



# The MCA Newsletter

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## Contact Us

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Association, please visit the  
MCA website at  
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There you will find even  
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## *Editorial* » **Events for All**

This newsletter issue comes to you a bit later than usual, but it makes up for the delay with exciting news and photos to show you all that the MCA has been up to in the past few months.

In September, the MCA once again partnered up with other language-oriented associations and communities to bring you another evening of readings and productions in the world's beautiful and varied languages.

In October, the MCA organised yet another public lecture for its members and for the general public. This time, Prof. Joe Friggieri, the MCA's honorary president for 2018, spoke to us about Plato and his approach to art.

In November, then, the MCA co-organised a Treasure Hunt for the University of Malta's International Students and for students of the Department of Classics and Archaeology.

Meanwhile, the MCA, in collaboration with Malta Libraries, launched a series of mythology-based events aimed at the younger generation.

Looking to the future, the MCA will be organising another public lecture, by Prof. Michael Zammit on Friday 16<sup>th</sup> November, as well as this year's final public lecture by Prof. Horatio C.R. Vella, to be followed by the MCA's annual Christmas dinner and certificate awards ceremony on the 7<sup>th</sup> of December.

We hope to see you there!

*Samuel Azzopardi*

## *Do you have something to share?*

Do you have an interesting topic you would like to write about for this newsletter?  
Or do you have a Classics-related project that you are working on? Or perhaps you simply have a question you'd like answered. Email the editorial team with your thoughts, questions and submissions on [newsletter.classicsmaltasoc@gmail.com](mailto:newsletter.classicsmaltasoc@gmail.com)

## European Day of Languages

Following last year's participation, the Malta Classics Association once again joined a number of other associations and groups for an evening of celebration of the world's many beautiful languages and their literature. This year, the Languages Festival was held on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of September in Sliema. The Malta Classics Association thanks the Għaqda tal-Malti and all other organising authorities for their kind invitation. Volunteers from the Malta Classics Association also contributed to the evening's running program by acting out a conversation in English and Latin. Visitors to our stand also had the opportunity of trying out traditional Roman bread called *Buccellatum*, the one-time staple-food of choice of the Roman soldier.



## Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad*

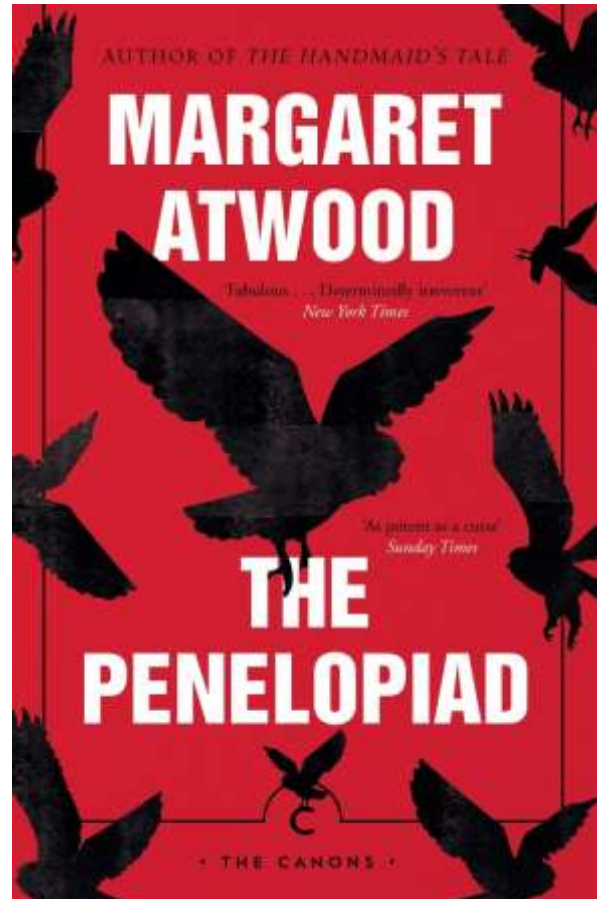
By Jasmine Alexa Bajada

*The Penelopiad* is Margaret Atwood's contribution to Canongate's 'The Myths', a series of contemporary retellings of ancient myths reimagined by critically acclaimed writers such as Ali Smith and Jeanette Winterson. As the title suggests, Atwood revisits *The Odyssey* with a fundamental difference: the hero Odysseus is displaced from the centre of the narrative to privilege, instead, Penelope's point of view. While retaining the oral quality of the epic, Atwood gives a voice to Penelope that, in its assertiveness, demands to be heard: 'Now that all the others have run out of air, it's my turn to do a little story-making.'

