

# THE REPRESENTATION OF FEMALE CHARACTERS IN BUTLER'S TRANSLATION OF THE *ODYSSEY*: A CORPUS-BASED APPROACH

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**RIASSUNTO:** In *The Authoress of the Odyssey* (1897), Samuel Butler sviluppò un'intuizione particolarmente controversa sull'autorialità del poema. Nelle sue analisi, egli giunse alla conclusione che la stessa persona non poteva aver creato l'*Iliade* e l'*Odissea*: mentre la prima era stata indubbiamente scritta dal poeta greco maschio Omero, la seconda doveva essere considerata come un'opera di accompagnamento dell'*Iliade* ed era invece opera di una donna «young, headstrong, and unmarried» (come recita il titolo del suo capitolo VII) della Magna Grecia, più precisamente di Trapani, in Sicilia. Questa teoria si basava sul presupposto che i personaggi femminili nell'*Odissea* sono ritratti con favore, mentre i personaggi maschili sono relativamente trascurati. Le traduzioni in prosa di Butler dell'*Iliade* e dell'*Odissea* ebbero un grande successo e vengono consultate ancora oggi; tuttavia, le sue opinioni sulla paternità delle opere di Omero furono duramente criticate all'epoca. Lo scopo di questo lavoro è esplorare in che misura la teoria di Butler abbia influito sulla sua traduzione dell'*Odissea*, analizzando la sua rappresentazione dei personaggi femminili attraverso le collocazioni («word sketches»); a tal fine, sarà adottato come disegno di ricerca per questo studio un approccio che combina la *corpus linguistics*, la *corpus stylistics* e la *translational stylistics*. Questo studio analizza il testo di arrivo per capire come il genere viene rappresentato e recepito attraverso le scelte linguistiche.

**PAROLE CHIAVE:** *Odissea*, Butler, corpus stilistico, traduzione, rappresentazione di genere

**ABSTRACT:** In *The Authoress of the Odyssey* (1897), Samuel Butler developed a notably controversial intuition about the poem's author. In his analyses, he concluded that the same person could not have created the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*: whilst the former was undoubtedly written by the Greek male poet Homer, the latter should be regarded as a companion piece to the *Iliad* and was instead the work of a «young, headstrong, and unmarried» woman (as the title to his chapter VII

phrases it) from Magna Graecia, more precisely Trapani, Sicily. This theory rested upon his assumption that female characters in the *Odyssey* are favourably portrayed, whereas there is a relative disregard for male characters (Ebbott 2005). Butler's prose translations of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* became highly successful and are still consulted nowadays; however, his views on the authorship of Homer's works were severely criticised back then. The purpose of this paper is to explore to what extent Butler's theory impacted his translation of the *Odyssey* by analysing his portrayal of female characters through collocations («word sketches»); to this end, an approach combining corpus linguistics (Fischer-Starcke 2010), corpus stylistics (Mahlberg 2012), and translational stylistics (Boase-Beier 2006) will be adopted as the research design for this study. This study analyses the target text to understand how gender is represented and received (Venuti 2019) through linguistic choices.

KEY-WORDS: *Odyssey*, Butler, corpus stylistics, translation, gender representation

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In *The Authoress of the Odyssey* (1887), Butler presents several controversial claims about the authorship of the ancient Greek epic poem, delving into various aspects of its creation and authorial identity. One of his key assertions is that the *Odyssey*'s author is distinct from the author of the *Iliad*, a viewpoint he suggests is gaining traction among scholars and literary critics. By examining the stylistic differences and thematic elements of the two epics, Butler posits that they were likely composed by different individuals, challenging the traditional view of Homer as the singular author of both works. Furthermore, Butler contends that the *Odyssey* was authored by a single individual, countering the prevalent view that proposes multiple authors for each poem. This stance represents a significant departure from established scholarly consensus and requires thorough examination and substantiation. To support his argument, Butler conducted a detailed analysis of the landscape descriptions in the poem, drawing parallels to geographical features in Sicily, particularly in the region of Trapani. He also suggested a specific timeframe for the composition of the *Odyssey*, proposing a date between 1050 and 1000 BC based on various textual and historical clues. Butler dedicates several chapters of his book to developing and defending

these conclusions, meticulously presenting evidence and engaging with existing scholarly debates. However, the most contentious aspect of his argument is his claim that the *Odyssey*'s author was a woman, whom he labels an "authoress". He goes on to characterise her as «a woman-young, headstrong, and unmarried», as highlighted in the title of Chapter vii. Despite the apparent popularity of Butler's book during his era, the notion of female authorship of the *Odyssey* failed to gain widespread acceptance among scholars and readers. Today, the book is primarily regarded as a historical curiosity, offering insight into the evolving scholarly discourse surrounding the origins and authorship of ancient texts.

