

Penelope's role in "The Odyssey" is vitally important, and yet her character gets no recognition for her heroic deeds. Through time, Penelope's character has come to represent the sexism in our world that women must face every day.

In "The Odyssey" Penelope is faced with many tasks like raising a son without a father, running the island of Ithaca, constantly warding off suitors, not to mention with extreme concern for her husband's well being. Penelope is constantly tasked with mundane tasks and unlike Odysseus she can't give in to her temptations because she knows in her heart that she has a responsibility to her son and to the island of Ithaca. In the end Penelope is more hard working and loyal than Odysseus himself.

In most stories women like Penelope are romanticized. The woman are only in the story to compliment the man. It seems like this was the original intent for Penelope; she was to represent the perfect trophy wife, loving and loyal willing to wait for Odysseus to return. Although most people don't believe in the outdated sexism that the Odyssey represents. They enjoy the romanticized idea of missing a loved one. An example of this is Lorena McKennitt, a singer and songwriter who wrote a song about Penelope. In her song she seems to totally disregard any struggle that Penelope might have had to while Odysseus was away. Instead, talking about the ache she gets when she is without a man. In the song she whines "I'll keep your heart with mine, till you come to me" (McKennitt line 7&8). McKennitt makes it sound as if women are useless without a male counterpart. McKennitt may be alluding to the fact that, that is how women have always been treated.

Penelope represents the modern day woman for using her wits against men. The "wise Penelope" tricks the suitors by weaving and unweaving a tapestry "So by day she'd weave at her great and growing web—by night, by the light of torches set beside her, she would unravel all she'd done" (153-155, book 24). Penelope's constant weaving during the day represents mundane tasks forced on women by gender roles. The tasks are seemingly easy but vital to society. The unweaving at night represents a man's need to discredit females. By saying a woman's job is so easy and simple, men discredit women to make their achievements seem bigger. This is why people constantly see nurses as women's jobs because that is an extension of their domestic roles in society and it's also why people constantly see doctors as primarily men's jobs.

Dorothy Parker does an excellent job at showing the sexism between men and women's accomplishments. In her poem "Penelope" she writes two stanzas, the first one sarcastically describes how hard Odysseus' journey must have been while the second describes the harsh reality that Penelope had to face while her husband was gone. The poem ends with an emotionally heavy line "they will call him brave". Although Dorothy Parker describes the two tasks as equals, she shows that even though they are deemed equal the men will always be recognized because their task is supposedly more important.

Without women society would crumble.. Penelope gives modern day women a sense of comfort because her story lets women know they are important and vital to societal function.