

Candidate 1 evidence

Advanced Higher Classical Studies

“The Good, The Bad and The Beautiful”; An Evaluation Into How Women Were Depicted in Greek Myth and Literature



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Introduction

“... people will think most highly of you if you behave in the best way you can and if men say as little about you as possible, whether they are praising your good sense or criticising you for not having any.”- Pericles quote in Thucydides 11.45.2 (5th Century BC)

In the classical world, Greek women had no power and little influence as it was the held societal view that women were subservient to men. They would live under the control of the men in their lives and “good” Greek women were expected to keep a good household and partake in activities fit for women at the time such as weaving. These expectations were placed on most if not all female characters in the heroic world, whether goddess or mortal.

Though Ancient Greece was a patriarchal society, women play key roles in Greek myth and literature; becoming women that are meant to be admired for their loyalty or to be feared for their cruelty. Many women fall into the inbetween, becoming enigmatic characters that we never fully understand as they are portrayed in such differing ways depending on the writer. These various interpretations can hinder our understanding of these characters as their portrayals can differ significantly depending on the writer.

Plays are integral in our understanding of life in Ancient Greece as these plays were a way for playwrights to supply their commentary on social issues. A detriment to this is that it reflected only a man’s perspective and how they wished all women behaved. However, these original plays from the 5th Century BC are still useful as they are accurate to what was expected of women at the time.

In recent years, with a rise of female classicists, there has been a rise in conversations about how women are depicted in myth as these stories have only been told from the male perspective. It could be seen that women are reclaiming their importance in classical history through applying feminist theory to Greek myth and literature. A classicist that inspired me when choosing a dissertation topic is Natalie Haynes as she focuses on retelling the stories of women in Greek mythology. It was her novel “Pandora’s Jar: Women in the Greek Myths” that influenced my choice of topic as it disproved my previous conceptions of these women in Greek myth and motivated me to do my own research.

I wanted to focus on how women are depicted in Greek myth and literature but was unsure of who to discuss when first planning my dissertation. Initially I considered focusing on the antagonistic women in Greek myth and look at them through a contemporary lens. Instead, I decided to focus on Penelope, Clytemnestra and Helen of Troy as through reading parts of “The Iliad” and “The Odyssey”, I found that these women could represent the main categories female characters often fell into; “the good”, “the bad” and “the beautiful.” I found that this topic would be easier to relate to the modern day and one I was eager to discuss.

For my research, I have looked at the works of Homer alongside other Greek writer’s interpretations of famous myths such as the works of Euripides and Aeschylus alongside evaluating what was expected of women at the time as well as looking at various artists’ depictions of these women throughout time.

“The Good: Penelope”

The most notable mortal woman throughout the Odyssey is Penelope, the “good” wife of Odysseus who refused to remarry after twenty years of separation from her husband, causing her suitors to run their estate into the ground. Though Penelope is often depicted in the Odyssey being stuck in an melancholic state, she is not meant to be seen as weak. In reality, she is an intelligent woman fit for Odysseus, living up to her epithet as “wise Penelope.” In Book 1, it seems that Penelope is helpless in her situation; her husband has not returned from war a decade after it ended yet she refuses to remarry. She however stops the bard from singing about the suffering of the Greeks travelling home from Troy as it upsets her.

"But break off this song- the unendurable song that always rends the heart inside me... the unforgettable grief, it wounds me most of all!" Homer, *Odyssey*, Book 1 lines 410-412

Here we see Penelope having some influence as she stops the performance and they listen to her when she could have been ignored. Whatever influence she may have is thwarted as she is reprimanded by her son, Telemachus:

"... so go to your quarters now and attend to your own work, the loom and the spindle, and tell the servants to get on with theirs. Talking must be the men's concern, and mine in particular; I am master in this house."-Homer *Odyssey*, Book 1 lines 430-435

This shows to us that though Penelope does possess some level of influence, she ultimately obeys the male figure in her life, in this case, her son. From the perspective of the time, she is acting according to what would have been expected of her. She, "astonished" but pleasantly surprised by his actions, retreats back to her room. It may be assumed that she is going to be the submissive wife that we assume a Greek Hero should have; loyal to her husband who has been away for years and never strays away from him.¹ Penelope manages the maids of the house, exhibits good *Xenia* to the suitors and loves her son Telemachus while he may not treat her with respect. He is taking control as the masculine figure in her life when he had no positive authority figure due to Odysseus being away for twenty years.