According to Butler, an author's gender is crucial for interpreting a text, and the text itself often reveals the author's gender. Butler assumes that women are fundamentally different from men, and therefore, they write differently. He argues that this difference does not make women's literature «any the less charming when it is good of its kind; on the contrary, it makes it more so». <sup>1</sup> To properly appreciate texts written by women, they must be evaluated as women's literature. The distinct characteristics that reveal the author's gender must also be considered when interpreting and assessing the text, as Butler claims to have done with the *Odyssey*. He suggests that ignoring these differences would lead to incorrect judgments.

There is a common belief that men and women communicate differently, and earlier research in language and gender explored this idea, <sup>2</sup> but sociolinguists have largely moved away from the notion that men and women use language in fundamentally different ways. <sup>3</sup> The focus in language and gender research has shifted from comparing men and women as homogenous groups to examining how gender interacts with other aspects of identity and exploring variations within gender categories. This type of research recognises that gender is constructed through language use rather than merely reflected in it. Consequently, studies often involve a small number of participants to provide in-depth analyses of how language and identity are negotiated in interactions. <sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> BUTLER 1897: 11.

<sup>2</sup> E.g., MALTZ - BORKER 1983.

<sup>3</sup> See BAKER 2014.

<sup>4</sup> E.g., BUCHOLTZ 1999; MENDOZA-DENTON 2008.

Corpus analysis techniques are increasingly used in language and gender research to examine large datasets and uncover hidden patterns, allowing researchers to test hypotheses about language use. Baker's review<sup>5</sup> of corpus studies on gender reveals that women's and men's language use is largely similar, contrary to the widespread belief in distinct gendered speech patterns. Differences are often due to a small number of atypical speakers. Corpus studies align well with small-scale «community of practice»<sup>6</sup> investigations, which explore how individuals project identities and how linguistic forms contribute to these constructions.

Corpus studies have highlighted patterns of gendered representations in language. Feminist scholars<sup>7</sup> have noted the asymmetrical linguistic portrayal of women and men, pointing out how language often subjugates and marginalises women. Key debates have centred on the use of generic masculine pronouns and terms of address,<sup>8</sup> as well as the semantic degradation of female equivalents of word pairs. Motschenbacher demonstrated the persistent tendency for male items to appear first in mixed-gender personal binomials.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, there is inequitable representation of women and men based on descriptors related to age, appearance, and labelling trends.<sup>10</sup> Caldas-Coulthard found a significant disparity in the reporting of women's and men's voices in newspapers, highlighting a rhetoric of silencing women.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, Gidengil and Everitt observed that verbs used to report female politicians' speech in Canada were often aggressive and negatively connoted, underscoring a perceived combative nature of female politicians.<sup>12</sup>

Corpus studies have revealed that people still often indulge in the notion that men and women are fundamentally different in nature; in other words, the prevailing ideology posits that the genders – and notably there are assumed to be only two, as the

<sup>5</sup> BAKER 2014.

<sup>6</sup> ECKERT - McCONNELL-GINET 1992.

<sup>7</sup> CAMERON 1992; SPENDER 1998.

<sup>8</sup> MILLS 2008; ROMAINE 2001.

<sup>9</sup> MOTSCHENBACHER 2013.

<sup>10</sup> E.g., BAKER 2010; PEARCE 2008; MOON 2014.

<sup>11</sup> CALDAS-COULTHARD 1995.

<sup>12</sup> GIDENGIL - EVERITT 2003.

binary system is central to this traditional belief<sup>13</sup> – are inherently distinct, and these differences are reflected in language. Such discrepancies are evident when women and men are discussed. There are numerous corpus-based studies on the portrayal of male and female characters in literature, including children's literature;<sup>14</sup> however, as Cameron points out, when we examine language use, we find that «Men are from Earth, women are from Earth».<sup>15</sup> Asymmetry in language is significant, and understanding the unequal representation of females and males is crucial. Identifying these asymmetries can lead to insights into how such differences contribute to gender imbalance in society; conversely, understanding more symmetrical representations can help work towards reducing this disparity.

