canon. Furthermore, The central tenet of feminist theory is that, since the dawn of human civilization, women have been treated as second-class citizens by masculine-dominated social discourse and western philosophical tradition. Every civilization's history demonstrates that women have always been subordinated to a position in which they have no way of reclaiming their unique identity unless and until they revisit history, explore it, and finally re-establish it through their own experiences and insights. ( Raina 3372)

Moreover, Men have gained enormous control over women and nature in all three areas—historical traces, philosophical or epistemic tradition, and ecological inhalation. To put it another way, women's historical insignificance forces them to rely on and derive their existence from men. Additionally, Women have been largely regarded as a non-entity, second mistake, nonexistent creature, or a sexual object oscillating between libido and envy by the epistemic and philosophical systems. The third exploitation corresponds to nature's exploitation, because women have always been compared to nature and the objects of nature that are serene, cool, and irresistible-loving, caring, clay, earth, moon, reproduction, and nurturing. These notions are called into question by feminist thinkers who demonstrate protest and resistance to masculine coded codes of conduct. They are based on theoretical and philosophical frameworks, and at the same time make historical revisions to history, in order to reconstruct the new feminist literary classics. Therefore, feminist literary theory is to extend feminism into a theoretical or philosophical framework to analyze the reasons for the low status of women and explore women's literary traditions. By dispersing the central idea of the penis, they have gone through different stages to establish their own unique autonomous identity. These stages of development have gradually helped them obtain what generations have denied them. ( Raina 3373)

Generally, Simone de Beauvoir is believed to have laid the real theoretical foundations for feminist criticism. In her book "*Second Sex*" (1949), De Beauvoir asserted that femininity is not innate, but rather a social construction developed through a long-term socialization process. She states that women's low self-esteem is mainly caused by these three factors. Women are always taught first to help men in order to gain a presence related to men. Second, encourage women to externalize all aspects of femininity, such as meekness, indifference, and beauty, so that they can value themselves in society. Third, women enjoy fewer rights than men. Therefore, he argued that it was not the inferiority complex of women that made them historically insignificant, but rather that historical insignificance destined them to be inferior. According to her, women are not born, but become women through a male-centered socialization process, a socialization process that reduces women to a secondary sex and reduces them to a state of inferiority and subordination. Simone de Beauvoir notes:

One is not born, but rather becomes a woman. No biological, psychological or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine.

Since, the main focus of feminist theory remains the premise that since the beginning of human civilization, the literary world is dominated by male writers and female writing is excluded from mainstream literature and culture. In fact, it is not credible that women perform social functions in the public or private sector to improve their economic conditions. The patriarchal social structure also prevents them from pursuing literary ambitions, which is the belief in the innate superiority of men. Writers and theorists must challenge the oppressive doctrine and practice of patriarchy through alternative narratives, which will provide a safe area for women to explore and create unique art genres. ( Raina 3373)

To fill this gap, Virginia Woolf's book "*A Room of One's Own*" (1929) was originally written as a lecture she was invited to give on the topic of "Women and Fiction" at Gerton College in Cambridge in 1928. As a basis for feminist criticism. Her thesis accuses women of low self-esteem and makes a powerful materialistic analysis of the oppression of women. She argued that women's books are not written like

men's. She also insisted that artistic genius is not a natural miracle, but is developed in the educated and leisure class fulfilling two criteria. The first is *a room of one's own* which symbolizes an independent space for women as an individual. The second is economic independence. When these two criteria are met, women will perform well in social and literary activities. She also proposed the concept of androgyny. Although she clarifies, she believes that although the body is divided into two genders, the mind can contain the characteristics of both ( Raina 3373).

Christine Delphy is one of many thinkers influenced by Beauvoir, and based on Marxist principles, She proposed a feminist critique of patriarchy. Delphy coined the term materialist feminism in the early 1970s and focused her analysis on the family as an economic unit. She explained that just as the lower class throughout society is oppressed by the upper class, women are subordinate in the family. Therefore, no matter which socioeconomic class they belong to, women constitute an independent oppressed class because they are oppressed as women. For Delphi, marriage is an employment contract that connects women with unpaid housework and is usually regarded as "housework", which is considered not important enough to be taken seriously as a legitimate issue or issue. In addition, Delphi believes that women's housework at home is unpaid, not because their work is unimportant, or involves less time or work than paid work done by men outside the home, but because patriarchy defines women's work Housework. As a non-worker role. (Tyson 97)

For Hélène Cixous, Language reveals its so-called patriarchal dualism, which can be defined as seeing the world from a polarized perspective, where one is considered superior to the other. Examples include such hierarchical binary oppositions as head/heart, father/mother, cul-ture/nature, intelligible/palpable (that which can be understood by the mind versus that which can be felt by the body), sun/moon, and activity/passivity. Oppositions like this organize our way of thinking, and for each opposition Cixous asks, "Where is [the woman]?" (91). That is, which side of each opposition is assumed to define some aspect of the female? Obviously, according to patriarchal thinking, women occupy the right side of these opposites. Patriarchy considers the lower side — heart, mother, nature, tangible, moon, and passivity — and assumes that men define themselves as the left side of each opposition. On the other hand,

patriarchy considers the higher side: mind, parent, culture, understandable, sun, and activity. “Traditionally,” Cixous notes, “the question of sexual difference is treated by coupling it with the opposition activity/passivity” (92). That is to say, the patriarchal thinking holds that women are inherently passive, while men are inherently active, because it is natural that there are differences between the two sexes in this situation. Therefore, if a woman is not passive, she is not a real woman. Of course, women are naturally submissive to men, men are natural leaders, and so on (Tyson 100).

