<u>The Muses' Playground. *Odyssey* Lecture: Issues of Orality</u>

<u>A) presentation of poetry</u>: bards Phemius and Demodocus (image of poet? Song of Ares and Aphrodite: voice of narrator and Demodocus merging? Cf. beginning of the songs)

"paths" of song: bardic ability to move from one song-path to another

1) "...the bard [Demodocus] was inspired by the Muse to sing of famous men. He chose a passage from a lay ["path"] well known by then throughout the world, the Quarrel of Odysseus and Achilles" (*Od*. 8.73-5)

2) "But now I ask you to change your theme and sing to us of the making of the Wooden Horse" (*Od*. 8.492-3)

idealized picture of bardic profession

3) "No one on earth can help honouring and respecting the bards, for the Muse has taught them the art of song and she loves the minstrel fraternity" (Odysseus, *Od*. 8.479-81)

differences in length between the *Odyssey* (c.12000 lines) and bard songs in the poem (Demodocus' length more normal). Way of asserting superiority of the (longer) *Odyssey.*

<u>B) Intertextual relations between the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*?</u>

Iliad reveals myths about Odysseus: see e.g. epithets concerning his cunning, endurance and sacking of cities > engaging with mythic material which is taken up later by the *Odyssey*

Does the *Iliad* engage with the (later) *Odyssey*?

i) similar structure: non-sequential; start in middle; unity

ii) Different subject matter: avoiding direct challenge? Filling in gaps after *Iliad* 24 (e.g. death of Achilles)

iii) specific passages? e.g. quarrel between Achilles and Odysseus (only here) (about taking Troy by force or trick??). Details suit context but perhaps passage looks to *Iliad* (cf. Agamemnon-Achilles quarrel?)

4) "... telling how these two [Achilles and Odysseus] had fallen out at a rich ceremonial banquet and dismayed the rest by the violence of their language, though King Agamemnon was secretly delighted to see the Achaean chiefs at loggerheads. He was reminded of the prophecy that Phoebus Apollo had made to him .... in those days when almighty Zeus was conjuring up the great wave of disasters that was to overwhelm Trojans and Danaans alike" (Demodocus' song, *Od*. 8.76-82)

5) "It would have been too crude ... had the poet said, 'then Demodocus sang of the quarrel of Achilles...' Instead there are similarities- Achilles, verbal dispute, the impending fall of Troy ... and there are differences - the feast, Agamemnon's delight, the oracle from Delphi" (Taplin 1990: 112)

Contrasts in material (Achilles man of action and early death; Odysseus older, cannier, peaceful)
6) "The *Iliad* is a poem of war, the *Odyssey* one of peace" (Rutherford 2001: 123)

> Odysseus, a new kind of hero. *Iliad* evoked to help create new hero?

7) “Yet the exaltation of Odysseus into an opponent of Achilles (he has no such stature in the *Iliad*) is not without significance. Achilles was the last and greatest of those heroes who solved their problems by excess of violence: Odysseus represents a newer idea ..., probably congenial to many in the Homeric audience, the cool opportunist, valiant but prudent, and not ashamed to stoop to conquer.” (Heubeck, Hainsworth, West 1990: 351)

Odysseus superior to Achilles (cunning horse trick causes Troy's fall; meeting in underworld underlines superior fortune); Odyssean Achilles repenting *Iliadic* stance of fame over return

superiority of *Odyssean* ethos. Cunning preferable to force

8) “And now my manhood prompted me to action: I thought I would draw my sharp sword from the scabbard at my side, creep up to him, feel for the right place with my hand and stab him in the breast ... But on second thoughts I refrained” (Odysseus on plotting to kill Polyphemus, *Od*. 9.299-302)

9) “But the goddess [Circe] only cried out at me as an obstinate fool, always spoiling for a fight and welcoming trouble” (Odysseus on whether he could fight Scylla, *Od*. 12.115-17)

<u>C) Question of the end</u>

How to end an oral poem? Signs of closure in works from oral and literate societies.
Sign of closure in oral tradition: “decreasing doublet” (Kelly 2007): e.g. funerals of Patroclus and Hector (less extended treatment > winding down)

Did “Homer” write Book 24? or did the poem end at *Od*. 23.296 (cf. ancient critics Aristophanes and Aristarchus, from Hellenistic age)?

10) “And glad indeed they [Penelope and Odysseus] were to lie once more together in the bed that had known them long ago” (*Od*. 23.295-6)

inauthentic? 1) linguistic usage; 2) arguments relating to the underworld/afterlife (anachronistic religious beliefs; differences with picture of underworld in Book 11): ought we expect consistency?; 3) poetic quality (last part seems hasty; odd details; unease over Odysseus testing father)

11) “Meanwhile I shall try an experiment with my father, to find out whether he will remember me and realize who it is when he sees me, or fail to know me after so long an absence” (Odysseus, *Od*. 24.216-8)

BUT literary value of underworld scene (e.g. Penelope/Helen contrast; Agamemnon/Odysseus contrast)

literary value of Laertes scene: anticipated; neglect; father/son theme (as elsewhere)

12) “That will prevent the news of the suitors’ deaths from spreading through the town before we can beat a retreat to our farm among the orchards” (*Od*. 23.137-9)

13) “When the gallant Odysseus saw how old and worn his father looked and realized how miserable he was, he halted under a tall pear-tree and the tears came into his eyes.” (*Od*. 24.232-4) (cf. the dog Argus)

14) “The way in which Odysseus tests and plays games with his wretched father has outraged many critics, but it should not surprise those who recognize that the hero is not simply a paragon of gentlemanly virtues.” (Rutherford 1996)

15) “Nor could he make his mind at once whether to hug and kiss his father, and tell him the whole story of his own return to Ithaca, or first to question him and find out what he thought.” (Odysseus, *Od*. 24.235-40)

16) "The episode shows Odysseus, and us, that self-protection through deception is not an end in itself: there is a time also for openness and trust. .... Odysseus cannot play games with his fellow-men and family forever, but needs to learn to show himself to his father as he has, after a delay, to his son and his wife." (Rutherford 1986)

literary value of scene with suitors’ family: public themes demand resolution; anticipation of trouble from suitors' kinsmen; gathering of allies fits idea of recruitment

17) “while Odysseus’ subsequent gathering of his allies (24.205-411) is a necessary precursor to the final battle (for he cannot fight alone), it reflects more generally the long drawn-out recruitment of the members of his family and household (Eumaios, Telemakhos, Eurykleia, Philoitios) on which the hero has been engaged since his arrival on Ithaka.” (Kelly)

structural signs of closure
Decreasing doublet: battle against suitors’ families (24.493-548): cf. (more extended treatment of) Odysseus’ fight; assembly (24.420-71): cf. assembly in Book 2

18) “Constant to all these reminiscences is a diminution in scale and intensity, as the lessons earlier learned by the audience and the characters are now applied and exercised for the final time in the poem.” (Kelly)

ring composition (assembly 24.420-66; cf. 2.1-259. Council of the gods, 24.472-88; cf. 1.2-95); curtain-calls; flash-backs (23.310-41/ 24.121-85) and flash-forwards; closural motifs (e.g. burial)

19) “And presently Pallas Athene, Daughter of aegis-wearing Zeus, still using Mentor’s form and voice for her disguise, established peace between the two contending forces” (*Od*. 24.547-9)

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