It is important to note that the suitors are never seen as viable interests for Penelope as they are antagonistic figures in the myth; they plan to kill Telemachus when he finally confronts them for their gluttonous behaviour. The suitors vie for the power that would come with being the king of Ithaca alongside Penelope. Marriage in the Ancient Greece was seen as an opportunity for financial, social or political gain, not one of love. Penelope has avoided remarrying, both out of love for Odysseus and out of fear for her son. If she chose to remarry, the marriage would be arranged by her father though she is a grown woman. Women in Ancient Athens were always under the control of a male guardian, no matter her age or status as we have seen in how Telemachus treats his mother.²

However, Penelope plays a crucial role throughout the *Odyssey* as seen in her skills in weaving. Penelope had promised the suitors that she would remarry once she had finished weaving a funeral shroud for her father in law Laertes when he dies. Weaving was a woman's specialty in the Ancient world as it was expected for a woman to spend her time in her gynaikion, a woman only weaving room where she would be accompanied by her female slaves³. Weaving was also synonymous with femininity in the ancient world because women served important purposes in worshipping the gods as it was believed women were better suited to praise the gods. It was a woman's duty in the ancient world to give proper burial rites to her family members, including weaving funeral shrouds. But for Penelope, her weaving skills help to become symbolic of her own cunning. She spends her day weaving but at night, she unwinds her work, ready to restart the next day to ensure she won't remarry. This ruse is especially impressive considering it bought her almost three years worth of time and the act of unwinding would be physically demanding.

¹ An expectation which can make Penelope be pitied from a modern perspective as the reason why Odysseus' journey home has been so stunted is largely due to his relationships with other women alongside Poseidon's multiple attempts at killing him.

² An example of women being totally under the control of men can be seen in Emily Wilson's retranslation of *The Odyssey* in 2017, being the first woman to reinterpret the text. This is crucial in our understanding of the text as in the English translation of *The Odyssey* there is unnecessary derogatory language against women that is not present in the original Greek. An example of which being in Book 22 in which the maids are executed by Telemachus and Odysseus. In the standard English translation the maids are referred to as "sluts" and "whores" whereas in the original Greek they are referred to as "women."

³ it is unlikely that she would be able to have guests such as other wives to socialise with as society at the time often viewed women conversing together to be encouraging them to be gossips and that they are "naturally scandalmongers" as quoted in "*Phoenissae*" by Euripides.)



"So by day she'd weave at her great and growing web-by night, by the light of torches set beside her, she would unravel all she'd done. Three whole years she deceived us blind, seduced us with this scheme." Homer, Odyssey, Book 2 lines 115-118

("Penelope Weaves and Waits" by Marion Maguire, 2017, shown left, which provides a modern and accurate depiction of Penelope at the loom.)

By doing this to avoid remarrying, we see that a Penelope is a woman that was meant to be greatly admired. We see that she lives up to her given epithet of *periphron* meaning "circumspect" in that she is constantly thinking ahead and uses her intelligence to help preserve the *oikos*. The *oikos* was the family unit and was the most important groups any

man could belong to as it was his duty to provide for his household through battle. Odysseus hasn't been able to fulfil this duty as he had been away at sea. By weaving this plan to protect her *oikos*, Penelope earns her own *timé* or honour. In the Greek world, heroes would fight in battle to achieve *kleos* or *everlasting fame*. Heroes would first display their *Arete* or greatness in battle, this *Arete* earning them *timé* which would lead to achieving *kleos*. It could be seen that Penelope has earned her *kleos* by exhibiting the heroic trait of *Dolos*. *Dolos* is trickery or cunning and was seen as a way for women to earn *Arete*. The trickery involved in her plan alongside other examples of her trickery like testing Odysseus when he has returned disguised as a beggar as she removes their bed from their chamber to indicate that she had moved on, invoking Odysseus' anger and in doing so, confirming her belief that he has returned. These examples of Penelope's wit are what cements her good reputation as discussed by Beth Cohen.

"In the Iliad "imperishable glory" is attained by warriors through celebration in poetry when they have performed heroic deeds. Here in the Odyssey, the "excellence" (Arete) that leads to such glory is redefined to refer not to supremacy in battle but to the mental-toughness and faithfulness illustrated by Penelope in "remembering" Odysseus."

