

Women in the Odyssey.

Women are present in both of the Homeric epics; the importance of the female characters in the Iliad is less since this is a poem about war and warriors, but they are well drawn, and cannot be overlooked: Helen, Andromache, Hecuba, Briseis; and the core reason for the "wrath of Achilles" is provided by the seizure of Chryseis, though she appears only as a name, her father's efforts on her behalf allow us to regard her as more than a mere cypher. The "Odyssey" deals with the aftermath of war, and we see more of the domestic nature prevailing at the time and it is natural that women should be more in evidence. The apparent importance of the female has led some, notably Butler, to consider that this work may have been produced by a woman; but this is more likely to be a reflection of a time when that prevailing view of Archaic and Classical Greece was one of a male society in which women were regarded as being almost a sub-species, i.e., Butler's own times. Similarly, Graves' speculations read as a reaction to the "femme fatale" which occupied much of the art of his youthful period. Since Moses Finlay produced his work, "The World of Odysseus", in which he demonstrates a consistency indicating a description of a real, and, to employ an overworked word, viable culture, it has been seen that we have a description of a historical period - the so called Dark Age, between the Mycenaean and Classical Ages - and that the presentation of women may be an accurate reflection of their place and influence. This is important to our considerations of the later, Classical, period because we have a choice in our readings of the dramatic poets: either the female characters are the products of the male fantasy, or women were more important in society than has sometimes been allowed; Clytemnestra acts in a "masculine" way, Antigone is no "shrinking violet", Medea is very definitely "out of the house", and Euripides generally gives his nurses a part which we would not readily allow to be consistent with the impression of a totally subservient group in society; or we must re-assess the role of the female: whilst granting that they played no part in the affairs of the *polis*, and they had no place in the *andron* except as entertainers, they had crucial influence in the *oikos* in subtler and unrecorded ways. Aristophanes may be expressing male fears and fantasies, or he may be providing a description of women's nature "writ large" for his dramatic purpose. The Odyssey can be viewed as description of females in a society which had features of its own age, but had local variations; the localities in the Odyssey vary, and attempts have been made to apply a geography to them whose accuracy is not relevant, it is sufficient to say that The Poet may well be describing different shades of custom in places whose only contacts were provided by a small number of travellers: merchants, soldiers, adventurers.

A starting point which seems suitable is the court of Alcinous; we have a description of a royal palace, but it is one in which the daughter of the king goes with the maids, if not to do the washing at the river, at least to supervise it and to play with them on familiar, if not equal terms. Nausicaa is presented as a teenage girl who is recognisable (Bk. vi), she is on the threshold of maturity and offers to take a part in the domestic affairs; when she approaches her parents, her mother, Arete, is spinning whilst her father prepares to go to meet his colleagues. When she encounters Odysseus, she is self-possessed and her treatment of him is mature and independent; there is no hint that any man is superior to every woman. In advising him to seek the protection of the king, she tells him to approach her mother in the first instance and so makes us understand that the queen has a deciding influence in some matters. The impression is that, despite appearances, Nausicaa knows that the crucial influence in the home, albeit a palace, is the wife's, and that she can exert some influence of her own by colluding with her mother. She is aware of her influence as she shows when she points out (Bk. viii 460) that Odysseus owes his life to her. This description is entirely credible, and it may be possible to see other credible features if we can separate them from the poetic environment.

The motif of spinning and weaving occurs frequently, indeed is introduced into the Iliad (Bk. 6, 490), and we can infer that it was the everyday task of the woman of a certain social group; it was natural that Circe should be occupied at the loom (Bk. x 250) when Odysseus encounters her, and Helen (Bk. iv 120), spins during the visit of Telemachus (though, as one commentator has pointed out, Helen needs a lot of help to bring her work basket down), and it is used to show (Bk. ii 100) Penelope's inventiveness in delaying the advances of the suitors. As a poetic device we can see four types of woman, Penelope as resourceful as Odysseus, Arete as domestic, Helen as luxury loving, and Circe as possibly having nothing else to do as she waits for unsuspecting visitors.

