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Shipwrecked Spouses: Leukothea's Veil and Marital Reunion in The *Odyssey*¹

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Abstract: This article proposes a new view of the mysterious incident in which Odysseus wears Leukothea's veil to make it safely ashore in *Odyssey* 5, arguing that it bears directly on one of the epic's fundamental themes, the reunion of the hero with Penelope. Through an analysis of the traditional referentiality of the veil in the Homeric epics and of Odyssean similes associating shipwreck with family reunion, it is shown that Leukothea's veil identifies Odysseus with Penelope while both signifying and magically effecting the recovery of chastity, and ultimately of his marriage.

Keywords: Homer, *Odyssey*, Odysseus, Penelope, Leukothea, veil, simile

In Book 5 of the *Odyssey*, Odysseus, following the advice of the goddess Ino-Leukothea,² removes the clothing given him by Kalypso and ties Leukothea's gift of an "immortal veil" (κρήδεμνον ἄμβροτον) around his chest. Aided by this gift, Odysseus not only escapes death by swimming safely to shore on Scheria, but also ultimately regains his marriage with Penelope. Scholars have shown that clothing in general is a significant motif in the *Odyssey* that symbolizes Odysseus' gradual resumption of his identity, but without discussion of the particular role played by the "veil" (κρήδεμνον).³ More recently, Dianna Rhyan Kardulias (2001) discussed the Leukothea incident in particular, interpreting Odysseus' rescue through the veil as an instance of ritual transvestism effecting and symbolizing his reintegration into the human community.⁴

In this article, I propose a new interpretation of Odysseus' encounter with

¹ This article grew out of a talk at the 2015 Annual Meeting of CANE in Dedham, MA. I wish to express my thanks to the enthusiastic attendees for the challenging questions and lively discussion that followed. My thanks also to Bruce Heiden and the anonymous reviewer for many helpful suggestions.

² *Od.* 5.333-4.

³ Block 1985, Murnaghan 1987.

⁴ Holtmark 1966, 209 has interpreted Ino-Leukothea's role in the poem as "the white goddess," associated with "brightness" and "life," whose veil functions as an "umbilical cord" that aids Odysseus' rebirth or transition from the "womb" of the goddess Kalypso; the latter is interpreted as she who threatens to "cover" Odysseus in "darkness," first in the oblivion of immortality on Ogygia and afterwards in the oblivion of death at sea, where her weighty clothing nearly submerged him in the waves (cf. also Thalmann 1992, 50). For other discussions of Leukothea's fitting role as a former mortal who helps restore Odysseus to the human world, see Segal 1962, 20-3; Bergren 2008, 67-8; Van Nortwick 2009, 20-1.

Leukothea. Building on Rhyan Kardulias’ insight that the magical effect of the veil not only prevents Odysseus from drowning but also marks an end to his erotic adventures,⁵ on the traditional association of the veil with chastity,⁶ and on what scholars have shown of oral epic poetry’s capacity to use formulaic repetitions to create meaning for the traditional audience,⁷ I will argue that Odysseus’ act of wearing the veil is yet another way in which the *Odyssey* identifies Odysseus with Penelope, who is frequently shown guarding her chastity by appearing before the suitors in her veil.⁸ That Odysseus’ salvage from shipwreck through the veil bears fundamentally on the rescue of his marriage to Penelope will also be established through analysis of Andromache’s loss of the veil after the death of Hektor in *Iliad* 22.⁹ Above all, the *Odyssey* itself suggests a connection between the veil and marital reunion through the identification of Penelope with Odysseus in the famous reverse simile of Book 23, where she is likened to a shipwrecked sailor in much the same way as her husband was represented following the destruction of his raft at the hands of Poseidon in Book 5.¹⁰

In *Odyssey* 5, Kalypso finally gives Odysseus leave to depart from the island of Ogygia, and he sets out to sea on a small raft. But Poseidon, raging at Odysseus as much as ever, stirs up a violent storm which threatens to drown the hero (*Odyssey* 5.291-6). Suddenly the sea goddess Leukothea, formerly the mortal woman Ino, comes to Odysseus’ aid. She advises Odysseus to remove the clothing which Kalypso had given him and to swim for the shore, promising him the special protection of her own immortal garment (*Odyssey* 5.333-50)¹¹:

