

ENGLISH – THE PENELOPIAD & PHOTOGRAPH 51

'Hard work is my destiny, death is my fate' (The Penelopiad),' to be born at the right time. There's an element of fate to it.' (Photograph 51) Compare what these texts say about destiny and fate.

Dogmatic social structures and divine power determine the fate of individuals who are incapable of usurping the restrictions placed upon them in both ancient Grecian and modern times. Margaret Atwood and Anna Zeigler provide an 'Anthropological' commentary on historical events that have been shrouded in misogyny within their respective texts 'The Penelopiad' and 'Photograph 51', revealing the untold female perspective and the greater societal repercussions of a failure to recognise gender-based oppression. Whilst both the novella and play elucidate that predetermined destiny's hold a significant role in the unravelling of future events, both Atwood and Zeigler assert the capacity for the 'destiny' of different individuals within the social hierarchy to be rewritten via the contrasting of modern and 'archaic' values. Hence, the authors identify the necessity for modern society as a whole, in which the audience resides, to be further transformed in light of the lack of 'recognition' of the significant contributions of women in their various roles in society.

Hard work and ultimately death are the consequences suffered by women as a result of their placement in the social hierarchy. Due to the superiority of the 'patriarchal penis' that determines the 'fate' of all individuals within society, women are banished to the bottom of the social structure, left to deal with 'the menial tasks'; fulfilling their role as 'the dirty girls'. Atwood reveals the harsh reality faced by women by unveiling the 'sordid' aspect of Gracean culture that has historically been 'discarded' in Homer's portrayal of the 'Odyssey'. Whilst Homer omits the 'rape and murder' synonymous with female existence, Atwood uses the vile abuse of women as a leit-'motif' symbolic of the control men possess over every aspect of women's lives. As a consequence of the arbitrary system of monarchy and gender politics, by 'virtue' of being 'born to the wrong parents' the maids were left to fend for themselves, unable to 'refuse' sexual intercourse with their 'owners ... sons of [their] owners ... visiting noblemen ... [or] ignoble boys alike'. This recurrent abuse of women, recurs throughout the text, acting as a constant reminder of the lack of power women hold even over their own bodies. Similarly when Penelopiad recounts the events from Hades, in her state of 'liplessness, bonelessness and breastlessness' over which she lacks control, Penelope notes the presence of all the women mentioned whilst she 'plays the minstrel' in Hades with her, thus it is implied that those women too have 'crossed the river' stix in to Hades. Even in their new state of 'non-existence', Eurycleia continues to find 'babies to tend' beyond the life of 'the still living', the maids continue to 'smell out Odysseus wherever he goes' in a desperate search for justice and Helen continues to provide a 'robeless' display to the 'throng of men'. Despite all of the women being confined to the 'gloomy halls of Hades', Odysseus is capable of escaping his 'fate' of death befitted to the 'Year King', he is often found on the 'other side of the river', his status and 'birth right' granting him the capacity to avoid both hard labour and the continuation of it beyond death. Like the ultimate death of the maids, who were 'moon-maiden' sacrifices for their 'high priestess Queen Penelope', as a result of Rosalind's extreme dedication to her work, her life was also 'sacrificed' for the sake of discovery. Rosalind similarly to the maids is given the roles which Wilkins 'dreams' his life 'being free of'. The maids were 'murdered' due to their 'rape' by the suitors who Penelope had asked them to gain the 'trust', like the maids Rosalind worked diligently with the 'beam' whose light 'cut through [her] flesh' ultimately resulting in her fatal 'ovarian cancer'. Her failure to be 'recognised' historically correlates with the lack of concern afforded to the maids and whilst it was as a consequence of Rosalind's hard work and necessity to 'never be wrong' that the 'secret of life'

was discovered her name is not the answer to 'the occasional pub quiz' merely due to her chance birth at the bottom of the gender based political hierarchy. Rosalind is also incapable of remembering who 'played Hermione' in the Winter's Tale, concluding that she 'simply didn't stand out'; in the Shakespearean drama Hermione also labors via the carrying of her son Mamillius which is ultimately the cause of her death as her husband Leontes becomes assured that the child is as a result of Hermione and Pelixones having an affair, leading Leontes to unjustly 'murder' her as well. Ultimately, Atwood and Zeigler highlight the inevitable arduous and fatal 'destiny' attributed to women due to their placement at the bottom of the social hierarchy.

