

## THE HOMERIC CYCLOPES: FOLKTALE, TRADITION, AND THEME

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Among the episodes of the *Odyssey*, the Polyphemus tale has few rivals in its ability both to entertain its audience and to baffle its commentators. The universal appeal of this tale of escape has not distracted critics, ancient or modern, from ferreting out numerous inconsistencies and apparent lapses in narrative logic. During the past hundred years, modern scholarship has resolved most of these problems using a methodology not available to its ancient counterpart: the comparative study of folklore. As a result of this work, we can with some confidence understand the Polyphemus tale, as it appears in our *Odyssey*, as the incorporation of a folktale of a very common type—the escape from a blinded ogre—into material from the Greek epic tradition, the *nostos* of Odysseus.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, there is a general consensus that the numerous versions of this tale, attested throughout Europe as well as in parts of northern Africa and the Near East, constitute a folk tradition that is independent of the Greek epic tradition, and upon which the *Odyssey* itself has drawn.<sup>2</sup>

There yet remain, however, some problems which have so far eluded a satisfactory solution. I would like to consider the following three questions, and propose an analysis of the Polyphemus episode into its traditional, thematic, and folk elements which would answer all three.

1. Why is there such a discrepancy between the nature of the Homeric Cyclopes and the nature of those found in Hesiod's *Theogony*?

<sup>1</sup> The first major work devoted to the comparative study of the Polyphemus tale was that of Wilhelm Grimm, "Die Sage von Polyphem," *Abhandlungen der Königl. Akad. der Wiss. zu Berlin* (1857) 1–30, reprinted in *Kleinere Schriften* 4 (Gütersloh 1887) 428–62, to which subsequent references will be made. The most extensive collection of different versions of this tale is that of O. Hackman, *Die Polyphemsage in der Volksüberlieferung* (Helsinki 1904). Most readily available is the smaller collection of J. G. Frazer in *Apollo-dorus* 2 (Cambridge, Mass. 1947) 404–55. The most important recent contributions are the first chapter of D. L. Page, *The Homeric Odyssey* (Oxford 1955), and J. Glenn, "The Polyphemus Folktale and Homer's *Kyklôpeia*," *TAPA* 102 (1971) 133–81. These works will henceforth be cited by author's name only.

<sup>2</sup> See Grimm 454–55, Hackman 167, Glenn 135–42, and Page 7.

Ancient commentators were so exercised by this problem that they supposed there to be more than one type of Cyclops, and we must agree that, on the surface at least, these two groups could hardly have less in common.<sup>3</sup> Outside of the *Odyssey* and all subsequent literary works based on the Odyssean story of Polyphemos, the one salient feature of the Cyclopes is that they are craftsmen. In the *Theogony* they supply Zeus with the thunderbolts which enable him to defeat the Titans, and their work is described in terms glowing with praise:

ἰσχὺς δ' ἡδὲ βίη καὶ μηχαναὶ ἦσαν ἐπ' ἔργοις. (*Theogony* 146)

Later sources attribute to them the construction of the walls of Argos, Tiryns, and Mycenae, and in the Hellenistic period they are portrayed as assistants at the forge of Hephaistos. Although Hesiod describes his Cyclopes as ὑπέρβιον ἦτορ ἔχοντας (139), there is nothing particularly violent or malicious about the actions of these master craftsmen. How then can they possibly be categorized with the impious, vicious, and cannibalistic Polyphemos?

There are also problems of lineage. In the *Theogony* the three Cyclopes are treated as a congenital group, the sons of Ouranos and Gaia, much like the Titans or the Hecatoncheires. According to the *Odyssey*, Polyphemos is the son of Poseidon and the nymph Thoösa, herself a daughter of Phorcys. Are we to imagine Polyphemos to belong to a subsequent generation of Cyclopes? In that case we must ask, with Aristotle, in what sense can Polyphemos be said to be a Cyclops, with no Cyclopean blood, as it were, on either his father's or his mother's side?<sup>4</sup> And what, if anything, is his relationship to the other Cyclopes?<sup>5</sup> In fact, why are the other Cyclopes in the story at all? Several versions of the folktale have more than one ogre, it is true, but the others really have no great part to play in the

<sup>3</sup> The Hesiodic scholia at *Theogony* 139 attribute a three-fold distinction to Hellanicus: οἱ τὴν Μυκλήν τευχίσαντες, οἱ περὶ τὸν Πολύφημον and αὐτοὶ οἱ θεοί (fr. 88, *FGH*); cf. also the scholia to Aristides *Rh.* 52.10 (Dindorf 3.408). Modern discussion of this problem amounts to little more than pointing out that the two groups of Cyclopes have little in common: e.g., Roscher's *Lexikon* s.v. Kyklopen, coll. 1682–83; G. F. Schoemann, *Opuscula Academica* 4 (Berlin 1871) 325–35; K. Meuli, *Odyssee und Argonautica* (Berlin 1921) 75–76 (= *Gesammelte Schriften* 2 [Basel 1975] 644–45); F. Peachy, *The Homeric Story of the Cyclopes* (Diss. Harvard 1948) 80–81; M. L. West, *Theogony* (Oxford 1966) 207; and G. S. Kirk, *Myth: Its Meaning and Functions in Ancient and Other Cultures* (Cambridge 1970) 163.

<sup>4</sup> Aristotle fr. 172 (Rose).

<sup>5</sup> The text of the *Odyssey* (cf. especially 9.412) leaves in doubt the question of whether all the Cyclopes are the sons of Poseidon, or just Polyphemos. This uncertainty has been bequeathed to modern scholarship: e.g., S. Eitrem (*RE* s.v. Kyklopen col. 2333) implies that Polyphemos alone is the son of Poseidon; Roscher (above, note 3) col. 1683 calls the Cyclopes “zum Teil” the sons of Poseidon; West (above, note 3) 207 says that “one of them at least” is a son of Poseidon; and N. Austin (*Archery at the Dark of the Moon* [Berkeley 1975] 143) supposes that all Cyclopes are the offspring of the sea god.

Odyssean version: once the Cyclopean society is described, the poet immediately takes pains to isolate Polyphemus from the rest (9.188–89), and they do not reappear except to play a small part at the end.<sup>6</sup>

2. Why are the Odyssean Cyclopes blessed with a utopian existence in an idyllic setting—a gift from the very god they claim to hold in contempt?

Polyphemus and his fellow Cyclopes lead a remote but carefree life: crops grow uncultivated, and the beneficence of Zeus ensures that the rain will not fail (9.107–11). Even granting that the ogre Polyphemus has been imported from an independent folk tradition, we have to ask why he has been located in such a benign and well-ordered environment, for this is certainly not an aspect of the tale as it appears elsewhere. G. S. Kirk attributes the resulting contradictions, rightly I think, to a conflation of “the golden age/noble savage motif” with the motif of “the outwitting of a lawless giant.”<sup>7</sup> But this merely removes the question to a different level. Why has such a conflation come about? Since this golden-age existence is in no way relevant to the story, why would such a contradiction be introduced to begin with? Similarly, the Cyclopes’ contempt for the gods, particularly Zeus, is another Greek innovation whose importance to the plot is not readily apparent. Why was the poet willing to tolerate the embarrassing paradox of Zeus smiling favorably upon such self-proclaimed impiety?<sup>8</sup>

3. Why does the *Odyssey* nowhere explicitly mention that Cyclopes (or at least Polyphemus) have just one eye?

<sup>6</sup> See Glenn 147–49. D. Mülher (“Das Kypklopedicht der Odyssee,” *Hermes* 38 [1903] 426) characterized the presence of the other Cyclopes as “gegen den Geist des Märchens” and suggested that they belong more properly to the motif of the “Nobody-trick” than to that of the blinded ogre (outside the *Odyssey* these two are rarely conflated). Although his conclusion of multiple authorship is no longer seriously to be entertained, his observation that the other Cyclopes are intrusive in the blinding-tale is nonetheless valid. Page, who more correctly sees a conflation not of authors but of stories by a single author, supposes that the other Cyclopes have been introduced into the story for the sole purpose of making the “Nobody-trick” possible, an idea seconded by H. Eisenberger, *Studien zur Odyssee* (Wiesbaden 1973) 133. Eisenberger goes on to say that once the Cyclopes were thus introduced, the poet was presented with an opportunity, “in einer allgemeinen Einleitung diese Geschöpfe zu charakterisieren und ihre Eigenart mit einer besonderen Beschaffenheit ihres Lebensbereichs zu erklären.” It is my contention that the priority here is reversed, and I hope to show that the role that the Cyclopean community was intended to play in the thematic structure of the *Odyssey* is the primary one and of much greater significance than merely allowing the episode to end with a simple-minded joke.