Back to our main issue, so as we have mentioned previously, Women in Greek mythology are portrayed as having a variety of negative emotions, including anger, jealousy, promiscuity, and even male subversion. More explicitly, most Greek myths depicted women as deceitful, shameful, manipulative, and a scourge to man, necessitating male dominance in order to prevent women from fragmenting society. For example, Pandora was shameful and a plague upon society as she was responsible for releasing all pain and suffering into the world. Aphrodite was deceitful, manipulative, and disgraceful by flaunting her sexuality in a way that would have equated to a prostitute amongst mortal women (Meehan, par 5).

While there are several works that can be used to demonstrate the state of women in the classical period, those that are most relevant to the feminist standpoint are the *Homeric* epics and the poems of Hesiod (Gabriel, p8). In both of Homer's works *the odyssey* and *the iliad* men were always in charge and women were always subordinate to their male counterparts. According to Meehan's mentioned above statement, epic poetry by Homer did not only depict misogyny and patriarchy but they were also used as educational instruments to convey patriarchy and male dominance.

Texts that were often used as educational tools, like Oeconomicus or Homer's epic poetry, deliver themes of patriarchy and male domination that are hard to miss: men were in charge; women were always subordinate to their male counterparts. (Meehan, par2)

Hesiod's book entitled *Theogony* does not serve only as a vehicle for him to present the origin of the ancient Greek gods, but also to convey a misogynistic view of the female as a whole. His work highlights the strict limitations of women in ancient Greece (Gabriel, p7). And the best example of misogyny from his work is The story of Pandora's Box, which documented the imposition of man's greatest calamity, that is

women, the story was one of the most identifiable tales of misogyny in ancient Greece. As the Classics professor Barry Powell states:

The folktale of Pandora, like the biblical story of Adam and Eve, is etiological to explain the origin of woman, marriage, and suffering in the world. [Powell, p115]

According to Hesiod's *Theogony*, Pandora was created by Zeus as a punishment for Prometheus stealing fire from the gods. Basically, the concept of woman was created mainly as a punishment for man's wrongdoing; Pandora was a deception, glamorous on the outside but filled with chaos, trickery, and eventually, suffering. Despite the fact that the divine-mortal war was started by Prometheus, a male deity. Neither he nor Zeus were ever blamed for their role in bringing evil into the universe. and Pandora was the only one to blame, a woman who would not have existed if Prometheus had not stolen fire from the gods. One of the most patriarchal themes of this story is the assignment of blame to Pandora, despite being just as much a victim of Zeus' retribution as men, she was the one who was held accountable, while Prometheus was exonerated.

The patriarchal and misogynistic ideologies pervade all of the mentioned myth, and particularly when Hesiod depicts Pandora opening the jar:

“ But the woman took off the great lid of the jar (3) with her hands and scattered all these and her thought caused sorrow and mischief to men. Only Hope remained there in an unbreakable home within under the rim of the great jar, and did not fly out at the door;.” (Hesiod, “Works and Days,” lines 90-105.)

In the previous passage, Hesiod declares unequivocally that Pandora was responsible for inflicting evil and darkness on society and for preventing hope from escaping and mitigating at least some of the consequences of the newfound darkness. The only error men made was allowing women to join their homes. In other words, Pandora, in a way, punished men twice: once by releasing evil into the world, and again by suffocating the only thing that may shine through the despair that is hope. Pandora's explicit portrayal as the scourge of man reveals the ancient Greek view of women as "poor, fickle, and opportunistic," bound up in the implicit desire to hurt men. Based on the beliefs the Greeks had as a result of this written fable, it is clear that the injustice, seclusion, and misogyny displayed to women in Classical Greece was intended to prevent women from inflicting more damage. In addition to that, Pandora's

portrayal as frail, dishonest, and the demise of man was associated with male dominance and the isolation of elite women in the Greek world(Meehan ,par 8).

While Hesiod's account centers on the negative impact of women,It is quite remarkable that the Homeric poems emphasise the importance of women's role as wife, housekeeper, and mother, and praise her beauty as well as her intellect. Homer in *The Odyssey* celebrates Penelope for her strengths. Penelope, as an epitome of the faithful wife, does not only produce and raise heirs but also takes care of her household by weaving and watching over the slaves and goods while her husband is away.With this in mind it becomes clear that Ancient Greek society believes in the idea of necessary seclusion for women in the domestic affairs since the Greek fables clearly illustrated the dangers of allowing women to practice freedom, for that reason most noblemen kept their women in seclusion.and the best example of this can be found in Homer's *Odyssey* when Telemachus says:

“So mother, go back to your quarters. Tend to your own tasks,the distaff and the loom, and keep the women working hard as well. As for giving orders, men will see to that, but I most of all: I hold the reins of power in this house.”[Homer,*The Odyssey*,(1. 409-414)]

In the previous passage we see that Telemachus instructed his mother to leave all military action to him, while she occupied herself with weaving and other appropriate feminine activities.in this case,according to Meehan, If Telemachus had given his mother even the slightest control or opinion in 'male matters,' he would have essentially given up his sole authority in the household and elevated his mother, a woman, to a degree of input previously specified for men(Meehan,par4).

