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Myths/Legends Trojan War

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Penelopiad

Overview

* Windows into Penelope’s life during the events of the Odyssey
  + Telling stories and interacting with past as she’s in the afterlife
* And a little bit before she got married
* Atwood defines her goals for the Penelopiad
  + “I’ve chosen to give the telling of the story to Penelope and to the twelve hanged maids.”
  + “What led to the hanging of the maids and what was Penelope really up to?”
* Scenes take multiple shapes
  + Prose for Penelope
  + Any other structure for maids
    - Songs, poems, scripts, trial, etc.
* Drawing from Iliad and Odyssey
  + other sources talking about Penelope’s family history
  + “Mythic material was originally oral, and also local – a myth would be told one way in one place and quite differently in another. I have drawn on material other than the Odyssey, especially in the details of Penelope’s parentage, her early life and marriage, and the scandalous rumors circulating about her.”
* Homer’s characters are shown more like humans than divine heroes
  + More genuine emotions and motivations
  + Everyone’s a lot less noble and heroic
  + Only women, the men are more personifications of violence, greed, and rape
* I’m generally going to focus on the interpretation of the characters and how they related to their own life vs. how it’s told in the epics
  + The quotes are meant to give an idea of the character’s voice, personality, and interpretation
  + Also, I just like those quotes

Character Interpretations

* Penelope – the faithful people-pleaser
  + Like so many other women, her life didn’t belong to her
    - Forces enacting life upon her
  + Cousin to Helen, constant comparisons
    - Penelope was the smart one, Helen was the pretty one
    - Everyone had to compliment them both equally
      * But they also knew Helen was more valuable in real life
    - Penelope’s qualities not valued “up close” or by Homeric standards for women
      * Except for loyalty
  + Profoundly lonely during Odysseus’s wanderings
    - Isolation in Ithaca leading to hyper dependency
  + Manufactured scene where she realizes Odysseus is Odysseus for his ego
  + Men force sexuality upon her
    - They keep telling her they thought a widow would be super horny
    - Odysseus’s joke in the beginning “if anyone else knows about the olive tree bed I’ll know you’re cheating on me”
      * He said that to a teenager
    - Reducing women to sexual desire that needs to be controlled
      * Also significant in the case of the maids
  + Penelopiad Quotes
    - “[…] what did I amount to? […] a stick used to beat other women with.” Pg 2
    - “I wanted happy endings in those days, and happy endings are best achieved by keeping the right doors locked and going to sleep during the rampages.” Pg 3
    - “No man will ever kill himself for love of me.” Pg 29
    - “Which of us can resist the temptation of being thought indispensable?” pg 80
    - “There is indeed something delightful about being able to combine obedience and disobedience in the same act.” Pg 117
* Helen – narcissistic seductress
  + Affair with Paris treated as consensual
    - Left willingly, wanted to stay
  + Takes pride in the violence on her behalf
    - Always know how many people died because of her
    - Asks Penelope if the deaths of the suitors made her feel pretty
  + Every story ends with “and I was so beautiful that everyone apologized and/or was brutally murdered”
  + Chapter 11 is titled Helen Ruins my Life so. That kind of covers it.
  + Penelopiad Quotes
    - “The part of the story she enjoyed the most was the number of men who’d died in the Athenian war: she took their deaths as a tribute to herself.” Pg 75
    - “Cousin Helen, Helen the lovely, Helen the septic bitch, root cause of all my misfortunes.” Pg 131
    - “You wouldn’t have any idea of how exhausting it is, having such vast numbers of men quarreling over you.” Pg 154
* Eurycleia – overbearing mother-in-law, obsessed with her mediocre son-like figure
  + In the most loving caring and adoring way possible she reminds me of my grandma
  + Spoils Telemachus and Odysseus
    - They can do no wrong in her eyes
    - But Penelope spoils her maids
  + Major cause for Penelope’s boredom
    - Won’t let her parent Telemachus or do any housework
    - Helps in keeping her isolated and ignorant
  + The one to rat out the 12 maids who are hanged
    - The ones that Penelope “spoiled”
* Maids
  + Speak mostly in the form of songs or plays
  + Interesting note about marriage by Penelope
    - Marriage purely to transfer property, so it was only for people who had some to give
  + Criticism of some academic’s insistence on the maids as a symbol
    - Called the Anthropology Lecture, I thought I escaped :( (Anthro major)
    - Olympic level gymnastics to keep Odysseus from being the bad guy by modern standards
  + Essentially raised by Penelope, her only connection to the outside world
    - Main form of news and communication
  + Relationship with Telemachus
    - Both being raised in the palace by Penelope, had a sibling relationship
    - But fundamental divide bc Telemachus would one day own them
  + Reaction to rape
    - Almost ritualistic mourning and recovery period
    - Operating and surviving under current oppressive culture
  + Quotes
    - “Infants when he was an infant, wailing just as he wailed, Helpless as he was helpless, but ten times more helpless as well,” Pg 66
    - “We were animal young to be disposed of at will, Sold, drowned in the well, traded, used, discarded when bloomless.” Pg 67
    - “But then the morning wakes us up: Once more we toil and slave, And hoist our skirts at their command for every prick and knave.” Pg 126
    - “You don’t have to think of us as real girls, real flesh and blood, real pain, real injustice. […] Consider us pure symbol. We’re no more real than money.” Pg 168