Penelope's wish to counter what she calls the 'official version' of *The Odyssey* with her own version of the story is a feminist revisionist approach that those who have read Angela Carter, Carol Ann Duffy, and Atwood herself, are familiar with. Indeed, the mythical identity of Penelope as the weaver (and un-weaver) of the shroud adequately symbolises contemporary attempts to rewrite the Western literary canon. Penelope opens her narrative by spelling out her aim to rewrite her role in the epic by revising the stereotype of the passive, faithful wife, which for centuries has been used as an impossible model for women to live up to. In the course of *The Penelopiad*, Atwood's Penelope demonstrates that it does not take a heroic sea voyage to prove one's wiliness; it can be achieved within the restrictive area of a domestic space.

Atwood's contemporary retelling of *The Odyssey* probes into the nature of storytelling and myths through her questioning of the 'official version', which, as she seeks to point out, does not exist due to the oral nature of the narrative. 'Myths,' the Canongate preface to the series explains, 'are universal and timeless stories that reflect and shape our lives'. Atwood goes a step further by suggesting that storytellers can also shape myths to rupture the patriarchal thinking encoded in the tales we tell ourselves. However, Atwood's *The Penelopiad* is mature in signalling the possible weakness of feminist revisionist texts by pointing to Penelope's difficulty of reclaiming her voice and, more significantly, by questioning how

effective the typical strategy of placing a female figure at the centre of the story is. Is privileging a woman of high status enough? Is a 'Penelopiad' still patriarchal by virtue of the epic's monologue-like voice? What about the twelve slave-girls, 'the ones without names' to coin a new epic title with?



Embedded within Penelope's counter-narrative to *The Odyssey*, there is the twelve maids' counter-narrative to *The Odyssey* and *The Penelopiad* itself. In the introduction, Atwood explains that she '[has] always been haunted by the hanged maids', who were raped by the twelve suitors and condemned to death by Odysseus. Atwood transforms her retelling into a polyphonic text by constantly disrupting Penelope's version with the maids' chorus lines of various genres, such as a song, a drama, and an anthropology lecture. In this way, Atwood achieves a hybrid text that challenges the 'official version' while also ingeniously challenging itself, thereby inviting us to always ask ourselves while reading which voices are left unheard.

# MDINA TREASURE HUNT



In collaboration with the *University of Malta International and EU Office*, the Malta Classics Association organised our first-ever Mdina Treasure Hunt on Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> November for UoM International students and students from the Department of Classics and Archaeology. The Treasure Hunt was followed with light traditional Maltese food as refreshments.



## Zeus

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*This time round, Julian March takes a closer look at the figure of Zeus, King of the Gods, in mythology.*

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We are told by Hesiod<sup>1</sup> that a race of powerful gods, known as the Titans were born to Uranus and Gaia – six males and six females, including Cronus and Rhea. Uranus regarded his offspring with horror. As soon as they were born, Uranus would force them back down again into the earth, all the way down to Tartarus, where they were imprisoned *‘and Heaven (Uranus) rejoiced in his evil doing.’*<sup>2</sup> At first Gaia grieved, but then a deep anger set in and seething with fury, she swore revenge upon her husband. She brought forth a scythe of adamant (a mythical metal of impenetrable hardness) and then she approached her children for help. They all shrank back in horror except for one. The youngest, Cronus, detested his father and willingly agreed to free his brothers and sisters. When night-time arrived, he lay in hiding and waited... At the opportune moment, when Uranus attempted to mate with Gaia, Cronus emerged from his hiding-place and in a flash cut off his father's genitals and flung them into the sea.

However, one day a son of Cronus would overthrow him just as he himself had dealt with his father, Uranus. For his rebellion, Cronus would be served in kind.<sup>3</sup> After deposing his father, Cronus assumed the throne and made his sister Rhea consort.<sup>4</sup>

Rhea announced that she was with child. The prediction that a son of his would usurp his throne as he had done himself, came to mind. So when his child was born and Rhea presented their daughter to Cronus, he did not even glance at his offspring. Instead, to Rhea's horror, Cronus simply swallowed it. Time passed and the next child suffered the same fate. One after the other, every child was swallowed until the youngest, Zeus, was due to be born. Rhea sought the counsel of Uranus and Gaia so as to save her unborn child.<sup>5</sup>