Yet,Mortal women like Pandora were not the only ones depicted as deceitful and manipulative; Aphrodite, Zeus' immortal daughter,was often depicted as crafty,dishonest ,clever and wily.As the goddess of love, sexual desire, and erotic attraction, Aphrodite exerted immense power over both men and women's emotions(par11). The Greek poetess Sappho described her in one of her poems as:

“Fancy-throned deathless Aphrodite, deceitful child of Zeus.”(Sappho,p 224)

One such story is Aphrodite's affair with her brother Ares, the god of war, was one such example.as *Homer* describe them:

“lay together in the house of Hephaestus secretly; and Ares gave her [Aphrodite] many gifts, and shamed the bed of the lord Hephaestus.”[Homer]

It is time now to shed some light on reality, both Ares and Aphrodite committed adultery in Hephaestus' palace, but it appears that Aphrodite was eventually blamed for the transgression due to her control over love and lust. Even though Ares was wrong to cuckold Hephaestus and sleep with her, all of the gods excuse him and justify his act as a reaction to Aphrodite's beauty and promiscuity. Aphrodite's behavior and reputation of being promiscuous was seen as the wrong, while the gods' and men's contributions to the experience could not have been avoided because Aphrodite's desirable spells totally ensnared them. There was nothing men could do to stop Aphrodite's wanton lust, and in this she acted as a model for all women (Meehan, par13).

To conclude, as this section illustrates, it's undeniable that ancient Greek myths were written to keep powerful men in power. In fact, none of the women described in the myths discussed above had their own voices. All of the Greek myths were created for men and featured only male characters. Pandora never responded to the accusations and blame leveled against her in either *Theogony* or *Works and Days*; her guilt was simply accepted by the male readers as a warning against giving women authority or independence. In Classical Greece, the educational parts of Hesiod's and Homer's epic poetry were utilized to rigidly enforce women's isolation rather than celebrate their contribution to society in the form of progeny and household care. Greek myths drew upon the negative characteristics of women in mythology like Pandora and Aphrodite. Women in mythology were frequently depicted as being crafty, manipulative, dangerous to men, and deceptive. Women's voices are never heard as loudly as men's in Classical Greece, reinforcing the concept that, despite feminine depiction in mythology, men are ultimately in charge of society (Meehan, par30).

## **Conclusion**

The term Greek Mythology in particular refers to the set of mythical stories, legends told by Ancient Greeks. Many myths describe the origins of the universe and the creation of man. Further, we can trace back the history of Greek mythology literature to the time of the earliest well-known Greek poets Homer and Hesiod. Among the earliest Greek writings are two great epic poems, *the Iliad* and *the Odyssey*,

by the poet Homer.in addition to Hesiod's survived works *Theogony* and *Works and Days*.The first feminists lyric poet was a woman named Sappho.Next,Since most of the works of Greek literature were told by men,Women in the ancient Greek myths had a little honorable representations in comparison to their male counterparts.Women in Greek mythology are portrayed as having a variety of negative emotions, including anger,jealousy, promiscuity, and even male subversion.moreover,Feminist critics point out that in myths, women are defined first and foremost by their household responsibilities and by their relationships with males, whether as daughters, husbands, lovers, or mothers.Women's voices are never heard as loudly as men's in Classical Greece, reinforcing the concept that, despite feminine depiction in mythology, men are ultimately in charge of society.

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## Chapter Two

### The Penelopiad as a Feminist Rewrite of the Greek Myth: The Odyssey

#### Introduction

Myths in its widest meaning have always been an important part of human life and history, therefore many ancient and contemporary writers have choose to use them in their writings. encouraged by the feminist movement, women writers especially have attempted to revise and rewrite these myths.

After the theoretical background of myths as Ideological Tools of Patriarchal Systems in the first chapter ,The coming chapter aims to analyze *the Penelopiad* by Margeret Atwood as an example of rewritings of Greek myth by contemporary women writers. by means of exploring the postmodern techniques that Atwood used in order to transform *the Odyssey* as a 8th century BCE male narrative into *The Penelopiad* as a postmodern feminist narrative. this chapter also tackles the deconstruction of mythical female types in Margaret Atwood's' *the penelopiad* and finally it shows how Margaret Atwood depicted women in her novel "The Penelopiad".

#### 1. **The Deconstruction of Mythical Female Types in Margaret Atwood's' the Penelopiad.**

Regardless of the fact that women in mythology are well-documented and discussed, they are reflected through a male discourse. Since myths are documented by men, and there is no surviving record of literary tradition by women in ancient times. The representation of women in ancient Greek mythology is regarded as inaccurate records. In Larrington's words "myths about women are not necessarily women's

myths” (Larrington,xii), and she adds: “Historically women have been disbarred from the means to fix their

myths in literary form, to give them a distinctively female perspective” (Larrington,xii).Moreover, the female versions of stories must frequently be represented by the women themselves in order to be accurate and heard.The French feminist critic H el ene Cixous was the first who calls for this in her essay *The Laugh of Medusa*:

“Women must put herself into the text – as into the world and into history – by her own movement. The future must no longer be determined by the past. I do not deny that the effects of the past are still with us. But I refuse to strengthen them by repeating them, to confer upon them an irremovability the equivalent of destiny, to confuse the biological with the cultural” (H el ene Cixous, p.875).

