


**FEMALE REPRESENTATION IN ART AND MYTHOLOGY IN MARGARET
ATWOOD'S THE PENELOPE ODYSSEY (2005)**

**REPRESENTAÇÃO FEMININA NA ARTE E MITOLOGIA EM A ODISSEIA DE
PENÉLOPE (2005) DE MARGARET ATWOOD**

**LA REPRESENTACIÓN FEMENINA EN EL ARTE Y LA MITOLOGÍA EN LA
ODISEA DE PENÉLOPE (2005) DE MARGARET ATWOOD**

 <https://doi.org/10.56238/sevened2025.030-076>

Luiz Antônio Pereira Lima Neto¹, Maria Lucilena Gonzaga Costa Tavares²

ABSTRACT

For centuries, real and literary history has been told and composed, for the most part, according to a patriarchal canon. Women have often been assigned a subordinate role, stereotypically portrayed in narratives and visual arts as submissive, hostile, or auxiliary to men. Throughout history, references to women's participation in various spheres of society are less frequent than those of men. Methodologically, this text is exploratory and bibliographical, aiming to analyze Penelope's Odyssey (2005), by Canadian author Margaret Atwood, focusing on the representation of Penelope, to discuss the various ways in which women have been represented in the visual and literary arts by male artists. The work revisits the classic The Odyssey (1488), credited to Homer, from a new perspective on the character Penelope, whose self-representation and version of events made her famous, thus weaving her own narrative. Based on the polytheistic context of The Odyssey, we aim to discuss the roles female deities, such as Athena and Circe, play in guiding the characters and how they were portrayed. To construct the theoretical framework for this article, we drew on authors such as Atwood (2020), Chartier (2002), Garcia (2015), Federici (2023), Homer (2013), Perrot (2019), Pizan (2012), Rago (2002), as well as other researchers who address gender and literary issues. As a result of this study, we observed that in both fictional and real worlds, the female figure has been portrayed in narratives and visual arts according to patriarchal and discriminatory conceptions, thus placing her in a secondary position in relation to men, which often hinders the achievement of a democratic and equitable society.

Keywords: Female Representation. Art. Mythology. Penelope.

RESUMO

Durante séculos, a história real e literária foi contada e composta, em sua grande maioria, por um cânone patriarcal. À mulher, coube, muitas vezes, um papel subalterno, nas narrativas e artes visuais é retratada, estereotipicamente, como submissa, hostil ou auxiliar masculina. Ao longo da historicidade, as referências da participação feminina nas diversas instâncias da sociedade são em menor grau em comparação aos homens. Metodologicamente, este texto apresenta-se do tipo exploratório e bibliográfico, com o

¹ Master's student in Education and Culture. Universidade Federal do Pará (UFPA).

E-mail: luiz20136@gmail.com Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2053-167X>

Lattes: <http://lattes.cnpq.br/0497856346957216>

² Dr. in Literary Studies. Universidade Federal do Pará (UFPA). E-mail: lucilena@ufpa.br

Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8718-0494> Lattes: <http://lattes.cnpq.br/9432855899972772>

objetivo de analisar *A Odisseia De Penélope* (2005), da autora canadense Margaret Atwood, tendo como foco a representação de Penélope, para discorrermos sobre as diversas formas em que as mulheres foram representadas nas artes visuais e literárias por artistas homens. A obra revisita o clássico *A Odisseia* (1488), creditada a Homero, a partir de uma nova perspectiva sobre a personagem Penélope, cuja autorrepresentação e versão sobre os fatos ocorridos a tornaram conhecida, tecendo, assim, sua própria narrativa. A partir do contexto politeísta de *A Odisseia*, visamos discutir quais papéis as divindades femininas, como Atena e Circe, têm na condução das personagens e como foram retratadas. Para a construção do referencial teórico desse artigo, nos baseamos em autores como, de Atwood (2020), Chartier, (2002), Garcia (2015), Federici (2023), Homero (2013), Perrot, (2019), Pizan, (2012), Rago, (2002), além de outras pesquisadoras que tratam de questões de gênero e literatura. Como resultados deste estudo, foi possível perceber que tanto no universo ficcional quanto real a figura feminina vem sendo retratada nas narrativas e artes visuais de acordo com concepções patriarcais e discriminatórias, colocando-a assim, em uma posição secundária em relação ao homem, o que dificulta, frequentemente, o alcance de uma sociedade democrática e com equidade.

Palavras-chave: Representação Feminina. Arte. Mitologia. Penélope.