When Rhea gave birth to her child, she hid her son in a cave on Mount Dicte in Crete and instead of a new-born baby she gave her husband a stone wrapped in swaddling clothes.<sup>6</sup>



*‘Saturn Devouring his Son’ by Francisco Goya, painted c. 1819-1823, now housed at the Museo del Prado in Madrid*

However, hiding the young god was not enough to keep him safe. It was vital that his father never learnt of his existence. Apollodorus says that so as to stop Zeus' cries reaching Cronus' ears, Rhea's priests, the Curetes, kept up a cacophony of sounds by clashing their weapons.<sup>7</sup>

When Zeus grew up, he married Metis, an Oceanid, who helped Zeus rescue his siblings by giving Cronus a potion that caused him to disgorge his children. Along with Zeus' brothers and sisters, Cronus also brought up the stone that Rhea had substituted for Zeus.<sup>8</sup> The precious stone was set up at Delphi where it was anointed daily with oil and adorned with wool during festivals.<sup>9</sup>

As soon as his siblings were freed, Zeus rebelled against Cronus in a battle that lasted a decade. Zeus and his allies defeated the Titans who were hurled into Tartarus<sup>10</sup> *‘beneath the wide-pathed earth, and bound ...in bitter chains.’*<sup>11</sup>

It is popularly believed that the Titans represent an old order of gods who became absorbed in the pantheon of the gods brought over by immigrants to Greece. Moreover, the old gods possibly represented standards of morality that were not as enlightened as those of the newcomers and therefore the Titanomachy might represent a clash of values with victory going to the new, more sophisticated order.

As for Cronus, he was said to have become the ruler of the Isles of the Blest or Elysium where those favoured by the gods were sent after their death.<sup>12</sup> The word Paradise is of Persian origin meaning ‘a place or state of bliss.’

From Vergil<sup>13</sup> we learn that Cronus became identified with Saturn in Italy, where his reign ushered in the Golden Age ‘whose equal sway untroubled peace to all his peoples gave.’<sup>14</sup>

*‘The Greeks are used to allegorize Kronos (or Saturn) into chronos (time).’*<sup>15</sup> We are told by Cicero that Saturn swallowed his children just as time devours the ages.<sup>16</sup> Thus, Cronus was portrayed as an old man complete with scythe - ‘Father Time’.

And so, Uranus' prophecy came to pass and, we are told by Pausanias that Zeus instituted the Olympic Games in honour of his victory over Cronus. On Cronus' dethronement,<sup>17</sup> lots were drawn whereby Poseidon's portion was the ocean while the realm of the dead passed onto Hades. Zeus succeeded Cronus, retaining sovereignty of the heavens.<sup>18</sup> The new gods adopted Mount Olympus as their home and would henceforth be known as the Olympians.

Mount Olympus, between Thessaly and Macedonia, nearly 10,000 feet high, was held to be the home of the gods who lived in the city above the clouds of the mount which rose into the heavens. Therefore, they lived on the mount and in heaven at the same time.<sup>19</sup> We are told by Homer<sup>20</sup> that *‘the gates of ...great heaven and Olympus,’*<sup>21</sup> entrusted to the Hours (the Seasons) were inaccessible.

*‘Neither is it shaken by winds nor ever wet with rain, nor does snow fall upon it, but the air is outspread clear and cloudless, and over it hovers a radiant whiteness. Therein the blessed gods are glad all their days...’*<sup>22</sup>



*‘Chronos and his Child’ by Giovanni Francesco Romanelli, a 17th century depiction of Cronus holding his scythe. Now at the National Museum in Warsaw.*

From their separate mansions, the gods travelled across the heavens along the Milky Way, so called on account of its appearance as a spurt of milk - the road that led to Zeus' imperial palace.<sup>22</sup>