τὸν δὲ ἶδεν Κάδμου θυγάτηρ, καλλίσφυρος Ἰνώ,
 Λευκοθέη, ἣ πρὶν μὲν ἔην βροτὸς ἀυδῆεσσα,
 νῦν δ’ ἄλως ἐν πελάγεσσι θεῶν ἐξ ἔμμορε τιμῆς. 335
 ἣ ῥ’ Ὀδυσῆϊ ἔλεησεν ἀλώμενον, ἄλγε’ ἔχοντα·
 αἰθυίη δ’ εἰκυῖα ποτῆ ἀνεδύσετο λίμνης,

⁵ Apart from Rhyan Kardulias 2001, 26 and 30-5, commentators have assumed that the veil’s effect as a magical talisman extends no further than preventing Odysseus from drowning (e.g. Hainsworth 1988, *ad.* 5.333-4; Louden 1999, 128; De Jong 2001, *ad.* 327-53), and indeed such an effect is all that is indicated by Leukothea’s words.

⁶ See Nagler 1974, 44-63 and 1996; Rhyan Kardulias 2001, *passim*, but see esp. 30-1; Steiner 2010, *ad.* 18.210.

⁷ Among the most fundamental accounts are Lord 1919 (1960), Nagy 1990, 18-35 (a revision of Nagy 1976), and Foley 1988; see also Elmer 2011 on the evolution of oral-formulaic theory and more recent scholarly developments.

⁸ *Od.* 1.334, 16.416, 18.210, 21.65.

⁹ When alleging connections between the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad* in particular, I will particularly rely on the concept of “traditional referentiality” that Foley 1991 used in his approach to the connection between epic language and the traditional audience, and on Pucci’s 1995 (1987) “intertextual” mode of reading the *Odyssey* in light of the *Iliad*.

¹⁰ To elucidate this important “intratextual” connection, I will draw in particular on the model provided by Due’s 2002 exploration of formulaic speech patterns in Homer’s *Iliad*.

¹¹ The Greek text of the *Odyssey* in this paper is taken from Stanford 1961; for the *Iliad*, from Monro and Allen 1920, unless otherwise noted. Translations are my own.

ἴζε δ' ἐπὶ σχεδίδης καὶ μιν πρὸς μῦθον ἔειπε·
 “Κάμμορε, τίπτε τοι ὦδε Ποσειδάων ἐνοσίχθων
 ὠδύσατ' ἐκπάγλως, ὅτι τοι κακὰ πολλὰ φυτεύει; 340
 οὐ μὲν δὴ σε καταφθίσει, μάλα περ μενεαίνων,
 ἀλλὰ μάλ' ὦδ' ἔρξαι—δοκέεις δέ μοι οὐκ ἀπινύσσειν—
 εἴματα ταῦτ' ἀποδὺς σχεδίην ἀνέμοισι φέρεσθαι
 κάλλιπ', ἀτὰρ χεῖρεσσι νέων ἐπιμαίεο νόστου
 γαίης Φαιήκων, ὅθι τοι μοῖρ' ἐστὶν ἀλύξαι. 345
 τῇ δέ, τόδε κρήδεμνον ὑπὸ στέρνοιο τάνυσσαι
 ἄμβροτον· οὐδέ τί τοι παθέειν δέος οὐδ' ἀπολέσθαι.
 αὐτὰρ ἐπὴν χεῖρεσσιν ἐφάψεται ἠπείροιο,
 ἄψ ἀπολυσάμενος βαλέειν εἰς οἴνοπα πόντον
 πολλὸν ἀπ' ἠπείρου, αὐτὸς δ' ἀπονόσφι τραπέσθαι.” 350

But there saw him Kadmos' daughter, fair-ankled Ino, Leukothea, who was before a mortal speaking with human voice, but now held the lot of the goddesses in the depths of the sea. She therefore took pity on Odysseus, the wanderer full of sorrows. And she emerged from the water like a diving bird in flight, and she sat upon the raft and spoke to him as follows: “Downtrodden by fate, poor man, why has earth-shaker Poseidon conceived such odium¹² for you, seeing that he's planting many evils for you? And yet I tell you for certain that he shall not destroy you, though he eat his heart out with rage. But come now, do this—for you do not seem to me to lack prudence—remove these clothes and leave the raft behind to be borne by the winds, but swim with your hands, strive for your homecoming, for the land of the Phaiakians, to which place it is your fate to escape. Come now, this veil here (τόδε κρήδεμνον), stretch it beneath your breast, it's immortal (ἄμβροτον): there's no fear that you'll either suffer or perish. But as soon as you lay hold of land with your hands, immediately loosen it and throw it back into the wine-dark sea, far from the land; but you yourself turn far away.”