RESUMEN

Durante siglos, la historia real y literaria se ha narrado y compuesto, en su mayor parte, según un canon patriarcal. A las mujeres a menudo se les ha asignado un papel subordinado, retratadas estereotípicamente en narrativas y artes visuales como sumisas, hostiles o auxiliares de los hombres. A lo largo de la historia, las referencias a la participación de las mujeres en diversas esferas de la sociedad son menos frecuentes que las de los hombres. Metodológicamente, este texto es exploratorio y bibliográfico, con el objetivo de analizar la *Odisea de Penélope* (2005), de la autora canadiense Margaret Atwood, centrándose en la representación de Penélope, para discutir las diversas maneras en que las mujeres han sido representadas en las artes visuales y literarias por artistas masculinos. La obra revisita el clásico *La Odisea* (1488), atribuido a Homero, desde una nueva perspectiva sobre el personaje de Penélope, cuya autorrepresentación y versión de los hechos la hicieron famosa, tejiendo así su propia narrativa. Partiendo del contexto politeísta de *La Odisea*, nos proponemos analizar el papel que las deidades femeninas, como Atenea y Circe, desempeñan en la guía de los personajes y cómo fueron retratados. Para construir el marco teórico de este artículo, nos basamos en autores como Atwood (2020), Chartier (2002), García (2015), Federici (2023), Homero (2013), Perrot (2019), Pizan (2012), Rago (2002), así como otros investigadores que abordan cuestiones de género y literarias. Como resultado de este estudio, observamos que, tanto en el mundo ficticio como en el real, la figura femenina ha sido retratada en las narrativas y las artes visuales según concepciones patriarcales y discriminatorias, situándola así en una posición secundaria respecto a los hombres, lo que a menudo dificulta el logro de una sociedad democrática y equitativa.

Palabras clave: Representación Femenina. Arte. Mitología. Penélope.

1 INTRODUCTION

This article deals with the construction of the female figure in world history. When we revisit historicity, we notice that most of the people in the spotlight, present in books and visual arts, are cisgender, white, heteronormative, Western men from wealthy economies. References to women's performance and women's writing in the archives of history are fewer in number compared to men, and when it is done, they are represented in a stereotyped way as submissive, defenseless, crazy or hostile.

This historicity was constituted by an androcentric society, in which man is in prominence and control, as Garcia warns:

The world is defined as masculine and man is attributed the representation of humanity. This is androcentrism: considering man as the measure of all things. Androcentrism has distorted reality, distorted science, and has serious consequences in everyday life. Focusing on a study, analysis or research from a male perspective alone, and using the results as valid for the rest of the world, makes all the knowledge produced unreliable or, at the very least, has huge gaps and confusion. A good example of androcentrism is the media. The androcentric view of the world decides and selects which facts, events or personalities are news, which will be front page and to whom or what to dedicate time and space (Garcia, 2015, p. 15).

In this sense, those chosen to represent society, such as politicians and social leaders are, for the most part, men. Becoming the main subjects of history, they are thus the reference for all decisions in society, placing women in a position of second place and dependent on the male gender. In this way, we problematize the causes of official world history being mostly written and made up of men. Why is this constituted without the presence of women? When references are made to women, how has their participation been portrayed and presented? How were they represented? And in this case, in *the work Penelope's Odyssey* (2005).

Historically, it was up to religion and myths to explain the formation and development of humanity, in this sense, women were also placed in a negative position in relation to men, as Garcia explains:

It should be noted that, throughout the history of Western society, many discourses legitimizing inequality between men and women have been produced. Mythology and religions are good examples. In Classical Greece and in the Judeo-Christian tradition, Pandora and Eve respectively play the same role: that of demonstrating that female curiosity is the cause of human misfortunes and the expulsion of men from Paradise (Garcia, 2015, p. 12).

Several female figures were held responsible for the act of curiosity, Pandora became legendary by releasing all human ills from her box, but also released hope, less remembered. Eve was stigmatized as the woman who dared to defy the rules of a male God and sought the fruit of knowledge.

In relation to Greek mythology, one of the first prominent women in the writing of literary history, and who was also represented in a stereotyped way as a model of a faithful woman and in an inferior position to men, is Penelope, a character present in the popular imagination and in works such as *Iliad* and *Odyssey* (IX to VII BC), credited to the Greek poet Homer and which would take place between the twelfth - eighth centuries B.C., in Ancient Greece. The works narrate the events of the Trojan War and the return home of Ulysses, Penelope's husband.