<sup>7</sup> *The Songs of Homer* (Cambridge 1962) 236. See also *Myth* (above, note 3) 164–65.

<sup>8</sup> For the rarity of the detail of the ogre’s impiety among the recorded versions of this tale, see Glenn 157–58. For his explanation of this apparent contradiction, see “Homer’s ‘God-Trusting’ Cyclopes,” *CW* 65 (1972) 218–20. A different solution was proposed by O. Wilder, “Zum Kypklopedichte in der Odyssee,” *WS* 28 (1906) 97–98.

This problem, which leaps out at even the most casual reader of the *Odyssey*, is usually explained, by those to whom some explanation seems necessary, in one of two ways. One solution attributes it to a tendency for the *Odyssey* to de-emphasize or eliminate entirely many of the supernatural and fantastic elements in the tales that it incorporates.<sup>9</sup> That the poem shows such a tendency cannot be doubted, but in this particular instance I do not see how a one-eyed Cyclops, humanoid in all other respects, would be any more fantastic than the six-headed and twelve-footed Scylla described in lavish detail at 12.85–100, or any more supernatural than the effects of Circe's wand.<sup>10</sup>

Most commonly, it is suggested that the poet simply felt it unnecessary to mention Polyphemus' abnormality because his audience already knew that Cyclopes are one-eyed.<sup>11</sup> I find two difficulties in this. In all other respects, the description of the Cyclopean society is so detailed that it almost sounds as if they are being introduced to us for the first time. It is hard to imagine that the poet would describe with such ethnographic zeal their social system, economy, family structure, dwellings, and religious ideas, yet willingly omit any mention of the one characteristic which is not only the most distinguishing feature of Polyphemus, but also will prove to be of critical importance in the narrative which follows. It is equally hard to believe that the poet who so scrupulously prepared his audience for the upcoming intoxication of Polyphemus with an elaborate twenty-line description of the wine to be used (9.196–215), could easily pass up the opportunity to prepare them similarly for the blinding by mentioning explicitly the one reason that this stratagem has a chance of success: only one eye need be put out to blind the ogre completely. I must agree with Samuel Butler that "such a marked feature does not go without saying."<sup>12</sup>

Secondly, even if it were the case that the intended audience of our *Odyssey* knew beforehand that Polyphemus, as a Cyclops, was one-eyed, the same can certainly be said for every subsequent literary audience ever since. Nonetheless, later writers who treated the story of Polyphemus generally thought it necessary, or at least appropriate, to mention explicitly (and in some cases describe graphically) his single eye.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>9</sup> E.g. Glenn 155.

<sup>10</sup> A clear instance in which an irrational element has been eliminated, or at least altered beyond recognition, is the case of the so-called "ring sequel" which concludes many of the attested versions of the tale under discussion. See Glenn 177–79, Page 9, and C. S. Brown, "Odysseus and Polyphemus: The Name and the Curse," *Comparative Literature* 18 (1966) 201–2.

<sup>11</sup> E.g. J. van Leeuwen, *Odyssea* 1 (Leyden 1917) 245; W. B. Stanford, *The Odyssey of Homer* 1 (London 1965) 352; Hackman 169; Page 14; Glenn 155.

<sup>12</sup> *The Authoress of the Odyssey* (London 1897) 191.

<sup>13</sup> E.g. Eur. *Cyclops* 21, Theoc. 6.22, 36, 11.33, 53, Lyc. *Alex.* 659, Lucian *D.M.* 1.1, Apollodorus *epit.* 7.4, Ovid *Met.* 13.772; cf. Virgil *Aen.* 3.658.

Furthermore, in virtually all the recorded versions of the underlying folktale of the blinded ogre, if that ogre is in fact one-eyed, the fact is noted explicitly.<sup>14</sup> In sum, the consensus of writers and storytellers—those whose business it is to make narratives, not analyze them—is that the audience should be alerted to the giant's deformity in preparation for the blinding about to take place. Since the poet of the *Odyssey* is indisputably to be ranked among the best of raconteurs, we must not dismiss this question so lightly.

At the risk of muddying clear waters yet further, I propose to consider whether the Greek Cyclopes in fact traditionally were one-eyed. There is certainly a direct statement in our text of Hesiod's *Theogony* to that effect (142–45), but this passage raises questions of its own. Hesiod's Cyclopes are personified storm elements—Arges, Brontes, and Steropes; they are not man-eating ogres destined to have a conveniently single eye poked out by a potential victim. What could possibly be the point of such figures being conceived of as one-eyed? Perplexity over this question has inspired generations of scholars to produce a host of bizarre theories about the original significance of the Cyclopes—theories which attempt to connect the idea of a single eye with various natural phenomena, ranging from the sun to a volcanic crater.<sup>15</sup> But our earliest literary evidence clearly and explicitly identifies the Cyclopes with lightning and thunder, and throughout the history of classical literature they are continually portrayed as supplying these forces to Zeus. Rather than trying to devise some other original significance for the Cyclopes which would account for their single eye, I suggest that we accept the interpretation of them as storm elements which the ancient evidence so unambiguously provides, and question instead whether the single eye was really part of the original conception of the Cyclopes. We shall return to consider *Theogony* 142–45 later; at this point I merely mention the suspicious nature of the fact that the only reason that our *Theogony* does mention the single eye of these figures is to support a proposed etymology for their name.

The solution to these three problems lies, I believe, in an understanding of the relationship of *Odyssey* 9.106–15 to the rest of the Polyphemus episode. These lines form our introduction to the Cyclopean society,

<sup>14</sup> Glenn 155. Only three of the 74 versions of the tale which he counts containing a one-eyed ogre fail to mention this fact explicitly.

<sup>15</sup> A full bibliography of this misdirected ingenuity would be lengthy and pointless. For the two examples mentioned in the text, see A. B. Cook, *Zeus: A Study in Ancient Religion* 1 (Cambridge 1914) 311–13; and V. Bérard, *Les Navigations d'Ulysse* 4 (Paris 1929) 118–94.

a society which at first glance seems to occupy a middle ground between the monstrous Polyphemus and the helpful craftsmen of the *Theogony*.<sup>16</sup>

Κυκλώπων δ' ἐς γαῖαν ὑπερφιάλων ἀθεμίστων  
 ἰκόμεθ', οἳ ῥα θεοῖσι πεποιθότες ἀθανάτοισιν  
 οὔτε φυτεύουσιν χερσὶν φυτὸν οὔτ' ἀρώσιν,  
 ἀλλὰ τὰ γ' ἄσπαρτα καὶ ἀνήροτα πάντα φύονται,  
 πυροὶ καὶ κριθαὶ ἡδ' ἄμπελοι, αἳ τε φέρουσιν  
 οἶνον ἐριστάφυλον, καὶ σφιν Διὸς ὄμβρος ἀέξει.  
 τοῖσιν δ' οὔτ' ἀγοραὶ βουληφόροι οὔτε θέμιστες,  
 ἀλλ' οἳ γ' ὑψηλῶν ὀρέων ναίουσι κάρηνα  
 ἐν σπέσσι γλαφυροῖσι, θεμιστεύει δὲ ἕκαστος  
 παίδων ἡδ' ἀλόχων, οὐδ' ἀλλήλων ἀλέγονσι.