After some anxious deliberation during which he fears this might be some trick, the destruction of his raft makes the situation so desperate that Odysseus has no choice but to trust the goddess and follow her advice. He ties on the veil and ultimately makes it safely ashore.

But before we look at Odysseus' safe arrival on land through the protection of the

¹² For the pun on Odysseus' name in “conceived such odium” (ὠδύσατ'), see the note in Hainsworth 1988 as well as Russo 1992, *ad Od.* 19.405, where he observes that to “be angry with” or “hate” (ὀδύ(σ)ομαι) is possibly cognate with Latin *odium*; Pucci 1995 (1987), 65 also thus renders the pun in translation. See also Clay 1983, 63-4 (and 54-68 on the name of Odysseus more generally).

veil, I want to establish the veil's traditional association with chastity and marriage both in the *Odyssey* and elsewhere in Homeric poetry. An example of this tradition occurs in *Iliad* 22, where we are presented with the following scene when Andromache learns of the death of Hektor (*Iliad* 22.463-72):

τὸν δὲ νόησεν

ἐλκόμενον πρόσθεν πόλιος· ταχέες δέ μιν ἵπποι
 ἔλκον ἀκηδέστως κοίλας ἐπὶ νῆας Ἀχαιῶν. 465

τὴν δὲ κατ' ὀφθαλμῶν ἐρεβεννὴ νύξ ἐκάλυπεν,
 ἦριπε δ' ἐξοπίσω, ἀπὸ δὲ ψυχὴν ἐκάπυσσε.
 τῆλε δ' ἀπὸ κρατὸς βάλε δέσματα σιγαλόεντα,
 ἄμπυκα κεκρύφαλόν τε ἰδὲ πλεκτὴν ἀναδέσμην
 κρήδεμνόν θ', ὃ ρά οἱ δῶκε χρυσῆ Ἀφροδίτη 470
 ἦματι τῷ ὅτε μιν κορυθαίολος ἠγάγεθ' Ἔκτωρ
 ἐκ δόμου Ἡετίωνος, ἐπεὶ πόρε μυρία ἔδνα.

...and she perceived [Hektor] being dragged, far from the city; and the swift horses were carelessly dragging him towards the hollow ships of the Achaians. But gloomy night covered her eyes, and suddenly she fell, and breathed forth her soul. And she threw far from her head the shining headbands, her diadem of a frontlet, her plaited hair-net, and the veil (κρήδεμνον) which golden Aphrodite had given her on the day when Hektor of the glancing helmet led her forth from the house of Eëtion, when he had given countless bride-gifts.

The “veil” (κρήδεμνον) which Andromache throws off is said to have been given to her by Aphrodite on the day of her marriage to Hektor. The *Iliad* clearly calls attention to the veil in this context both by making it the climax of the list of multiple elements of Andromache's headdress, and by placing it in relief at the beginning of a new line. Its highly significant removal on the occasion of her husband's death symbolizes the end of her marriage and a new state of vulnerability to her chastity.¹³

The *Odyssey* takes the traditional referentiality of the veil and combines it with the formulaic language of recovering one's breath to craft Odysseus's arrival ashore in thematic consonance with the Andromache scene, thereby inducing the epic audience to reflect on the status of Odysseus's marriage to Penelope. Continuing with Andromache's

¹³ De Jong 2012, *ad.* 468-72: “Since a κρήδεμνον is a symbol of chastity (cf. e.g. *Od.* 1.334), Andromache's gesture may make the narratees also think of the sexual violation which awaits her now that Hector is dead and hence the fall of Troy close at hand.” In Homeric poetry, “veils” (κρήδεμνα) are also used metaphorically to designate the towers of Troy (*Il.* 16.100, *Od.* 13.388; cf. Nagler 1974, 64-111). Thus Scully 1990, 33 notes that “[Andromache] signifies by that gesture the violation awaiting her and Troy when the city walls fail.” The tragic sense of the Andromache passage is emphasized by Segal 1971 and Richardson 1993, who notes on the same lines that the description of Andromache's elaborate headdress culminates with the κρήδεμνον received on her wedding day, which thus serves as a “more vivid symbol of her tragedy”; cf. *ad.* 470.

reaction to Hektor’s death, the *Iliad* narrates her recovery from the fainting spell (*Iliad* 22.475-6; cf. 22.466-7 above):

ἦ δ’ ἐπεὶ οὖν ἄμπνυτο¹⁴ καὶ ἐς φρένα θυμὸς ἀγέρθη
ἀμβλήδην γοόωσα μετὰ Τρωῆσιν ἔειπεν

But then when she had recovered her breath and her spirit had returned to her breast, she wept and amidst sobs she spoke among the Trojans...