Margaret Atwood, award-winning author of short stories, essays, poems and novels, rereads *The Odyssey in Penelope's Odyssey* (2005). The Canadian writer seeks to present a perspective from what she defines as Penelope's self-representation, weaving her own narrative, is thus the protagonist of her own Odyssey. However, as the reports mix facts with fiction, and there is not enough historical evidence to confirm whether Penelope or the facts that happened to her are really real, we will treat her as a literary character.

In the same universe written by Homer, the deities Athena and Circe also play a prominent role in the events, but they are portrayed according to patriarchal conceptions and in correlation with Ulysses, as they interfere with his journey back to Ithaca. Thus, we will explore the way they are described and their visual representations.

2 METHODOLOGY

We hope that this article will analyze the theme of female representation and the erasure imposed on women, because studying gender in historiography, according to Rago:

Ultimately, it is a matter of moving towards a history that is capable of perceiving the complexity of social processes from a perspective that takes into account the diversity of subjects who participate in them. It is evident that the forgetfulness, abandonment, dissimulation or, as we want to say, of women as active subjects in such a large part of historiography did not contribute in any way to providing a satisfactory historical writing, but on the contrary contributed to establishing history as the ideological discourse of the dominant classes (Rago, 2002, p. 15).

History was literally written by the dominant and dominating class, the male, imposing certain discriminatory categories on women. Based on this, we seek to analyze the way in which this occurs to the mythical and divine women of the *Odyssey*.

The research for this work is an exploratory approach that had the "purpose of providing more information on the subject, enabling its definition and design, that is, to facilitate the delimitation of the research theme; guide the setting of objectives and the formulation of hypotheses" (Prodanov; Freitas, 2013, p. 51-52) and bibliographic, as it was necessary to research, analyze, file and systematize all theoretical material that could be related to the theme to be studied. The bibliographic research was of paramount importance because:

When prepared from material already published, it consists mainly of: books, magazines, publications in periodicals and scientific articles, newspapers, bulletins, monographs, dissertations, theses, cartographic material, internet, with the objective of putting the researcher in direct contact with all material already written on the subject of research. In the bibliographic research, it is important for the researcher to verify the veracity of the data obtained, observing the possible inconsistencies or contradictions that the works may present (Prodanov; Freitas, 2013, p. 54).

Our analysis material was based on the work *Penelope's Odyssey* (2005), where we observed the fictitious and/or imaginary conditions of production of the real to understand the role of women and their representation in the published material.

Theoretically, we focus on the studies of Atwood (2020), Chartier, (2002), Garcia (2015), Gomes (2013), Federici (2023), Hodges (2022), Homero (2013), Perrot, (2019), Pizan, (2012), Rago, (2002) and Santos, (2015), to achieve the objectives of understand the narrative and artistic representations of prominent female figures such as Penelope, Athena and Circe, present in the polytheistic universe of the *Odyssey*.

3 ARTISTIC AND NARRATIVE REPRESENTATION OF MYTHICAL AND DIVINE WOMEN

In the following sections, we investigate the representation of female figures described in the polytheistic universe of the *Odyssey* and how they are (d)written and represented in narratives and visual arts. Thus, it is essential to understand the concept of representation:

To represent is, therefore, to make things known through 'the painting of an object', 'by words and gestures', 'by some figures, by marks' – such as riddles, emblems, fables,

allegories. To represent in the legal and political sense is also to 'keep someone's place, to have one's authority in one's hands' (Chartier, 2002, p. 165).

Portrayed by men in certain ways, women are placed in categories and, thus, end up submitting to the masculine ideal, as an ideal wife, dedicating their life and time to their partner and family. In addition to imposing certain standards, so that other women also follow him, such as the woman who behaves discreetly in public, not drawing attention to herself. The category of experience, within cultural history, is important, as it helps us to "identify the way in which in different places and moments a certain social reality is constructed, thought, given to reading" (Chartier, 1990, p.17). Making us better understand the historicity of women through and in the literary work.

To understand female participation in historicity, we need to return to one of the main spheres that command or have commanded society: religiosity, in this case polytheistic beliefs. The context and society in which Penelope and Odysseus, the kings of Ithaca, found themselves were polytheistic, that is, they believed in various gods and goddesses. Thus, we need to understand what role female characters, divine or not, have in the universe of the *Odyssey* and how they were portrayed. In this article we will highlight three different representations of women: the faithful, the protective, and the dangerous.