It is in this passage that we learn of the “golden-age” existence of the Cyclopes; here that we first see the contradiction of Zeus’ favor conferred on characters described as ὑπερφιάλων and ἀθεμίστων; and here in this description we would logically expect the poet to mention the one outstanding physical characteristic of these figures. What we would like to do is reconcile the contents of this passage both with the rest of the Polyphemus episode and also with the Hesiodic description of the Cyclopes.

For the sake of clarity, let me summarize my argument at the outset. The problems I have described can only be resolved if Polyphemus and the other Cyclopes are considered separately. This is not to say that *within the context of our Odyssey* the poet meant us consciously to imagine Polyphemus as being any different from his fellow Cyclopes (apart from his solitary life).<sup>17</sup> Rather, the distinction to be made is a diachronic one and concerns the ultimate origin of Polyphemus as opposed to that of the Cyclopes. As an individual character, the man-eating ogre Polyphemus stems from a folk tradition which is not specifically Greek; but the Cyclopes themselves—the storm-demons who arm Zeus with the thunderbolt—clearly are products of Greek mythological speculation.<sup>18</sup> The two are brought together for the

<sup>16</sup> The distinction in degree of civilization between Polyphemus and the other Cyclopes is discussed by Kirk (above, note 3) 168–70. The explanation that I am proposing is not consonant, however, with the structuralist one that he outlines.

<sup>17</sup> This unlikely line of interpretation is in fact attributed to Antisthenes by the scholia to *Od.* 9.106 and has been revived by G. R. Holland, “De Polyphemo et Galatea,” *LS* 7 (1884) 146, and F. Buffière, *Les Mythes d’Homère et la pensée grecque* (Paris 1956) 360–61.

<sup>18</sup> Admittedly, the line separating folklore from myth is sometimes thinly drawn. But in this case, I think that the distinction between the folktale cannibal and the mythological personification of meteorological elements is an obvious one. See Kirk (above, note 3) 163. For the priority of this elemental conception of the Cyclopes, see Roscher (above, note 3) col. 1676, Eitrem (above, note 5) coll. 2340–42, Peachy (above, note 3) 74–75, and J. Mewaldt, “Antike Polyphemgedichte,” *AAWW* 83 (1946) 269.

purpose of constructing an episode in the *nostos* of Odysseus.<sup>19</sup> We can never know with certainty why the Cyclopes suggested themselves to be the brethren of this ogre. The decision seems to have been based on purely superficial similarities: the Cyclopes were thought to be large and strong; they dwell underground in a remote area; and they are one of the few groups of larger-than-life figures to whom the Greek mythological tradition did not give a definite final resting place.

But these Greek Cyclopes had little else in common with the folktale ogre—especially as regards appearance and eating habits—and the incorporation of the ogre into Greek epic as a Cyclops resulted in a number of changes in their traditional characterization, changes which inevitably led to several internal contradictions in the poem. In fact, it is an easy demonstration that everything said or implied about the Cyclopes as a group outside of lines 9.107–15 is derogatory and contradicts the description of the Cyclopean society contained in those lines, which is generally positive, at worst neutral. My proposition, therefore, is that this description of the Cyclopes in lines 9.107–15 was already part of the Greek poetic tradition before the folktale character of the blinded ogre was introduced, and it preserves a very old idea of what happened to the Cyclopes subsequent to Zeus' victory—with the aid of their meteorological weaponry—in his cosmogonic battle with the Titans: a life in paradise, fostered by the benevolence of a grateful Zeus. (The similarities between the conditions described in 9.107–15 and those in Elysium have aroused frequent comment.)<sup>20</sup> If this is correct, then *Od.* 9.107–15 is a singular and precious vestige of a very

<sup>19</sup> We cannot know whether our *Odyssey* was the first one in which this conflation was made, or if it goes back further in an "Odyssean tradition." Kirk (above, note 7) has suggested that the discovery of four seventh-century vase paintings illustrating the Polyphemus episode might indicate a "fresh and popular version of the tale, not improbably that of the *Odyssey*" (285). The many narrative inconsistencies in book 9 also suggest a recent conflation rather than a long tradition, which presumably would have resolved some of them.

<sup>20</sup> Without raising the question of how the *Odyssey* was composed, we can surely assume at the least that the poet had been trained in the oral tradition of epic composition, for he is fluent in his use of its formulaic units, both small and large. Clearly, a poet so trained would have in his repertoire various self-contained segments from songs he had learned or heard. His recall of them need not be verbatim; he would have retained in his memory groups of ideas rather than a fixed text. I am suggesting that lines 107–15 are such a compositional unit (perhaps more properly intended for a theogonic poem than for the fantasy world of Odysseus' wanderings), which the poet has inserted without alteration into the *Odyssey* to suit his particular need. In principle, this process would be similar to what the early formulators of the oral theory of Homeric poetry called composition by theme, the only difference being that their use of the term "theme" was restricted to more generic units which were employed repeatedly in various contexts, such as arming, feasting, and sacrificing. See A. B. Lord, "Composition by Theme in Homer and Southslavic Epos," *TAPA* 82 (1951) 71–80; *The Singer of Tales* (Cambridge, Mass. 1960) 68–98. For a subsequent refinement of this notion, see M. Nagler, *Spontaneity and Tradition* (Berkeley 1974) 64–111.

old myth: in later Greek tradition the common conception is that of the Cyclopes as smiths who must continually forge new thunderbolts for Zeus in their Sicilian workshop, and therefore can never retire.

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From lines 9.107–15 (we shall return to consider 106 later on) we learn the following about the Cyclopes: they enjoy a close relationship with the gods, especially Zeus;<sup>21</sup> as a result, they live amidst an abundance of crops which require no cultivation; these crops include wheat, barley, and grapes, and this presumably constitutes their diet;<sup>22</sup> they dwell in caves; and their socio-political system is based on the family unit: there are no interfamilial congregations, institutions, or laws. Notably, the passage makes no mention whatever of their physical appearance.

In particular, there is nothing wild or savage about these Cyclopes. The bleak picture of them painted by modern mythographers is the result of an assumption—the assumption that what is said about Polyphemus is also true about the Cyclopes of 9.107–15. The comments of H. J. Rose serve as a representative example. He describes the Homeric Cyclopes as “a race of savage giants, living on an island . . . in a stage of rude pastoral culture.” Homer, he goes on to say, has “no illusions about the noble savage.”<sup>23</sup> None of these negative statements, however, is true of the Cyclopes in lines 9.107–15.<sup>24</sup> True, their lack of community and social organization at anything more complex than the level of the family has on occasion been condemned by both ancient and modern critics.<sup>25</sup> But as Kirk points out, “They are lawless . . . only in limiting social life strictly to the family; which some might consider a very idyllic, if primitive, state of affairs.”<sup>26</sup> A golden age needs no laws.

