Analysis of “To Helen” by Edgar Allan Poe

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The Poem
- Original
- Revised

Rhyme
- The rhyme of the poem

Analysis
- The analysis of every stanza
- The general analyses (tone, figurative, etc)
- Biographical and historical approach
Helen, thy beauty is to me
   Like those Nicean barks of yore,
That gently, o'er a perfum'd sea,
   The weary way-worn wanderer bore
To his own native shore.

On desperate seas long wont to roam,
   Thy hyacinth hair, thy classic face,
Thy Naiad airs have brought me home
   To the beauty of fair Greece,
And the grandeur of old Rome.

Lo! in that little window-niche
   How statue-like I see thee stand!
The folded scroll within thy hand —
   A Psyche from the regions which
Are Holy land!
Helen, thy beauty is to me
Like those Nicean barks of yore
That gently, o'er a perfumed sea,
The weary, way-worn wanderer bore
To his own native shore.

On desperate seas long wont to roam,
Thy hyacinth hair, thy classic face,
Thy Naiad airs have brought me home
To the glory that was Greece,
And the grandeur that was Rome.

Lo, in yon brilliant window-niche
How statue-like I see thee stand,
The agate lamp within thy hand,
Ah! Psyche, from the regions which
Are Holy Land!
The Analysis of To Helen

- The type of the poem: narrative poem
- The metrical feet of the poem: iambic tetrameter
- The stanzaic form of the poem: a stanza of 5 lines
- The tone of the poem: neutral, admiring something
- The figurative language:
The Rhyme of To Helen

Helen, thy beauty is to me (a)
Like those Nicean barks of yore, (b)
That gently, o'er a perfum'd sea, (a)
The weary way-worn wanderer bore (b)
To his own native shore. (b)

On desperate seas long wont to roam, (c)
Thy hyacinth hair, thy classic face, (d)
Thy Naiad airs have brought me home (c)
To the beauty of fair Greece, (d)
And the grandeur of old Rome. (c)

Lo! in that little window-niche (e)
How statue-like I see thee stand! (f)
The folded scroll within thy hand — (f)
A Psyche from the regions which (e)
Are Holy land!
Stanza 1:

Helen, thy beauty is to me
Like those Nicean barks of yore
That gently, o'er a perfumed sea
The weary, way-worn wanderer bore
To his own native shore.

- In the first line of this stanza, Poe tells about a woman named Helen. He describes that the beauty of Helen is only for him.
- In the second line, he compares the beauty of Helen with the ship of Nicean. Nicean means people from Nicaea. Nicaea was an ancient city on the west coast of Turkey.
- He compares Helen with ship means that Helen’s beauty like a ship that transport the tired feeling.
Stanza 2:

- Desperate seas mean that someone want to be with Helen, but he can’t be with Helen. It describes by the sea wants to reach the island, but the sea can’t reach it. Therefore, it mention as desperate seas.

On desperate seas long wont to roam,
Thy hyacinth hair, thy classic face,
Thy Naiad airs have brought me home
To the glory that was Greece,
And the grandeur that was Rome.
Lo, in yon brilliant window-niche
How statue-like I see thee stand,
The agate lamp within thy hand,
Ah! Psyche, from the regions which Are Holy Land!

• In the eleventh – twelveth lines, Poe assumes that Helen is standing “statue-like”, which means that she resembles a work of art and she is not moving at all.

• In fourteenth line, Poe describes Helen as “psyche”. Psyche is a beautiful woman in Greece mythology. And he describes that the beauty of Helen is similar with the beauty of Psyche.

• In the last line, Holy land means a beautiful place that has so many good things happen. It can be a heaven.
Edgar Allan Poe is not referring to a real woman named Helen, but a woman named Jane Stanard, the mother of one of his childhood friends. Poe would later claim that she was his first love. Actually, he fell in love with Jane when he haven’t yet 10 years old.
Grave of Jane Stanard in Shockoe Hill Cemetery, Richmond, Virginia. The last stanza of "To Helen" is inscribed on the bronze marker at the base of the stone.
Historical Approach

- In Poe’s era, the poet is a black romanticism, which means that the Poe’s works have characteristic, it’s something dark, gloomy and sad.

- In this poem (To Helen) our group think that it’s a sad poem because this poem told about the boy who fell in love with a woman and he can’t reach or can’t be with the woman.

- In Poe’s poem, To Helen, he use many symbol from several mythology. such as, Helen, the most beautiful woman, also Psyche, Nicean and many more that it can be related to the poem.