Before addressing this issue, however, we must first understand what a rewrite is,Rewriting and reinterpretation of myths is the act of rereading the original texts in order to create new meanings out of old ones.This new creation is an act of deconstruction and, at the same time a reconstruction in a subversive way.In this sense, deconstruction of mythological female types entails a reconsideration of the dark, negative, evil, subservient, and aggressive meanings ascribed to mythical female types.Furthermore,female types, having been given meaning by male culture, have been deprived of a voice that is original and permanent, and have been portrayed by the words of male poets( t eyaka,p29).Patriarchal portrayals of women and Goddesses set the roles that any female should play in a given myth.In this regard,the aim of rewriting myths using a feminist approach is to combat misogynistic attitudes as Larrington states:

“by changing the focus of the narrative from a male character to a female character, or by shifting the terms of the myth so that what was a ‘negative’ female role-model becomes a positive one” (Larrington,p.441).

Likewise,Susan Sellers emphasizes the importance of revaluing mythical images in terms of comprehending the profound meanings that patriarchal culture alters . She insists that:

Rewriting myth is not only a matter of weaving in new images and situations but also involves the task of excavation, sifting through the layerings of adverse patriarchal renderings from which women were excluded, marginalized or depicted negatively to salvage and reinterpret as well as discard (Sellers,p.22).

Therefore, altering myths is fundamentally deconstructive. It deconstructs myth's fundamental meaning and replaces it with a new one that is a subverted version of the old one that serves as a

supplement. The act of rewriting results in the act of differentiating. It deconstructs the myths' ultimate, totalizing meaning, which is coded with female and male role models, and instead opens up fresh avenues for alternate interpretations "encompassing different possibilities and other points of view" (Sellers, p. 29). Consequently, as Sellers states "It would enable us to envisage rewritings not only as pleasurable reversals or ingenious tinkering but as new embroideries, adding fresh images and colors to radically alter the picture" (Sellers, p.29).

According to Sellers, feminist studies of myth rereading and rewriting strives to change the picture whose patterns are shaped by patriarchal power. The main purpose of this research is to look into how myths construct gender structures. In order to accomplish this, it focuses on the mythic investigation of the transition from matriarchal to patriarchal power, as well as the deconstruction of gender structure as a patriarchal power production in terms of identity politics. In this respect, feminist criticism of myths emphasizes how women are represented in myths and the important changes in the role of female types as a result of the shift from a matriarchal to a patriarchal societal framework (Öteyaka, p30).

In the same vein, the concept of revisionary fiction, it refers to rewriting of old texts with the intention of correcting , which is common in postmodernist works. According to Widdowson, revisionary fiction implies that :

A hitherto one-way form of written exchange, where the reader could only passively receive the message handed down by a classic text, has now become a two-way correspondence in which the recipient answers or replies to the version of things as originally delineate (Widdowson, p.501).

In other words, revisionary fiction consists of looking back to canonical or widely-known works in order to retell the same story; it gives voice to silenced perspectives so as to tell the untold story and fill in the blanks: "A view from the margin differs markedly from a view from the centre" (Widdowson, p501).

Feminism is one of the movements that uses revisionary fiction to give voice to women who have traditionally been marginalized in literary tradition. Adrienne Rich states:

we females need to know the writing of the past, and know it differently than we have ever known it; not to pass on a tradition but to break its hold over us (Rich, p19).

This is a key concept in corrective rewrites: modifying the perspective of previous works to reflect a shift in our current society. Because women have historically been marginalized in canonical works, it

appears that those texts must be revised in order to produce a story that favors female perspectives.

Adrienne Rich put it this way:

Re-vision--the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction--is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival. Until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves. And this drive to self knowledge, for women, is more than a search for identity: it is part of our refusal of the self-destructiveness of male -dominated society. A radical critique of literature, feminist in its impulse, would take the work first of all as a clue to how we live, how we have been living, how we have been led to imagine ourselves, how our language has trapped well as liberated us, how the very act of naming has been till now a male prerogative, and how we can begin to see and name--and therefore live--afresh. (Rich,p18)

Back to our core issue, and by applying all what have been said above on *the Penelopiad* by Margaret Atwood, we come to see that in her attempt of rewriting the old myth of *the odyssey*, atwood concentrates on the emergence of new woman types out of old mythical female types, by so doing she aims to subvert the male-defined female character and her role in myths, and expressed the transgression of stereotypical roles that are prescribed by men. From this perspective, we can see how Penelope and the maids deconstructs the stereotypical roles which are submissive and in the service of male desire , and how Atwood rewrites the roles of women in myths in accordance with postfeminist ideology of freedom of choice and speech is scrutinized. Thus it has been argued that *The Penelopiad* by Atwood displays the layers of the maids and Penelope's transformation process from simple women to powerful women by subverting the traditional role models in myths. In that respect, Penelope and the maids become a new and deconstructed version of various mythical female types mentioned previously in Homer's male version .