Just as the Phaeacians represent a fantastic idealization of urban life, the society described in lines 9.107–15 is that of an idealized natural

<sup>21</sup> The Cyclopes are also said to be close to the gods at 7.206. There they are mentioned together with the Giants, however, and the designation consequently loses some of its moral luster.

<sup>22</sup> Within the context of lines 107–15, there is no reason to think that these Cyclopes do not consume the things that nature provides so freely. It is Polyphemus who is elsewhere described as living on dairy products and in no way resembling “bread-eating man.”

<sup>23</sup> *A Handbook of Greek Mythology* (New York 1929) 22, 57.

<sup>24</sup> If it is not a typographical error, it is revealing that Rose documents his characterization of the Cyclopes by referring his reader to lines 9.116ff., that is, the lines directly *after* the general description of the Cyclopean society.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Plato *Laws* 680B–D; Aristotle *Nic. Eth.* 10.9.13; Peachy (above, note 3) 143ff. One of the most vehement modern criticisms is that of N. Austin (above, note 5) 143–50: he goes so far as to condemn the Cyclopes for not practicing agriculture, in spite of the fact that they do not have to.

<sup>26</sup> Kirk (above, note 3) 164.

environment—a pre-civilization utopia, not an uncivilized mob of savages.<sup>27</sup> I suggest that this passage is one that the poet knew from a different context, and that these Cyclopes are the ones that were familiar to the Greeks before the inclusion of the folktale Polyphemus among them. So the first question we have to consider is why this character from folklore, upon being introduced into the adventures of Odysseus, was placed in such a context. Why did he not remain the solitary ogre that he obviously once was? To answer this question we have to view the Polyphemus episode in the larger context of the overall thematic content of the poem, and in particular take into account the relationship that the poet has established between the Cyclopes and the Phaeacians.<sup>28</sup>

One of the recurring themes of the *Odyssey*, especially in the section dealing with the wanderings of Odysseus, is the hospitality theme.<sup>29</sup> It is called into play every time the hero sets foot on a new shore: the question of how he will be received is uppermost in his mind as well as in ours, and the manner of his reception is a touchstone of the humanity and civilization of everyone he comes in contact with.<sup>30</sup>

Idealized in every other way, the Phaeacians are also the perfect hosts, and they offer Odysseus the ultimate in hospitality. On the other hand, by his very nature the cannibalistic ogre, who eats his guests instead of feeding them, lies at the other extreme: everything Polyphemus says or does is a perversion or mockery of the rites of hospitality.<sup>31</sup> But the contrast does not end here. It is the clear intention of the poet to create in his characterization of the Cyclopes a cultural group at the opposite extreme from the Phaeacians on the scale of civilization and hospitality, thereby placing the humanity of the latter in sharper relief.

The opening description of the Phaeacians leaves little doubt that we are meant to compare the two cultures:

<sup>27</sup> See Meuli (above, note 3) 642ff.; Buffière (above, note 17) 360–62; W. Mannhardt, *Wald- und Feldkulte* 2 (Berlin 1905) 103–12.

<sup>28</sup> For the importance of interpreting the Polyphemus episode within the thematic structure of the entire poem, see S. L. Schein, "Odysseus and Polyphemus in the *Odyssey*," *GRBS* 11 (1970) 73–83.

<sup>29</sup> Schein (above, note 28) 81–82. See also A. J. Podlecki, "Guest-gifts and Nobodies in *Odyssey* 9," *Phoenix* 15 (1961) 125–33.

<sup>30</sup> A gross abuse of hospitality is of course also taking place at this very moment in Odysseus' house. Thus the *xenia* theme helps to bind together the two halves into which the poem naturally falls: Odysseus must endure both bad hosts and bad guests.

<sup>31</sup> A few of the more obvious examples: the very first words out of Polyphemus' mouth upon spotting Odysseus and his men are ὦ ξείνοι, τίρες ἐστέ; (9.252; by way of contrast, the Phaeacians do not ask his identity until he has eaten, and in fact they wait politely until the next day for his answer); Polyphemus drinks their wine, rather than offer them anything himself; he holds them by force rather than help them on their way; and he mocks the institution of gift-exchange in his offer to eat Odysseus last as his *xeinion*. See C. M. Bowra, *Heroic Poetry* (London 1952) 182–83; Eisenberger (above, note 6) 139.

αὐτὰρ Ἀθήνη  
βῆ ῥ' ἐς Φαιήκων ἀνδρῶν δῆμόν τε πόλιν τε·  
οἳ πρὶν μὲν ποτε ναῖον ἐν εὐρυχόρῳ Ὑπερείῃ,  
ἄγχου Κυκλώπων, ἀνδρῶν ὑπερηνορέοντων,  
οἳ σφεας συνέσκοντο, βίῃφι δὲ φέρτεροι ἦσαν. (6.2–6)

Although they were once neighbors, the pacific Phaeacians were driven from their former home by the violent actions of the Cyclopes. This common history of the Phaeacians and Cyclopes appears to be an *ad hoc* invention of the poet.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, every element in the description which follows immediately of the Phaeacians' new home and life is to be contrasted with the Cyclopean culture:

ἔνθεν ἀναστήσας ἄγε Ναυσίθοος θεοειδής,  
εἴσεν δὲ Σχερίη ἐκάς ἀνδρῶν ἀλφειστάων,  
ἀμφὶ δὲ τεῖχος ἔλασσε πόλει καὶ ἐδείματο οἴκους  
καὶ νηοὺς ποίησε θεῶν καὶ ἐδάσσατ' ἀρούρας. (6.7–10)

Their social structure is the *polis* as opposed to the tribal system of the Cyclopes; they live in houses rather than caves; they have temples, while the Cyclopes openly despise the gods; and they practice agriculture, which their former neighbors do not.<sup>33</sup>

Above all, the Phaeacians are extraordinary for their maritime ability, and it is here that the poet's effort to induce us to contrast the two groups is most clumsy and thus most obvious. As opposed to the Phaeacians, the Cyclopes cannot travel by sea at all (9.125–30), and the way in which the poet has chosen to make the drawbacks of this failing vividly clear is to locate an island of great potential for habitation just off the Cyclopes' coast, and just out of their reach. There is no subtlety here: we are told explicitly that the place would have made a good habitation *for the Cyclopes* if only they had the technological skill to build and operate ships. This is in fact the island where Odysseus and his men have put into harbor, and to add sting to his criticism, the poet points out that the harbor is an excellent one, the implication being that anyone with even the most rudimentary knowledge of sea travel could have gone out there and taken advantage of the abundance that the island has to offer.

So we are to imagine the land-bound Cyclopes sitting dismally on their shore, helpless, because of their lack of technology, to tap the abundant resources on an island a stone's throw away.<sup>34</sup> But the description of this island (116–48) follows directly upon the description of the life of the Cyclopes on the mainland, and the utter illogicality of the two passages

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Eustathius on *Od.* 6.5 (1549.17). See also C. Segal, "The Phaeacians and the Symbolism of Odysseus' Return," *Arion* 1.4 (1962) 33–34.

<sup>33</sup> For further discussion of the contrasts between the technological Phaeacians and the primitive Cyclopes, see Austin (above, note 5) 153–57, and Segal (above, note 32) 33–35.

