Casey Dué Hackney  
The Human Situation  

Odyssey Lecture 1: Oral Poetics and Performance in the Odyssey

A) *Iliad* 9.410-416: My mother Thetis tells me that there are two ways in which I may meet my end. If I stay here and fight, I shall lose my safe homecoming [*nostos*] but I will have a glory [*kleos*] that is unwilting; whereas if I go home my glory [*kleos*] will die, but it will be a long time before the outcome of death shall take me.

B) *Odyssey* 1.267-302: "But there! It rests with heaven to determine whether he is to return, and take his revenge in his own house or no; I would, however, urge you to set about trying to get rid of these suitors at once. ...You are too old to plead infancy any longer; have you not heard how people are singing Orestes' praises [*kleos*] for having killed his father's murderer Aigisthos? You are a fine, smart looking young man; show your mettle, then, and make yourself a name in story.

C) *Odyssey* 1.1-10: Tell me, O Muse, of that many-sided hero who traveled far and wide after he had sacked the famous town of Troy. Many cities did he visit, and many were the people with whose customs and thinking [*noos*] he was acquainted; many things he suffered at sea while seeking to save his own life [*psukhê*] and to achieve the safe homecoming [*nostos*] of his companions; but do what he might he could not save his men, for they perished through their own sheer recklessness in eating the cattle of the Sun-god Helios; so the god prevented them from ever reaching home. Tell me, as you have told those who came before me, about all these things, O daughter of Zeus, starting from whatsoever point you choose.

D) *Iliad* 1.1-7: Sing, O goddess, the anger [*mênis*] of Achilles son of Peleus, that brought countless ills [*algea*] upon the Achaeans. Many a brave soul did it send hurrying down to Hades, and many a hero did it yield a prey to dogs and vultures, for so was the will of Zeus fulfilled from the day on which the son of Atreus, king of men, and great Achilles, first fell out with one another.

E) *Odyssey* 1.325-355: Phemios was still singing, and his hearers sat rapt in silence as he told the baneful tale of the homecoming [*nostos*] from Troy, and the ills Athena had laid upon the Achaeans. Penelope, daughter of Ikarios, heard his song from her room upstairs, and came down by the great staircase, not alone, but attended by two of her handmaids. When she reached the suitors she stood by one of the bearing posts that supported the roof of the cloisters with a staid maiden on either side of her. She held a veil, moreover, before her face, and was weeping bitterly.

"Phemios," she cried, "you know many another feat of gods and heroes, such as poets love to celebrate. Sing the suitors some one of these, and let them drink their wine in silence, but cease this sad tale, for it breaks my sorrowful heart, and reminds me of my lost husband for whom I have grief [*penthos*] ever without ceasing, and whose name [*kleos*] was great over all Hellas and middle Argos."

"Mother," answered Telemakhos, "let the bard sing what he has a mind [*noos*] to; bards are not responsible for the ills they sing of; it is Zeus, not they, who is responsible, and who sends weal or woe upon humankind according to his own good pleasure. There should be no feeling of nemesis against this one for singing the ill-fated return of the Danaans, for people always favor most warmly the *kleos* of the latest songs. Make up your mind to it and bear it; Odysseus is not the only man who never came back from Troy, but many another went down as well as he."
F) **Odyssey** 8.26-84: “Hear me,” said he, “aldermen and town councilors of the Phaeacians, that I may speak even as I am minded. This stranger, whoever he may be, has found his way to my house from somewhere or other either East or West... you will join me in entertaining our guest in the cloisters. I can take no excuses, and we will have Demodokos to sing to us; for there is no bard like him whatever he may choose to sing about.” ... A servant presently led in the famous bard Demodokos, whom the muse had dearly loved, but to whom she had given both good and evil, for though she had endowed him with a divine gift of song, she had robbed him of his eyesight. Pontonoos set a seat for him among the guests, leaping it up against a bearing-post. He hung the lyre for him on a peg over his head, and showed him where he was to feel for it with his hands. He also set a fair table with a basket of victuals by his side, and a cup of wine from which he might drink whenever he was so disposed.

The company then laid their hands upon the good things that were before them, but as soon as they had had enough to eat and drink, the muse inspired Demodokos to sing the feats [kleos] of heroes, and most especially a matter whose kleos at that time reached wide heaven, namely, the quarrel [neikos] between Odysseus and Achilles, and the fierce words that they heaped on one another as they sat together at a banquet. But Agamemnon was glad in his noos when he heard his chieftains quarreling with one another, for Apollo had foretold him this at Pytho when he crossed the stone floor to consult the oracle. Here the beginning of the evil started rolling down, by the will of Zeus, toward both Danaans and Trojans. [83] Thus sang the bard, but Odysseus drew his purple mantle over his head and covered his face, for he was ashamed to let the Phaeacians see that he was weeping.

G) **Odyssey** 1.1-12: [1] Tell me, O Muse, of that many-sided [polutropos] hero who traveled far and wide after he had sacked the famous town of Troy. Many cities did he visit, and many were the people with whose customs and thinking [noos] he was acquainted; many pains [algea] he suffered at sea while seeking to save his own life and to achieve the safe homecoming [nostos] of his companions; but do what he might he could not save his men, for they perished through their own sheer recklessness in eating the cattle of the Sun-god Helios; so the god prevented them from ever reaching home. Tell me, as you have told those who came before me, about all these things, O daughter of Zeus, starting from whatsoever point you choose. [11] So now all who escaped death in battle or by shipwreck had got safely home except Odysseus, and he, though he was longing for his return [nostos] to his wife and country, was detained by the goddess Calypso, ...

H) **Iliad** 1.1-7: Sing, O goddess, the anger [mênis] of Achilles son of Peleus, that brought countless ills [algea] upon the Achaeans. Many a brave soul did it send hurrying down to Hades, and many a hero did it yield a prey to dogs, and vultures, for so was the will of Zeus fulfilled from the day on which the son of Atreus, king of men, and great Achilles, first fell out with one another.

I) **Iliad** 9.410-416: My mother Thetis tells me that there are two ways in which I may meet my end. If I stay here and fight, I shall not have a return [nostos] alive but my glory [kleos] will be imperishable [aphthiton]: whereas if I go home my name [kleos] will perish, but it will be long before the end shall take me.