Furthermore, Aiming the deconstruction of the traditional role models appointed for women in myths, Atwood has focused on rereading and rewriting the gender ideology of myths by approaching them within a postmodern, feminist point of view. In that respect, Penelope and the maids become a new text of the old ones by giving them a voice to tell their version of the story. This deconstruction de-centers the original idea of women and their roles signified in myths, and erases the presence of stereotyped meaning. Thus it defers the established meaning and differentiates it by distancing it from its origin.

As the products of male writers, myths celebrated the glorification of male power as warriors, husbands and rulers while placing women in secondary status that serves male desire and needs. As an

example of this type of women in Penelope in Homer's *the Odyssey*, Penelope was depicted as the ideal female figure, has no more agency than any other wife, mother, or slave in the ancient Greek world. Her 'idealized' feminine image is an ideal because it is presented from a male point of view. In that respect, women are given an identity from a male point of view. Her character stands to promote the 'good' female that remains not only subservient to the male gender sphere but also complicit in reinforcing the subjugated position of women. Penelope's character demonstrates that at times the typical 'tricky' female wives are permissible within the male system of domination. They must, however, serve to foster the androcentric order. In Penelope's case, for example, her clever tricks maintained her fidelity to her husband and her loyalty to her family (Gabriel, p14). In this regard, how Penelope rewrites a new text out of old texts of mythical female types has been the focus of this study. Consequently, Atwood aimed to display Penelope as a "supplement" to mythical female types by deconstructing them in terms of postmodern politics such as women's right to speak for themselves. Thus, Penelope, within a postfeminist frame, prioritizes individual choice and responsibility free from male impact, and becomes an emblem of changing character of mythical female types. As an emblem of this changing character, Penelope becomes the author of her own myth.

To conclude with, Penelope tells her own story of becoming a woman by deconstructing the assigned role models for women. In her deconstruction of mythical female types, Penelope creates a new woman type who is an active, strong woman. In this creation, Penelope celebrates the consumption based femininity with a special emphasis on beauty and cleverness. Consequently, she deconstructs mythical female types with a postfeminist ideology that celebrates women's individual choices, putting an end to masculine hegemony in describing and determining women's preferences.

## **2. The Odyssey as a Postmodern Feminist Rewritten Myth**

Margaret Atwood's novella *The Penelopiad* was published in 2005 as part of the first set of books in the *Canongate Myth Series*. It is a re-telling of Homer's most celebrated epic *Odyssey*. In this novel, Atwood reconstructs her own version of Homer's *Odyssey* from a contemporary feminist point of view. In her novella, she adds new dimensions and perspectives to gender, mythical beliefs, and thoughts about

traditions, customs, and characters , imbuing them with a new outlook and voice. In her essay, *Deconstructing Gender and Myth in Margaret Atwood's The Penelopiad*, Irshad states that:

Margaret Atwood's novella *The Penelopiad* presents a revisionary account of Homer's *Odyssey* from the contemporary position. In this paper it is shown how Atwood not only deconstructs gender but also the mythical version of male narrative of Homer's *Odyssey* by giving voice to the female characters that otherwise remain imprisoned in the traditional gender stereotypes. The mythical patterns and beliefs turn out to be instrumental in encapsulating and shielding the reality of gender. The truth behind Penelope's celebrated chastity and Odysseus's courage is deftly investigated to prove the hollowness and instability of gendered identities. (Irshad, p35)

As the previous passage indicates, The story is told by Penelope, Odysseus' wife, and the twelve maids who were guiltlessly hanged to death by Odysseus and his son Telemachus. The twelve maids who were hung to death by Odysseus and his son Telemachus without remorse. By doing so, Atwood deconstructs the gender and myth related to the male narrative of Homer's *Odyssey* by giving voice to the female characters, freeing them from the traditional beliefs, practices, conventional patterns, and norms, fetters of femininity.

Homer's *Odyssey* tells the story of King Odysseus' return from the Trojan War to Ithaca after a twenty-year absence. He is said to have spent ten years fighting for Helene's husband, King Menelaus, in order to bring Helen back from Troy. For the rest ten years he is believed to have been lost and wondering in the Aegean sea, "trying to get home, enduring hardships, conquering or evading monsters, and sleeping with goddesses" (Atwood, p.xix). His wife Penelope, King Icarius' daughter and Helene's cousin, is well-known. His wife Penelope, King Icarius' daughter and Helene's cousin, is well-known for her unwavering fidelity, "quintessential faithful wife" and known for her, "intelligence and constancy" (Atwood, p.xix). Penelope not only remains faithful and waits for her husband for twenty years, but she also declines the suitors' marriage proposals. She cleverly postpones her marriage decision by maneuvering the trick of choosing one of the suitors after the completion of shroud weaving of her father-in-law. She cleverly postpones her marriage decision by maneuvering the trick of choosing one of the suitors after the completion of shroud weaving of her father-in-law. The story concludes with Odysseus and his son Telemachus slaughtering the suitors and twelve maids and Penelope's reunion with Odysseus after twenty long years apart.