This passage should be compared with Odysseus’s safe arrival ashore, where much of the same formulaic language recurs (*Odyssey* 5.458-9):¹⁵

ἀλλ’ ὅτε δὴ ῥ’ ἄμπνυτο καὶ ἐς φρένα θυμὸς ἀγέρθη,
καὶ τότε δὴ κρήδεμνον ἀπὸ ἔο λῦσε θεοῖο.

But when he had recovered his breath and his spirit had returned to his breast, then at that very moment he loosened from himself the veil of the goddess.

Commentators on the *Iliad* have incidentally noted the similarity of these passages without further remark.¹⁶ And yet they share some interesting details in common that would have resonated with the epic audience. Though the language of recovering one’s breath is formulaic,¹⁷ the traditional referentiality of the motif easily could have conjured for the audience other instances of heroes recovering their breath.¹⁸ The additional peculiar circumstance of Odysseus’s letting go the veil suggests that the epic audience was invited to reflect on its traditional referentiality, which includes marriage.¹⁹ We can go even further and observe that the *Odyssey* plausibly invites the audience to recall Andromache’s swoon as recounted specifically by the *Iliad*, given the repetition of context and formula, combined however—most importantly of all—with difference.²⁰

¹⁴ Here I have followed the textual reading adopted by De Jong 2012, *ad. Il.* 22.475, who explains why Aristarchus’s proposed emendation of “breathed in” (ἔμπνυτο) is likely incorrect.

¹⁵ The other occurrence of this traditional phraseology in the *Odyssey* is at 24.349, where Laertes recovers from a fainting spell.

¹⁶ De Jong 2012 and Richardson 1993; cf. Heubeck 1992, *ad. Od.* 24.349.

¹⁷ The verb for “recovering breath” (ἀναπνέω) is traditional in this regard (De Jong 2012, *ad. Il.* 22.475); besides the two passages under discussion and the incident involving Laertes (15n.), see *Il.* 5.698, 11.359, 22.222.

¹⁸ On the concept of traditional referentiality, see Foley 1991, 6 (and 1-60 more generally). See also Nagy 1990, 23 on the way a diachronic view of formulaic language argues for traditional theme as the determining factor rather than in-composition metrical convenience.

¹⁹ See Foley 1991, 38-60 for the application of reader-response theory to explain how oral poetry generates meaning through the participation of the audience.

²⁰ See Pucci 1995, 250 for the idea that “Homeric repetition of lines and expressions diachronically develops a supple, complex, overdetermined spectrum of significations and connotations, within which intertextual effects may be considered legitimate and intended,” exemplified in the contrast between “spirit” (*thumos*) in *Il.* 12.300 and “stomach” (*gaster*) in *Od.* 6.133, where “the repetition, the synonymy and the difference are so strongly marked that they are undeniable” (250-1; cf. 157-64). Pucci is careful, however, to qualify his notions of “text”, “intentionality”, and “allusion” as carrying more subtle connotations than are afforded by the positivistic philological approach to literary texts (29-30, 251-5).

The significant difference between the two instances lies in the way the loss of the veil does not happen at the same time for each person. In *Odyssey* 5, Odysseus comes to himself and then casts the veil back to sea, fulfilling Leukothea's command. It is striking that his actions actually reverse the order of Andromache's. Andromache throws off her veil, and then faints and recovers. This reversal of order implies that while Andromache has now lost her marriage, Odysseus is now going to recover his. She sees her dead husband, throws off her veil, faints, and then returns to herself and mourns. Odysseus faints due to sheer exhaustion, returns to himself, removes the veil and casts it far back to the sea (where Leukothea receives it). Then he rejoices, looking upon the bed of leaves he has made for himself on the shore: "seeing it, much-enduring godlike Odysseus rejoiced" (τὴν μὲν ἰδὼν γήθησε πολύτλας δῖος Ὀδυσσεύς, *Odyssey* 5.486). In addition, when Odysseus returns the veil, he has safely reached shore and overcome his earlier sentiments of despair (*Odyssey* 5.299-312). At this point, he can now look forward to reunion with his wife Penelope.²¹ Andromache, by contrast, threw off her veil in despair at the loss of her marriage, then fainted, and at last awoke only to additional grief, as she went on to lament the danger to which her son Astyanax was now to be exposed (*Iliad* 22.477 ff.). Another point of comparison presents itself when we consider that "night covered" Andromache's eyes (νύξ ἐκάλυπεν, *Iliad* 22.466) when she saw Hektor being dragged off dead, and she immediately threw off her "veil" (κρήδεμνον). Odysseus, confronted with night, did the opposite: Poseidon "covered" (κάλυψε, *Odyssey* 5.293) the sky with clouds, and "night" (νύξ, 5.294) came down from above; after this, presented with Leukothea's offer, Odysseus put on a "veil" (κρήδεμνον) which enabled him to emerge from the sea to the hope of regaining his marriage. Both are covered with night, but while Odysseus awakes to joy because of the salvific effect of the veil, Andromache wakes up to the permanent loss of what the veil signifies, and to grief.