→ in this passage, A

Penelope is a model wife; her name seems to be a byword for wifely fidelity (Bk. ix 480), even beyond the grave. We are given an unusual circumstance, her husband is absent but not on a mere visit; he may be alive or dead. She remains mistress, but it seems that her position is as regent during her son's minority; she has the responsibility for the running of the *oikos* but no influence in public affairs; the approach of Telemachus' maturity will put her into a subordinate position, she can retire, which means returning to her father's house, or re-marry. In the former case, she will have no claim on Odysseus' estate and Telemachus will be at the mercy of his peers; in the latter, her tenure may be secure, but as subordinate to her new husband and one assumes that if Telemachus is still a minor, he will be dispossessed. This is suggestive of a special role for the woman, her power is only exercised whilst she has the protection and patronage of a man; Penelope is a surrogate for Odysseus and may be one for Telemachus, whilst Arete's power was exercised through her husband and Nausicaa's through her father via her mother. Telemachus' moment of maturity is characterised by his banishing his mother from the hall (Bk. i 360) and reminding her of her duties; her compliance signals her acceptance of his dominance. That this does not make her mindless is demonstrated later, when she tests the stranger (Bk. xxiii 180) by asking for the bed to be moved and making Odysseus reveal himself as the only man who knew that it was an integral part of the house; this can also be seen as a demonstration of her fidelity, implying that she had worked out a test which he alone could pass.

There are revealing glimpses of the servants and they are characterised as falling into three categories: Euryycleia is faithful enough to be regarded as an intimate of the household, and there are those who are faithful as a matter of course and those who are unfaithful. Of fifty serving maids, twelve have been unfaithful (Bk. xxii 410), perhaps trying to curry favour with the new master of the house (whoever he turned out to be), the rest remaining loyal; it might be too much too attempt to apply a statistical analysis to this, but it might be that a quarter of women could be expected to behave this way - or that Homer and his audience thought they would. Eumaeus tells (Bk. xv 400) how he was carried away from his home by a woman selling herself for her own advantage, but the evenhandedness of the poem is such that we see a spectrum of human behaviour rather than a superficial generalisation. Euryycleia had been herself bought as a slave (Bk. i 390), but had been treated with deference, partly because of her birth and also out of respect for his wife by Laertes; she had proved worthy of this deference, and had nursed both Odysseus (Bk. xix 390) and Telemachus and was the housekeeper entrusted with the keys of the store-room (Bk. ii 350); she recognised Odysseus by the scar on his thigh gained many years later, so she had had a continuing intimacy with him. This favoured position as a member of the household did not mean she was relieved from her obligations as a servant, and so she was required to wash the beggarly stranger. This is another recurring motif; Telemachus and Peisistratos are bathed by the maidservants at Sparta (Bk. iv 45) and Telemachus by Nestor's daughter, Polycaste (Bk. iii 430); this would appear to have been a normal feature of the society and is more likely to draw comment from us than the original audience. There may have been a hierarchy here, the social status of the guest being reflected in which of the women of his host's

house performed the ministrations, and it may be that Eurycleia's vanity (iii) is significant, the appearance would have made it more likely that the lesser servants would have been given the task, but it allows recognition of his nature to precede recognition of his person by Penelope (as well as the more practical recognition, required by the plot, by Eurycleia herself) and this reveals facets of her nature as well as his. Though Eurycleia has been described as the housekeeper, when Odysseus is revealed (Bk. xxiii 150), he is bathed by "the housekeeper Eurynome", this suggests that Eurycleia held an unofficial post, but one carrying greater regard and affection.

Outside the hierarchy of the *oikos* we are presented with a different ordering of women; one which seems part of the fantasy of the Odyssey. Circe (Bk. x) is a witch, she is the brother of Aeetes (the father of Medea in other sources) and daughter of the Sun and Perse, daughter of Ocean. It is not clearly stated that she is immortal, but she seems to stand between men and gods; she is an enchantress and her delight seems to be in transforming men into beasts: Odysseus' companions are turned into swine; earlier visitors have been changed into other beasts. On one level, we can read this as a metaphor for the type of woman (should such a type exist outside the male imagination) who brings out the worst in men characterised as their beastly natures; and that she is a witch and malevolent is shown by the affection shown by the beasts to other men. That she is vanquished by Odysseus, helped on this occasion by a male god, Hermes, rather than his usual patron, Athene shows that she is not all powerful, and when her power has been challenged, she falls into bed with the conqueror. This may, again, be a male fantasy associated with this constructed type; and may suggest a hint of masculine vanity. Circe is mistress of her domain in the absence of men; and she preserves her status only by unmanning the males in that domain. And yet she retains her nature and independence by helping Odysseus to leave and seems content to advise him and return to her former way of life.