3.1 PENELOPE AND THE REPRESENTATION OF THE IDEAL WOMAN

In order to better understand Penelope's story, and also her new representation, it is necessary to know the context in which she is inserted. In the first work, *Iliad*, formed by twenty-four cantos, the famous Trojan War against Greece is narrated, which would last about ten years. The events begin with the kidnapping (or escape) of Helen, Penelope's cousin and wife of Menelaus, king of Sparta. Helen was taken by her lover Paris, prince of Troy (present-day Turkey). To recover his wife, and also conquer the Trojan territory, Menelaus invokes the help of Gods and Goddesses and several warriors such as Achilles, famous for his strength, but also for the fragility represented by the heel, and Odysseus, Penelope's husband.

The war is won by the Greeks, using an artifice devised by Odysseus. They pretend to declare defeat and retreat from Troy, leaving a wooden horse, which would be given as a gift to the Trojans. However, Odysseus and his warriors hide inside the Trojan Horse that has been taken into the city. At night, while the population slept, the Greeks came out of hiding and conquered the Trojans and the city, taking Helen back to Menelaus.

The second book, *Odyssey*, a title derived from Odysseus, narrates, also in twenty-four cantos, the return of the warrior to the kingdom of Ithaca, and, in parallel, the provocations about Penelope's fidelity. The return trip, by ship, lasted another ten years and is permeated by various difficulties faced by Odysseus and the crew, but also sexual adventures with deities, which will be dealt with in the first and third sections. To this day, the term *Odyssey* means journey or adventurous narrative.

Like many women, Penelope is linked to male figures, initially to her father and husband and then to suitors. She is, to this day, considered one of the first models of a faithful and dedicated woman, as she remained so, while her husband was absent for about twenty years, when participating in events related to the Trojan War. Because the king was away for a long time, they believed that he was already dead, so Penelope was harassed, according to Atwood, by more than a hundred suitors who wanted to ascend the throne by marrying her.

As she believed that Odysseus was alive and also did not intend to choose one of the suitors as her husband, Penelope uses the stratagem of weaving a shroud to gain time. In Atwood's version, Penelope attributes the inspiration to the Goddess Athena:

I thought of a way to postpone the day of the decision without committing myself. I finally thought of a ruse. When I told the story afterwards, I used to say that Pallas Athena, goddess of cloth, had given the idea, and perhaps it was true, as far as I know; crediting the gods with an inspiration was always a good way to avoid accusations of undue pride, if the scheme worked, as well as guilt, if it failed (Atwood, 2020, p. 75)

By giving inspiration to the deity, Penelope had more support to be able to weave the shroud, buying time until Odysseus returned. So the queen began to weave:

A large loom being installed in his room, he began to weave a delicate and too long cloth and then said to us: "Young men, my suitors, since the divine Odysseus died, be patient in your ardor for my hand, until I finish the piece, so that my warp may not be wasted; it is a shroud for the brave Laertes, for when he prostrates the sad fate of a painful death [...] So she said and our haughty heart allowed itself to be persuaded. From there, during the day, he was weaving his immense plot; at night, he had the torches lit and undone it (Homero, 2013, p. 28).

After unwinding, the next day he began to weave again, postponing the choice of a new king. However, the plan is discovered, which causes the suitors to put even more pressure on Penelope. However, Odysseus returns in time to Ithaca, kills all the suitors and