I also want to suggest that the veil has a salvific effect on Odysseus in more than one way— not only because it enables him to survive Poseidon's storm, but also because it somehow causes a change in Odysseus on another level. That is, with the benefit of hindsight, it is revealed that the experience of wearing this veil enables Odysseus to be chaste towards Penelope; no longer will he be held up by female obstacles.²² Since the veil is associated with chastity and marriage, Odysseus' act of donning the immortal veil of a goddess both magically effects and symbolically implies that there will be no repetition in the plot of what happened after he left Circe. Reviewing the plot, we recall that Odysseus left Circe's island only to end up in the delaying embrace of yet another goddess, this

²¹ As Poseidon tells us, Odysseus' arrival at Phaiakia represents a milestone in his quest to return home: "and in fact he is close to the land of the Phaiakians, where his fate is to escape, [crossing] the great boundary line of the sorrow which reaches him" (καὶ δὴ Φαιήκων γαίης σχεδὸν, ἔνθα οἱ αἴσα / ἐκφυγέειν μέγα πείραρ οἴζυος, ἧ μιν ἰκάνει, *Od.* 5.288-9). Cf. Hainsworth 1988, *ad.* 5.289, quoting Bergren's 1975 study of the word for "boundary line" (πεῖραρ).

²² For a similar view, see Rhyon Kardulias 2001, 30-5.

time on Ogygia, where we are told he slept with Kalypso until she was no longer pleasing (*Odyssey* 5.153). When Odysseus is finally allowed to leave, it is unclear whether he will be delayed in his homecoming by yet another woman. And in fact, Odysseus is presented with yet another potential female obstacle as soon as he reaches the land of the Phaiakians, that is, the young Nausikaa, who is offered him in marriage. But in the aftermath of wearing Leukothea's veil, Odysseus does not fall for this last potential female obstacle to his returning home.

To be sure, the apparent power of the veil to confer chastity becomes clear only in hindsight.²³ In fact, the reader can easily get the initial impression from the way Odysseus “loosened from himself the veil of the goddess” (κρήδεμνον ἀπὸ ἔο λῦσε θεοῖο, *Odyssey* 5.459) upon reaching shore that he is about to engage in another sexual misadventure. After all, upon discarding the “veil” (κρήδεμνον), Odysseus soon encounters the young Nausikaa and her maids, who have also recently removed their own “veils” (κρήδεμνα, *Odyssey* 6.100). There is the additional circumstance that Odysseus, having fulfilled Leukothea's injunction both to remove his clothes and to throw the veil back to sea upon reaching land, is left entirely naked. It is therefore a completely naked Odysseus who, shortly afterwards, approaches the maiden Nausikaa as a suppliant— a Nausikaa who has herself just thrown off her own veil for the purposes of playing a ball game with her handmaidens. As Steiner observes, Nausikaa unveiled (6.100) indicates her sexual vulnerability, since the veil bespeaks a woman's reserve and communicates a message of chastity. But the poet plays with the reader's expectations about what is going to happen even more by using sexually suggestive language in this context: “thus was Odysseus about to mix with the lovely-haired girls, though he was naked” (ὥς Ὀδυσσεὺς κούρησιν ἐϋπλοκάμοισιν ἔμελλε / μείξεσθαι, γυμνός περ ἑόν, *Odyssey* 6.135-6).²⁴ At first, then, Odysseus' loss of the veil upon reaching land and his subsequent encounter with Nausikaa would seem to indicate anything but the assurance of his chastity. And yet as things turn out, the wearing of the veil is revealed to have been a turning point in Odysseus' homecoming, since, in a reversal of the previous pattern of interaction with females, he does not have a sexual liaison with Nausikaa, nor is he detained by love of her in his quest to return home. Instead, upon surveying the plot of the poem as a whole, we see that after the experience of wearing the veil, Odysseus never fails again in chaste fidelity towards Penelope. The cycle of infidelity and delay