<sup>34</sup> The picture is painted graphically by Austin in the passage cited in the preceding note.

taken together makes it patently clear that they cannot have originally been an organic whole. For as the text stands, why should the Cyclopes want to settle, or even visit the island? True, the soil is unusually fertile, but it still has to be cultivated (134), while on the mainland wheat and barley grow without cultivation. We hear that grapes could grow in profusion on the island (133), but the Cyclopes already have vines.<sup>35</sup> There are lush meadows (132), but there is no reason to think that the bounty of Zeus has not provided this also for the mainland Cyclopes. In short, while the island is the perfect place for habitation relative to the real world, the mainland life of the Cyclopes as described in 107–15 is something even better—an otherworldly paradise. But the poet has achieved his purpose admirably, and the audience is left with the feeling that here is yet one more area in which the Cyclopes compare unfavorably with their ex-neighbors.<sup>36</sup>

Moreover, the position of Odysseus' visit to each of these two cultures within the overall scheme of his wanderings serves to highlight the thematic contrast between the hospitable Phaeacians and the violently inhospitable Cyclopes. For the Cyclopes and the Phaeacians mark the beginning and end of Odysseus' experiences in the world of fantasy. There is little of the supernatural in the purely human struggle with the Ciconians (9.39–61), or in the encounter with the drug-addicted Lotus-eaters (9.82–104). But when Odysseus first sets foot on the Cyclopes' shore, he is plunged straight off into a world where the laws of human intercourse, as he knows them, do not pertain. And it is only after much suffering, wandering, and loss that he reaches the supreme humanity of the Phaeacians, preparatory to his return to his own world.<sup>37</sup> The Cyclopes and the Phaeacians also mark another beginning and end, that of the wrath of Poseidon, which the hero incurs among the former, and which he, in a sense, transfers to the latter. And this brings us to the last

<sup>35</sup> This mention of wine in line 111 caused the poet some embarrassment: the traditional description places the Cyclopes in a utopia and naturally includes the easy availability of wine (what Greek could imagine utopia without wine?). However, this forces the explanation (9.196–215) that Odysseus is able to trick Polyphemus into a state of complete intoxication only by means of an *especially strong* wine. What the tale wants, of course (and what it has in other versions), is the more felicitous situation of the uncultivated ogre who has never experienced wine at all; for the fermenting of beverages, like the making of bread, is often regarded as a mark of civilization. See Stith-Thompson *Motif-Index* #G.521. Van Leeuwen (above, note 11) 247 felt so strongly that it was necessary for Polyphemus to have no prior knowledge of wine that he deleted lines 9.357–59; see also Page 6ff., Glenn 161–62.

<sup>36</sup> See Eisenberger (above, note 6) 133. Among the Roman poets, for whom the idea of a lost golden age is a common *topos*, the lack of nautical ability is considered one of the positive features of that age, and the invention of ships marks the beginning of moral decay: cf. Horace *Carm.* 1.3.17ff., Ovid *Met.* 1.94–96, *Am.* 3.8.43–44, Tibullus 1.3.35–40, Virgil *Ecl.* 4.37–39.

<sup>37</sup> For a lengthy discussion see the article by Segal cited in note 32, and Austin (above, note 5) in the chapter entitled "Intimations of Order" (130–78).

point of comparison between Polyphemus and the Phaeacians: both have their way of life forever altered because of their treatment of this representative from the outside world. Polyphemus is blinded as punishment for offering too little hospitality (9.477–79),<sup>38</sup> and the Phaeacians, by carrying Odysseus home, are offering too much hospitality: as a sea-going people they should not risk offending the god of the sea, and their punishment is a curtailment of subsequent maritime activity (13.180–81).

Seen in this light, the paternity of Poseidon appears likely to have been another *ad hoc* innovation to help incorporate the Polyphemus tale thematically into the *Odyssey*.<sup>39</sup> There was already at hand, as part of the epic tradition, a cause for divine anger directed against the Achaeans returning from Troy: the anger of Athena over atrocities committed during the final destruction of the city (cf. *Od.* 3.130–47). But the poet of the *Odyssey* has reserved a special role for Athena as the ally of Odysseus' family in the up-coming battle with the suitors. She can hardly harass him all the way home and then suddenly switch allegiance. It was bad enough that she failed to help him through his trials at sea, and the poet felt embarrassed enough about this to make an explicit apology (13.339–43). So the blinded ogre became the son of Poseidon, providing not only a divine wrath to harry the seaborne Odysseus (appropriately, that of the sea-god), but also one more thematic link with the Phaeacians.<sup>40</sup> The question of how, if at all, Polyphemus is supposed to be related to the other Cyclopes within the context of the *Odyssey*—and whether they also are to be thought of as the sons of Poseidon—is a question which apparently did not enter the poet's head, and consequently has no answer. It is Euripides (*Cyclops* 20) who first extends the paternity of Poseidon explicitly to all the Cyclopes.

So the Phaeacians, the Cyclopes, hospitality, and the wrath of Poseidon are all inextricable parts of a thematic complex, for the creation of which Polyphemus has been placed in a society antithetical to the civilized and welcoming Phaeacians. But since the folktale really only works with a solitary ogre (how could Odysseus' plan possibly have succeeded unless the giant lived alone?) Polyphemus is simultaneously isolated from the group; and for most of the episode we actually think of him as a single monstrous entity, like many another of the abominable grandchildren of Phorcys.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Eisenberger (above, note 6) 139.

<sup>39</sup> This is also the judgment of Mannhardt (above, note 27) 108, and G. Finsler, *Homer 2* (Berlin 1918) 319. The opposite view is argued by Meuli (above, note 3) 645–46. For the whole question of the importance of Poseidon's curse in the *Odyssey* see G. Bona, *Studi sull' Odissea* (Torino 1966) 35–51.

<sup>40</sup> See W. J. Woodhouse, *The Composition of Homer's Odyssey* (Oxford 1930) 29–40; Eisenberger (above, note 6) 144–45.

<sup>41</sup> The decision to have Polyphemus descended from Phorcys on his mother's side was an obvious and appropriate one: the line of Phorcys includes many of the monstrous creatures slain by various heroes, e.g., Medusa, the Hydra, Chimaera, the Sphinx, and others.

What we see in the Polyphemus episode then are the poet's efforts to resolve the differences between the *traditional* Greek conception of the Cyclopes (which I have claimed is expressed by the description in lines 9.107–15) and the *thematic* use to which they are being put in the *Odyssey*. He does this, not by tinkering with the content of 107–15, but rather by alerting the audience beforehand to several non-traditional aspects of the Cyclopes Odysseus will encounter: lines 1.68–75 tell us that at least one of these Cyclopes will be the son of Poseidon,<sup>42</sup> and 6.2–10 prepare us for their unexpectedly malicious nature. We have also seen the further attempt to malign them in 9.125–30 by denigrating their lack of naval technology.

We are now ready to consider the lines in which the poet introduces the description of the Cyclopean society, for this is an obvious attempt to bridge the gap between the traditional passage he is incorporating and the manner in which he is trying to depict the Cyclopes in the poem:

Κυκλώπων δ' ἐς γαῖαν ὑπερφιάλων ἀθεμίστων  
 ἰκόμεθ', οἳ ῥα θεοῖσι πεποιθότες ἀθανάτοισιν. . . . (9.106–7)

Line 106 can hardly have been part of the description which follows, for it is irreconcilable with the piety implied in 107. It is true that the Cyclopes' lack of *themis* is also mentioned six lines later as an aspect of their idyllic culture, but there the implications are different: line 112 states that the Cyclopes have neither *agorai* nor public *themistes* and, within the innocent simplicity of the culture described in lines 107–11, none are needed: all trust is placed in Zeus.<sup>43</sup> But in his effort to present a blacker picture of these characters, the poet has latched on to this potentially damning characteristic of their culture and has employed it to introduce the entire description. And in this new context, their lack of *themis* appears in a very different light: not only is it now the very first thing that we hear about the Cyclopean society—without yet knowing why they need no *themistes*—but it is also coupled with the adjective *ὑπερφιάλος*, a word of unambiguously negative connotation.<sup>44</sup> Line 106, together with the advance notice we had in 6.4 about the ruthless nature of these Cyclopes, colors our perception of even the idyllic description which follows, and we are left with a generally negative opinion of the

<sup>42</sup> See Woodhouse (above, note 40) 29–31.