Female representation in Homer's *Odyssey* has been a focal point of scholarly research, revealing the complexity and diversity of female characters in the epic. The portrayal of women in the *Odyssey* is multifaceted, encompassing figures who range from goddesses to slaves, each contributing uniquely to the narrative. Scholars such as Schein have analysed these representations, noting the intricate roles women play within the epic's mythology and oral poetic tradition.<sup>16</sup> These roles often reflect broader societal views on gender during the time the *Odyssey* was composed and later interpreted. One of the central female figures in the *Odyssey* is Penelope, whose character has been extensively studied for her depiction as a faithful wife and clever woman. In her work, Murnaghan explores Penelope's use of knowledge and power, illustrating how she navigates her precarious situation in Odysseus's absence.<sup>17</sup> Penelope's loyalty and intelligence make her a symbol of ideal womanhood, yet her character also challenges the passive female archetype, showcasing her active role in maintaining her household and fending off suitors. Circe and Calypso, two powerful goddesses in the *Odyssey*, embody different aspects of femininity and divine influence. LeClair's study contrasts Circe's bewitching allure and Calypso's nurturing captivity, highlighting the tension between female power and vul-

<sup>13</sup> See MOTSCHENBACHER - STEGU 2013; ZIMMAN 2014.

<sup>14</sup> E.g., EBERHARDT 2017.

<sup>15</sup> CAMERON 2006.

<sup>16</sup> SCHEIN 1995: 17-28.

<sup>17</sup> MURNAGHAN 2009.

nerability.<sup>18</sup> These characters demonstrate how female deities in the *Odyssey* can be both agents of transformation and obstacles to the hero's journey, representing a complex interplay of enchantment and entrapment.

Feminist scholars have further explored these themes, emphasising how the epic reflects and perpetuates gender norms. Bodiştean discusses the representation of female strength and independence, particularly through characters like the Amazon, who challenge traditional gender roles.<sup>19</sup> This analysis extends to mortal women in the *Odyssey*, who often embody a range of virtues and vices, contributing to the epic's rich tapestry of human experience. The representation of female slaves in the *Odyssey* is another critical area of study. Thalmann examines the depiction of servitude and the narrative roles these women play.<sup>20</sup> Female slaves, such as Eurycleia, are portrayed with a mix of loyalty and subservience, reflecting their marginalised status within the social hierarchy. Thalmann's analysis underscores the complexities of these characters, who are integral to the household yet remain subject to the whims of their masters. Recent feminist retellings of the *Odyssey* offer contemporary perspectives on its female characters. Bretzinger highlights how modern adaptations reframe the narrative to foreground women's experiences and agency.<sup>21</sup> These retellings, such as Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad*, provide a critical commentary on the traditional interpretations of female roles in the epic, challenging patriarchal narratives and giving voice to previously marginalised characters.

Visual representations of female characters from the *Odyssey* in ancient art provide additional layers of interpretation. Buitron-Oliver and Cohen explore how these images convey cultural values and gender dynamics.<sup>22</sup> The contrast between depictions of monstrous figures like Skylla and virtuous women like Penelope reveals societal attitudes toward female power and morality.

Language and literary scholars have also examined the rhetorical strategies used to portray female characters in the *Odyssey*, e.g. Lesser compares the ethical representations of

<sup>18</sup> LECLAIR 2023.

<sup>19</sup> BODIŞTEAN 2012: 187-194.

<sup>20</sup> THALMANN 2005.

<sup>21</sup> BRETZINGER 2023.

<sup>22</sup> BUITRON-OLIVER - COHEN 1995.

female figures in Homer's epics, revealing how their moral characterisations influence the narrative's thematic development.<sup>23</sup> Lesser's work underscores the importance of understanding these characters within the broader context of epic tradition and literary rivalry.

The present study examines the collocational profiles in Butler's translation of the *Odyssey* to explore whether Butler's ideological perspectives influenced his rendition of Homer's epic. By analysing specific verbs, the study aims to reveal how Butler's choices in language shape the reader's perception of characters and their relationships and actions<sup>24</sup>. This investigation involves comparing the collocates associated with four female characters (Penelope, Athena, Circe, and Calypso) and four male characters (Telemachus, Antinous, Zeus, and Poseidon). Odysseus, being the protagonist, was deliberately excluded from this list to avoid potential bias in the results.

The objectives of this study are twofold: firstly, to provide an overarching view of how female and male characters in the *Odyssey* are depicted through Butler's translation, and secondly, to offer a more nuanced understanding of these characters by closely analysing the verbs associated with their actions. By focusing on these linguistic elements, the research aims to shed light on the representation of gender in the *Odyssey* through collocation patterns. Ultimately, this study seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on gender representation in classical literature and translation studies by illustrating how translation choices can reflect and reinforce ideological perspectives.

## 2. DATA AND METHODS

The dataset for this study is derived from Butler's translation of Homer's *Odyssey* (1900), specifically in its digital form edited by Henry Festing Jones in 2015. This corpus consists of 126,656 words, offering a substantial body of text for analysis. The primary tool used for analysis is Sketch Engine,<sup>25</sup> a corpus analysis software that facilitates the examination of "word sketches" i.e. collocational profiles providing a detailed view of a word's collo-

<sup>23</sup> LESSER 2019.

