**Helen of Troy: Was She or Wasn’t She?**

Common Core Standards: RL 1(textual evidence); RL 2(theme); RL 7(representation in artistic mediums);

*Use the poem and article below to help you answer the question.*

**The Abductions Of Helen Of Troy, In Order Of Abduction-y-ness**

[Mallory Ortberg](http://the-toast.net/author/mallory-ortberg/) on January 13, 2015 in [Religion](http://the-toast.net/category/religion/) [55 Comments](http://the-toast.net/2015/01/13/abductions-helen-troy-order-abduction-y-ness/#idc-container)

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Pretty much the only poem I care about (SORRY POEMS) is Hilda Doolittle (H.D. to you)’s “Helen” on the “Of Troy” lady of the same name.

*All Greece hates  
the still eyes in the white face,  
the lustre as of olives  
where she stands,  
and the white hands.*

*All Greece reviles*  
*the wan face when she smiles,*  
*hating it deeper still*  
*when it grows wan and white,*  
*remembering past enchantments*  
*and past ills.*

*Greece sees unmoved,*  
*God’s daughter, born of love,*  
*the beauty of cool feet*  
*and slenderest knees,*  
*could love indeed the maid,*  
*only if she were laid,*  
*white ash amid funereal cypresses.*

**Annotate the poem for the imagery and archetypes. Discuss how the imagery and archetypes that you identified help to develop the themes.**

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AAAGHGHHH, right? That pretty much sums up Western society’s attitude towards women and beauty for the last 2500 years or so. Anyhow. Helen of Troy is the absolute best. She was the daughter of Zeus and Leda (yes, the swan lady), the most beautiful mortal woman in existence, and was kidnapped roughly 400 times before the age of 20. Kidnapping, in ancient Greece, was really just a friendly way of saying hello, how’ve you been, I’m running away into the hills above Lacedaemonia with all of the women in your family but you can have at least half of them back if you’re willing to challenge me in a footrace. Ladies who hadn’t been kidnapped by a certain age had a wan, forlorn look to them, as if to say *Where are the simple joys of maidenhood*, like the poet says.

So! Helen spent a great deal of her childhood being flung about from heroic figure to heroic figure, being briefly kidnapped by Theseus of all people before finally settling down with Menelaus, the king of Sparta. SMASH CUT TO ten years later when Paris, after having judged Aphrodite to be the most beautiful of all the goddesses and earning her favor, sails into town and takes Helen home with him to Troy.

This is the fun part! Because, you know, this was a beloved subject for European painters for centuries, and European painters had a lot of *conflicting* and *varied* opinions about female agency and morality. So there are roughly 4000 paintings titled “The Abduction of Helen,” all with varying degrees of actual abduction. (Helen ended up being fine, or as fine as a woman can be who has been kidnapped as often as one of Liam Neeson’s daughters; she either tired of Paris or never truly loved him and rejoined her husband and children in Sparta after the Trojan War, which is more than you can say for the Trojans.)

Here are some of them, in order of abduction. (See Power Point)

**Notes and Discussion Questions**

1. Examine the situations in the paintings and especially the depictions Helen. What trends do you notice?
2. After examining the paintings and reading the author’s comments above, what can you conclude about the “*conflicting* and *varied* opinions about female agency and morality”?