

Dr. Erika Weiberg  
Florida State University

"Making an End: Penelope and Ambiguous Loss in the *Odyssey*."

Friday, October 18, 3:30 pm  
Dodd 205 I (Classics Seminar Room)

This lecture employs recent sociological and psychological research on “ambiguous loss” to frame the narrative strategies of the *Odyssey* and its portrayal of Penelope’s grief. I argue that, like many spouses of MIA soldiers, Penelope experiences her loss of Odysseus as an ongoing trauma in which Odysseus is psychologically present, but physically absent. This trauma, moreover, is encoded in narrative repetitions and hesitations, culminating in a final decisive act that testifies to Penelope’s agency and resilience in making an end. With its tidy conclusion of return and reunion, the *Odyssey* defies the reality that most people never find when they lose a loved one. Yet the subplot of Penelope’s ambiguous loss nonetheless gives voice to the perspective of those who learn to live with a story of loss that has no ending.