

“NEVERHOME” BY LAIRD HUNT

Discussion questions

1. *Neverhome* shares many characteristics of the classical epic, particularly The Odyssey. In fact, a conversation between Gallant Ash/Constance and a war widow includes the following exchange:

“Ah,” she said. “A young married woman, far from her home, traveling with an army at a time of war. That’s an extraordinary image.”

“Yes, ma’am,” I said.

“Penelope gone to the war and Odysseus staying home.”
2. Where does *Neverhome* stray from its epic structure? Is Gallant Ash/Constance an epic hero? When and how does she fall short? Is it possible to set an epic narrative in the style of Odysseus during the Civil War?
3. *Neverhome* opens with: “I was strong and he was not, so it was me went to war to defend the Republic.” Throughout the novel, Bartholomew acts as a kind of gender-foil to Constance. Contrast Bartholomew’s feminine qualities with Constance’s masculine qualities. What does the comparison reveal about their relationship?
4. As *Neverhome* draws to a close, Constance describes a letter she wrote to the general. What does this letter reveal about her reliability as a narrator? When and why has she lied to us?
5. Although clothing today may not be as gendered as it was during the nineteenth century, when a woman wearing pants was a shocking sight, so much of our individual identity still is tied up in the way we dress. Why? How does wearing certain types of clothing make you feel differently than when you’re wearing other types? How do you use strangers’ clothing to draw assumptions about them?
6. Many argue that war is a man’s game, that there is no place for women amidst its violence. Yet history has shown us that women and civilians are almost always swept up in the conflicts raging around them. Does the fact that Constance makes a conscious choice to enter the fray change how you view her? Is the courage she exhibits while fighting on the battlefield different than the courage she exhibits fighting as a civilian at the end of the novel? How?
7. Though she shoots countless people when disguised as a man during the war, it is when she is living as a woman that Constance commits her worst murder. Is this significant? Why?

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