<sup>43</sup> This same opinion is expressed by the scholia to 9.112: ἀθεμίστους λέγει οὐχ ὡς ἀδίκους, ἀλλ' ὡς μὴ θέμιδος ἦτοι νόμου χρήζοντας εἰς εὖρεσιν τοῦ καλοῦ. ἦσαν γὰρ ἀγαθοί.

<sup>44</sup> This emotional distinction between ἀθεμίστων in line 106 and the mention of the lack of *themistes* in 112 is well illustrated by Richmond Lattimore's translation (Chicago 1951): in line 112, "these people have no institutions, no meetings for counsels," which does not sound so bad until you preface the whole description by saying "we sailed on further along, and reached the country of the lawless outrageous Cyclopes."

Cyclopes—an impression which is strengthened immediately when we hear about their primitive inability to travel by sea, and confirmed one hundred lines later when we first meet Polyphemus.<sup>45</sup>

This interpretation of the poet's methods in presenting traditional figures in a new light also provides a satisfactory solution to the problem of the Cyclopes' contempt for the gods.<sup>46</sup> It is not part of the description contained in lines 107–15, and within that description nothing contradicts the conception of the Cyclopes as god-loving and divinely-favored. It is only later (9.275–76) that we learn that the Cyclopes pay no heed to Zeus and the other gods, and the context of this statement makes it clear why the poet has added this detail. Odysseus, still hoping—in spite of the horrendous appearance of Polyphemus—that the conventions of hospitality are in effect in this remote place, asks for a *xeinion*, pointing out that not to give one would be an affront to Zeus *Xeinios* (267–70). Polyphemus not only refuses, but states explicitly what is implied by that refusal:

οὐ γὰρ Κύκλωπες Διὸς αἰγιόχου ἀλέγουσιν  
οὐδὲ θεῶν μακάρων, ἐπεὶ ἦ πολὺ φέρτεροί εἰμεν. (9.275–76)

If the poet wants to portray the Cyclopes as a paradigm of poor hospitality, he cannot help but make them despisers of Zeus. Once again the hospitality theme is at odds with the traditional characterization of the Cyclopes, and once again a fault of the ogre Polyphemus is attributed to the whole Cyclopean society, in stark contrast to the piety expressed in line 107.<sup>47</sup>

So if we undo what the poet has done and strip away from the Odyssean Cyclopes all the negative qualities that he has given them to suit his thematic purpose, we are left with characters (i.e., those described in 107–15) in no way inconsistent with the Hesiodic Cyclopes, except as regards their number. Our first impression might be that there is a difference in vocation—shepherds as opposed to smiths—but this is a misconception arising out of a confusion of later material with earlier. The idea that these allies of Zeus are smiths, forging the storm-god's thunderbolts, is clearly not the original conception of the Cyclopes. The

<sup>45</sup> A close parallel to the compositional process I have just outlined for the creation of the Homeric Cyclopes has been suggested by Page for the Homeric Sirens (*Folktales in Homer's Odyssey* [Cambridge, Mass. 1973] 85–90): the traditional Siren “seems to bear no resemblance whatsoever to the so-called Sirens of the *Odyssey*,” but was a demonic escort to the underworld who was neither beautiful nor a singer. But “the name of this dismal and dreadful human-headed fowl is simply transferred in the *Odyssey* to the enchantresses of a well-known folk-tale” (86). In the same way, the term Cyclops was transferred, in spite of its traditional meaning, to the ogre of an equally well-known folktale.

<sup>46</sup> For an overview of past attempts to grapple with this problem, see Glenn (above, note 8) 218–19.

<sup>47</sup> Buffière (above, note 17) 361 also attributes impiety to Polyphemus alone; but his notion that it is *Polyphemus* (rather than the poet) who is here falsely imputing impiety to the other Cyclopes is untenable.

Hesiodic passage does indeed imply that they made the thunderbolts that Zeus used against the Titans, but the fact that their names—Brontes, Steropes, and Arges—are identical with what they supply to Zeus suggests that the original idea was that they made nothing, but gave *themselves* to Zeus. That is, as the personification of thunder and lightning, merely by standing at Zeus' side they were bestowing upon him what they were, much as Kratos and Biê, a gift from their mother Styx, aid Zeus simply by their presence, endowing him with the qualities which their names imply (*Th.* 385–88).<sup>48</sup>

On the other hand, lines 9.107–15 of the *Odyssey* say nothing about the vocation of these Cyclopes. That Polyphemus is a shepherd is due to the requirements of the folktale. The sheep (or, in some cases, sheepskins) are essential to the story as a means for the hero to effect his escape from the blinded giant.<sup>49</sup> But lines 107–15 rather imply that the Cyclopes described here do not have to do anything to secure their needs. For the whole purpose in portraying someone as living in the midst of an uncultivated abundance of food is to make the point that his life is a toil-free one. It defies logic to imagine the traditional Cyclopes as having such a bounty of grain, yet ignoring it and spending all of their time working at pastoral chores, as Polyphemus does. (The *Cyclops* of Euripides is again the earliest source for the generalization of this pastoral life and diet to all Cyclopes.) It is just a conjecture, to be sure, but not an implausible one that Zeus was thought to have rewarded his loyal allies with such a retirement in care-free idleness.<sup>50</sup>

There only remains to be considered the number and placement of the Cyclopes' eyes, a matter on which there was less certainty in antiquity than there seems to be today.<sup>51</sup> Here the conflict with which the poet of the *Odyssey* was confronted was not between tradition and theme, but between tradition and the demands of the folktale. I suggested above that if being one-eyed were a traditional attribute of Cyclopes, we would expect the fact to be mentioned in their description

<sup>48</sup> For the Cyclopes as "Gewitter-dämonen" see Roscher (above, note 3) coll. 1676–77; Eitrem (above, note 5) coll. 2341–42; Preller-Robert, *Griechische Mythologie* (Berlin 1894) 1.48–49. Pausanias mentions a cult of the Cyclopes in Corinth (2.2.2), as well as a sacrifice to *astrapai*, *thuellai*, and *brontai* by the Arcadians near Trapezous (8.29.1).

<sup>49</sup> See Glenn 167–69.

<sup>50</sup> It is clear that they could so retire, because the Hesiodic conception is not that they must continually forge new thunderbolts for Zeus, but rather that once they had conferred this boon, he had it for all time. Also, no other interpretation will allow for the alternate tradition that the Cyclopes were killed by Apollo in revenge for the death of Asclepius (Hesiod frag. 52 [MW], Eur. *Alc.* 5–6, etc.): surely we are not to imagine that this act deprived Zeus of his source of weapons.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Servius on *Aen.* 3.636: "multi Polyphemum dicunt unum habuisse oculum, alii duos, alii tres."

in 9.106–15, or in any case at least in the description of Polyphemus (9.233–51). The usual assumption, that this feature of Cyclopes was already so traditional and widely known that mention of it was unnecessary, is generally substantiated by reference to the Hesiodic passage:

οἱ δὲ τοι τὰ μὲν ἄλλα θεοῖς ἐναλίγκιοι ἦσαν,  
μοῦνος δ' ὀφθαλμὸς μέσσω ἐνέκειτο μετώπῳ.  
Κύκλωπες δ' ὄνομ' ἦσαν ἐπώνυμον, οὐνεκ' ἄρα σφέων  
κυκλοτερὴς ὀφθαλμὸς ἕεις ἐνέκειτο μετώπῳ. (*Theogony* 142–45)

Here is as unambiguous a statement as one could want that Cyclopes generically have a single, frontally-located eye.

