

# Helen of troy does countertop dancing assignment

Literature



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Teagan de Marigny DSVTEA001 Due Date: 16 September 2011 English  
Literary Studies: ELL1016S Tutor: Nicola Lazenby Tut group 13 Assignment 2:  
Poetry 'Helen of Troy Does Countertop Dancing' - Margaret Atwood 'Helen  
of Troy does Countertop Dancing', by Margaret Atwood, deals with the  
refusal to agree to or obey with the idea that woman need to live a self-  
respected life and have a humble day job, which is pressured by society in  
order for woman to be 'Ideal'. As well as Atwood's writing on the oppressed  
female and her finding of power and control in everyday life.

In this poem, there is an account of Feminist Resistance. Through observing  
the context, contents and form of the poem evidence of this resistance will  
be made clear. Margaret Atwood is a Canadian poet who was born November  
18, 1939. 'Helen of Troy does Countertop Dancing' is found in one of  
Atwood's poetry books entitled, 'Morning in the Burned House' which was  
published in 1995. There are two distinct themes that are evident in this  
book. The first is the exploration of torture, particular to the torture of  
woman. This theme is made clear through the retelling of certain myths such  
as Helen of Troy.

Many of her poems have been based and inspired on mythological figures as  
well as fairy tales. The second theme of the poems, in the book, is based on  
mortality and aging, which was a reaction towards her father's death.

However the theme of the torture of woman and the use of mythological  
figures will be what we will be dealing with in 'Helen of Troy does  
Countertop Dancing'. Atwood uses a narrative approach in this poem. This  
creates a personal connection with the reader especially woman feminists.  
Helen of Troy was known as the most beautiful woman in the world.

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There have been many different stories about who her parents were and how she was conceived. However in Atwood's poem it appears she chose the idea that Helen was the daughter of Greek God, Zeus, and Spartan Queen Leda. It has been said that Zeus disguised himself as a swan and raped Leda. Leda then produced an egg from which Helen came from. ' but I come from the province of gods'(58) ' My mother was raped by a holy swan. '(62) ' in my blazing swan-egg of light. '(80) Here are three instances where Atwood refers to the myth of who Helen's parents were and how she was conceived.

Using Helen of Troy as the ' prostitute/stripper' in the poem creates great interest and entertainment due to the history of who Helen of Troy was. Helen is here being referred to as having no morals and self-respect. This introduces feminist resistance in the sense of irony that the ' most beautiful woman in the world' is a prostitute. This allusion provides us with the idea of the approach Atwood had for this poem. The poem begins with the idea that woman feel disgusted towards other woman who sell their bodies and degrade themselves by stripping and entertaining men.

Women see this as giving woman in society a bad reputation and men who find pleasure in such a thing still sees this as a woman having no self respect. However this job is known as the world's oldest profession for woman and who decides if this way of making money is really wrong? '... I should be ashamed of myself/if they had the chance. Quite dancing. /Get some self-respected job. ' (2-5) Helen then rebuts by stating that why would she leave this job when all she'll be getting is '...minimum wage, and varicose veins...' (6-7) she goes on to say, ' Selling gloves, or something. Instead of what I do sell.

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You have to have talent to peddle a thing so nebulous' (12-15) why would she waste her talents on selling objects when she can sell herself? ' Exploited they'd say... but I've a choice of how, and I'll take the money. ' (17-19) Helen is strong willed and will not conform to society but rather to make her own decisions regardless of her reputation. ' Helen' uses her work as a battle against oppression which comes from an explicit attitude from society as well as from the need to gain control on a daily basis in life, therefore, ' Helen' works as a stripper in order to gain her own control in life.

She also has the power to decide who she will dance for or sleep with. ' You can take me out to dinner' (62) is said as a command more than an offer. ' Helen' also is able to have men worship and love her: ' my beery worshippers! That, or a bleary hopeless love. ' (33-34) . This idea of worshipping is again tied back to Helen of Troy who was worshipped however, under these circumstances they do not worship her how Helen of Troy was worshipped but rather as a person of beauty who is entertaining them for sexual arousal. Although they worship her they still undermine her as a woman.

They see her and treat her as an object rather than a person, as some men do towards woman. ' The rest of them would like to watch me and feel nothing. Reduce me to components' (68-69) Even though in this poem we know that ' Helen' is a stripper there is an implication that Atwood may be referring to woman in general. Often men treat woman as objects rather than people therefore this idea is an example of Feminist resistance. The idea that all women should be beautiful and appear to walk on air is another idea that Atwood deals with. Look—my feet don't hit the marble! ... I hover <https://assignbuster.com/helen-of-troy-does-countertop-dancing-assignment/>

six inches in the air. ' Here ' Helen' is referring to her high heels that are giving the illusion that she is soaring in air, high off the ground. She questions whether the men she dancers for think she is a goddess and then dares them to try and see otherwise. ' Helen' states on how this poem is a ' torch song' (83). A torch song is a sentimental love song which is ironic as being a stripper does not exactly entitle one to experience love. It is all an act. She then goes on to state ' Touch me and you'll burn. This tie in with the rules men need to obey at a strip club. If they touch a stripper there will be consequences and here ' Helen' uses a very violent statement of how she is a torch and anyone who touches her will get burnt. Here there is evidence on how Atwood requires lashing out at men who feel the need to over step boundaries with woman and who show no respect towards woman. Here again proving how this poem can be seen as resistance text. This poem is divided into three stanzas. The first and last stanza has 19 lines while the second stanza has 45 lines.

Stanza one deals with the way women in society regard strippers as an insult to all woman as well as ' Helen's' argument as to why she has chosen this job. The second stanza forms a story base about her clients and their reaction towards her as a stripper. The last stanza is more aggressive and personal on ' Helen's' behalf. This form of poetry is enjoyable to follow and keeps the reader interested. Margaret Atwood successfully exposed her idea on the oppressed female and her fighting for control in everyday life. She refuses to obey and agree with the idea that woman need to have humble day jobs in order to be accepted by society.

This feminist resistance text allows the reader to take sides with the character of 'Helen' and to question the ideals that society has of woman. If one can be happy with what they do and be in control with their own lives then no one has a right to judge. I feel that this is what Atwood wanted to achieve in her writing of this poem and I feel that she achieved this with great success. The Academy of American Poets, 2006. Atwood, Margaret. "Helen of Troy Does Countertop Dancing." [online] (updated 15 February 2006) Available at: [http://www. poets. org/printmedia.](http://www.poets.org/printmedia)

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