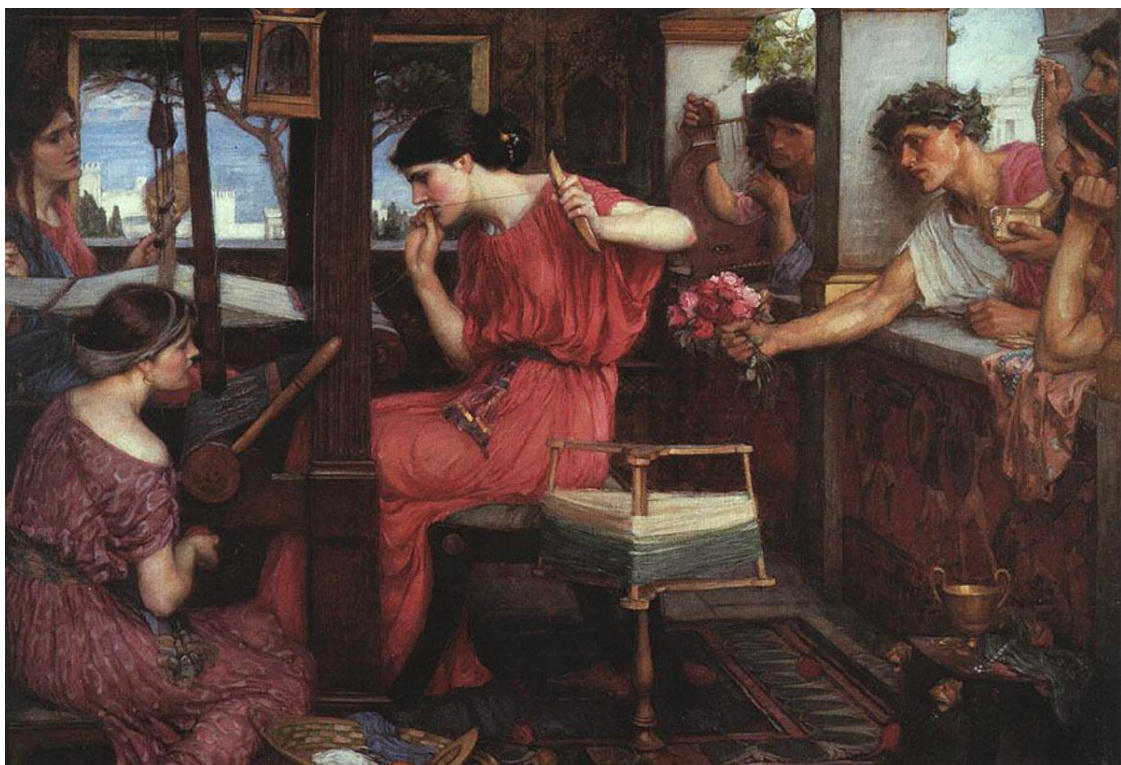
also the twelve enslaved women who helped Penelope with the plan, because he mistakenly thinks that they were in league with the enemies.

We perceive, up to this point, the way the character was stigmatized. However, in Margaret Atwood's retelling, Penelope tells her perspective on the stereotypical facts that earned her fame. This modern view also takes place today, and is narrated by Penelope in Hades, after the Greek mythological life, as she has been dead for millennia. Now, dead, Penelope discovers all of Odysseus' adventures and also the way she became known, as a model of a devoted and chaste wife and can reframe her story. The narrative is interspersed with the songs of the twelve companions enslaved and unjustly killed.

For illustration purposes we have, below, a painting of Penelope produced by the painter John William Waterhouse:

Figure 1

Penelope and the Suitors by John William Waterhouse



Source: *Feel the art website*.

In the image, Penelope is in the central position, bent over, as if dedicated to weaving the shroud, the stratagem used to postpone the choice of a suitor. On one side, the enslaved women who helped her in the task are portrayed, and on the other, some of the men who pressured her and wanted to be chosen as her new husband.

In the same way that Atwood reinterprets a classic, the Italian poet and philosopher Christine de Pizan (1364-1431), considered the first professional writer, rewrites the classic *The City of God* (426), by St. Augustine, in *The City of Women* (1405), considered the first feminist work of Western literature. In the first, society is divided between the society of men and that of God. In Pizan's narrative, it is separated by that of men and women. In the same way that Penelope ruled in the absence of Odysseus, in this universe it is women who rule. The author recovers women from different eras, and reinterprets them as a symbol of cunning and resistance, including Penelope:

The ancient books give several s of chaste and virtuous women. Among the pagan danas, Penelope, wife of Prince Ulysses, was a woman of great virtue, but of all merits it was exemplary chastity that was most praised. We find his story in several chronicles. This woman conducted herself irreproachably during the ten years that her husband was besieged in Troy, and this with all the harassment of many kings and princes, caused by her immense beauty, which she refused to listen to. She was wise, virtuous, devoted to the gods and of exemplary life. An even more remarkable fact is that she waited for her husband ten more years, after the destruction of Troy (Pizan, 2012, p. 230-231).

We can perceive the characteristics that, throughout historicity, have been used to describe Penelope, virtuous, irreproachable, wise. These were the values expected (by men) that a dignified woman had.

3.2 ATHENA AND THE ROLE OF PROTECTOR

After the Trojan War, dated around 1200 B.C., lasting about ten years, Odysseus and his companions continued their journey by ship to return to Ithaca, which would last about seventeen years, however, they encounter numerous difficulties created, both by human beings, as well as mythological and divine, such as Poseidon, the god of the seas, that he sought revenge, because his son, Polyphemus, the cyclops, had been blinded by Odysseus.