<sup>24</sup> SEMINO - SHORT 2004; CALDAS-COULTHARD - MOON 2010.

<sup>25</sup> KILGARRIFF 2004; ID. 2014.

cates and its surrounding lexical environment. This involves categorising the results into grammatical relations, such as words that function as objects or subjects of verbs, and words that act as modifiers.

The methodology involves a comparative analysis of the word sketches associated with the four most recurring female characters (Penelope, Athena, Calypso and Circe), labelled altogether as “F”, and the four most recurring male characters besides Odysseus (Telemachus, Zeus, Poseidon and Antinous)<sup>26</sup>, labelled altogether as “M”. To ensure a comprehensive overview of gender representation, these characters are grouped by gender and analysed collectively. This bulk analysis approach allows for identifying overarching patterns and trends in how male and female characters are portrayed linguistically.

The analytical process includes the following steps. The corpus is uploaded into Sketch Engine, where word sketches are generated for each character. These word sketches highlight the most frequent and significant collocates for both groups, categorised by their grammatical function; e.g., verbs associated with each character, adjectives describing them, and nouns with which they frequently interact are all examined. The results are then organised into comparative tables to facilitate the analysis of similarities and differences in the linguistic portrayal of male and female characters.

The study employs a multi-layered analytical framework that includes corpus linguistics,<sup>27</sup> corpus stylistics,<sup>28</sup> and translational stylistics.<sup>29</sup> Corpus linguistics provides the tools to handle large datasets and identify patterns in language use. Whilst corpus stylistics focuses on the stylistic elements of the text, examining how linguistic choices contribute to the portrayal of characters, translational stylistics considers how Butler’s translation choices might reflect his ideological perspectives and how these choices influence the representation of gender.

<sup>26</sup> Notably, in his version, Butler insisted that all the Greek names of gods be converted to their Roman equivalents because these names were more familiar and popular with the British public at the time, as explicitly stated in the preface of his first editions. Therefore, the names referenced in the text are Minerva, Jove, and Neptune.

<sup>27</sup> See PEARCE 2008; FISCHER-STARCKE 2010; MAHLBERG 2012; BAKER 2014.

<sup>28</sup> HALL 2012: 134-178.

<sup>29</sup> BOASE-BEIER 2006.

In examining the semantic fields and grammatical relations associated with both groups, the study seeks to uncover implicit biases and underlying assumptions in Butler's translation. By comparing the linguistic environments of male and female characters, the research aims to reveal how gender roles and characteristics are constructed through language. This analysis not only provides insights into Butler's translation but also contributes to broader discussions on gender representation in translated literature.

Moreover, this study adopts the approach articulated by Venuti in *Contra Instrumentalism* (2019). Venuti posits that translation is inherently an interpretive act that carries ethical responsibilities and political commitments. He advocates for a hermeneutic model, which offers a more thorough and insightful understanding of translation. This approach enables an appreciation of the translator's creative and scholarly contributions, while also highlighting the significant role that translation plays in the cultural and social institutions that influence human life. By following Venuti's framework, this study emphasises that analysing the reception of the target text does not necessitate a parallel evaluation of the source text. Instead, it focuses on how translation, as an interpretive act, influences the representation of gender and the broader cultural implications within Butler's translation of the *Odyssey*.

Overall, the study's methodology combines quantitative analysis through Sketch Engine with qualitative interpretation through stylistic frameworks. This approach allows for a nuanced understanding of gender representation in Butler's *Odyssey*, shedding light on how linguistic choices shape the reader's perception of male and female characters. The findings aim to contribute to the fields of corpus linguistics, literary studies, and translation studies, offering a comprehensive analysis of gender dynamics in one of the most enduring works of Western literature.

### 3. RESULTS

This section presents a comparative analysis of the word sketches, or collocational behaviour, associated with four female characters (Penelope, Athena, Calypso, and Circe), collectively labelled as "F", and four male characters (Telemachus, Zeus, Poseidon, and

Antinous), collectively labelled as “M”. These characters were selected based on their frequency of occurrences in the text, deliberately excluding Odysseus to avoid an imbalanced representation and potential bias due to his role as the protagonist. This selection strategy has an additional beneficial outcome: within each group, two characters support the hero (Penelope, Athena, Telemachus, and Zeus) and two characters oppose him (Calypso, Circe, Poseidon, and Antinous). This balance helps ensure that the interpretation of the word sketches remains unbiased and comprehensive.

The collocational profiles analysed in this section include modifiers, verbs with the character as subject and object, possessive constructs and predicates. The lexical items listed in the following tables are obtained by extracting the typicality score, which is an index determining how typical or strong the collocation is, with the frequency index provided in brackets. By examining these linguistic elements, the analysis aims to uncover patterns in how gender and character roles are represented through language in Butler’s translation of the *Odyssey*. This approach provides insights into the portrayal of both female and male characters, offering a deeper understanding of the text’s linguistic and stylistic nuances.