It could be seen that due to all of this, Penelope is a prime example of what a good woman and wife should be in the classical world. She not just uses her wits to help her husband but does so by incorporating a symbol of femininity, hence why she was so admired. She uses her role as a woman and what is expected of her to her advantage in order to stay loyal to Odysseus.⁴ She behaves throughout in a clearly feminine way; when she weaves her shroud, she is being cunning and exhibits the trait of *Dolos*. Overall, Penelope is presented as having her strengths lying in her femininity.

In regards to discussing Penelope, the concept of the "good wife" is still prevalent in modern media. The modern day Penelope's can be found as wives to politicians who attract controversy by having affairs with other women, an example being Bill Clinton's affair with Monica Lewinsky while he was President of the USA, which was resurrected in "Impeachment: American Crime Story." The "Penelope" would be Hillary Clinton as she stood by her husband throughout and is still married to him. The Clinton scandal helped to inspire the television series "The Good Wife" which focuses on the politician's wife instead. The title, "The Good Wife" is reminiscent of Penelope and how she was regarded in the ancient world. A "Good Wife" stands by her husband as he is in a position of power and notoriety. In order to uphold his image, she has to be near perfect. She takes care of their children, has her own career but never outshines him and is her husband's biggest supporter. This relates back to Penelope in the Odyssey; she adores Odysseus, supports him by weaving her shroud and welcomes him back with open arms. Overall it could be seen that the concept of the "good wife Penelope" never disappeared but has been updated throughout the years; still admired for their unwavering loyalty.

⁴ Her actions being heavily contrasted with the actions of fellow famous wife Clytemnestra towards her husband Agamemnon.

“The Bad”:Clytemnestra

While Penelope waited for Odysseus with a heart full of love, Clytemnestra waited for Agamemnon seething with anger. Before sailing off to fight in the Battle of Troy a decade prior, Agamemnon had committed the terrible deed of sacrificing his own daughter Iphigenia; leaving Clytemnestra to plot her revenge. She takes up a lover, Aegisthus, who helps her plot and murder Agamemnon. In the events of *Agamemnon*, the first play in the *Oresteia*, Clytemnestra welcomes Agamemnon home who then introduces her to his prisoner of war, Cassandra, who he favours more than his wife. After arriving home, he is murdered by Clytemnestra and Aegisthus by being hacked to death in the bath. In Aeschylus' version of the myth, it is Clytemnestra who murders Agamemnon; this is the most common version of the story.⁵

Clytemnestra is revered as one of the biggest female villains in Greek myth but her decision to murder her husband is not unjustified. Being a mother was the most important purpose women in the ancient world had to offer to society and was likely the cause of death for many if not most women in the ancient world. Clytemnestra had one of her daughters stolen from her, her life cut short by her own father whose duty mattered more to him. After he leaves to fight, Clytemnestra is filled with hatred as she longs for vengeance; refusing to agree with the principle that one life lost is worth it for the greater good.

Clytemnestra takes on a lover while Agamemnon is absent, Aegisthus who is Agamemnon's cousin. Her act of adultery would have been looked down upon by the audience of the time as it was common for men to cheat on their wives with slave girls, prostitutes or prisoners of war like Agamemnon with Cassandra. It was acceptable for a husband to cheat on his wife as marriage was contractual but the same allowances could not be made for women. Women of a certain status were expected to never stray from her husband and if she was caught cheating there was the risk of being divorced. This would likely lead to her being ostracised by society, never being able to leave the house as she brought shame upon her family, sometimes being driven to suicide due to this embarrassment.

By Clytemnestra having an affair, it further emphasises that she is not meant to be the “good” Greek wife as she is not only planning to murder her husband but that she has taken on both a lover and an accomplice. Clytemnestra is aware of this double standard and actively criticises it, showing how unconventionally outspoken her character is.

“Women are fools, I don't deny it, but even so, when the husband goes elsewhere, spurning his marriage, and the wife wishes to initiate the man and find another love, then the full glare of scandal falls on us, but the men who were the cause receive no blame.”- Euripides, Electra 1035-40

Aegisthus has his own motivations for killing Agamemnon other than to marry Clytemnestra and become king of Mycenae. Aegisthus wants to kill Agamemnon as revenge for Agamemnon's father killing Aegisthus' brothers. This arguably suggests that though Clytemnestra has this affair, it doesn't mean that she is going to be loved because it's an affair of convenience. This creates sympathy for Clytemnestra's character as the men in her life prioritise power over her. Agamemnon was not a good example of a husband by both modern day and Classical standards. He can be seen as incredibly cruel by sacrificing his own daughter or for his strong distaste for Clytemnestra.⁶ Unlike Odysseus and Penelope's relationship, their marriage never contained any element of love. Though Odysseus cheated on Penelope, he pined for her as she is meant to be his equal. This emphasises the parallel between Clytemnestra and Penelope even in their relationships with their husbands.

