Return of the king (Both Physical and Mental Return)

Key word: Nostos 1. Return or homecoming OR song about homecoming
   2. Return to light and life

Nostos is a genre, type of a story about a hero’s return from Troy. There were many other stories about the return of other heroes from Troy (other than Odysseus).

Note: Correlation between Nostos and Noos (mind, thinking). These words are not only related but both are derived from the same root (nes). Nes means “saving oneself”.

Now let’s take a look at the beginning of the Odyssey:
   • Note that in the handout there is a very literal translation.
   • We can see already in the first two lines that in the original Greek, the “noos” is unclear what it is in reference to. It could be his own “noos” or the “noos” of other people.
   • Next two lines: he suffered many pains while sailing at sea struggling to save his own “psukhe” (life) and to achieve the safe homecoming [nostos] of his companions.
   • Comparison we can draw between the Iliad and the Odyssey:
     • Iliad about a monolithic hero (Achilles) but he is a savior. He stuck to his principles. Very single sided. Uncompromising.
     • The Odyssey, Odysseus is a “company man” who wants to save everyone but by the time he gets back from Troy he isn’t able to save a single one of his companions. When he gets his “nostos” no one is left. Odysseus is a man of many sides (he has capacity to turn into many different identities). Multiform.
     • It will be harder to agree about what is going on in the Odyssey. It is about a very complex person and the epic itself is very complex. Outside the Odyssey, Odysseus has very bad press. Our Homeric Odyssey is the only song in Greek song culture where he comes out relatively well.
   • These two epics are very complementary. You cannot understand one without the other. Keep in mind the Iliad as we read the Odyssey. You cannot separate the two.
   • Now let’s look at passage B:
     • Athena goes in disguise as Mentes and later on as Mentor. She goes to Ithaca to set Telemachos straight. Telemachos is clueless mentally, morally, and emotionally. He is a perfect candidate to receive the wisdom of the ancestors. In this passage, she will ensure the “nostos” of Odysseus. They will get kleos as a result of this.
Consider the comparison with Achilles. Achilles chooses between “nostos” and eternal “kleos aphtiton.” It is either or for this monolithic hero.

For Odysseus, he gets both. He will not get any “kleos” unless he has a “nostos”. Odysseus does not have to choose. He is again a man of many sides.

Telemachos means (tele: far, mache: battle). His identity and his name are defined from his father being far away at Troy (fighting far away from his countryland) and from his father’s ability to fight from afar that is using his arrows for example. His name will be a micronarrative for the hero.

Odysseus will get his epic by virtue of his homecoming. He will not get kleos for the destruction of Troy. Although Odysseus succeeds where Achilles failed, Odysseus will not get the kleos for the destruction of Troy. Odysseus instead gets kleos from a safe homecoming.

Symbolism of Nostos: (nostos as return to light and life)
- Metaphor: meaning by substitution
- Metonymy: meaning by association
- When metaphor “goes wild” it becomes allegory.

(Aristotle)

The Postman: about the life and times of Pablo Neruda. He got exiled. Leftist. A postman who delivers letters to Pablo Neruda and asks him what is a metaphor.

Starship Enterprise: The crew is trying to establish relationship with people on this celestial body who can only speak in metaphor. You need to know the imagery and story behind the imagery to understand the metaphor. You need to read the whole Odyssey so you know the narrative (the grammar).

Passage C: we have a singer (equivalent of court poet)
- Nasty suitors are the audience. This singer is singing a nostos. This is a really perfect performance of a “nostos”
- It makes Penelope come down and stop the singer.
- It is a “penthos” for her and “kleos” for the suitors listening.
- Emotional response different for different people.
- Time is not linear (cf. Proust).
- Past is reconstructed from memory and feeling.
- Generally the return of the Greeks was a sad story. Algea (pains) and sufferings of those returning. They have sad endings.
- Consider comparison between the algea that Achilles has caused for the Achaens and the Trojans (line 1 of Iliad) and the algea of Odysseus as he is returning home.
- Now let’s look at sufferings expressed by lament.
- Example: Agamemnon has to sacrifice his daughter Iphigeneia.
- Much of the sorrows of the Trojan war, we cannot understand without the personal grief.
Example: The Death of Polyxena. She is sacrificed because Achilles’ spirit demands the blood of a virgin.

These are scenes of terror of pity. These moments of suffering we need to feel and know so that we can understand the characters of the heroes.

Passage E:
- Achilles as representative of brute force: bie
- Odysseus: metis
- Which is more likely to destroy Troy? We know that Odysseus is the one who destroys Troy.

Passage F: We see a summary of an Epic that is not a part of the Odyssey.
- It provides details regarding the destruction of Troy through the ruse of the Trojan horse.
- There are many gruesome deaths.
- We see Priam die, Helen taken by Menelaos, Ajax takes Kassandra and rapes her, Polyxena is killed, the city is put to the torch.
- Odysseus kills Astyanax (son of Hektor). Odysseus throws him from the Walls.
- Andromache is forced to be the wife of the son of Achilles (Neoptolemos).
- What kinds of memories does Odysseus carry when we get to Odyssey 8?

Passage G: The song of Demodokos (singer of the Phaeacians)
- We see an interesting choice of the poet. He chooses not to include the scene when Odysseus kills Astyanax. The poet is reciting the song and when we get to this part we see instead Odysseus crying as a woman weeps when she is about to be taken as a captive (cf. Andromache).