Table 1 presents an analysis of the use of modifiers – phrases that add information about the names under examination – applied to the two groups of characters, labelled “F” and “M”. Although Butler stated in the preface of his prose translation that he intended to avoid Homer’s epithets to improve the text’s readability, we can clearly see that some forms of epithets are actually used as modifiers. Thus, it is interesting to observe which ones he preserved.

Firstly, it is evident that there is an imbalance between F and M, with more modifiers applied to male characters. The main modifiers include terms such as ‘goddess’, which applies to Athena, Circe, and Calypso. Calypso also receives the modifier ‘nymph’, reflecting her divine nature, along with ‘divine’, which is applied across various contexts. Circe is further identified as an ‘enchantress’, a traditional epithet linked to her character. In contrast, Penelope is primarily referred to as Odysseus’s ‘queen’ and ‘wife’. Notably, the modifier ‘daughter’ applies to all four characters in group F, highlighting their identification through paternal relationships. Additionally, ‘beautiful’ is a common modifier applied to all members of group F. Penelope, despite having a list of epithets in Homer’s

source text (e.g., ‘cautious’, ‘careful’, and ‘wise’), retains none of these in Butler’s translation. Instead, she is characterised only by either her marital relationship or the adjective ‘long-suffering’, which conveys a passive and negative image of her as an enduring sufferer. Circe is also associated with the term ‘Aeaeon’, referring to her dominion over the island of Aeaea. Both Calypso and Circe are described as ‘powerful’, ‘cunning’, and ‘mean’, emphasising the negative aspects of their power. Interestingly, Athena’s famous epithet *γλαυκῶπις* (‘bright-eyed’) appears only once in Butler’s translation as ‘blue-eyed’.

As mentioned earlier, Table 1 shows that the characters in group M have an overall larger number of modifying phrases. This applies especially to Zeus and Poseidon, who are frequently referred to with modifiers such as ‘father’, ‘king’, ‘mighty’, ‘divine’, and ‘great’ throughout Butler’s rendition. Specific modifiers for Zeus include “Aegis-bearing” (*αἰγίοχος*), ‘Olympian’, and ‘lord of thunder’, which likely translates many epithets relating to thunder. Poseidon is often described with terms like ‘earth-encircling’ (*γαυήροχος*) and ‘sea-god’. Telemachus and Antinous, on the other hand, receive fewer modifiers and are primarily identified by their relationships to their respective fathers (‘son’).

The analysis of modifiers is perhaps the most significant aspect of examining gender roles in Butler’s translation of the *Odyssey*. Despite Butler’s alignment with the theory that the author of the *Odyssey* might have been a woman, his translation tends to identify female characters mainly through their relationships with male characters or the effects they exert on male characters. This focus on relational and effectual identifiers underscores a gender bias in representation, which is critical to understanding the broader implications of translation choices in shaping character portrayals.

Modifiers	
F	M
goddess (25)	father (47)
daughter (19)	king (29)
beautiful (17)	son (22)
nymph (16)	mighty (19)
queen (6)	divine (14)
wife (6)	Aegis-bearing (12)

divine (6)	uncle (4)
long-suffering (5)	chief (8)
powerful (2)	Olympian (8)
cunning (3)	lord of thunder (6)
enchantress (2)	earth-encircling (4)
Aeaeon (4)	great (4)
mean (3)	sea-god (4)
blue-eyed (1)	

Table 1. Modifiers in the F and M groups

Table 2 provides an analysis of verbal collocations for the groups F and M. This analysis distinguishes between instances where the characters function as subjects (e.g., verbs with ‘Penelope’ as the subject) and as objects (e.g., verbs with “Penelope” as the object), revealing notable gender differences and their implications. For the female characters (F) as subjects, the most frequent verbs include ‘say’, ‘go’, ‘give’, ‘tell’, and ‘smile’. These verbs suggest a focus on communication, emotional expression, and domestic or supportive actions. For instance, verbs like ‘smile’, ‘weep’, ‘tremble’, and ‘persuade’ indicate a nuanced portrayal of female characters that leans towards emotional and interpersonal interactions. The presence of verbs such as ‘teach’ and ‘explain’ suggests a dimension of wisdom and knowledge-sharing, especially relevant to characters like Athena. This also emphasises the role of guidance provided by female characters in Odysseus’s journey. However, the verb ‘weep’ underscores a stereotypical association with vulnerability and emotional distress and it is associated with Penelope (see discussion on ‘long-suffering’ above). When examining the female characters as objects, the verbs include ‘say’, ‘tell’, ‘hear’, ‘answer’ and ‘shout’. This set of verbs continues to emphasise communication, but also highlights passivity and receptivity, as female characters are often on the receiving end of actions. ‘Disguise’ only applies to Athena, who frequently takes on different forms to interact with mortals and influence events in the *Odyssey*. The verb ‘marry’ concerns Penelope, who faces pressure from numerous suitors to remarry during Odysseus’s prolonged absence.