While Homer's *the Odyssey* focuses on Odysseus' struggle to get home to Penelope, *The Penelopiad* focuses on Penelope's many thoughts and reflections concerning many things including: her marriage to Odysseus, her jealousy towards her attractive cousin Helen of Troy, the difficulty of raising their son alone, and her struggles to manage the household on her own, holding all the suitors out when everyone when Odysseus was away, and the reason behind Odysseus' hanging all of her Twelve maids after slaughtering the suitors.

After this introduction to Homer's and Atwood's versions of the same story it is time now to shed light on the postmodern techniques that Atwood used in order to transform the 8th century BCE male narrative into a postmodern feminist narrative in which Penelope is not a passive character but she is an active one. First, in terms of the stylistic transformation, Atwood transforms the epic, serious tone into the humorous, lighter tone. Probably the most obvious example is when Atwood writes: "The gods couldn't seem to keep their hands or paws or beaks off mortal women, they were always raping someone or other" (Atwood, p.20). Then, in terms of the thematic shifts, Atwood actually does only one simple thing which is shifting the focus of the narrative from a male character to a female character, in other words the focus of the narrative shifts from the male character Odysseus to the female character Penelope, and as a result of which the narrative voice shifts from Odysseus' point of view to Penelope's point of view, this time we read *The Odyssey* from Penelope's point of view, it is Penelope's version of the story. Penelope opens her narration by explaining why she is recounting a well-known narrative. She expresses her dissatisfaction with the accepted interpretation of Odysseus' story as told in *The Odyssey*. She is now going to tell her own narrative. Nevertheless, it is important to mention that Penelope doesn't state that she is going to tell the truth; however, she says that she is going to tell the story from her own perspective. As Penelope states: "It's my turn to do a little story-making. I owe it to myself" (Atwood, p.3.). Since it is Penelope's version of the story now, the title of narrative turns to be "the Penelopiad" which is parallel to Homer's title "the Odyssey". This significant change in voice, focus and title results in the whole transformation of the myth as it she adds new dimensions and perspectives to this original myth. Nevertheless, it is worthy to mention that Penelope is telling the same story as Homer. For example, There are some passages where we can clearly see the parallelism with the original work, but this time the narrator specifies particular passages from The

Odyssey: "Helen ... had run away with a prince of Troy [Paris] ... It was love at first sight" (Atwood, p77); however, this time, instead of an abduction, it appears that we are talking about true love. Furthermore, secondary characters are elevated to the status of protagonists, as Atwood states in the introduction: "I've chosen to give the telling of the story to Penelope and to the twelve hanged maids" (xxi).

Furthermore, through Penelope's point of view, we learn about events that occurred prior to the story told in *The Odyssey*, such as Penelope's childhood in chapter three and, more specifically, her marriage to Odysseus in chapter six. Through her voice we become aware of the fact that she was forced to marry a man she didn't love, and, as if that wasn't enough, she also had to wait diligently and patiently for him for twenty years. However, *the Penelopiad* mainly recounts incidents that happened after the events of *The Odyssey*, such as the dwelling of most of the characters in Hades in chapters five and twenty seven. There is an odd passage in chapter twenty seven when the protagonist describes her life in her new home: she says they will return to the living world if they drink from the Waters of Forgetfulness, where they are expected to forget their previous lives and, in doing so, prepare to live new adventures (Atwood, p186).

As a result of the shift in voice and the narrative's focal point, there is now a new way of perceiving the main characters, especially Odysseus. The protagonist, Odysseus, is no longer regarded as the great hero, but rather as the antagonist of Penelope and, particularly, of the maids. As it is written in the novel: "Why did you murder us? What had we done to you that required our deaths? You never answered that" (Atwood, p193). For example, Telemachus is now a member of Parliament and Odysseus "has been a French general, a Mongolian invader, a tycoon in America and a headhunter in Borneo" (Atwood, p189), giving Homer's epic male heroes a comedic twist.

Moreover, in *The Penelopiad*, the heroic achievements of Odysseus are severely questioned, with the Cyclops potentially being "a one-eyed tavern keeper"; the cannibals possibly being a few men fighting; and Circe probably not being a goddess but a woman working in a whorehouse (83-4). According to Atwood, as she: "the minstrels took up these themes and embroidered them considerably" (84), as a result, Homer's *Odyssey* appears to be a fabrication whose sole intention is to mythologize the figure of Odysseus. According to Atwood, as she states: "the minstrels took up these themes and embroidered them

considerably” (Atwood,p84). As a result, Homer's *Odyssey* appears to be a fabrication whose sole intention is to mythologize the figure of Odysseus.

Finally, all of these alterations lead to the most important transformation: the semantic transformation, which in this case is corrective. Atwood raises some interesting points about allegedly invented facets of *The Odyssey* that mythologize the male in order to challenge the authenticity of the source work, and therefore male authority. In addition to that, the shift in the narrative's focal point suggests a corrective purpose on Atwood's part, since shifting females from the margins to the center entails a clear ideological subversion: that they should not be on the margins. However, *The Penelopiad* is not solely militant in its subversion, as it depicts female characters very differently, as we will try to demonstrate in the following segment.