The fate of individuals is depicted by both Atwood and Zeigler as being determined by a higher power. Atwood's *The Penelopiad* highlights the role of both the Fates and the Gods as controlling the lives of 'mortals'; the fates 'measuring out lives' and 'entwining the lives of women and men'. These powerful entities are depicted by Atwood as feared by all individuals, with Penelope careful to 'sing [their] praises' during her 'mortal' existence but develops a healthy sense of power in the afterlife conceding the necessity for Hades to 'redecorate'. Whilst 'Photograph 51' also features the existence of a higher authority in the form of 'Kings college', an institution that mirrors the 'archaic' 'patriarchal' system upon which the societies of Ithaca and Sparta are founded, Zeigler's play lacks the female 'divine' authorities present in 'The Penelopiad'. With Female Gods like 'Athena' as well as the control possessed by the 'three fatal sisters' exemplified as a form of superior jurisdiction. The father figure is also depicted as possessing a higher authority both in *The Penelopiad* and *Photograph 51*. The attempted infanticide of Penelope by her father, and his renaming of her 'duck' highlights the male figurehead's influential role within society as his actions determine her 'distrust' of men throughout her life and her 'early learning of the virtues of independence'. Penelope's childhood experience parallels the failure of Penelope's father to endorse her career choice, telling her 'no' when she expressed her yearning to continue to explore 'endless shapes overlapping' as a career. Without his harsh assertion a top 'a mountain in the lake district' that if she 'goes forward with this life [she] must never be wrong', Rosalind would not have worked so obsessively to ensure that her 'calculations' were correct and that the 'B form is definitely helical' - the ultimate reason for her 'destiny' to discover the 'secret of life' and her fate of not reaching 'her next birthday' due to her 'twin tumors'. Similarly, it is the control of Leontes in the *Winter's Tale* over his son, depriving him of maternal care that leads to mamillus' ultimate death. Thus, the control of primarily male figure heads both within the confines of family and 'divine' social structure determines the ultimate outcome of women in both texts.

Despite their confinement within 'patriarchal' power structures, women are capable of controlling the destiny of others. Atwood exemplifies the superior capacity of women to transcend oppressive social ethos via the use of their own individual talents. Helen whilst only being lifted upon a pedestal based on her 'attractive' physical appearance, an important attribute as determined by men, is able to utilise her own 'flirtatious' skill set in order to leave her male dominated marriage to menelaus and follow her heart to 'Paris of Troy' acting as a catalyst for the Trojan war. If it were not for her well-practiced amorous appearance, the 'fate' of the 'hordes of men' who fought in the Trojan war. Penelope's weaving and unweaving of her 'father-in-law's shroud', a skill based she developed through the compulsory (hand crafts) of the 'era'. 'In the evening Penelope would 'undo what [she] had accomplished' allowing her to prolong her selection of the suitors. However, 'Penelope's web' had dire consequences for both the suitors and the maids upon Odysseus' return, with her artful 'deception' resulting in the ultimate death of her 'beguiling' 'geese'. Although it was not the fate that Penelope had desired, despite her limited authority within the misogynistic social structure, Penelope controlled the fatal destiny of 'the pretty-cheeks'. Similarly, in *Photograph 51* Rosalind influences the 'race' for DNA, her work remaining 'instrumental' in Wilins, Watson and Crick obtaining the 'Nobel Prize'. Without her self