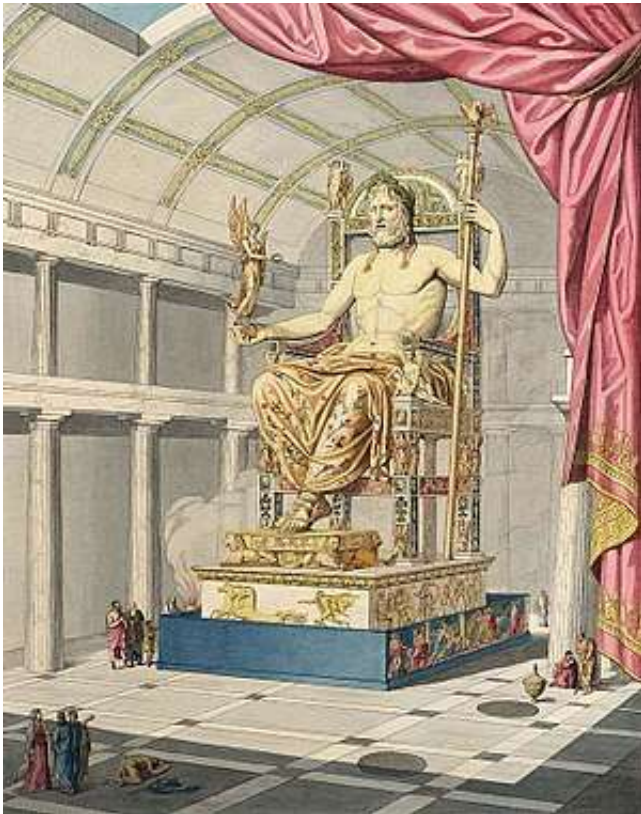


*The Milky Way*

Thus, up above the heavens, behind the gate of clouds which veiled them from mortal eyes, lived the gods, forming a society with its own rules and hierarchy.

By the 6th century B.C., an altar to the ‘The Twelve’ Olympians was erected in Athens. Herodotus makes reference to this altar<sup>24</sup> from which all distances in Attica were measured. The twelve gods were Athena, Hera, Apollo, Artemis, Hermes, Demeter, Aphrodite, Hephaestus, Ares, Poseidon and Hestia – later supplanted by Dionysius, the god of wine, as indicated in the east frieze of the Parthenon<sup>25</sup> constructed during the 5th century B.C.

The grandeur of Zeus' statue at Olympia, made of ivory and gold, proclaimed him king of the gods. Sculpted by Pheidias, it was completed c. 432 B.C. and was one of the ancient Seven Wonders of the World. Pausanias says that legend has it that when his work was complete, Pheidias prayed for a sign that his masterpiece had met with the god's approval and Zeus threw a thunderbolt in assent, over which hallowed spot a bronze jar was placed.<sup>26</sup>



*Artist's impression of what the statue of Zeus at Olympia might have looked like. The temple which housed the statue was destroyed in 426 AD, and it is assumed that the statue perished with it.*

Zeus was the protector of law and justice<sup>27</sup> and the sovereign ruler in all matters. He was called by Homer *'the father of men and gods.'*<sup>28</sup> Even the gods were compelled to obey him. Those who did not submit to his will were severely punished.<sup>29</sup> Both Poseidon and Apollo were ordered to serve as slaves to mortals as a penalty for their insubordination.<sup>30</sup> Zeus was appropriately the epitome of authority, strength and wisdom.

Yet he could be opposed. Above all the gods was a power that dared resist even the god of gods.<sup>31</sup> The three goddesses of destiny, the Fates (*'Moirae'* - the word *'moira'* meaning *'lot'*) were

the daughters of Zeus and his second wife, Themis,<sup>32</sup> who introduced the concept of rules governing man and precepts prevailing in the gods' world.<sup>33</sup> At times, she is depicted holding a balance.<sup>34</sup>

However, we are also told that as supreme god, it was within Zeus' power to override Destiny. During the siege of Troy, as he looked down from above watching his son, Sarpedon, knowing that his death was imminent, he desperately wished to save his son's life but he resisted the temptation for it would have encouraged the other gods to do the same.<sup>35</sup> He was aware that to do so would create confusion which contradicted his position, that of guardian of peace and order.

Zeus' last wife<sup>36</sup> was his sister Hera.<sup>37</sup> It was said that their marriage took place in Crete. On the island was a temple where the union between Zeus and Hera was commemorated each year.<sup>38</sup> Yet Zeus was always involved in amorous adventures with one woman after the other. One of his main preoccupations was to hide his infidelities from Hera. The idea of a majestic god who constantly cheats may seem incongruous but it can be explained by the fact that Zeus was the combination of several gods. As his worship spread from one district to another, the wives and lovers of the other chief gods were absorbed by Zeus and the myths surrounding the other gods were also attributed to Zeus.



*Roman marble copy of a Greek original. Now housed at the Musée du Louvre, in Paris.*

As a result of his numerous dalliances, Zeus fathered several heroes, including the most powerful man (or demi-god - the son of a god and a mortal) on earth – Heracles, who was famed for his feats, the most famous of which were known as the ‘Labours of Heracles’, each one so difficult and dangerous, it has given us the term ‘herculean task.’ Zeus also fathered a woman of surpassing beauty – Helen of Sparta also known as Helen of Troy. Hers was *‘the face that launched a thousand ships.’*<sup>39</sup> It would be for her sake that the Greeks would destroy the kingdom of Troy.

