

**Lesser, R. H. (2019) "Female Ethics and Epic Rivalry: Helen in the *Iliad* and Penelope in the *Odyssey*," *American Journal of Philology* 140 (2), 189–226.**

Building on scholarship regarding the rivalry between the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* traditions through the contrasting ethics of their respective heroes, Achilles and Odysseus, this paper argues that the poems also compete by setting against one another their central female characters, Helen and Penelope. Intertextual dialogue between the two epics constructs the women as similar, yet ethically antitypical: they both desire lost husbands, wish for death, and inspire the *erōs* of men who are not their legitimate spouses, but whereas Helen is an adulterous female agent who weaves war and indiscriminate suffering, Penelope is a faithful, thoughtful wife who more passively preserves Odysseus's family and authority. These radically different heroines help distinguish the destructively "tragic" *Iliad* from the conservatively "comedic" *Odyssey*. The paper draws on recent oralist methodologies, arguing for intertextuality on the basis of marked or restricted formulas or themes used in like contexts to significant effect, and exploring different models for the relationship between the two Homeric epics, including "bidirectional" intertextuality.