assurity and lack of 'room for humanity' and 'speculation' the structure of DNA would not have been 'deciphered' in a manner that could 'hold together'. However, like Penelope, Rosalind's work whilst being pivotal in the determination of the 'winner' of the 'DNA race' was inevitably finalised by men. Without the betrayal of Gosling despite him declaring his 'allegiance' to her, via 'slip[ping] Wilkins the photo' determined the historical recognition remaining with the male figureheads in spite of them focusing on trivial things rather than 'doing [their] work'. The only male character who fully submits to 'Dr. Franklin's' authority is Caspar, who remains dependent on her in order to 'finalise [his] doctorate', with Rosalind's 'X-ray images' and 'published articles' opening up 'a whole new world' for him and providing him with the opportunity to be granted the 'semantics' that will 'fling open windows' of opportunity for him. 'Margaret Ramsay' also determines the isolate destiny of Wilkins by 'leaving' after he 'declared his undying love for her'; placing her in a position of power over her own scientific career rather than allowing a male colleague to potentially ruin her career. Women who are able to make use of their own pre-existing skill sets are capable of rising above social mores to determine both their own future and that of others however both Atwood and Zeigler highlight that their female influence is often granted by or altered by Men.

Both texts identify the necessity for societal reversal and act as a catalyst in the usurping of dogmatic social mores that continue to prevail in modern society. The Penelopiad and Photograph 51 contrast the fate of women across the ages, holding up a mirror to the treatment of women in modern society and highlighting the ingrained misogyny that permeates 'daily life'. The 'Anthropology' lecture provided by the maids within the chorus allows Atwood to draw focus to the contemporary consequences and struggle for female rights within both society and the tertiary education system which is explored in Photograph 51. Atwood's intentional use of the only contributing individual during the 'lecture' as 'Sir' highlights the male dominance and female subordination that continues to govern female contribution to society. In both the 'lecture' and 'the Trial of Odysseus as videotaped by the Maids', Men taking a leading role in the recounting of history, a societal commentary which reflects Zeigler's allowing of the male characters to narrate 'the story of Rosalind. By portraying these male dominated aspects of history in this manner, the authors are able to both draw focus to the suffering and injustice of women but also simultaneously provide a subtext of the continuation of the continuation of male arrogance and female subservience despite the 'three thousand year' time difference. Whilst the metamorphosis of social ethos towards women is elucidated in the court trial of Odysseus via the juxtaposition of the acceptance of 'rape' being a 'deplorable but common feature of palace life' with modern 'standards of behaviour', the continuation of vulgar social mores is highlighted through the Judge's final decision that the 'rape and murder' is no more than a 'minor incident' deciding to 'dismiss the case'. Atwood highlights the necessity to recognise the significance of women via the chorus' assertion that they are 'no more real than money'; a statement that asks the audience to consider consider that the 'value' placed on individual's lives is 'fabricated' in a similar manner to the development of currency, but you cannot accept one thing as real and important whilst denying the other. The 'projection' of 'hope' onto the statue of Hermione in the Winter's Tale encapsulates the hope shared by both Atwood and Zeigler that the next generation of oppressed women may transcend the objectification that continues to permeate 'daily' existence and write a new future where they a 'recognised' rather than 'forgotten'.

Atwood and Zeigler present the fate and destiny of women as being both under divine control and able to be influenced by their own behaviour and that of those around them. Ultimately, the ability to transcend the inevitable is depicted as dependent on the capacity of women to utilise their own skill set to control the destiny of others. Whilst there is limited capacity for women to overcome adversity, the fate of women is primarily determined by male figureheads, a reality that has continued to prevail regardless of time period. Whilst the texts reveal the ingrained

nature of misogyny throughout the ages, the contrasting roles of women and the extent to which they are able to determine their own future and that of others reveals the capacity for society as a whole to evolve and for dogmatic values to be abandoned in order to develop a society founded on inclusivity and social equity.