An interesting detail of the murder of Agamemnon is that before he is murdered, he is trapped by a type of transparent shroud making him incapable of fighting back. This trap set by Clytemnestra

⁵ Though in the *Odyssey*, Homer depicts Aegisthus as being the murderer instead.

⁶ As seen in how his lone mention of her in the *Iliad* is to compare how his prisoner of war, Chryseis, is much better and that she will be sleeping in his bed from now on.



krater by the Dokimasia Painter, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

is key in understanding how her character rejects the “good” wife persona as she is directly compared to Penelope. Penelope used her skills in weaving to avoid remarrying; her feminine capabilities are empowering but she still fits into what an Ancient Greek woman should be. Clytemnestra also uses her ability to weave but to doom her husband. She has weaved her plan after years of longing for revenge. To her, weaving is also a tool of empowerment but one of self-empowerment.

Throughout the play there is the running motif of trapping imagery or net imagery. This can be seen in Clytemnestra’s monologue after Agamemnon’s murder where she says;

“The deed achieved, here I stand I, where I slew. So was it wrought (and this I’ll not deny) That he could neither ‘scape, nor ward his doom; Around him, like a fish- encircling net, This garment’s deadly splendour did I cast.. Him with third blow I cowered, votive gifts.”- Aeschylus, Agamemnon lines 1378-1388

The net imagery evokes the image of a trapped, helpless animal. This could be seen as Clytemnestra dehumanising Agamemnon, that the Greek Hero can be swayed into a false sense of security so easily. It could be seen that Clytemnestra is purposefully stealing away Agamemnon’s pride before he dies as punishment; to reduce him to a state of helplessness that Iphigenia might have felt when she was murdered, that Agamemnon’s life means as little to Clytemnestra as Iphigenia’s did to him. He is the sacrifice; by killing him, Clytemnestra reaches her catharsis.

Clytemnestra is demonised for her actions and associated with the women in Greek myth that are feared. In the context of if she aligns with the what a “good” woman in the ancient world should be, she wouldn’t and not just because she murders her husband. A key element of Clytemnestra’s character is that she rejects feminine roles and takes on more masculine traits, an element of her character that the Ancient Greek audience would have frowned upon. She is outspoken in regards to the position women have in ancient society and objects to these double standards. She is feared in *Agamemnon* by the Greek Chorus when they try to question her morality and she snaps back at them. She defies what was expected of both a woman and a wife but it could be argued that at her character’s core, she is emotionally fragile. Her actions all stem from her daughter being sacrificed to achieve the perceived “greater good” of Agamemnon fighting in Troy. Her own daughter’s life was not seen as important and this is what ruins her. It’s loss that motivates Clytemnestra and so a conclusion could be made that Clytemnestra is not inherently evil, but a victim to the actions of the men in her life.

Clytemnestra could be seen as the earliest depictions of the “Woman Scorned” trope in media. This trope is defined as a woman who has been wronged by the men in her life and seeks vengeance against them, usually in the form of murder. Clytemnestra murders Agamemnon for scorning her by murdering Iphigenia alongside bringing home Cassandra. Agamemnon’s adultery helps Clytemnestra fit into this trope even more as often in the “Woman Scorned” trope, it is her partner’s unfaithfulness that motivates the woman to committing murder. A notable example of this trope can be found in the musical Chicago in the song “Cell Block Tango” in which the “Six Merry Murderesses of the Cook County Jail” sing their accounts of murdering their partners for scorning them in some way. Though their actions were morally wrong, the characters frame it that it was their partner’s faults for wronging them as seen in the last lines of the song. “If you had been there, if you had seen it, I bet y’a you would have done the same.” There is no doubt that Clytemnestra would agree with these scorned women getting their revenge as she viewed it as being only fair that Agamemnon was to be punished for all of the anguish that he had caused her. She follows a similar thought process to the Six Merry Murderesses of the Cook County Jail, concluding that; **“He had it comin.”**

“The Beautiful”:Helen

Helen is a perplexing character in that she is one of the most well known women in Greek myth and yet her character remains a mystery. As remarked by Christopher Marlowe, she is “the face that launched a thousand ships”; the reason for the destruction of Troy. To some she is an innocent, to others a seductress or a selfish, superficial woman that doesn’t care about the destruction that she has caused. It could be argued that it is most accurate to categorise Helen into the role of the “beautiful” woman in myth; the woman who is the beautiful object for men to fight over and because of this, she is never warranted a set personality. She can be a seductress, innocent or most commonly, just beautiful.

