

## “COMPARE HOW BOTH PHOTOGRAPH 51 AND THE PENELOPIAD EXPLORE THE EFFECTS OF BEING DENIED A VOICE”

In making the “invisible, visible”, Atwood and Ziegler both expose stories of those who have been silenced by history. In both Ancient Greece and 1950s England, a patriarchal system exists which aims to erase female autonomy. The consequences of being denied a voice can be seen as instances of historical marginalisation are silenced, allowing it to persist in the future. The denial of a voice is also apparent as women fail to be acknowledged compared to their male counterparts. As women are silenced, male voices are allowed to dominate leading to a proliferation of patriarchal control and instances of injustice.

Both *The Penelopiad* and *Photograph 51* depict examples where women face gendered discrimination at the hands of men. In Atwood’s novella, this extends to gendered violence as both Penelope and her maids are threatened by the men in their lives. In Penelope’s society, women are viewed as the “property” of their masters and husbands. Odysseus, symbolic of patriarchal control, threatens to “chop [Penelope] into little pieces”, if she ever proves disloyal. Even more marginalised than Penelope, the twelve maids who had “no voice, no name” are raped by the suitors and this act of violence is dismissed as a “common feature of palace life”. As feminine voices are largely absent in *The Odyssey* - “the main authority” - the gendered violence focus by women have been largely erased from history. In giving voice to the previously voiceless, Atwood exposes a society where female infidelity is “ample matter for beheading” and condemns the preference for a male dominated version of history. Like Penelope and her maids, Rosalind too is met with marginalisation at King’s College. Although Rosalind is never physically threatened, she still encounters ostracism in her workplace. Her male colleagues constantly scrutinise her physical appearance, objectifying her as they wonder if “she would be attractive”. However, unlike Penelope, Rosalind at first defends her ill treatment, vehemently stating “I will not be anyone’s assistant”. Although Rosalind recognises the entrenched sexism and racism in London, she proves ultimately powerless to change matters like Penelope. Her outcries are silenced as Ziegler expands on the impossibility of overcoming discrimination in post World War 2 England. By highlighting the injustices surrounding misogyny in history, Atwood and Ziegler seek to rectify this version of events by offering an alternate perspective in history.

The effects of being denied a voice is also seen through the lack of acknowledgement facing Atwood and Ziegler’s female protagonists in their respective fields. Rosalind’s scientific expertise is constantly undermined as she struggles to gain recognition. She is referred to by her male colleagues as “Miss Franklin” rather than “Dr Franklin”, a form of professional erasure. The denial of Rosalind’s brilliance causes her and Wilkins to work “in increasing isolation” while their rivals, Watson and Crick who form an “efficient pair”. Ultimately this results in Wilkins’ betrayal of Rosalind, culminating in her erasure from history as she fails to receive credit for her contributions in discovering the “secret of life”. Ziegler’s play acts as a condemnation of Watson, Crick and Wilkins’ actions as she hopes to illuminate the injustices that have occurred throughout history. Like Rosalind, Penelope is similarly denied recognition in professional spheres. Both women have their achievements eclipsed by men and are erased from history. For Penelope her “intelligence” and resourcefulness are seen as a reflection of Odysseus’. Whilst Odysseus fights in the Trojan War, it is Penelope who runs Ithaca as she grows to “take pleasure in uncouth matters.” However, upon Odysseus’s return, Penelope is once again relegated to the margins of history as her actions are taken to be “always for him.” Both Penelope and Rosalind seem resigned to their fate, however, Rosalind’s impassivity emerges from selflessness as she acknowledges “the world won didn’t it.” In contrast, Penelope’s submissiveness leads her to ignore her marginalisation as she subscribes to her society’s belief that it was always “an imprudence to step between a man and a reflection of his own cleverness.” Nonetheless, both texts depict examples where women are denied professional acknowledgement and as a result, are forgotten by history.

A consequential effect of erasing female voices can be seen through the dominance of men in history. As a “legendary hero of high repute,” Odysseus is who determines which version of history is deemed true. As a result, he is forgiven for his violent and scheming nature. The suitors are afforded a similar treatment as they are punished purely because they plundered Odysseus’s property. They are killed not because they raped the maids, but because they “raped without permission.” Ultimately, it is the maids who are blamed and murdered for their role in defying Odysseus, highlighting the historical trend where women are blamed for the transgressions of men. The male dominated narrative continues in *Photograph 51*, which has a distinctively more masculine voice as it is the men of the story who narrate the events. Watson’s subterfuge, like Odysseus’s trickery, is largely forgotten by history, resulting in Rosalind’s erasure. Both the play and the novella depict examples where male voices dominate at the cost of female presences in history.

Atwood and Ziegler in their respective works offer an indictment of historical events that have silenced female voices. As a result, gendered discrimination is ignored, women are excluded from professional acknowledgement and men continue to dominate the narrative.