but she does not submit and sometimes is very obedient to her subjects, etc.
Calypso (Bk. v) is higher than Circe in that she is definitely immortal; she lives with her nymphs in what seems to be a female world until the arrival of Odysseus, there are no men, turned into beasts or otherwise. She is portrayed thus, a woman without any man, as too eager to please; she offers Odysseus the ultimate gift - for a goddess - immortality, wanting to keep him on her island, to herself. This may be another type of woman, real or a figment of man's imagination. Her power is such that an even higher power, that of the Olympian gods as represented by Hermes, is required to make her release Odysseus, but she is bitter, unlike Circe. It seems that Homer is contrasting these two female types with Penelope; they are unusual as women, independent yet vulnerable to men. Circe is more independent; Calypso more vulnerable, and the power which they have over man (represented by Odysseus) is paradoxical: Calypso has complete power; Circe, once she is shown who is master, little or none. Calypso is hurt when deserted, Circe is not; yet Calypso is the higher power; vulnerability may be more powerful than independence. Or Homer may be saying that men grant more power to the vulnerable woman than the independent and if they cannot obtain release, suffer themselves more because of it. Penelope, Calypso and Circe have one thing in common, they all have their importance because of their relationship to Odysseus; they seem to have no independent existence worthy of mention, or any future. The poem seems to allow Nausicaa a future, although it will probably be tied in with some other man and Eurycleia does seem to have an independence, even if it is a sterile one; Arete's independence and future are related to that of Alcinous; his presence at home contrasts with Odysseus' absence, and so she contrasts with Penelope.

Throughout, Odysseus and Telemachus are never without the protection of Athene. She helps and inspires, and as an anthropomorphic presentation she mirrors Odysseus (Bk. xiii 290) as he matches her for cleverness and guile; as she appears in different forms (Mentes Bk. i 105, Nestor ii 400, a young girl vii 25, a shepherd xii 90, a beautiful woman xvi 145, a lamp-bearer xix 75), so

*She showed they not had to wear a third of the time. Near contact
is mentioned with special powers who they could not have in ordinary life.
I know the impression that it also the Japanese tradition (?)*

L. You. The Circe is also mentioned...

he adopts different identities. Odysseus is marked out for favour; in all his trials, he acts with resourcefulness, guile and courage to a superhuman degree, and this superhuman element is personified as the goddess. This relationship makes him into a hero, capable of feats which are not permitted for the many. To use Professor Dodds' concept of over-determination, his actions are matched by her action on a higher plane; just as his tribulations are caused on a higher plane by the god Poseidon. She comments (Bk. xiii 230) that he is civilized, intelligent and self-possessed, qualities of which she is patroness, and we read of his abilities as a craftsman; the house built round the bed and the raft on Calypso's island, and his martial prowess; again qualities associated with Athene. Others may be favoured with one or other, but Odysseus has all these, denoting his special relationship. We can regard him as talented because he is favoured, or favoured because he is talented; but the introduction of Athene explains why he is separated from other men. In later times, the audience could regret the passage of a time when the gods interested themselves in human affairs, or see it as a sign of the times that men were no longer worthy.

The relationship between Odysseus and Athene can be re-interpreted in terms of modern thought; we can see in the goddess a psychological principle which is common to all but more apparent in some. Hence, it is this wisdom and experience which inspires Mentos or Mentor, and which Odysseus recognises in the shepherd etc. It would be possible to follow Jung and see in her the female archetype manifesting through the female "unconscious", but these are giving the epic a veneer from our own culture and are of doubtful value except to draw attention to its universal and timeless qualities. Odysseus receives practical help from Alcinous and Eumaeus, but supernatural aid is rendered by the female as (Bk v 335) Ino/Leucothoe, and the threat from the suitors is balanced by a supernatural threat from the Sirens (Bk. xii 190); blessings and curses are represented on different levels, and these are cases where the levels are separate, but they are balanced. Here the worldly features are associated with the male and the other-worldly with the female, but equal portions of good and bad.

