

The Name of Clytemnestra in the *Odyssey*

Clytemnestra's role in the Odyssean versions of the Oresteia myth is a topic of much disagreement. Many scholars have long held that the Homeric poet presents Aegisthus as the principal actor in Agamemnon's murder and that Clytemnestra is guilty of complicity rather than of murder; however, in this talk I will show that Clytemnestra was viewed as a principal actor in the murder of Agamemnon by analyzing five of the fifteen instances of the Odyssean Oresteia myth (identified in Olson 1990) which contain both veiled and overt references to Clytemnestra's role in the murder. In these passages, wordplay on the components of Clytemnestra's name cue the audience to think of her, often without overtly stating her name. For this purpose, I use Bruce Louden's definition of Homeric wordplay: "a connection between two similar-sounding words which invests the relationship between them with additional meaning" (Louden 1995: 27). Second, I will show that the Homeric poet strategically deploys both versions of Clytemnestra's name (*Clytemnestra* and *Clytemestra*) to evoke Penelope's situation in Ithaca. My examination of both forms of Clytemnestra's name in the *Odyssey* will strengthen the claim advanced by numerous scholars (e.g., D'Arms and Hulley 1946, Beye 1974, Katz 1991, Tsagalis 2003) that Clytemnestra appears in the poem as a foil for Penelope. By examining the Odyssean evidence for Clytemnestra, I will show both that Clytemnestra was viewed as a principal actor in Agamemnon's murder, and that wordplay on her name suggests a strong parallel with Penelope. I will conclude with a brief examination of Agamemnon's speech in the second Nekyia (*Odyssey* 24.191-202) as evidence in support of the claim that Clytemnestra acts as a foil for Penelope.

Clytemnestra is often alluded to within the narrative of the Oresteia myth by way of wordplay on the constituent parts of her name. The five instances of the Oresteia myth that I shall examine in this talk all evoke Clytemnestra via wordplay. In this talk, I will argue that significant references to Clytemnestra often include *figura etymologica* (etymological wordplay on Clytemnestra's name) and parechesis (non-etymological punning on Clytemnestra's name through the repetition of sounds contained in her name) (Louden 1995: 28-29). My examination of this wordplay sheds light on the persistent question of the correct form of the name "Clytemnestra." Some modern editors favor *Clytemestra* (from κλυτός and μήδομαι, "renowned for her cunning"), while others favor *Clytemnestra* (from κλυτός and μνηστεύω, "renowned for her suitor/wooing"). *Clytemestra* has been the prevailing form of the name since Eduard Fraenkel's commentary on the *Agamemnon*, and subsequent scholarship has largely followed Fraenkel in defending this spelling. However, ancient literary and material sources suggest an early awareness and use of both forms of Clytemnestra's name (cf. Marquardt 1992 for a summary of these sources).

Both *Clytemestra* and *Clytemnestra* have particular relevance within the narrative of the *Odyssey*, and the Homeric poet engages in wordplay on both forms of the name at critical points in the poem. It has been widely recognized that Clytemnestra serves as a foil for Penelope; the wordplay on both forms of Clytemnestra's name strengthens this claim. I argue that when the poet deploys the form *Clytemestra*, we are meant to understand a reference to the ambiguous nature of female μήτις, including Penelope's own; similarly, puns on *Clytemnestra* evoke Penelope's situation with the suitors (μνηστῆρες). The abundance of wordplay on both forms of Clytemnestra's name supports the claim that the Oresteia myth is deployed as a warning about the danger that could await Odysseus upon his return.

Finally, by briefly examining *Odyssey* 24.191-202, I will show that the Oresteia myth provides a compelling lens through which to consider the κλέος awarded to Penelope. The etymology of Clytemnestra's name provides a frame for the ambiguous nature of Penelope's κλέος. Reading the *Odyssey* through the lens of the Oresteia myth allows us to fully appreciate the complexity of Penelope's κλέος.

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