For the male characters (M) as subjects, the most frequent verbs are ‘say’, ‘tell’, ‘go’, ‘come’ and ‘send’. These verbs indicate a more active and commanding presence,

focusing on movement, communication, and the exertion of power. Verbs such as 'strike', 'kill', 'scold', 'begin' and 'shout' further highlight a portrayal of male characters as assertive, authoritative, and often violent. The use of 'murder' and 'rebuke' underscores a harsher and more dominant depiction of masculinity, which contrasts with the more communicative and emotive portrayal of female characters. As objects, male characters are associated with verbs like 'serve', 'please', 'shout' and 'hate'. The verbs 'serve' and 'please' indicate expectations of deference and satisfaction from others, reinforcing a hierarchical view of gender roles. Verbs such as 'strike' and 'kill' suggest vulnerability to violence, though this is portrayed differently compared to female characters, often highlighting conflict and power struggles among men. The verbs 'say' and 'speak' suggest that male characters, even as objects, maintain a significant role in communication and discourse.

Overall, the collocational analysis in Table 2 reveals a clear distinction in the portrayal of gender roles within Butler's translation of the *Odyssey*. Female characters are predominantly associated with emotional, communicative, and relational actions, reflecting traditional stereotypes of femininity. In contrast, male characters are depicted through actions that emphasise authority, power, and assertiveness, aligning with conventional views of masculinity. This analysis underscores the gendered dynamics at play in the text, highlighting how linguistic choices contribute to the construction and reinforcement of gender roles within the narrative.

Verbs			
F		M	
as subject	as object	as subject	as object
say (32)	say (21)	say (51)	serve (19)
go (27)	tell (17)	tell (43)	please (18)
give (21)	hear (15)	go (31)	shout (18)
tell (18)	answer (15)	come (27)	hate (14)
smile (11)	shout (14)	send (27)	save (13)
speak (11)	exclaim (8)	strike (27)	strike (13)
know (11)	mind (8)	kill (26)	kill (12)
answer (9)	send (8)	scold (21)	say (12)

disguise (9)	marry (3)	begin (20)	speak (12)
warn (8)	propitiate (3)	shout (20)	reply (12)
explain (8)		answer (16)	make (12)
persuade (8)		hate (15)	answer (9)
weep (7)		take (14)	
convince (6)		murder (14)	
live (4)		save (14)	
tremble (3)		speak (13)	
teach (4)		reply (9)	
		raise (9)	
		rebuke (7)	
		grant (6)	

Table 2. Verbal collocations in the F and M groups.

Table 3 provides an analysis of possessive constructs in the two groups. This examination of possessives – phrases like ‘Penelope’s house’ – reveals significant insights into how gender roles and relationships are linguistically represented in the text. For the female characters (F), the most frequent possessives include ‘house’, ‘instruction’, ‘suggestion’, ‘assistance’, and ‘help’. These terms suggest a focus on domestic and supportive roles, reinforcing traditional views of women as caretakers and advisors within the household. The possessive ‘house’ emphasises the centrality of the home in the lives of female characters, particularly Penelope, who manages her household in Odysseus’s absence. Terms like ‘instruction’, ‘suggestion’, ‘assistance’ and ‘help’ highlight the advisory and nurturing roles that female characters often occupy. Interestingly, ‘hatred’ also appears, indicating the complex emotional landscapes navigated by these characters, possibly reflecting Penelope’s feelings towards the suitors. The inclusion of ‘prayer’ and ‘heart’ points to the spiritual and emotional depth of female characters, while ‘sight’ suggests a perceptive quality. The possessive ‘wife’ underscores the relational identity of female characters, tying them to their husbands. More unique terms like ‘cave’ and ‘pigstye’ highlight specific narrative elements related to characters like Calypso and Circe, emphasising their connection to distinct locations and roles within the story.

