

*'COMPARE HOW PHOTOGRAPH 51 AND THE PENELOPIAD EXAMINE HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS.'*

Both 'Photograph 51' by playwright Anna Ziegler and 'The Penelopiad' by author Margaret Atwood present a world in which women take control of the story of their lives, originally dictated throughout history by men. Human relationships are a central aspect in both protagonists' lives, particularly their interactions with the men around them. The elements of competition, the exertion and lack of power, and the influence of the patriarchal society in which both women live, distort and negatively impact on human relationships present in both texts.

Human relationships are examined through the lens of competition, particularly between the male characters in both texts. Rosalind, in 'Photograph 51', competes with the other scientists in the 'race' to discover the structure of DNA. The professional relationship between Rosalind and her research partner, Wilkins, is compromised due to the lack of teamwork between them. The pressure associated with their research and the ingrained sexism Rosalind experiences as a woman in the field of science, pushes her to alienate herself, preferring to work alone than have her "data misinterpreted" by others. Rosalind and Wilkins' competitors, Watson and Crick, also demonstrate how a highly competitive atmosphere can impact on relationships. Watson is eager to "get in the race" and his unrelenting ambition often puts his partner, Wilkins, off working with him, damaging their friendship as a result. Wilkins also describes how his wife, Odile, had started to "slowly move her things out of [their] bedroom". His ambition to beat Rosalind and her team in the race evidently had led him to neglect his wife and caused her to move away from him. The Penelopiad similarly demonstrates people in competition with one another. Throughout the text, Penelope frequently makes comments about her cousin Helen; a woman who she envies for the attention she receives, and despite her being a family member, Penelope describes her as a "septic beach" and sees Helen as the "root cause of all [her] misfortunes". Penelope credits her cousins' actions in escaping to Troy with her new lover, Paris, as taking her own husband, Odysseus, away from her, leaving her alone and "a stranger in a strange place". The Suitors who later swoon over Penelope for her hand in marriage are also effectively competing with one another. They use their rivalry for their benefit and make a deal with each other to make 'conquering' Penelope profitable for all of them. They band together and agree that "whoever gets the prize gives out respectable gifts to the others". Both 'The Penelopiad' and 'Photograph 51' demonstrate a competitive atmosphere to have damaging effects on relationships. However, there are also instances in both texts in which competition leads to an odd mix of rivalry and profit; as Watson and Crick discover the "secret of life" for the greater good of the world and the Suitors put aside their rivalry in an attempt to ensure they all become better off.

The exertion of power and the subsequent lack of power present between the characters in both texts also distort human relationships. As a woman in the male dominated field of scientific research, the barriers that Rosalind puts up to protect herself emotionally, often make her appear "cold". However, this is her attempt to combat the powerlessness she experiences due to her role in society, and fight against the way and which her work is viewed as less important than that of the men around her. One reason why she might prefer and insist on others referring to her as "Dr Franklin" and not "Miss Franklin", is that she wants her dedication and professionalism to be noticed before the fact that she is a woman. Being identified by the title of Dr grants her more power in her field and makes her feel like the integrity of her work is being considered. The male scientists around her exert their power by constantly putting her down and suggesting that she's not good enough to "get it on her own", suggesting that she can't produce any meaningful research on her own.

The inherent view that Rosalind is powerless against “something that was at her back, a force greater than she was,” demonstrates that the male researchers were held in a higher regard and didn't respect Rosalind as a scientist. This ultimately meant that she was inhibited from forming meaningful and mutually respectful professional relationships. Lack of power is also represented through the maids in 'The Penelopiad' who were objectified and used by the Suitors. They were powerless and “could not refuse” the men who raped them, some of which the girls had even fallen in love with, destroying their chance at a loving relationship and defying the maids trust in the process. Though Penelope is not defiled in the same way as the maids, she was aware that it was happening to them, but felt powerless and unable to defend them as she would have to go against the Suitors herself. Penelope's powerlessness against men is also shown through the changing dynamic of her relationship with her son, Telemachus. As he grows up, he comes to take on the same disrespectful attitudes of other men in society, disrespecting his own mother and “defying [her] parental authority”. Each text demonstrate how those with power use it to undermine women without power in society, showing how the relationships between them are ones primarily of domination and disrespect.

'The Penelopiad' and 'Photograph 51' are set in a patriarchal society in which the inherent gender roles silence the female protagonist to some extent, leading to the development of weak relationships. Upon Rosalind's arrival at Kings, she is expected to assume the role of assistant to Wilkins research, despite being told otherwise. Wilkin's suggestion that they could “think of [their] work together as a kind of partnership” indicates that she is expected to simply comply with less than what she was promised, which was to lead her own research. This expectation of her as a woman in a patriarchal society to be incapable of meaningful research follows with the fact that her contributions to the discovery of the structure of DNA have been largely forgotten or ignored throughout history. The reference to this is evident through the character of Hermione in Shakespeare's 'A Winter's Tale', the play that Rosalind went to see. “She simply didn't stand out, I suppose”, and neither did Rosalind and her contributions to science. Similarly, as a woman depicted in ancient Greek history, Penelope had been denied the opportunity to tell her own version of events, taking advantage only in modern times to do a “little story making for [her]self”. As she recounts her feelings of loneliness throughout her life, she also describes how she “kept [her] mouth shut, or, if [she] opened it, she sang [Odysseus'] praises”. She felt she couldn't be honest about her true feelings and beliefs, recognising the dangers of honesty in a society that would condemn her for speaking badly of any man, especially her husband. The patriarchal society in which both protagonists lived restricted them from honesty in their relationships and denied them the recognition they rightfully deserved for their roles in history.

'The Penelopiad' and 'Photograph 51' demonstrate how the misogynistic behaviours of men and the expectations of women to conform in both ancient and comparatively modern times impact human relationships. The feminist lens that each author adopts allows them to openly condemn the traditionalist behaviours that have silenced both Rosalind and Penelope, and enable them to highlight the detriment to healthy relationships in each of the stories.