Originally Helen of Sparta, she is often believed to have been the child of Zeus and Leda after Zeus turned into a swan and “seduced” Leda.⁷ Even when she was young Helen was believed to be a girl of extraordinary beauty and the theme that her good looks meant that she is a prize is evident in the myth of her childhood abduction by Theseus as he wanted to marry a daughter of Zeus. She is eventually rescued and brought home by her brothers Castor and Pollux; marking the start of her tendency of getting abducted. However there are disturbing inclinations from this first encounter as though women being abducted in Greek myth was commonplace, it was often that an inclination of “kidnapping” was sexual assault. In different

Francisco Primaticcio’s “The Rape Of Helen”(1530-39)



⁷ More accurately it should be described as rape but the concept of consent in the Ancient world was practically non-existent or completely different to how we view consent in the modern day hence why the term “rape” is rarely used outright.

versions of this myth such as Stesichorus⁸, Helen bears a child after this encounter.⁹It is important to note that due to the nature of mythology, details will change over time. Although this version of the myth isn't common though other writers do follow Stesichorus' version, it still gives us a sad inclination of what her character is doomed to be; a prize, something to steal away and to be fought for.¹⁰

Helen is best known for being "the face that launched a thousand ships," as she is often cited as being the cause of the Battle of Troy when she runs away with Paris and abandons her husband Menelaus. As a consequence of this, Paris invokes the Oath of Tyndareus where the suitors who vied for Helen's hand agreed to defend the chosen husband and consequently the Battle of Troy begins. But how much of the war can be blamed on Helen? Like every mortal in Greek mythology, Helen is a pawn of the gods. The truest root of the Battle of Troy is Eres' golden apple at the wedding of Thetis and Peleus which was inscribed "for the most beautiful." This led to a contest between Hera, Athena and Aphrodite which had to be resolved by Paris choosing who was most beautiful. Aphrodite offered Paris Helen, the most beautiful mortal, as a wife¹¹ and so he chose Aphrodite to be the most beautiful. It could be seen that Helen was a bargaining chip to Aphrodite in order to win the competition between the goddesses.¹²Helen had no say in this as she was a pawn to Aphrodite ; something insignificant that she could use to keep the agreement in tact. The nature of the abduction itself is inconsistent between sources as some depict it as Helen being kidnapped or raped while other sources depict her as willingly leaving with Paris.¹³

There are even some interpretations of the myth of the Battle of Troy where Helen was *never at Troy*. Writers such as Stesichorus and Euripides depict the Helen at Troy as being an *eidolon*; an identical figure made out of cloud. This eidolon took her place during the war while the real Helen stayed safe in Egypt as described in Euripides' play "*Helen*."

⁸ Stesichorus, fr. 191 PMG

⁹ It is worth noting that Helen's age is never disclosed in this telling of the myth. Some versions have Helen as a young child, in some she is meant to be eleven, perhaps twelve.

¹⁰ However the topic of sexual assault in Greek mythology is a complex issue that would require an entire separate analysis or rather, an entirely separate dissertation in order to look at this sensitive topic in depth but it is important to remember that many of the women who fall into the category of the "damsel" or rather of the "beautiful ones" are frequently kidnapped and assumed to have been assaulted by the men who take them. Whether this context is recognised or not in the modern day is another question. (Looking at a myth such as the kidnapping of Persephone by Hades for example is now regarded in modern pop culture as one of the first "forbidden love" stories and is frequently retold and romanticised when there are other retelling of the story where it is depicted that Hades sexually assaults her and then keeps her in the Underworld with him.)

¹¹ (although she was already married)

¹² It could be argued that an amount of blame could be placed upon Paris for choosing a beautiful wife over ruling Asia like Hera promised him or wisdom regarding battle strategy as Athena affected him. Either of the two other options may have created chaos in the Ancient world but regardless, his decision seems like a very poor one from a modern perspective considering his options.