Help could come from various entities of Olympus, the abode of the Greek gods, but for this to occur, Odysseus would have to conquer the Divine benevolence:

The relationship that Homer and his heroes maintain with the gods is more formal than psychological and it is enough to make sacrifices to please these gods or commit some inordinate thing to attract their wrath.

On this journey of Ulysses back home, full of adventures, dangers and challenges, the hero will have many opportunities to prove his piety and win the favor of the gods (Gomes, 2013, p. 22).

The king of Ithaca pleased the gods by performing heroic feats, such as the decisive act to win the Trojan War by hiding inside the wooden Horse to invade the city. Also, he showed courage in facing such creatures as mermaids and cyclops.

The great interferences in the return trip to Ithaca, both for good and for bad, come from female figures. The main beneficiary of Odysseus' group is Athena or Minerva, goddess of war and wisdom and daughter of Zeus. In the canvas below, *The Fight Between Mars and Minerva* (1711), by the Frenchman Jacques Louis David, the Goddess is portrayed in one of the scenes of the Iliad, in which she fights against her brother Ares or Mars, God of war:

Figure 2

The struggle between Mars and Minerva by Jacques Louis David



Source: *Mythology and Fantasy Website*

In the scene, we have Ares positioned on the ground, below Athena, and, having been defeated by his sister, he is on the ground with the weapons. Both he and other warriors are in an inferior position in relation to the Goddess, who, victorious, is higher upright, erect and imposing, keeping the helmet and helmet, elements linked to war. This elevated position of

women in relation to men will not be recurrent in the visual works throughout the work. We perceive another divine but naked female figure floating in the clouds. Female nudity is a frequent element in paintings, especially by men, and, for this reason, we question whether there is a real need for the artist, a man, to portray women in an eroticized way.

Athena's intercession to Ulysses dates back to the beginning of the Trojan War. Dos Santos (2015) discusses the reasons that led her to take the side of the hero:

Athena's influence on the fate of the hero Odysseus begins in the Iliad, as Athena helped the Greeks in everything she could to make them win the Trojan War. In this way, being a defender of the Greeks, she would also be of Odysseus. One of the reasons that made Athena in favor of the Greeks was the fact that at the Trial of Paris, he chose Aphrodite as the most beautiful since she offered him the most beautiful woman in the world, Helen (Santos, 2015, p. 17-18).

In the story, we realize that the reason for Athena to help the Greeks is related to vanity and a possible intrigue between the Goddesses Athena and Aphrodite, configuring female stereotypes, such as jealousy, envy, and female rivalry.

Regardless of the reasons, Athena, at various times, advises or helps the hero in his return. We highlight two more occasions in which Athena helps him: at the beginning of the Homeric narrative, the Goddess recommends Telemachus, son of Odysseus, to leave the island and go after his father to be able to help him: "Then a conversation takes place. Athena advises Telemachus to go and look for his father first in Pylus, the city of Nestor, then in Sparta, the city of Menelaus. She leaves giving signs that she is a goddess. Meanwhile, the party of the suitors takes place" (Homero, 2015, p. 18). This guidance is essential, because, only in the face of this, Odysseus is able to return home.

Then, the strategy used by Odysseus to get to safety is to transform himself into a beggar or old man, so as not to be recognized: "Athena advises Odysseus near the coast about the Death of suitors. She hides her belongings in a cave and turns Odysseus into an old man" (Homer, 2015, p. 281). In this way, not even the opponents and even Penelope would easily recognize him. We can then see that, even though he is considered a great hero, Odysseus needs female protection to return to the kingdom.

3.3 CIRCE: ETERNALIZED SEDUCTRESS AND DANGEROUS

One of the dangers faced on the journey to Ithaca occurs when Odysseus meets the nymph-goddess Circe who, according to Kate Hodges, is the "first witch in Western literature

and who served as a model for centuries for sorceresses", (2022, p. 18). Great is the importance given to it, however, this model was often seen in a negative way, as women, linked to spiritual practices, are also condemned for being considered witches, since "they offend reason and modern medicine, by their magical practices. They claim to heal bodies, not only with herbs, but with elixirs made by them and with esoteric formulas" (Perrot, 2019, p. 89). Circe was linked to these practices.