### References

- <sup>1</sup> *Theogony* 133-138, 153-182, 187-189
- <sup>2</sup> *Theogony* 158-159 (H.G. Evelyn-White)
- <sup>3</sup> *Theogony* 463-464
- <sup>4</sup> Apollodorus 1.1.4-5
- <sup>5</sup> *Theogony* 453-472
- <sup>6-7</sup> Apollodorus 1.1.6-7
- <sup>8</sup> Apollodorus 1.2.1
- <sup>9</sup> Pausanias 10.24.6
- <sup>10</sup> Apollodorus 1.2.1
- <sup>11</sup> *Theogony* 717-718 (H.G. Evelyn-White)
- <sup>12</sup> Pindar’s *Second Olympian Ode* 66-75
- <sup>13</sup> *Aeneid* 8.319-326
- <sup>14</sup> *Aeneid* 8. 325-326 (T.C. Williams)
- <sup>15</sup> Plutarch’s *Moralia: De Iside et Osiride* (Isis and Osiris) 32 (ed. W.W. Goodwin)
- <sup>16</sup> *De Natura Deorum* (The Nature of the Gods) 2.25 5.7.10
- <sup>17</sup> *Iliad* 15.190-192
- <sup>18</sup> *A Dictionary of Greek and Roman Biography and Mythology* (ed. W. Smith)
- <sup>19</sup> *Iliad* 5.749-751
- <sup>20</sup> *Iliad* 5.749-750 (A.T. Murray)
- <sup>21</sup> *Odyssey* 6.43-46 (A.T. Murray)
- <sup>22</sup> *Ovid’s Metamorphoses* 1.168-175 (B. More) 6.108.4
- <sup>23</sup> *The Gods of the East Frieze of the Parthenon* by I.S. Mark pg. 291
- <sup>24</sup> 5.11.9
- <sup>25</sup> *Iliad* 1.237-238
- <sup>26</sup> *Iliad* 8.132 (A.T. Murray)
- <sup>27</sup> *Iliad* 15.71-74
- <sup>28</sup> *Iliad* 21.444-446
- <sup>29</sup> *Aeschylus’ Prometheus Bound* 515-518
- <sup>30</sup> Apollodorus 1.3.1
- <sup>31</sup> Diodorus Siculus 5.67.4
- <sup>32</sup> *The Greek Anthology Vol. II* 8.110
- <sup>33</sup> *Iliad* 16.433-449
- <sup>34</sup> *Theogony* 921
- <sup>35</sup> *Theogony* 453-457
- <sup>36</sup> Diodorus Siculus 5.72.4
- <sup>37</sup> Christopher Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus* Act V Scene

## PLATO AND THE ARTS

By Prof. J. Friggieri



The Malta Classics Association thanks its Honorary President for 2018, Prof. Joe Friggieri for delivering a public lecture on this engaging subject on Friday 26<sup>th</sup> October. The MCA also thanks the National Library for hosting us.







In collaboration with *Malta Libraries*, the *Malta Classics Association* is holding a number of events at different libraries around Malta and Gozo for children between the ages of 7 and 10. During these sessions, children participate in a number of fun activities to discover if, after they all, they have what it takes to become heroes.

Special thanks to Malta Libraries for their support and for these excellent photos. And a huge *congratz!* to all our new heroes and heroines!



### Upcoming Sessions

- December 1<sup>st</sup> - 9.30a.m. - Mqabba
- January 5<sup>th</sup> - 10.00a.m. - Floriana Central Library
- 26<sup>th</sup> January - 10.00a.m. - Gozo Central Public Library
- 16<sup>th</sup> February - Mtarfa - 2.30p.m.

Although the events are free, spaces are limited, so please book your place by emailing Malta Libraries at [events.library@gov.mt](mailto:events.library@gov.mt)  
See you there!



A LECTURE BY PROF MICHAEL ZAMMIT

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# BHAṢA

# THE SPOKEN SANSKRIT PHILOSOPHY

FRI 16TH NOVEMBER @ 6PM  
CLASSICS & ARCHAEOLOGY FARMHOUSE

IN COLLABORATION WITH  
THE HIGH COMMISSION OF INDIA IN MALTA



Malta  
Classics  
Association

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