Let us pause, however, to consider to what extent these lines can be thought to reflect the popular conception current at the time that the *Odyssey* was composed. It is a curious fact that once Polyphemus is excepted, there is nothing in the remaining mythological tradition concerning the Cyclopes which depends on, explains, or in any way makes use of the fact of their supposed single eye. Within the logic of mythology, if a figure has some sort of outstanding physical abnormality, we could reasonably expect to find something in the myths associated with that figure to which the abnormality is relevant.<sup>52</sup> Polyphemus is one-eyed because the folktale to which he owes his origin dictates that there be some particular way for the ogre to be completely blinded before he can retaliate.<sup>53</sup> But we search in vain for any similar relevance of a single eye to any of the narratives associated with the Cyclopes as storm-demons, smiths, or wall-builders.<sup>54</sup>

In fact, the weight of the evidence indicates that in these mythological roles, the Cyclopes were not generally regarded as one-eyed. In the

<sup>52</sup> For example, the Hecatoncheires put their superfluity of hands to good use in fighting against the larger number of Titans, as does Argos usefully employ his abundance of eyes in watching over Io; and Hephaistos' limp has a myth to explain its origin. To take just one example from outside of Greek myth, the Germanic god Odin is also one-eyed, but there is in this case a mythological account of what happened to the other one.

<sup>53</sup> Hackman 218. In some versions of the story, the ogre is in fact two-eyed, and some other means must be found to blind him. One of these alternative methods is for the hero to offer to cure an ogre's diseased eyes, which he then blinds by pouring in some hot or caustic liquid. It is significant that in these "healing" versions, the ogre is rarely one-eyed, since this is not necessary for the success of this particular scheme. See Page 15; Hackman 215; and L. Röhrich, "Die mittelalterlichen Redaktionen des Polyphem-Märchens (AT 1137) und ihr Verhältnis zur ausserhomerischen Tradition," *Fabula* 5 (1962) 62–63.

<sup>54</sup> Of course, the myth-making imagination might create a deformed creature simply to represent an object of horror and loathing (Typhoeus or Echidna, for example) but there is nothing in the mythology of the Cyclopes apart from Polyphemus which would suggest that this was the case. The idea of a race of one-eyed giants seems more at home in the irrational world of fantasy and legend, and in fact the Greeks told tales of just such a legendary people, the Scythian Arimaspi; see J. D. P. Bolton, *Aristeus of Proconnesus* (Oxford 1962) 82–83, 176.

post-epic literary tradition, the mythology of the Cyclopes branches along two well-defined lines of development. Out of the *Odyssey* grows the tradition centered around the anthropophagous Polyphemus and his fellow one-eyed pastoral ogres. These are the Cyclopes of the satyr plays, comedy, and the Hellenistic romance of Polyphemus and Galatea.<sup>55</sup> On the other hand, from the *Theogony* stems a separate tradition of the Cyclopes as henchmen of Zeus, smiths who eventually become, in the Hellenistic period, assistants of Hephaistos.<sup>56</sup> The two lines of development are all but independent; the only real contamination between the two is that in post-Homeric accounts Polyphemus and his Cyclopes are generally located near Etna, which was widely held to be the site of the Cyclopean forge. But the significant fact is that though they reside on the slopes of Etna, Polyphemus and his fellows are always shepherds, never smiths.<sup>57</sup>

In particular, apart from the Hesiodic passage and the one other exception in Callimachus' hymn to Artemis (both essentially mythographic passages), the Cyclopes as smiths and wall-builders are never even *mentioned* as being one-eyed (nor are they cannibals or sons of Poseidon). This is true not only of Greek and Roman literary sources, but in art as well: the three Cyclopes toiling at Hephaistos' forge were a favorite theme in Roman art, and the Cyclopes are virtually always portrayed without any distinguishing physical characteristics whatever.<sup>58</sup>

The evidence clearly suggests that the Cyclopes, with a very few exceptions, were only thought to be one-eyed when they were in a context

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Euripides *Cyc.*, Epicharmis (CGF 1 fr. 81–83), Cratinus (CAF 1 fr. 135–50), Aristophanes *Pl.* 290ff., Nikocharēs (CAF 1 fr. 2–3), Antiphanes (CAF 2 fr. 131–33), Alexis (CAF 2 fr. 36–39), Timotheos fr. 780–83 (Page), Philoxenus fr. 815–24 (Page), Theocritus 6, 11, Callimachus epig. 47, Lycophron 659–61, Cicero *T.D.* 5.39.115, Virgil *Aen.* 3.616–83, *Ecl.* 9, Ovid *Met.* 13.755–897, 14.167–220, Propertius 2.33.32, 3.12.26, 3.2.7–8, Val. Flac. 1.136, Lucian *D.M.* 1, 2, Athenaeus 1.6–7.

<sup>56</sup> Euripides *Alc.* 5, Orph. fr. 178–80 (Kern), Ap. Rh. 1.510, 730, Callimachus *Dian.* 46–97, Cicero *De Div.* 2.19.43–44, Virgil *Aen.* 8.418–53, *Georg.* 4.170–75, Horace *Carm.* 1.4.7, Ovid *Met.* 1.259, 3.305, *Fasti* 4.287–88, Val. Flac. 7.647–48, Apollodorus 1.1.2, 1.2.1, 3.10.4, Diod. Sic. 4.71.3. The idea of the Cyclopes as wall-builders undoubtedly belongs to this branch of the tradition as well.

<sup>57</sup> A rare instance in which the two traditions are conflated is Callimachus' hymn to Artemis (46–97). Otherwise, the next source for such a conflation is Nonnos (14.52–66, 28.172–237). Apollodorus (1.1.2) attributes a single eye to Argēs, Brontes, and Steropes, but he is surely just copying this detail from the *Theogony*.

<sup>58</sup> See F. Brommer, *Hephaistos* (Mainz 1978) 44–45, 124; C. Robert, *Die antiken Sarkophag-Reliefs* 3 (Berlin 1919) part 3, 437–44, pl. 117; M. De Clarac, *Musée de Sculpture antique et moderne* 2 (Paris 1828–30) #433, pl. 215, 30; E. Schulze, "Über die Giebelgruppe des Capitolinischen Juppiter-tempels," *Arch. Zeit.* 30 (1873) pl. 57; W. Helbig, *Wandgemälde der vom Vesuv verschütteten Städte Campaniens* (Leipzig 1868) 73, 289, pl. 4; H. Blümner, *Technologie und Terminologie der Gewerbe und Künste bei Griechen und Römern* 4 (Leipzig 1887) 363ff.; S. Lewis, "A Coptic Representation of Thetis at the Forge of Hephaistos," *AJA* 77 (1973) pl. 52.

in which Polyphemus was one of their number. The conclusion seems incapable that the condition of being one-eyed belongs properly to him, as a folktale figure, rather than to them, as Greek mythological creations; and that the conception of one-eyed Cyclopes therefore owes its origin to the introduction of Polyphemus into the Greek poetic tradition as a Cyclops. Lines 142–45 of the *Theogony*, then, do not constitute any proof that the idea of one-eyed Cyclopes was already widely-held when the *Odyssey* was composed, but rather are an idiosyncratic and learned contamination of the smith-tradition with this one fact from the Odyssean tradition, introduced because of the specious etymology it provided for the word κύκλωψ. We shall return to this etymology presently.