Pizan (2012) also discusses the story of Circe, highlighting her importance as the Queen of her island:

This woman knew the art of magic so well that she could get anything she wanted by the force of her spells. She knew a drink that had the virtue of transforming men into wild animals and birds. We have the proof in the story of Ulysses. He was returning after the destruction of Troy, thinking he was on his way to his country, Greece, when winds and fortune carried his ships hither and thither in the storm, until he finally reached the port of Queen Circe's city. But as the wise Ulysses would not disembark without the permission and consent of the queen of the place, he sent his knights to the queen to find out if he would like them to come down to land. But that lady, suspecting that they were enemies, offered them some of her drink, immediately turning them into pigs. But Ulysses did not take long to go to her and did so much that he persuaded her to restore their original appearance (Pizan, 2012, p. 134).

In the narrative, Odysseus, when he arrives on the island of Eeia, describes her as "Circe with beautiful braids, terrible goddess of human speech (...) of pernicious thought" (Homer, 2011, p. 283). In addition to analyzing physical aspects, such as hair, temperament and personality are also judged. Because she was considered a witch, Circe should be feared, as well as other women who throughout history have also been classified in this way, because witches "have always been women who dared to be brave, aggressive, intelligent, non-conformist, curious, independent, sexually liberated, revolutionary [...] You are a Witch by the fact that you are a woman, indomitable, crazy, cheerful and immortal" (Morgan, 1970 *apud* Federici, 2023, p. 300).

Trusting in her ability and powers, Circe was not afraid to stand up to men who dared to invade the territory. For the purpose of illustration, we have below a painting by Circe, entitled *Odysseus and Circe* (1585) by the Belgian painter Bartholomaeus Spranger (1546-1611):

Figure 3

Odysseus and Circe by Bartholomaeus Spranger



Source: WikiArt website.

When we analyze the painting, we identify that Ulysses is intertwined with Circe, but by his expression and facial position he seems to move away, as if rejecting her. They are surrounded by animals, such as dogs, wild boars and horses, which would actually be bewitched men. We note, again, the female nudity, as Circe appears with her breasts exposed and in a sensual way, reiterating the stereotyped way that women are represented throughout history, not only in writing or orality, but also in the visual arts.

Circe lived in "her palace, situated in a clearing in the woods surrounded by lions and wolves who had not been born of beasts, but men who had been transformed into animals by the force of her spells" (Robles, 2019, p. 105). Animals that would lead Odysseus' crew to the commander of the Island. Circe seduces the men with a bewitched banquet and then, with a magic rod, turns part of the crew into pigs.

Circe's strategy to protect herself from the newcomers to the island was to convert the crew into pigs. We can relate the species of the transformed animals to "the motto of the second feminist wave and the cry 'macho pigs', which reinforces how much Circe's actions reverberated" (Hodges, 2022, p. 20). A cry that to this day demonstrates the indignation of women at the animalistic and savage character of men.

Few men were not transformed into animals, among them Eurylochus and Odysseus. The first led the twenty-two men to the island, but, perceiving Circe's intention, avoided approaching. Odysseus, on the other hand, was initially saved, as he was taking care of the ship. However, in the course of the narrative, the hero is helped by the gods to avoid the spell. The messenger God, Hermes, sent by the Gods to protect him, suggests that he ingest an herb, so as not to be bewitched and also instructs him to protect himself from being transformed into a pig:

As soon as Circe touches your body with her wand, quickly draw the cutting sword, which hangs next to you, and lashes against the goddess, showing intention of killing her. She will then beg you to accompany her to bed. In no way refuse to climb to the bed of the goddess, so that the members want to free you and treat you benign (Homer, 2015, p. 117).

In this way, being helped by Hermes, Odysseus lies with the Goddess to get the promise that she will not make new traps. Thus, he conquers the exit and liberation of the island, in addition to preventing his companions from being turned into pigs again:

And so it was that, in the midst of sacred rituals, Circe pledged an oath in the name of all the blessed gods to restore to human form not only the companions of Ulysses, but all the other wretches whom she held captive in the form of beasts, and even swore that she would never do anything that could harm him while he was asleep (Robles, 2019, p. 110-111).

Circe kept her promise and undid the transformation. However, she ended up seducing Odysseus, but not bewitching him "with any arcane substance, but the goddess used her

bonds of love in order to keep him tied to her bed" (Robles, 2019, p. 113) thus, imprisoning him on the island for longer, which causes the generation of children from the relationship.

After a year of enchantment, Odysseus reminds Circe of the promise of deliverance, and thus, the Goddess keeps her word. Circe also helps them protect themselves against the song of the sirens that would bewitch them during the journey. In this way, we can see that, in the Homeric narrative, the female characters, linked to the divine, are portrayed in a seductive and also dangerous way or in order to help the man, portrayed in the position of hero.

