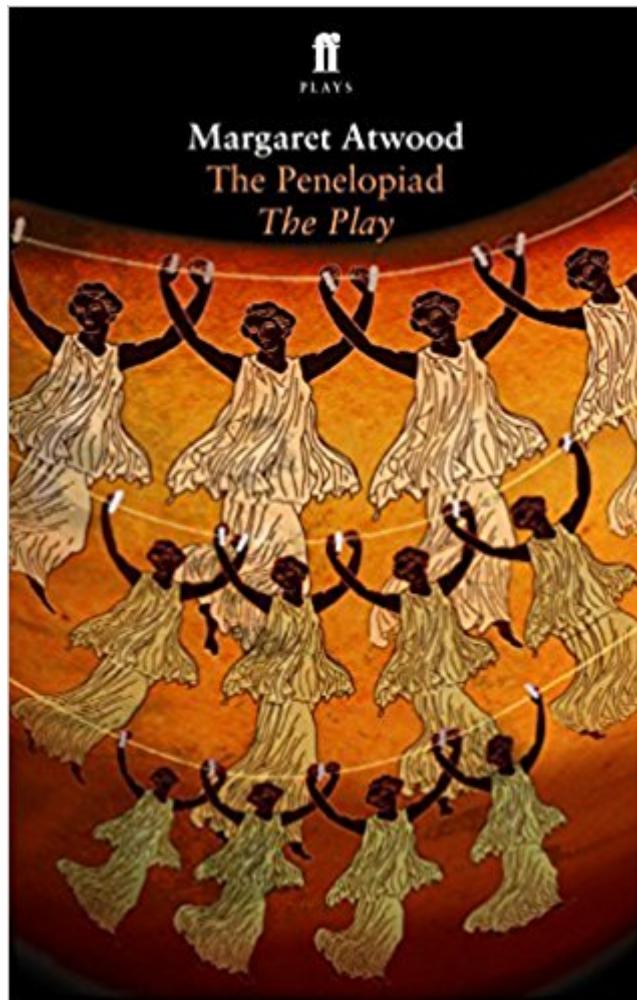


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# The Penelopiad



## **Synopsis**

As portrayed in Homer's Odyssey, Penelope - wife of Odysseus and cousin of the beautiful Helen of Troy - has become a symbol of wifely duty and devotion, enduring twenty years of waiting when her husband goes to fight in the Trojan War. As she fends off the attentions of a hundred greedy suitors, travelling minstrels regale her with news of Odysseus' epic adventures around the Mediterranean - slaying monsters and grappling with amorous goddesses. When Odysseus finally comes home, he kills her suitors and then, in an act that served as little more than a footnote in Homer's original story, inexplicably hangs Penelope's twelve maids. Now, Penelope and her chorus of wronged maids tell their side of the story in a new stage version by Margaret Atwood, adapted from her own wry, witty and wise novel. The Penelopiad premiered with the Royal Shakespeare Company in association with Canada's National Arts Centre at the Swan Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, in July 2007.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

I did enjoy this book very much. Ever wonder what Persophone's life was like while Odysseus was

off to war? Margaret Atwood gives her imaginative answer to that question in this book. With beguiling creativity, Atwood deftly tells of how Persephone acted as well as what she thought. There is subtle yet nasty humor here and songs (as in a Greek chorus) from her 12 youngest and prettiest maids. They are bitter because they were murdered by Odysseus and Telemachus, after secretly serving as Persophone's spies within the mob of suitors seeking to replace Odysseus as the man of the house. The reader will find that the meter and rhythm of the choruses bleeds over into the text that follows them. This is delightful use of prose. All-in-all, it is Atwood's fruitful imagination that wins the day here. This is a spell-binding read, well worth the reader's time. Enjoy!

