Notes by Nagy for Dialogue 01

Key word for this dialogue: kλoες ‘glory, fame, that which is heard’; or, ‘the poem or song that conveys glory, fame, that which is heard’.

This word was used in ancient Greek poetry or song / music to refer to the poetry [*“epic”*] or the song / music [*“lyric”*] that glorifies the heroes of the distant heroic past. (Since the references to kλoες in archaic Greek poetry and song / music make no distinction between poetry and song / music, I will simply use the word “song” in this dialogue.)

Passage A. Iliad IX 410-414

My mother Thetis, goddess of the silver feet, tells me that there are two ways in which I may meet my end [telos]. If I stay here and fight, I will not have a return [nostos] alive but my glory [kλoες] will be unwilting [aphθhion]: whereas if I go home my glory [kλoες] will perish, but it will be long before the end [telos] shall take me.

Passage B. Iliad XI 218-227, esp. verse 227 Married, he went away from the bride chamber, looking for kλoες from the Achaeans.

Another key word for this dialogue: ἥρα (plural ἥραι) ‘season, seasonality; time; timeliness’. The goddess of ἥρα was Ἡρα (the two forms ἥρα and Ἡρα are linguistically related to each other). She was the goddess of seasons, in charge of making everything happen on time, happen in season, and happen in a timely way. Related to these two words ἥρα and Ἡρα is hērōs (singular) / hērōes (plural), meaning ‘hero’. As we will see, the precise moment when everything comes together for the hero is the moment of death. The hero is ‘on time’ at the ἥρα or ‘time’ of death.

Hēraklēs means ‘he who has the kλoες of Ἡρα’. In the Iliad, we find an embedded micro- narrative that tells the story of Herakles as it relates to the story of Achilles in the macro- Narrative that is the Iliad. I quote the entire micro-narrative:

Passage C. Iliad XIX 75-133 Then Agamemnon spoke, rising in his place, and not going into the middle of the assembly. “Danaan heroes,” said he, “attendants [θεραπόντες] of Ares, it is well to listen when a man stands up to speak, [80] and it is not seemly to interrupt him, or it will go hard even with a practiced speaker. Who can either hear or speak in an uproar? Even the finest orator will be disconcerted by it. I will expound to [Achilles] the son of Peleus, and do you other Achaeans heed me and mark me well.

[85] Often have the Achaeans spoken to me of this matter and upbraided me, but it was not I who was responsible [αἰτίας]: Zeus, and Fate [Μοίρα], and the Fury [Ερίνυς] that roams in darkness struck me with derangement [ατέ] when we were assembled on the day that I took from Achilles the prize that had been awarded to him.

[90] What could I do? All things are in the hands of the gods, and Atē, eldest of Zeus’ daughters, shuts men’s eyes to their destruction. She walks delicately, not on the solid earth, but hovers over the heads of men to make them stumble or to ensnare them.[95] Time was when she [Atē, goddess of derangement] fooled Zeus himself, who they say is greatest whether of gods or men; for Hera, female though she was, beguiled him on the day when Alkmene was to bring forth mighty Herakles in the fair city of Thebes.

[100] He told it out among the gods saying, ‘Hear me all gods and goddesses, that I may speak even as I am minded; this day shall Eileithuia, helper of women who are in labor, bring a man child into the world who shall be lord over all that dwell about him

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[105] who are of my blood and lineage.’ Then said Hera all crafty and full of guile, ‘You will play false, and will not hold to the finality [telos] of your word. Swear me, O Olympian, swear me a great oath, that he

[110] who shall this day fall between the feet of a woman, shall be lord over all that dwell about him who are of your blood and lineage.’ Thus she spoke, and Zeus suspected her not, but swore the great oath, to his much
ruing thereafter. For Hera darted down from the high summit of Olympus, [115] and went in haste to Achaean Argos where she knew that the noble wife of Sthenelos son of Perseus then was. She being with child and in her seventh month, Hera brought the child to birth though there was a month still wanting, but she stayed the offspring of Alkmene, and kept back the goddesses of childbirth [Eileithuiai]. [120] Then she went to tell Zeus the son of Kronos, and said, ‘Father Zeus, lord of the lightning - I have a word for your ear. There is a fine child born this day, Eurystheus, son to Sthenelos the son of Perseus; he is of your lineage; it is well, therefore, that he should reign over the Argives.’ [125] Then Zeus was stung to the very quick with grief [akhos], and in his rage he caught Atē by the hair, and swore a great oath that never should she again invade the starry heavens and Olympus, for she was the bane of all. [130] Then he whirled her round with a twist of his hand, and flung her down from the heavens so that she fell on to the fields of mortal men; and he was ever angry with her when he saw his son groaning under the cruel labors [athloi] that Eurystheus laid upon him.”

Paraphrase of narrative by Diodorus of Sicily about the life of Herakles:
The supreme god and king of gods, Zeus, impregnates Alkmene, a mortal woman (4.9.2). The wife of Zeus, the goddess Hera, is jealous; she decides to intervene in the life of the hero who is about to be born, Herakles (4.9.4). If this hero had been born on schedule, on time, in time, he would have been the supreme king of his time; but Hera makes sure that Herakles is born not on schedule, not on time, not in time. Herakles’ inferior cousin, Eurystheus, is born ahead of him and thus is fated to become king instead of Herakles (4.9.4-5). During all of Herakles’ lifetime, Eurystheus persecutes him directly; Hera persecutes him indirectly. The superior hero has to spend his entire lifespan obeying the orders of the inferior king (4.9.5). The orders add up to the Labors of Herakles.

At the final moment of Herakles’ heroic lifespan, he experiences the most painful death imaginable, climax by burning to death. This form of death is an ultimate test of the nervous system, by ancient Greek heroic standards. Here is how it happens. Herakles is fatally poisoned by the semen of a dying Centaur. His ex-wife Deianeira gave it to him in a phial as a “wedding present” on the occasion of the hero’s re-marriage to the girl Iole: the ex-wife had mistakenly thought it was a love-drug that could win back the love of her ex-husband (4.38.1-2). Burning up on the inside with the excruciatingly painful poison that is consuming his body from the outside, Herakles arranges with the people of Trachis to have them build for him a funeral pyre on the peak of Mount Oita, Herakles climbs up on top of the funeral pyre (4.38.3-4). He yearns to be put out of his misery, ready to die and be consumed by the fires of the funeral pyre; he calls on his friend Philoktetes to light his pyre (4.38.4). At that precise moment of agonizing death, a flaming thunderbolt from his father Zeus strikes him. He goes up in flames, in a spectacular explosion of fire (4.38.4-5). In the aftermath, those who attended the primal scene find no physical trace of Herakles, not even bones (4.38.5). They go home to Trachis, but Menoitios, the father of Patroklos, will later establish a hero cult for Herakles at Opous, and the Thebans have a similar hero cult for him (4.38.1). Others, however, especially the Athenians, worship Herakles not as a hero but as a god (4.39.1-2). The rationale for this alternative custom is given by the continuation of the myth as retold by Diodorus: at the moment of his death, Herakles regains consciousness and finds himself on the top of Mount Olympus, in the company of the gods (4.39.2-3). He has awakened to find himself immortalized. He is then adopted by the theoi ‘gods’ on Mount Olympus as one of their own (the technical Greek term is apotheosis). Hera now changes identities - from Herakles’ stepmother to Herakles’ mother (4.39.2). The procedure is specified by Diodorus, and I translate literally (4.39.3): ‘Hera got into her bed and drew Herakles close to her body. She let him fall through her garments to the ground, re-enacting [= making mimēsis of] the genuine birth.’