

First & Last Name

English 2332

Professor Martin

22 February 2005

*The Odyssey*

Passage: “Helen gazed at her husband” (IV.144) “But now it entered Helen’s mind to drop into the wine that they were drinking an anodyne, mild magic of forgetfulness” (IV.230-233). “Three times you walked around it, patting it everywhere, and called by name the flower of our fighters, making your voice sound like their wives, calling” (IV.294-296). “Then deep in the great mansion, in his chamber, Menelaos went to rest, and Helen queenly in her long gown, lay beside him” (IV.322-334).

Question: How does the story of Helen illustrate the cyclical Greek way of thinking? How are the characters of Helen and Odysseus similar?

Issue: Issue of Genre. *The Odyssey* is a classical piece of literature; so, how does Homer incorporate that classical Greek way of thinking into the stories of the characters and their adventures. Odysseus, Menelaos, and Agamemnon do not stay in Troy once the great city is conquered. They do not build on what has been taken into Greek possession. The Greeks take the spoils of war and return from whence they came, their homes, their wives, their riches.

Critical Approach: The New Criticism Approach works the best in this instance. Simply looking at Homer’s words, as well as paying close attention to what is said by the other members of the story, will help draw the connections between the two very different, yet at the same time similar, characters of Helen and Odysseus.

Answer: Helen starts the Trojan War by being taken from the house of Menelaos and marrying Paris. In *The Odyssey* she is back with Menelaos, as his wife. This illustrates the idea of coming full circle. Also, she does not seem like she ever left. She is content with her husband, Menelaos and holds no hostility towards the Greeks, who pillaged her late husband, Paris', city. Perhaps, this demonstrates the Greek idea of fate. Fate has given Helen this life and there is nothing she can really do about it, so she better just sort of roll with the punches.

There is also this parallel between the characters of Helen and Odysseus. They are both adept deceivers. Helen is clever enough to figure out what is really inside the Trojan horse and Odysseus is clever enough to see past the beguiling voices of the men's wives, played by Helen. It is interesting to note, however, that trickery seems to be a common trait among the women of *The Odyssey*. While Helen is poisoning her quests for good or for bad, Penelope is deceiving the suitors to keep them at bay. So the question is, why is Odysseus endowed with the basic trait of a woman, as he is a deceiver and trickster. Perhaps, that is the only way he will find his way home alive.