²³ Hindsight is an important factor in interpreting the *Odyssey*. Scott 2009, 125 argues that sometimes similes and actions are best understood in retrospect. He analyzes the simile of Odysseus as craftsman at 5.249-50 in this respect. “The images of the craftsman put the hero in a proper perspective. As a craftsman lays out a design and then brings it into actuality, so also Odysseus has a driving desire to return to home and family, and **in retrospect he will be seen to have taken the initial step in achieving this goal by choosing to flee Calypso. His conduct from this point on.** . . . all are signs that Odysseus is careful in planning his moves and competent in their execution” (emphasis mine). I think we are meant to understand Odysseus' experience of wearing the veil in a similar way: its effects become clear only as the plot moves forward.

²⁴ The use of “lovely-haired” (ἐϋπλοκάμοισιν) may also be suggestive, since the goddesses with whom he formerly had liaisons, Circe and Kalypso, are also given this epithet: see *Od.* 10.136 and 5.58 respectively.

which resumed after his departure from Circe will not be resumed in the aftermath of his departure from Kalypso, thanks to Leukothea's mysterious veil, which seems to confer on Odysseus the chastity and fidelity which it signifies in other contexts.

Speaking of these other contexts, let us turn at last to the example of Penelope. There are four times in the *Odyssey* when Penelope goes before the suitors wearing the veil. The first occurs in Book 1 (*Odyssey* 1.330-5):

κλίμακα δ' ὑψηλὴν κατεβήσετο οἷο δόμοιο,
οὐκ οἴη, ἅμα τῇ γε καὶ ἀμφίπολοι δὺ' ἔποντο.
ἦ δ' ὅτε δὴ μνηστῆρας ἀφίκετο δῖα γυναικῶν,
στῆ ῥα παρὰ σταθμὸν τέγεος πύκα ποιητοῖο
ἄντα παρειῶν σχομένη λιπαρὰ κρήδεμνα·
ἀμφίπολος δ' ἄρα οἱ κεδνὴ ἐκάτερθε παρέστη. 335

She went down the high staircase from her room, not alone, but two handmaidens accompanied her. But when in fact she reached the suitors, the godlike woman, she stood beside the column of the thickly built roof, **holding her shining veils around her cheeks:** and a trusty handmaiden stood for her at each side.

Nagler cites this passage as an example of the veil's associations with chastity.²⁵ He comments as follows: "All this iconography—shawl (*krēdemnon*), maidservants, and lady-at-the-pillar—transmits a strong message of chastity that of course protects Penelope's appearance before the Suitors."²⁶ For my purposes, it is important to add that Penelope's reliance on the veil runs like a thread through the whole poem. Other instances where Penelope appears before the suitors in her veil occur at *Odyssey* 16.413-6, 18.206-11, and 21.63-5. In each passage, the same line recurs: "holding her shining veils around her cheeks" (ἄντα παρειῶν σχομένη λιπαρὰ κρήδεμνα). And so the whole time that Odysseus is away, Penelope is careful to appear among men clad in her own veil, as she holds on for dear life to the memory of her long-lost husband. By continuing to wear the veil amongst the suitors, she reveals her loyalty to her husband and her hope that he is still alive. Penelope's

²⁵ Cf. Nagler 1974, 45-60, where he also discusses its other potential denotation of "allurement" or temptation. Bennett 1997, 129-30 follows Nagler in assuming this basic double signification for both "veil" (κρήδεμνον) and "head covering" (καλύπτρη). Rhyan Kardulias 2001, 30-5, however, distinguishes the two, arguing that the first is associated with chastity and the second with eroticism.

²⁶ Nagler 1996, 155-6. Nagler also argues that appearances of Penelope make use of the other potential denotation of the "veil" (κρήδεμνον), that of allurement. In this light, he interprets the scene in Book 18 where Penelope appears before the suitors as a sign of her role as a sort of mortal version of the "dread goddess," causing the suitors' destruction through their desire to sleep with her in just the same way as Circe transforms Odysseus' men into animals. Cf. Steiner 2010, *ad.* 18.210, who notes the same double potential signification: "Throughout H., veils symbolize female chastity (contrast 6.100, a pointer to Nausicaa's sexual readiness). P.'s unusual choice to appear veiled even in her own house conveys her desire to prevent familiarity between the suitors and herself."

abiding hope contrasts sharply with Andromache’s manner of acting upon learning of the death of her husband Hektor in *Iliad* 22. Penelope can still have hope that Odysseus will return, but no hope of a continued marriage with Hektor remains for Andromache once she has seen him dead with her own eyes. At that point, the veil she received upon marriage had no further purpose.