In contrast, the male characters (M) are frequently associated with possessives such as ‘daughter’, ‘son’, ‘message’, ‘mind’ and ‘word’. These terms reflect a focus on lineage, communication, and intellectual authority. The prominence of ‘daughter’ and ‘son’ underscores the importance of familial relationships and the continuation of lineage for male characters, particularly figures like Zeus and Telemachus. Possessives like ‘message’, ‘mind’ and ‘word’ suggest control over information and thought, highlighting the authoritative and communicative roles of male characters. The term ‘protection’ indicates a protective and possibly dominant role in safeguarding others. Physical attributes and connections are evident in possessives like ‘eye’, ‘friend’ and ‘age’ (mostly relating to Telemachus’ inexperience) illustrating a blend of personal relationships and martial prowess (cfr. “spear”). Less frequent terms such as ‘room’, ‘voyage’, ‘mother’, ‘death’, ‘altar’ and ‘temple’ reflect a broader range of experiences and responsibilities, from domestic settings to religious (specifically relating to Zeus and Poseidon) and existential concerns.

The analysis of possessives in Table 3 reveals a clear differentiation in how gender roles are portrayed through language in Butler’s translation. Female characters are primarily associated with domestic, supportive, and relational roles, emphasizing their connection to the household and advisory capacities. In contrast, male characters are linked to authority, lineage, communication, and protection, highlighting their roles as leaders, communicators, and protectors. These linguistic choices reflect and reinforce traditional gender roles, offering insights into the broader cultural and social contexts within which Butler’s translation was produced.

Possessives	
F	M
house (13)	daughter (39)
instruction (12)	son (31)
suggestion (12)	message (19)
assistance (12)	mind (18)
help (12)	word (18)
hatred (9)	protection (18)
prayer (4)	eye (17)

heart (4)	friend (15)
sight (3)	spear (14)
wife (3)	age (9)
cave (1)	room (5)
pigstye (1)	voyage (5)
	mother (5)
	death (5)
	altar (2)
	temple (2)

Table 3. Possessives in the F and M groups.

Table 4 presents an analysis of predicates, comparing the usage between the two groups. This analysis focuses on predicate constructs that include a copula and a noun phrase or adjectival phrase (e.g., ‘Penelope is (a)...’), shedding light on how characters are described and characterised in the text. For the F group, the most frequent predicates include ‘daughter’, ‘afraid’, ‘unable’, ‘eager’, ‘woman’ and ‘judge’. The prominence of ‘daughter’ underscores the recurring theme of female characters being defined by their familial relationships, specifically their connection to their fathers. The adjectives ‘afraid’ and ‘unable’ suggest a portrayal of female characters as experiencing fear and incapacity, which can imply a sense of vulnerability and passivity. Conversely, ‘eager’ introduces a dynamic of enthusiasm and willingness, adding a layer of complexity to their characterisation. The use of ‘woman’ as a predicate is relatively infrequent but significant, highlighting their gender explicitly. The predicate ‘judge’, though rare, indicates moments where female characters are attributed with authority and discernment, showcasing their ability to make decisions and assessments, which underlines Athena’s role in the hero’s quest.

In contrast, the male characters are frequently associated with predicates such as ‘god’, ‘immortal’, ‘lord’, ‘angry’, ‘furious’, ‘oath’, ‘son’, ‘friend’ and ‘quick’. The terms ‘god’, ‘immortal’ and ‘lord’ highlight the divine and authoritative status of male characters, particularly figures like Zeus and Poseidon. These predicates underscore their power and dominance within the narrative. The adjectives ‘angry’ and ‘furious’ reflect intense emotional states, often linked to their roles in conflicts and displays of power. The pred-

icate ‘oath’ suggests a focus on their commitments and promises, further emphasizing their role as figures of authority and reliability. ‘Son’ and ‘friend’ indicate relational roles, but unlike their female counterparts, these terms are less about dependency and more about their own identity and social connections. The adjective ‘quick’ points to their physical agility and responsiveness, aligning with traditional masculine virtues of strength and action.

As seen in Table 1, 2 and 3, the analysis stresses that female characters are often defined by their relationships and emotional states, suggesting a more passive and dependent characterisation. In contrast, male characters are described with terms that emphasise their power, divinity, authority, and emotional intensity, reflecting a more active and dominant role. These linguistic choices reinforce traditional gender stereotypes and provide insight into the broader cultural and social contexts influencing Butler’s translation.

Predicates	
F	M
daughter (14)	god (18)
afraid (13)	immortal (18)
unable (9)	lord (11)
eager (7)	angry (10)
woman (3)	furious (10)
judge (2)	oath (5)
	son (4)
	friend (4)
	quick (4)

Table 4. Predicates in the F and M groups.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

The analysis presented in Tables 1, 2, 3, and 4 illustrates how Butler’s translation choices reveal his own gender biases. Table 1 shows that female characters are frequently associated with domestic and relational modifiers, while male characters are linked to terms

of power and authority. This underscores a traditional view where women are seen as caretakers and men as leaders. Verbal collocations reported in Table 2 further highlight gendered distinctions, with female characters performing actions related to communication and emotion, and male characters engaging in acts of aggression and authority. This reinforces the perception of women as passive and men as active agents. The analysis of possessive constructs reported in Table 3 reveals that female characters are often defined by their roles within the home and their relationships to others, whereas male characters are portrayed through terms indicating their lineage and authority. This highlights a bias that sees women as supportive figures and men as dominant forces. Finally, the data related to predicates in Table 4 show that female characters are frequently described in terms of their dependencies and vulnerabilities, while male characters are associated with divine status and authority. This further underscores the gendered portrayal of characters, where women are seen as dependent and men as powerful.