### **3. The Depiction of Women in The Penelopiad**

As previously stated, Atwood's work centers on Penelope as protagonist, the narrative's focal point, and narrator, putting her and other female voice at the center of the narrative. As opposed to *the Odyssey's* account, her characters are knowledgeable, strong, and active participants in their own lives. But there's one more thing to consider: the problem of class. As the author admits, “ I've always been haunted by the hanged maids” (Atwood,p.xxi), therefore she decides to give them a chance to tell their story. It is important to recognize that they have been subjected to two forms of oppression: “social oppression as slaves and gender oppression in a patriarchal society. Despite the fact that Helen is responsible for the death of countless warriors as her husband fought for her return when she left him for another man. Yet She is never punished or threatened. As Penelope states in Chapter five, " Helen was never punished, not one bit." unlike, the Twelve maids, who kill no one but speaks against Odysseus, they are hanged to death. This discrepancy emphasizes the wide disparity in class between lower- and upper-class women. By obtaining a narrative voice, they become stronger and capable of seeking justice ... even if it takes over 3000 years” (Bottez,p55). In this way, they serve as a Greek chorus throughout the narrative, whose combined voice condemns societal hypocrisy, or, as Suzuki says, “the sexual double standard that condones his

Odysseus'adultery while finding their the maids's liaisons deserving of deadly punishment" (Suzuki,p5).When reading *The Odyssey*, some may think that the murder of the maids is justifiable according to the protagonist point of view ,but in fact he is killing them for a crime he is the only responsible for its happening. By giving voice to the maids, Atwood attempts to censure this unfairness, so that to reveal the brutality and injustice of Homer's male heroes.We can see how much they have suffered throughout their lives by dint of this collective voice:"We were animal young, to be disposed of at / will, / Sold, drowned in the well, traded, used, / discarded when bloomless" (Atwood,p67-8).they add,"Dirt was our concern, dirt was our business, dirt was our specialty, dirt was our fault".

In the previous passage from *The Penelopiad*, the Twelve maids recount their miserable life as maids .They are always cleaning up after others, but they never clean up after themselves.They make clean,comfortable beds, but they never get to sleep in them. They're also chastised for being filthy.The maids play on the double meaning of dirty by implying that they are sexually promiscuous and available.

As a matter of fact ,The maids are not passive victims; they attempt to seek justice.In chapter 26, entitled"*The Chorus Line: The Trial of Odysseus, as Videotaped by the Maids,*"is totally devoted to the pursuit of this justice.The maids send Odysseus to a twenty-first-century tribunal, where the guilt is not that the suitors raped the maids, but that they did it without Odysseus' permission:"It wasn't the fact of their being raped that told against them, in the mind of Odysseus. It's that they were raped without permission" (Atwood,p181).To summarize, in Suzuki's words:

"Atwood re-envisions the maids not merely as silent victims sacrificed to the interests of patriarchy and the ruling class, but as energetic satirists of the dominant order, who literally put Odysseus on trial" (Suzuki,p7).

However, the maids express their displeasure not only with Odysseus' decision, but also with Penelope: after all, they remain her servants.They tell us conflicting versions of the same narrative, so we don't know who to believe or to trust.On the one hand,Penelope's biggest regret is that she believes she played a part in the deaths of the Twelve maids. As she includes them in her plan to deceive the suitors.As a result,Several maids are raped by the suitors before Odysseus kills all of them.In her expression of her regret Penelope says:"This plan came to grief". She concedes that she could be to blame for the maids' deaths, as the author states: "I told my twelve young maids ... to hang around the Suitors and spy on them,

using whatever enticing arts they could invent ... In retrospect I can see that my actions were ill-considered, and caused harm” (Atwood,p115, 118). However, She did not do this on purpose, because she loved the maids and did not hold a grudge against the girl who betrayed her in regards to the weaving of the shroud. The maids, on the other hand, believe that Penelope has always wanted them dead. They believe she told Eurycleia that they were :“feckless and / disloyal ... / and not fit to be / The dotting slaves of such a Lord as he [Odysseus]!” (150). These tensions are not limited to the servants. In Atwood's novel, We see that most of the female characters, if not all of them, are not connected or even friendly with one another. Throughout the novel, Penelope, for example, does not get along with her mother-in-law Anticleia, who is “a prune-mouthed woman” (60), paired with Eurycleia, Odysseus's nurse, who is a tyrant (Atwood,p79).

Furthermore, in *The Penelopiad*, Penelope constantly berates and shames Helen for her behavior. For example, As the title of chapter 11 indicates, "*Helen Ruins My Life*", Penelope despises her cousin Helen since she has ruined her life. When referring to the Trojan War Penelope says: “Disaster struck. It was because of Helen, as the entire world knows by now” (Atwood,p76), and she even refers to her as a “septic bitch” (Atwood,p131). The majority of Penelope's remarks have a judgmental tone and, to a large extent, reflect Penelope's jealousy of Helen. For instance, Penelope discusses how no man would “ever kill himself for love of [Penelope,]” stating “I was not a man-eater, I was not a Siren, I was not like cousin Helen who loved to make conquests just to show she could” (Atwood,29). Penelope feels the need to set herself apart from Helen's actions and position herself as superior to Helen. Despite her beauty and popularity. Further, Penelope and Helen have a competing relationship since they represent two different types of women, the beautiful and the intelligent. As Penelope asserts, “I was a kind girl –kinder than Helen ... I knew I would have to have something to offer instead of beauty. I was clever, everyone said so ” (Atwood,p29).

