The Odyssey is mainly perceived as the poem *par excellence* that sings the Hero’s Return. The Poem though is not only a linear or non linear story of events, recounting the tormented destiny of a wandering hero: this is only the first level of the narrative. Other threads work on different levels. The very word for ‘return’ (and for ‘the songs of return’), *nostos*, has a deeper meaning (‘return to life and light’ as Douglas Frame puts it) endlessly commented by the odyssean poetics. What I would like to discuss with you more specifically is this other thread which shows well the nature of Homeric poetry: the *Odyssey* is as much the Return of the Hero as it is the Return of a Song, *the Song* revealing the Truth about Odysseus’ *nostos* and his specific heroic profile. More than that, the Return of the Song uncovers progressively a symbolic odyssean geography where the “itineraries of kleos” reflect fundamental poetic and religious categories *(Ioanna Papadopoulou-Belmehdi, Le Chant de Pénélope).*

I hereafter propose for close reading two fundamental passages¹ to introduce the discussion. I add as well a summary of an important article by Charles de Lamberterie about the controversial etymology of the word *asmenos* (same family as *nostos/ neomai*), which offers a very useful discussion on the synergy between historical linguistics and philology,

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¹I am using the translation by Samuel Butler revised by Soo-Young Kim, Kelly McCray, Gregory Nagy, and Timothy Power (2013)- sometimes slightly modified.
focusing on the thematic connection of *asmenos* with the idea of “coming back from death”, “escaping death” (as shown by Douglas Frame).

*ODYSSEY*

**The denial of the Song**

**SCROLL 1:**

(Penelope):

Then, shedding tears, she addressed the godlike singer: “Phemios, you know many another thing that charms mortals, all about the deeds of men and gods, to which singers give glory [*kleeîn*]. Sing for them [= the suitors] some one of those songs of glory, and let them in silence [340] drink their wine. But you stop this sad song, this disastrous [*lugrē*] song, which again and again affects my very own [*philon*] heart in my breast, wearing it down, since an unforgettable grief [*penthos alaston*] comes over me, more than ever. I feel this way because that is the kind of person I long for, recalling his memory again and again, the memory of a man whose glory [*kleos*] extends far and wide throughout Hellas and midmost Argos.

[345] “Mother,” answered the spirited Telemakhos, “let the bard sing what he has a mind [*noos*] to; bards are not responsible [*aitios*] for the ills they sing of; it is Zeus, not they, who is responsible [*aitios*], and who sends weal or woe upon humankind according to his own good pleasure.

[350] There should be no feeling of sanction [*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 [355] back from Troy, but many another went down as well as he.
The return of the song

SCROLL 23

[300] When Odysseus and Penelope had had their fill of love they fell talking with one another. She, shining among women, told him how much she had to bear in seeing the house filled with a crowd of wicked suitors who had killed so many sheep and oxen on her account, [305] and had drunk so many casks of wine. Odysseus in his turn told her what he had suffered, and how much trouble he had himself given to other people. He told her everything, and she was so delighted to listen that she never went to sleep till he had ended his whole story.

[310] He began with his victory over the Kikones, and how he thence reached the fertile land of the Lotus-eaters. He told her all about the Cyclops and how he had punished him for having so ruthlessly eaten his brave comrades; how he then went on to Aiolos, who received him hospitably [315] and furthered him on his way, but even so he was not to reach home, for to his great grief a hurricane carried him out to sea again; how he went on to the Laestrygonian city Telepylos, where the people destroyed all his ships with their crews, [320] save himself and his own ship only. Then he told of cunning Circe and her craft, and how he sailed to the chill house of Hadēs, to consult the spirit \([\text{psukhē}}\) of the Theban prophet Teiresias, and how he saw his old comrades in arms, [325] and his mother who bore him and brought him up when he was a child; how he then heard the wondrous singing of the Sirens, and went on to the wandering rocks and terrifying Charybdis and to Scylla, whom no man had ever yet passed in safety; how his men then ate the cattle of the sun-god, [330] and how Zeus therefore struck the ship with his thunderbolts, so that
all his men perished together, himself alone being left alive; how at last he reached the Ogygian island and the nymph Kalypso, who kept him there in a cave, and fed him, and wanted him to marry her, in which case she intended making him immortal so that he should never grow old, but she could not persuade him to let her do so; and how after much suffering he had found his way to the Phaeacians, who had treated him as though he had been a god, and sent him back in a ship to his own country after having given him gold, bronze, and raiment in great abundance. This was the last thing about which he told her, for here a deep sleep took hold upon him and eased the burden of his sorrows. Then the owl-vision goddess Athena thought of another matter.

When she thought that Odysseus had had enough both of his wife and of repose, she bade gold-enthroned Dawn rise out of Okeanos that she might shed light upon humankind. Then, Odysseus rose from his comfortable bed and said to Penelope, “Wife, we have both of us had our full share of trials, you, here, in lamenting my grievous return, and I being constrained through sufferings by Zeus and the rest of the gods far from my homeland though longing for it.