

### **Penelope: Role Model Extraordinaire**

Flipping open a new window on the browser, it wasn't necessarily a surprise to see the top headlines on the homepage displaying another dirty scandal with a picture of a guilty-looking woman. It would be an off day if there *wasn't* something along those lines flashing across the computer screens and televisions of America. With the world around us going into a moral holocaust, mothers everywhere are urging their oh-so-susceptible daughters to find a good role model virtually anywhere. The solution that many mothers don't seem to be aware of is that we have a woman portraying each of the characteristics that our moms are drilling us to have, right at our fingertips. In fact, we're studying her in English! The question still remains, however: How does the character of Penelope illustrate moral characteristics in an immoral world?

Penelope was one of the only women in Mythology (if not *the* only one) that strived for excellence in her demeanor, her moral caliber, and her husband. Married to Odysseus, solid extraordinaire and good looking to boot, Penelope swore to herself and her husband to be loyal, and, despite the bad examples that were being set for her peers, she stuck to it (Athena "Human Women in Greek Myths"). When Odysseus left for a war that led to almost two decades in solitude for Penelope, suitors began harassing her and her son, demanding her hand in marriage. Refusing to weaken her stance, she used her own wit to postpone the wedding that would, in turn, break her spirit. With steadfastness of heart, she held true to her word, her love, and her will, and was later rewarded with the homecoming of the man she adored; unlike the other women of mythological times, who ended up with slightly less...picturesque fates.

Take, for example, Helen of Troy. She was born a beauty, and wasn't that just wonderful for her, especially having to live with the guilt of having a *world war* started over it? 'The Face That Launched 1,000 Ships' came about from her dear old mommy and daddy's infidelity, and the result may or may not have had something to do with her being born out of an egg (Athena "Women in Greek Myths"). Her mother, Queen of Sparta, was unfaithful to her husband, shedding the first trace of light on where Helen might've gotten some of her ideas. Helen, apparently, had no problem with leaving *her* husband and running off with some 'Paris' guy, just because she was a little more into adventure than that whole 'till death do us part' thing (Poikile). Zeus, being the womanizing god that he is, didn't find anything wrong with turning into a swan to seduce poor, innocent women. While Zeus was doing his thing (well, *everything*, really) down on Earth, Hera, his unfortunate wife, was sentenced to a life in jealous misery. Outraged by her husband's player-like skills, she took it upon herself to seek some therapeutic help...that is, by taking her anger out on anybody she could find, really. The fault, of course, was never her husbands. No, it wasn't *his* fault that he shamelessly seduced women around the world and had an innumerable amount of kids.

Even the *men* were setting bad examples for Penelope! While Zeus went around cavorting with the natives, Narcissus had a great time adoring himself. Pride is a dangerous thing, even for us mere mortals, and the problem was only escalated by the fact that Narcissus was drop dead gorgeous (Cotterell). As the ladies chased after him,

forever longing for him and his bulging muscles, he was entertaining himself by playing peek-a-boo with his own reflection. One has to wonder, however: was the curse that was placed on him really so different from how he was before? Did anybody really notice a difference in the way he talked? This carelessness regarding love was emulated throughout mythology, as if love were just another trivial thing that happened sometimes, but most of the time it was simply taken (Hamilton). In the society that Penelope grew up in, morals seemed to be out of the picture: no, it was all about getting what you wanted. This, however, wasn't necessarily a bad thing to be taught. As Penelope was determined to wait for her husband, her stubbornness eventually won out.

Is our society really all that different from the morals that mythological characters felt they had to ignore? Although we're not as dead set as they used to be on ideals such as marriage and children, that whole moral conduct thing seems to, once again, have been thrown out the window. If Penelope had grown up in our day, would she have had her story end differently? Yes, the suitors in her time were persistent. But they honored her wish to make a burial cloak for her late father-in-law, despite their impatience (Zimmerman). Would the impatient men of *our* era have granted her this much courtesy? I doubt it. The 'I want it I get it' mentality has overflowed into our culture, into things that we regard as everyday life. Grand Theft Auto, for example. It's all about the pleasure seeking, the thrill ride, the 'what can I get away with doing' moments. Were mythological values really a foretelling of what was to come? An oracle, maybe, set into various stories?

As Penelope helped achieve her happily-ever-after, setting an unprecedented score among the people of mythological times, the others seem to pale in comparison. Penelope set the standard higher against a background of immorality and infidelity, not giving in to peer pressure or harassment, not backing down from what she knew was right, and what she wanted. The examples that were set for her were terrible, from Zeus, the ultimate Playboy subscriber, to Helen of Troy, the Brittany Spears of Greek mythology. Still, she kept her standards high, avoiding temptation as it came her way. Her moral caliber not only supersedes her day, but ours as well, which seems to me to be something that you could definitely want to emulate in your life. So, Mom, ever thought about Penelope?

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