With all of this in mind, it could be claimed that “the feminine heroine grows up in a world without female solidarity, where women in fact police each other on behalf of patriarchal tyranny”(Andrew,p109). In this scenario, not a single woman can be called innocent; they all appear to be at odds with one another. Thus, what we have here is sororophobia, which literally means a female fear of or

hatred towards her sister, i.e. other women. If, as Michie has stated, “feminists [in general] are trapped in a model of sisterhood which denies differences among women” (qtd. in Cramer 240), Atwood appears to have gone farther, illustrating the tensions between the various female characters in her novel. Atwood does not want to depict an idealized and collaborative female community, but rather a more realistic world in which women criticize rather than support one another.

## **Conclusion**

Many modern Western feminist writers turn to myths to revise and rewrite them with a special focus on strong female figures. Therefore, we can see a trend when it comes to the use of ancient Greek mythical women in 21st century literature, and the selected work by Margaret Atwood, *The Penelopiad*, is just one of many examples that gave focus to ancient Greek women these past years. Furthermore, by using postmodern narrative techniques Atwood weaves a complex retelling of the story in which Penelope is not a passive character but she is an active one, and deconstructs the old mythical female types that was determined by male authors into a new one. More particularly, in her rewriting of Homer's *Odyssey*, Atwood draws attention to Penelope's side of the story. In which, Penelope, the epitome of loyalty in Homer's epic, tells her own story of Odysseus' home back and her reunion with him after two decades. Additionally, unlike Homer version of the story which muted and marginize women, Atwood's version gives voice to those who were muted in the original work, particularly to Penelope and the maids. As a result the maids were able to achieve some sort of freedom and justice as their voice was heard this time and they were able to blame and punish Odysseus. Further, Atwood appears to have gone farther, when illustrating the tensions between the various female characters in her novel. As she does not depict an idealized and collaborative female community, but rather a more realistic world in which women criticize rather than support one another. Finally, Atwood represented women in a well and quite accurate image; even the less important female characters show aspects of strength in *the Penelopiad*. To conclude with, we can say that Atwood has practiced a promising mythmaking in her novel. She has rewritten the female experience which has been restricted to a position either related to a man such as a wife, a mother, a sister, a daughter or defined by men such as a lunatic, a witch, a whore or a hysteric. The heroines of

Atwood are strong and active women who listen to their bodies like Penelope and the maids, who stand up for their right. The heroines of Atwood rewrite the female experience by crossing the older ones leaving their traces. They survive through the worst situations, saving their experiences to change sad stories of sad women into happy and promising ones, not only for themselves but also for those who are inspired by them. The female characters Atwood creates carry the potential to write new stories out of the old ones.

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## General Conclusion

Our conclusion will revisit the central questions presented in the general introduction. This will be done in hopes of answering these questions directly while also providing a discussion of our overall findings. These foundational questions guided our study of the Greek myths and aimed to tackle women's portrayal within a number of important ancient Greek works such as Hesiod's and Homer's works. And to explore the deconstruction of the mythical female types represented by the female characters in Margaret Atwood's *the Penelopiad*. There is no denying that ancient Greek instructional texts were written to keep elite men in power. In fact, none of the women discussed in the preceding texts have their own voices. All of the texts were written about men and featured only male characters.

Throughout history, gender stereotypes have been a controversial issue for many religions and cultures. Women were commonly regarded as the subservient gender. On the other hand, men were regarded as heroic and strong. A fact that is not uncommon in Ancient Greek literature. However, powerful and strong women, such as Athena, are not celebrated as much in Greek mythology. Through the epic poem *The Odyssey*, Homer depicts the positive and negative roles of women. The women in the poem are represented by the contrasting actions of Penelope and the maids.

In this research, the main concern was on the way modern writers attempted to revise ancient Greek works from a feminist point of view and give voice to unheard women in the original text, or even to reflect a change in our current society. Atwood's *The Penelopiad* is a postmodern rewriting in which feminist discourse criticizes the patriarchal view of the sex relationship in the Odysseus- Penelope couple as well as Penelope and the maids. In order to exhibit the flaws of patriarchy, Atwood shifts the narrative's center from the masculine to the feminine, focusing on the victims of this type of society.

In her feminist rewriting, Atwood looks beyond the Homeric myth to a contemporary society that, despite its theoretical principles of gender equality, is unable to provide a climate in which women are granted full rights. In this context, rewriting becomes not only a tool for social criticism, but also a battleground against the center, and the myth is the story that must be destroyed because it reflects a guilt-ridden, intolerant mentality that is incompatible with progress.

Finally, throughout this research we have seen how ancient Greek texts presented women in their ancient literary works. In addition, we have seen how In the nineteenth century, female authors used myths to write about topics that were taboo for women, such as sex, rage, and the woman as victim, artist, and social change agent. Later, female authors rewrote myths more deliberately, incorporating female experience into traditionally male-written female characters. Female authors are changing the way we perceive myths by giving voice to silenced female characters.

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