

Spinning a yarn, 'weaving tales' or 'plot threads': all these familiar expressions suggest a long-lasting metaphorical link between storytelling and clothing making. And Ovid's Latin poem *Metamorphoses* tells of Arachne, turned into a spider by Minerva (the Roman name for Athena) as a punishment for outdoing her in a weaving contest by creating an intricate tapestry that exposes the crimes of the gods. Ancient poetry introduces us to some of these subversive stitchers: in Homer's epic *Odyssey*, for example, we encounter Penelope, who designs her secret ruse of stitching and unpicking a veil, so as to avoid marriage to a suitor and stay loyal to her absent husband; meanwhile, in ancient Greek thought, the goddess Athena was identified with the clever intellect required to weave anything from ancient Greek. But despite this focus on the relations between storytelling and weaving, these two styles of practice were also strongly divided along gendered lines in the ancient sources. Some of these ancient women weavers – mythical and actual – could be seen as the foremothers of today's makers and 'craftivists' who use textiles to make their voices heard through storytelling and protest. In the Latin word *texere*, 'to weave' the English words 'text' and 'textile' even have a shared origin. Both archeological and written evidence from the classical antiquity reveals that the production of cloth – as in many societies since – was primarily women's work. Ancient Greek and Roman writers too have seen links between fabric production craftsmanship and poetry composition.