

# TOMES Eden U2T2 Task 2.1

## Essay Plan 1: Male-Female Relationships in *The Penelopiad*

### Thesis:

Atwood represents male-female relationships as fundamentally transactional and dictated by patriarchal power, exposing marriage as a contract, love as performance, and sexual encounters for the marginalized as exploitation.

### P1: Marriage = Business, not Love

- **Point:** Marriage isn't romantic; it's a deal where women are assets.
  - **Evidence:**
    - Penelope literally a prize in a contest (p. 23).
    - She felt like “a package of meat” getting married (p. 29).
    - Her marriage was “payment” for Odysseus's help with Helen (p. 28).
  - **Importance:** This de-romanticizes the core relationship, highlighting women's economic and political function as property. Penelope's cynicism is clear, as she understands her own material value.
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### P2: Odysseus & Penelope: Master Deceivers

- **Point:** Their relationship isn't about trust, it's about being cunning. They're both liars.
- **Evidence:**
  - Penelope *knew* Odysseus was a “tricky and a liar” (p. 9).
  - Their reunion is a carefully staged test (bed secret, p. 93).
  - Penelope admits they're “proficient and shameless liars” to each other (p. 94).

- **Importance:** This challenges the “constant Penelope” myth, showing them as intellectual equals in deceit. Their “love” and trust are performances essential for survival.
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### P3: Maids: Exploitation & Violence

- **Point:** For lower-class women, relationships are just abuse and death, with no power.
  - **Evidence:**
    - Maids had no choice if men wanted sex: “could not refuse” (p. 16).
    - Penelope viewed their rape as “thievery” against Odysseus, not against them (p. 65).
    - Their hanging was an “honour killing” (p. 104) for being victims.
  - **Importance:** This emphasizes the brutal intersection of class and gender. The Maids' collective voice exposes the true horror often hidden by hero narratives, underscoring their disposable lives.
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## Essay Plan 2: Disruption of Beliefs about Female Agency

### Thesis:

Atwood's *The Penelopiad* significantly disrupts traditional notions of female agency through Penelope's cunning and the Maids' collective voice. Yet, it critically examines the severe limitations and ultimate vulnerability of this agency within patriarchal structures.

### P1: Penelope: Not So Passive After All

- **Point:** Penelope isn't just sitting around; she shows intelligence and manipulates things.
- **Evidence:**

- From the grave, she takes control of the story: “my turn to do a little story-making” (p. 10).
  - The shroud trick was a planned “scheme” (p. 63), not just busywork.
  - She set up the bow contest for Odysseus: “I set the whole thing up on purpose” (p. 77).
  - **Importance:** Penelope's agency is rooted in her intellect and strategic planning. This portrayal subverts her traditional image, showing her as clever and calculating rather than merely virtuous.
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## P2: Maids: Giving Voice to the Voiceless

- **Point:** The biggest disruption: the Maids get a voice and challenge *everything*.
  - **Evidence:**
    - The “Chorus Line” format alone is agency — they get to speak.
    - “An Anthropology Lecture” (p. 89-91): they literally theorize their own deaths, taking back control of their narrative.
    - “The Trial of Odysseus” (p. 95-99): they accuse him directly, demanding justice.
  - **Importance:** This represents a powerful reclamation of their story. Anonymous figures become central, and their posthumous haunting signifies an enduring form of resistance.
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## P3: Agency Has Its Limits

- **Point:** Even with agency, women are still stuck. Male power ultimately wins.
- **Evidence:**
  - Penelope's own plan using the maids leads to their rape and death (p. 66). Accidental harm.
  - She's locked up, unable to stop the slaughter (p. 86). “Couldn't save my geese.”
  - Maids hanged despite their agency, receiving no trial or real justice (p. 103).

- **Importance:** Agency is depicted as a struggle *within* oppressive systems, not a means of escape. The book highlights the brutality in the original myths—even when viewed from a new perspective—emphasizing the dominance of male power.