4 CONCLUSION

The purpose of this article was to analyze the representation of the female figure through the characters Athena and Circe, as well as Penelope, resignified in the work *The Odyssey of Penelope* (2005) by Margaret Atwood, in order to discuss how women were represented in the visual and literary arts by male artists. In the analysis, we realized that, both in the fictional and real universes, the female figure was portrayed according to patriarchal conceptions, placing the woman in a secondary position in relation to the man, the "beautiful, modest and homely", a condition constructed by founding and millennial discourses that impose the female condition as submissive, dependent, not owner of knowledge, of being and living itself.

By analyzing the works and characters, we found that representation is and has been portrayed in the visual arts by men still from the patriarchal point of view, which places women in a subordinate condition. Thus, these discourses are of male domination of and over women's bodies and lives, and are still seen as male property.

The prominent divine women, Athena, Circe, and the mythical Penelope are represented and related to a male figure, Ulysses. Athena, helps and protects the Hero, helping to free himself from dangers like those of Circe, who seduces and imprisons him. Penelope is the example of a woman who faithfully and patiently waits for her husband, however, we can consider that Margaret Atwood, through her writing, questions and denounces the ways that women are subjugated and harassed. Penélope is the target of excessive male attacks. In this way, she can tell her version of the facts and take a position of equity and importance, enabling other women to also represent themselves.

REFERENCES

- Atwood, M. (2020). *A odisseia de Penélope* (C. Nogueira, Trans.). Rio de Janeiro, Brazil: Rocco.
- Chartier, R. (1990). *A história cultural*. Rio de Janeiro, Brazil: Bertrand.
- Chartier, R. (2002). *A beira da falésia: A história entre incertezas e inquietudes*. Porto Alegre, Brazil: Ed. UFRGS.
- Federici, S. (2023). *Calibã e a bruxa: Corpos e acumulação primitiva* (2nd ed., Coletivo Sycoraz, Trans.). São Paulo, Brazil: [Publisher not specified].
- Garcia, C. C. (2015). *Breve história do feminismo*. São Paulo, Brazil: Claridade.
- Gomes, C. O. D. S. (2013). Os desafios do herói e a ajuda dos deuses em Homero e Bunyan. *Revista Temporis [Ação]*, 13(2), 16–26.
- Hodges, K. (2022). *Bruxas, guerreiras, deusas: As mulheres mais poderosas da mitologia* (M. M. Galvão, Trans.). Ubatuba, Brazil: Livros da Raposa Vermelha.
- Homero. (2013). *Odisseia* (2nd ed., J. Bruna, Trans.). São Paulo, Brazil: Cultrix.
- Mitologia e Fantasia. (2016, August 1). A luta entre Marte e Minerva. Atena: Deusa da sabedoria. Retrieved September 12, 2024, from <https://mitologiaefantasia.wordpress.com/2016/08/01/atena-deusa-da-sabedoria/>
- Perrot, M. (2019). *Minha história das mulheres* (2nd ed., A. M. S. Côrrea, Trans.). São Paulo, Brazil: Contexto.
- Pizan, C. de. (2012). *A cidade das damas* (L. E. de F. Calado, Trans.). Florianópolis, Brazil: Ed. Mulheres.
- Prodanov, C. C., & Freitas, E. C. (2013). *Metodologia do trabalho científico: Métodos e técnicas da pesquisa e do trabalho acadêmico*. Novo Hamburgo, Brazil: Feevale.
- Rago, M. (2012). *Gênero e história*. Compostela, Brazil: CNT.
- Santos, I. B. dos. (2015). A deusa tecelã de destinos: Uma leitura da interferência de Atena no destino do herói Odisseu. In R. Ambrosio, T. P. do Carmo, & Z. G. dos Santos (Eds.), *Anais do II Encontro de Estudos Clássicos da Bahia* (pp. 1–10). Salvador, Brazil: Universidade Federal da Bahia.
- WikiArt. (n.d.). *Odysseus and Circe*. Retrieved September 20, 2024, from <https://www.wikiart.org/en/bartholomaeus-spranger/odysseus-and-circe-1585>
- Penélope e os pretendentes (1912), de John William Waterhouse. (n.d.). Retrieved September 17, 2024, from <https://app.fta.art/pt/artwork/04b2e10e26e0a817e179ad02a621134ccf16a560>