Book ix is of note in that there is no female presence, the Cyclops is a solitary, and though there are others, they do not conform to any standard of civilized behaviour. The episode stands in contrast and almost seems to say that although the female element in society causes problems, it is necessary. Odysseus can exercise his ingenuity and leadership, he can show supreme courage and, in line with his ethos, demean his beaten enemy; but it is a foul world inhabited by beasts worse than those conjured by Circe and produces a perversion of human nature.

The Odyssey can be said to review the female in its presentation of characters within the framework of the culture which produced it. The epitome is the faithful wife and hence revered mother (Bk. xi 210); as one moves further from this ideal, in the direction of the lower orders (Euryclia to the unfaithful servants), or higher (Circe and Calypso), there is instability and unhappiness until one reaches the goddess Athene who has lost human failing (unless one classes partisanship as a failing). Penelope is ideal under very trying circumstances; Arete is ideal, but has not been tested; and Nausicaa is an ideal maiden and should become an ideal wife.

revision of Circe, Calypso [Note "Calypso" = "I should conceal" which explains many years of absence before Od. reaches Ithaca]
 young innocent well-bred

a mature and successful woman

(big) world. My impression is of uneven treatment. The boy section in the circles is first class. Am you not going to hear to say rather more about the male is more to analyse the female, especially show why they would be

good
of
psychology

Postscript: Matriarchal Society.

There is interest in the possibility that the first settled communities were "matriarchal": there is little evidence to allow this as a general statement, even if it held good in some instances. The matrilinear nature of Pharaonic Egypt is easily explained on the grounds that the mother is the undisputed parent of the child; paternity could always be questioned. It is said that there was an age when there was no concept of paternity, and some cultures have been reported by anthropologists to have been seen to hold this view: it is more likely that paternity was observed in animals, and that the phenomenon was soon recognised in man and no need was felt to record it as a momentous discovery (and no possibility in a pre-literate age!)

One can adduce evidence for a change in pattern from patriarchy to patriarchy in the Odyssey and assume that if it did not occur on a global scale, Homer was describing different stages of development as they existed in his time or within recent folk memory. Ithaca can be regarded as familiar ground with men firmly in power; Ogygia is an exotic place where women hold sway - tales of Amazons' always fascinate; and the Phaeacians lie in between. Penelope, Calypso and Arete are all royal but Penelope cannot have the influence of Arete or the power of Calypso; she has no power over the suitors or her grown son. Nausicaa has self-assurance, and will grow up to be more like Arete than Penelope; neither of the two latter are concerned with the games and activities of men, but Arete is the main force in her household and her relationship with Alcinous is the opposite of Penelope's with Telemachus or Helen's with Menelaus. Calypso reigns supreme; Odysseus is an intruder from the patriarchal society, and a god is on his side (the poem was, in all probability, the work of a man), but Calypso believes that if a goddess had been supreme, matters would have turned out differently. Penelope has ~~no~~ status without a man. Calypso can only use one as a subject, Nausicaa is pragmatic; she accepts the need for a man but he will enhance her status and not diminish it; Arete could have advised her to let the men think they are in charge.

Calypso, though. The

Circe is a queen and if one follows the ideas of Frazer, one can read into Book x a description of a matriarchal queen selecting one of a number of men as king for a year, the rest acting the part of a totem animal - acolytes if not priests. The use of drugs to determine the choice is described, and after a year the king dies a ritual death, a real death being suffered by a surrogate (Elpenor). After a symbolic visit to the land of the dead by the king, the surrogate is buried with kingly honours and the old king and his band leave the queen to await the next contingent. If such a ritual did obtain and Homer knew of it, either as an "antique" or remote phenomenon, it would explain its inclusion, especially the otherwise puzzling book xi. This and the story of Calypso can be seen as two elements of a single system, Calypso being the embodiment of self-sufficient woman, and Circe the woman requiring man but having only token submission to him.

Even if one does not accept the widespread existence of patriarchy as a system, there may have been a similar intellectual opinion in Homer's age which gave rise to speculation and which Homer may have incorporated - with or without believing it.

As you say, this is an issue of very sensitive subjects. On the other hand, what I want is how it presents women (from the Odyssey)

i.e. To find to go into several questions in rapid succession. But could similar needs support from the poem.