¹³ According to some, Paris deduced Helen, for others Helen seduced Paris. The nature of which she was taken remains foggy however a recurring theme in regards to Helen as a character is that though her beauty is what makes her so special to these men and in turn, what has kept her relevant in modern culture, only caused her great pain and unhappiness. Throughout many of the depictions of her life in Troy, Helen can be portrayed as rather miserable as she has been abducted from her home by a man she has never met and has inadvertently started a war due to her beauty and is usually subject to scrutiny for this when she, along with every mortal and especially hero in the Ancient world, is just a pawn for the gods to play with.



Benjamin West's "Helen Brought to Paris"(1776)

"But Hera, indignant at not defeating the goddesses, made an airy nothing of my marriage with Paris, she gave the son of King Priam not me, but an image alive and breathing, that she fashioned out of the sky and made to look like me."-Euripedes. Helen, lines 31-35

It could be seen that this concept of *eidolon* Helen at Troy perfectly summarises her purpose; to be this beautiful figure that men fight for. The "Helen of Troy" we refer to is a blank slate that we project onto. This is common in Greek myth and literature as one of the biggest disadvantages is that though myths were reinterpreted by different writers, it was always male writers who depicted women the way they wanted them to act.¹⁴ There are many female characters in Greek myth that aren't given fixed personalities and become enigmatic like Helen. She is whoever you need her to be.



Helen is an interesting character in that she could fit into many tropes in modern media due to the enigmatic nature of her character. She however could definitely be considered a damsel in distress as most mentions of her involve her being abducted and being reliant on men to rescue her. There is one character in particular that is most Helen-esque in that they share a tendency of getting kidnapped. That character is Daphne Blake from the Hanna-Barbera cartoon Scooby Doo. Throughout the show, Daphne has been the damsel in distress, being captured by various monsters and left waiting for the help of the rest of the "Scooby Gang"; being saved with the help of her love interest Fred's traps. This could be seen as similar to Helen as her main role in myth is to be kidnapped and then rescued by the heroes. However, Daphne's damsel in distress character has faded in the franchise as seen in the live action adaptations. In these films, Daphne is given an update; being self aware and actively fighting back when dealing with any monsters. She is played by Sarah Michelle Geller who is best known as playing Buffy Summers in "Buffy the Vampire Slayer," a television series that was synonymous with female empowerment. It's quite worrying that Daphne has had a better reinvention than Helen as there haven't been many retellings of the Battle of Troy in which Helen is portrayed with much depth. Perhaps it's time to reinvent her character and to focus solely on Helen.

Conclusion

The topic of how women in Ancient Greek myth and literature are depicted is complex as due to the sheer number of female characters, it would be impossible to evaluate how fairly they were all depicted. To be a good woman that is loyal and uses her intelligence for good, to be a bad woman that uses her intelligence with cruel intentions or to be an *eidolon* whose personality is projected onto her by others. These three options of how women could be presented in Ancient Greek myth can be seen as confining the idea of who an Ancient Greek woman could be as, like previously mentioned, all of these sources were written by men and so how accurate these expectations were for Greek women remains a mystery.

¹⁴ Though there are definite exceptions to this like Euripedes who wasn't afraid of writing his female characters to be outspoken or clever like Clytemnestra and Medea.

However, through exploring these characters in depth, we see that these women are incredibly complex individuals. Penelope is badly casted as the miserable wife waiting for her husband to return when in reality, she is an intelligent woman that the Ancient Greeks admired. A reason as to why the Ancient Greeks held Penelope in such a high regard is that her heroism is rooted in her femininity; she uses the feminine activity of weaving as a form of empowerment instead of trying to adopt masculine traits instead. This differs greatly with female characters like Clytemnestra who were vilified for being "too masculine". Clytemnestra falls under this criticism as she is vengeful; murdering her husband and taking on a lover. She was the opposite of how society expected women to behave but there is a fragility to her character as she is motivated by loss; wanting her daughter's life to have value in a world that did not regard women as equal to men. She uses her weaving to doom her husband instead ; rejecting the notions that society has placed upon her and in doing so, achieves a sense of empowerment. Helen however is an enigma of a character that can't be compared to either. She is the most beautiful woman in the Ancient World yet her beauty causes only misery for those around her. One minute she is a seductress, another a helpless victim. She is not so much a character but an eidolon that others project onto the image that they want to see. Even in the modern day we haven't decided who Helen is; she is up to interpretation.

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