Thus far, we have seen how the veil is associated with chastity and marriage; we have seen how a survey of the *Odyssey*’s plot as a whole appears to reveal that Leukothea’s κρήδεμνον has the effect of conferring what it signifies, namely chastity; and we have seen that Penelope herself often wears the veil as a testimony of her chaste resolve towards her husband. Let us now see how Odysseus’ experience of wearing the veil relates to the scene of the married couple’s reunion. At issue here is a striking simile in Book 23 that repeats some of the language from a simile regarding the shipwrecked Odysseus in Book 5. As Odysseus embraces Penelope for the first time in about twenty years, the epic unexpectedly changes perspective from Odysseus to Penelope, and says that the sight of her husband is welcome to her in the same way that the sight of land is welcome to those who have been shipwrecked (*Odyssey* 23.231-40):

Ἦς φάτο· τῷ δ’ ἔτι μᾶλλον ὕφ’ ἴμερον ὄρσε γόοιο·
 κλαῖε δ’ ἔχων ἄλοχον θυμαρέα, κέδν’ εἰδυῖαν.
 ὧς δ’ ὄτ’ ἂν ἀσπάσιος γῆ νηχομένοισι φανῆη,
 ὧν τε Ποσειδάων εὐεργέα νῆ’ ἐνὶ πόντῳ
 ραίσι, ἐπειγομένην ἀνέμῳ καὶ κύματι πηγῶ— 235
 παῦροι δ’ ἐξέφυγον πολιῆς ἀλὸς ἠπειρόνδε
 νηχόμενοι, πολλῆ δὲ περὶ χροῖ τέτροφεν ἄλμη,
 ἀσπάσιοι δ’ ἐπέβαν γαίης, κακότητα φυγόντες—
 ὧς ἄρα τῇ ἀσπαστὸς ἔην πόσις εἰσοροώση,
 δειρῆς δ’ οὐ πῶ πάμπαν ἀφίετο πῆχεε λευκῶ. 240

So she spoke, but [Odysseus’] desire to lament rose up even stronger: and he wept, holding his worthy, caring wife. But just as when land appears **welcome (ἀσπάσιος)** to those who are swimming, whose well-worked ship Poseidon has shattered in the deep, and it has been driven by wind and mighty wave—but a few swimmers make their escape from the gray sea to dry land, and much brine is caked around their skin, and **gratified (ἀσπάσιοι)**, they set foot upon land, having escaped evils—so, then, was her husband **welcome (ἀσπαστὸς)** to her as she looked at him, and her white arms did not let up in the least from clinging to his neck.

Commentators have noted the evident similarity of the actions described in the simile here with Odysseus' shipwreck at the hands of Poseidon in Book 5 (*Odyssey* 5.394-9):²⁷

ὥς δ' ὅτ' ἄν ἀσπάσιος βίωτος παίδεσσι φανήη
πατρός, ὃς ἐν νόσῳ κείται κρατέρ' ἄλγεα πάσχων 395
δηρὸν τηκόμενος—στυγερός δέ οἱ ἔχραε δαίμων,
ἀσπάσιον δ' ἄρα τόν γε θεοὶ κακότητος ἔλυσαν—
ὥς Ὀδυσῆ' ἀσπαστὸν εἰείσατο γαῖα καὶ ὕλη,
νῆχε δ' ἐπειγόμενος ποσὶν ἠπείρου ἐπιβῆναι.

But just as when, to children, the life of their father appears **welcome** (**ἀσπάσιος**) when he lies in illness suffering mighty pains, wasting away for a long time, while a hateful spirit afflicts him, but then he is **gratified** (**ἀσπάσιον**) when the gods free him of the evil: thus did the land and the forest appear **welcome** (**ἀσπαστὸν**) to Odysseus, and he swam, urging himself on with his feet to set foot upon dry land.