I really enjoyed this book. It is the story of Penelope and Odysseus told from Penelope's viewpoint after her death. She tells her side of the story of Helen of Troy, what Odysseus was up to, her maid's actions, and the suitors who tried to woo her during Odysseus' absence. Overall an entertaining twist on the myth.

Penelope having been left alone with a kingdom to run, has to deal with the suitors who sit in her hall and eat her food. In this darkly humorous take on Penelope's story, Atwood addresses Penelope's challenges while Odysseus works his way home from the arms of beautiful goddesses and escapes the revenges of Poseidon. She is irked by the uproar her dramatic cousin Helen has put in place. When her husband returns, he and their son hang twelve of her hand maids the hanging of the maids has always been a puzzling part of the legend. They really had no choice in their acceptance of sexual approaches. They and Penelope present their case from Hades. It's a worthwhile re-reading of the story.

The myth(s) of Odysseus are brilliant and complex. As Margaret Atwood re-tells the tale(s) well, and invites us readers to open our psyches to the forgotten, the barbaric, the possible, and the creative energy that is the REAL point of our own mythic lives, always lived in the eternal Now..

I was hesitant to read this, because I hated *The Handmaid's Tale*, but this was different. It was amusing, disgusting, and maddening, but in that way it was just like the *Odyssey*. What's funny is that Penelope is just as much of a liar as Odysseus.

From the beginning of her career, Margaret Atwood has displayed a gift for wry (and sometimes grim) irony. In her poems, in her fiction, even in her criticism, she hits a note of irony that is a bit

short of humor while eliciting twisted smiles from attentive readers. In this retelling of the events of the *Odyssey* focussing on the stay-at-home wife Penelope, she finds humor by contrasting the way those who have told the story in its familiar, hero-based form with the way her heroine sees the situation and events of Homer's tale. By referring to the "facts" as we know them from the Homeric tale of Odysseus's circuitous return trip from Troy to Ithaca, but filling in details of the actions and attitudes of the Greeks who heard and treasured his tale, Atwood makes a familiar story strange and new and interesting. Atwood's gift for looking at the world "slant" has frequently taken the form of dystopias, beginning with *"The Handmaid's Tale"*. Yet, in her very early novels *"The Edible Woman"* and *"Lady Oracle"* she also revealed a mordant sense of humor. That wit is again central to her story-telling in *"The Penelopiad."* Her skill at refocussing on familiar events from a feminist viewpoint, as in *"Life Before Man"* and *"The Robber Bride,"* continues to characterize her writing in this novel. Readers familiar with her work will enjoy this fresh take on an old legend. Those just getting acquainted with her writing will be moved to seek out more of her biting wit. Recommended.

For the contemporary lover of classical literature, mythology and history, the book is fun candy. This small volume shows a strong background on the part of the author and a great sense of humor.

I first read this years ago when it first came out and enjoyed it, but I just finished reading it a second time with my literature group, read in conjunction with Simon Armitage's dramatic retelling of *"The Odyssey"*, and *"Cold Mountain,"* a somewhat updated American version of one man's *Odyssey* home after fighting in the Civil War. I mention these other books because--although I did like the book the first time around--I found the *"The Penelopiad"* to be much more meaningful and enjoyable when it is read in context. This novel by Atwood is the story of *The Odyssey* told from Penelope's (Odysseus's wife) point of view. Atwood also gives voices to Penelope's 12 maids who are killed seemingly without reason by Odysseus and Telemachus in Book 22 of the original story. Penelope doesn't get much face time in the original *Odyssey*, so it's very enriching to read about her life and experiences. Being an Atwood book, I expected this to be a feminist take on a well-known masculine myth, but Penelope wasn't as strong a character as I expected (or hoped.) The chapters featuring the maids (as the chorus) however, were every bit as thought-provoking and disturbing as I've come to expect and love from Atwood. This is apparently part of a larger *"Modern Myths"* series by Canongate featuring other authors retelling well-known myths from unexpected points of view. I look forward to reading more in this series.

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