

The action of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* takes place long before Odysseus reaches Ithaca, but for Aeschylus and his audience, Odysseus' return home has already happened. The *Odyssey* is, for them, a paradigm against which to understand the tragedy (Goldhill, 195). In a sense, this is also true for Aeschylus' characters. Clytemnestra is created, regardless of the chronological order of the stories, as though she shares the Athenian audience's knowledge of the *Odyssey*. I examine a part of the conversation that the *Agamemnon* is having with the *Odyssey*, in the presentation of Clytemnestra's speech and action. Clytemnestra demonstrates a masterful ability to manipulate elements of the epic for her own ends. In her speech, by alluding to the *Odyssey*, she invites Agamemnon to interpret her as Penelope. In her actions, she re-produces on stage Penelope's famous test of her husband, albeit with a tragic inversion.

Aeschylus knew how to create fresh and arresting metaphors, and he had no hesitation in attributing such creative language to Clytemnestra (e.g. 868, 870-73). We must then explain why, at 896-99, she utters a string of remarkably stale and conventional metaphors. Why has she lost the imagistic brilliance with which Aeschylus endowed her just a few lines earlier?

Clytemnestra's string of metaphors consists of a series of allusions to key images from the *Odyssey* (the dog, the mast, the pillar, and the ship-wrecked sailor). Even as she plays the role of Penelope, she is further, in a sense, playing Homer, with her impressive ability to mobilize the idiom of the *Odyssey*. Clytemnestra's authorial mastery of epic wins her authority over the action on the tragic stage as well. Once we see that Clytemnestra knows and uses her *Odyssey* with skill, we can then read her invitation to her husband to walk on the cloths as an aptly inverted restaging of Penelope's bed-test.

Clytemnestra and Penelope, both models of deception at the climactic moment of reunion with their husbands, give orders that textiles properly belonging inside a domestic enclosure be brought outside of that space. Odysseus' reaction to Penelope's order to bring the bed and bedding outside reveals his true knowledge of the history of the most intimate place in his household, and results in Penelope's acknowledgment of him at last as her husband. The bed and its coverings remain inside the bedroom, to become the happy place of the couple's renewal of their marriage. In the *Agamemnon*, the cloth tumbles out of the palace, and Agamemnon, a poor reader of Clytemnestra's text, follows her stage directions to walk on the path of textiles that will lead to the end of his marriage and of his life.

I thus explain the metaphors of 896-99 as taking their texture and interpretive potency from their allusive gesture. An important source of Clytemnestra's authority is not just her skill in speaking persuasively (Lev Kenaan, 106), but also her anachronistic knowledge of the *Odyssey* and her ability to rewrite its language and to restage its action. We can add to her transgressive usurpations of male power (Zeitlin, 91-92, McClure, 79, Foley, 209) her mastery as a learned reader and composer of epic.