One of the more striking features common to both similes is the triple repetition of forms of the word ἀσπάσιος and ἀσπαστός, words meaning “welcome” and “gratified”. But this simile resonates with the former not only in terms of repeated language, but also circumstance.²⁸ The epic audience naturally would have recalled Odysseus' shipwreck because of a tradition that associated rescue at sea with family reunion.²⁹ Indeed, since the motif is traditional, the simile of Book 5 already puts the audience in mind of Odysseus' ultimate reunion with his family at the end of the poem.³⁰

What I wish to underscore here is the way the interplay of these two similes serves to identify Penelope and Odysseus with one another in the mind of the audience. The Book 23 simile likens Penelope to someone shipwrecked eagerly sighting land, echoing both the actual situation and sentiments of Odysseus after the wreck of his raft in Book 5; the unexpected change in perspective from Odysseus to Penelope places her in “the role of men.”³¹ In addition, I would call attention to the particular circumstance that Odysseus is wearing a veil at the moment he catches sight of land in the simile from Book 5. Although there is no mention of Penelope's veil at the moment of reunion with her husband, nevertheless her path to reunion

²⁷ Cf. e.g. Podlecki 1971, 89-90; Moulton 1977, 129-30; Foley 1978, 7-8; Murnaghan 1987, 45; Hainsworth 1988, *ad.* 5.394-7; Fernández-Galiano 1992, *ad.* 23.233-9, who lists additional bibliography regarding the common diction of the two passages; De Jong 2001, *ad.* 5.392-9 and 23.233-40.

²⁸ See Fernández-Galiano 1992, *ad.* 23.233-9 and Friedrich 1981, 133-7, who notes the reversal between Book 5's simile about the joy of a family at their father's recovery and the actual familial reunion in Book 23, while the actual shipwreck in Book 5 is transferred to a simile in Book 23.

²⁹ See Hainsworth 1988, *ad.* 5.394-7.

³⁰ Cf. Dué 2002, 73 on the way Andromache's lament in *Iliad* 6 evokes, and does not simply presage, the funeral of Hektor in Book 24 (see 67-81 more generally on the pattern of Andromache's lament throughout the epic).

³¹ De Jong 2001, *ad.* 233-40.

with Odysseus was characterized by the faithful wearing of the veil, the same means by which Odysseus' path to shore and ultimate reunion with his wife were made possible.³² Therefore the two characters are linked, not only by the interplay of the similes, but also through the truly peculiar circumstance of Odysseus in the veil in the parallel situation in Book 5.

Moreover, the close relationship between these two similes points to the similarity of the trials of Odysseus and Penelope, and in particular to the common experience of having to wear the veil as protection. The implication of the Book 23 simile is that Penelope has been, in her own way, lost at sea during the time of Odysseus' absence. But if Penelope is like a sailor who has been shipwrecked by Poseidon, and the sailor shipwrecked by Poseidon is very much like Odysseus in Book 5, then we are justified in asking how Penelope's shipwreck was similar to Odysseus'. We recall that in the Book 5 scene, Odysseus, while shipwrecked, was wrapped in the veil as a means of protection. What else has Penelope been wearing all this time while lost at sea, so to speak, in her own house, buffeted by the storms brought by the invasion of the suitors— what else, but the veil?³³

Through the epic's repetition of familiar similes and the motif of the veil, the audience of the *Odyssey*, and we modern readers as well, can see yet another way in which Penelope and Odysseus are identified with each other. Their common resolve to be reunited to each other is symbolized by the common experience of relying on the veil for protection from the hostile forces arrayed against them. For Odysseus, the veil both safely gets him through the particular trial of the storm and mysteriously assimilates him to the chastity of his own wife, as it appears to inoculate him against further romantic adventures and hence additional delays to his return. For Penelope, the veil safely gets her through the trial of being surrounded by several suitors pressing for her hand while she holds out hope that Odysseus is still alive. And the linchpin of this successful reunion: not only Athena, who is responsible for orchestrating Odysseus' return on the broadest level, but also, and in a subsidiary role all too often overlooked, the goddess Leukothea and her mysterious veil.

³² There may also be a subtle allusion to the goddess Leukothea in the reference to Penelope's "white" arms that concludes the picture of their embrace, especially given the emphatic position of "white" (λευκῶ) at line ending (23.240).

³³ De Jong 2001, *ad.* 23.233-40 comes closest to my approach: "All in all, the effect is a merging of the experiences of man and wife... Penelope's years on Ithaca, tearfully waiting for Odysseus and holding out against the abrasive Suitors, have been as much an ordeal as Odysseus' physical hardships during his years abroad."

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