Butler's translation, despite his claims of objectivity, is deeply influenced by his own gendered assumptions. His portrayal of female characters aligns with traditional stereotypes, emphasising their domestic roles and emotional expression, while male characters are depicted as authoritative and aggressive.<sup>30</sup> These patterns reflect broader societal norms and expectations about gender, which Butler perpetuates in his translation. Regarding gender and the influence of an author's gender on their writing, Butler portrays these concepts as straightforward and unambiguous. In presenting his argument, Butler, whether intentionally or not, aligns his reading methodology with his views on gender.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>30</sup> This can be seen in specific instances where Butler's rendering deviates from the original Homeric text. For example, in passages where Homer's Greek offers more neutral or multifaceted descriptions of female characters, Butler's translation tends to heighten their domestic or emotional roles. Additionally, while the original text presents male characters with a range of qualities, Butler's translation often emphasises their authority and aggression in ways that are less pronounced in Homer's version, e.g. Homer describes Penelope's cleverness using the word *περιφρων* (*periphron*), meaning 'very thoughtful' or 'full of care'; in contrast, Butler refers to her as 'long-suffering' and 'patient', focuses heavily on her sadness and emotional turmoil. Conversely, Homer describes Zeus as *πατήρ ἀνδρῶν τε θεῶν τε* (*patēr andrôn te theôn te*), meaning 'father of men and gods', which presents him as a paternal figure with the authority to balance justice among gods and mortals, Butler's translation frequently emphasises Zeus as 'lord of thunder', which focuses more on his power and aggression, reinforcing a more traditionally masculine portrayal of authority through physical strength and dominance. To demonstrate this further, a more detailed comparison with the original Greek text would reveal the subtle ways in which Butler's gendered assumptions influence his interpretation.

<sup>31</sup> BUTLER 1897: 73.

These views, likely less contentious than the conclusions they helped him reach, form the foundation of his interpretive approach. Central to Butler's interpretation and the resulting conclusions are his beliefs about gender and the dynamic between authors and their texts: how authors craft their works and how texts reflect their creators. Butler treats these beliefs as self-evident truths, indisputable, and uses this assurance to underpin his argument.

The analysis of Butler's translation highlights the importance of critically examining how gender biases influence literary interpretation and translation. By uncovering these biases, we can gain a deeper understanding of how classical texts are shaped by the cultural and social contexts in which they are read and interpreted. This approach calls for a more reflective analysis of gender in classical literature, one that acknowledges the complexities and contradictions inherent in our interpretations.

Ultimately, this study contributes to a richer understanding of the *Odyssey* and its translation by illustrating how linguistic choices can reflect and reinforce gender biases. By examining the interplay between gender, authorship, and textual interpretation, we can develop a more comprehensive understanding of classical texts and the cultural contexts that shape them. This approach aligns with the need for a nuanced and critical perspective on gender in literary studies.<sup>32</sup>

The analysis of Butler's translation through the lenses of "word sketches" reveals significant insights into the gender dynamics both in source text and in the target text. Butler's assertion of a female author for the *Odyssey* provoked significant controversy in his time, as it challenged the traditional scholarly perspective, even amidst debates about the composition and textual history of the Homeric epics. The notion of a woman authoring the *Odyssey* was considered absurd. Butler's work, while condescending at times, also offers praise, but we must avoid letting our own unexamined gender biases reinforce stereotypes. Exploring Butler's arguments reveals how gender assumptions can both promote and ridicule women's literature, even when praising its distinctive qualities as «charming».<sup>33</sup> A new method that incorporates our understanding of gender is particularly necessary for studying Homeric poetry. An approach that avoids categorising

<sup>32</sup> EBBOTT 2005: 116.

<sup>33</sup> BUTLER 1897: 11.

the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* into “masculine” and “feminine” realms, as Butler did, could enable gender-focused and feminist perspectives to enrich our understanding of all Homeric poetry. We should aim to make gender considerations more integrated, ensuring future research diligently examines and articulates its own gender-related assumptions and motivations. This will help prevent future Homeric scholars from questioning the seriousness of our work in the same way Butler’s was.

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