There are two ways in which this contamination could have come about: (1) It might have been part of the original *Theogony* of Hesiod; this is possible only if the Polyphemus episode (not necessarily the entire *Odyssey* as we have it) was already part of the poetic tradition at the time that the *Theogony* was composed, and familiar to Hesiod. (2) It might be the result of a later interpolation; that is, lines 142–45 may have been added to the text of the *Theogony* as part of the revisionism in the post-epic characterization of the Cyclopes caused by the success of the Polyphemus story.<sup>59</sup> I have elsewhere (above, note 19) expressed a preference for placing the incorporation of the Polyphemus tale into the Odysseus legend at a date close to the actual composition of our *Odyssey*, if not coinciding with it; consequently, I here prefer the second of these alternatives. Most editors have sensed in lines 141–46 the hand of an interpolator at work to some extent. I suggest that the entire etymology (142–45) is a later addition, and that the original Hesiodic description of the Cyclopes consisted of lines 139–41 and 146 (keeping in mind that the interpolation of 142–45 might well have replaced one or more authentic Hesiodic lines elaborating further on the characteristics of the Cyclopes).<sup>60</sup>

γείνατο δ' αὖ Κύκλωπας ὑπέρβιον ἦτορ ἔχοντας,  
 Βρόντην τε Στερόπην τε καὶ Ἄργην ὀμβριμόθυμον,  
 οἳ Ζηνὶ βροντῇν τ' ἔδοσαν τεύξάν τε κεραυνόν.  
 ἰσχὺς τ' ἦδ' ἐβίη καὶ μηχαναὶ ἦσαν ἐπ' ἔργοις.

My suggestion therefore is that the description of the Cyclopes in *Od.* 9.107–15 makes no mention of their having just one eye because

<sup>59</sup> One such attempt to reconcile, by interpolation, Hesiod's description of the Cyclopes with later tradition—in this case the tradition that the Cyclopes were killed by Apollo—has been preserved: Crates replaced line 142 with the following:

οἳ δ' ἐξ ἀθανάτων θνητοὶ τράφεν ἀυδήεντες.

The only difference is that his interpolation did not win a place in the canonical text.

<sup>60</sup> If this is in fact the case, then line 142, which obviously cannot stand alone, might also be authentic, originally introducing some other distinguishing characteristic of the Cyclopes.

they traditionally were not one-eyed.<sup>61</sup> But then why isn't Polyphemus at least so described? We can best answer this question by putting ourselves in the position of the poet trying to incorporate the one-eyed folk ogre into his *Odyssey* as a Cyclops. He has two obvious choices: he might simply declare Cyclopes to be one-eyed as a group characteristic, adding this to the description in 9.107–15. That, however, would be an intolerable break with tradition, which would only confound the audience and detract attention from the story itself. Alternatively, he could specifically make this abnormality an individual trait of Polyphemus rather than a group characteristic of Cyclopes in general. Once he has made this explicit, however, it seems to me that he would have to drop the other shoe, so to speak, and inform his audience *why* Polyphemus has the sight of one eye only. He would thus have to invent some story to account for Polyphemus' condition, since the tradition in which he is composing would have nothing to offer.<sup>62</sup>

Our poet chose neither of these options, and the simplicity of his solution is exceeded only by its effectiveness: he solves the problem by ignoring it. Nowhere does he explicitly state that Polyphemus has just one functional eye, thereby not contradicting the Greek mythological tradition about the Cyclopes; yet he tacitly *assumes* this fact throughout the story (note the use of the singular in lines 1.69, 9.383, 387, 394, 397), thereby satisfying the narrative demands of the folktale.<sup>63</sup> It is never made clear—nor is it relevant—whether all the Cyclopes are supposed to have one eye, or just Polyphemus. The situation is therefore much the same as it was concerning the paternity of Poseidon. This technique of implication rather than explicit statement would be especially successful if the *folktale* of the blinded ogre was already familiar to the audience, independent of its inclusion among the adventures of Odysseus; and

<sup>61</sup> That all Cyclopes were not originally imagined as one-eyed might be the point of a comment by Strabo (1.2.10): *τάχα δὲ καὶ τοὺς μονομμάτους Κύκλωπας ἐκ τῆς Σκυθικῆς ἱστορίας* [*Ὀμηρος*] *μετενήροχε· τοιοῦτους γὰρ τινὰς τοὺς Ἀρμασπούς φασιν*.

<sup>62</sup> The critics of antiquity in fact proposed this very solution: not only was Polyphemus the only one-eyed Cyclops, but he himself was born two-eyed and had previously lost an eye in some sort of accident; cf. Philoxenus cited in the *Odyssean scholia* to 9.106 (Dindorf 415) and Eustathius on *Od.* 9.183 (p. 1622.47). The idea was received with some enthusiasm by Butler (above, note 12) 191; cf. also P. Courbin, "Un Fragment de cratère protoargien," *BCH* 79 (1955) 36–37; and O. Touchefeu-Meynier, *Thèmes Odysseens dans l'art antique* (Paris 1968) 74–75. But this is exactly the kind of synchronic distinction between Polyphemus and the rest of the Cyclopes that I do not want to make.

<sup>63</sup> L. G. Pocock (*Reality and Allegory in the Odyssey* [Amsterdam 1959] 97–98) likewise comments on the poet's reluctance to commit himself to "the absurdity of the single centrally situated eye." But he does not make explicit why he thinks the poet "wisely" avoided this commitment. See Glenn 155.

there is no good reason to think that it was not.<sup>64</sup> We can say, then, that indeed the audience might already have known that Polyphemos had just one functional eye without being told explicitly; not, however, (and this is the critical point) because he is a Cyclops, but because he is recognizable as a character from a widely-known story in which the giant always has one eye.<sup>65</sup> It is in post-Homeric literature that the single eye becomes explicitly a generic characteristic of Cyclopes: for the third time we see an attribute of Polyphemos as folk ogre extended to all Cyclopes associated with him; and for the third time it is Euripides who is our first source for this generalization.<sup>66</sup>

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The purpose of our close examination of these perplexing characters has been to show that the Homeric portrayal of the Cyclopean society results from the interaction of three elements. The first is the tradition of the Greek mythological Cyclopes. Originally the personification of natural forces, they appear in the *Theogony*, at a later stage of development, as the craftsmen who fabricate the storm-weapons of Zeus. They also had a place

<sup>64</sup> In fact, several aspects of the story as it appears in Euripides' *Cyclops* (which in most respects follows the *Odyssey* closely) are best understood as being based directly on the folktale, rather than the literary version contained in the *Odyssey*. These include the fact that Polyphemos cooks his victims rather than eating them raw (cf. also the *Odysseus* of Cratinus, CAF 1 fr. 143); that he is blinded with a spit rather than a stake; and that he has never tasted wine before. See Page 9–11; Glenn 164–66. Moreover, there are various deviations from the *Odyssey* in the vase paintings of the blinding of Polyphemos, which may similarly be based on a popular tradition rather than a literary version; see Courbin (above, note 62) 47–48, Touchefeu-Meynier (above, note 62) 13.

<sup>65</sup> I quote again from Page's similar comments on the Homeric Sirens (above, note 45):

The truth will be that the *Odyssey* has abbreviated and modified the common folktale, yet not so far as to make it unrecognizable. The audience know the folktale, and recognize it immediately in the Homeric narrative. . . . They already know, and take for granted, all that Homer omits. (88–89)

<sup>66</sup> *Cyclops* 20, etc. There is an ambivalence in the representation of Polyphemos' eye in vase painting which exactly parallels that in the literary tradition. Although depicting a single frontal eye on a figure in profile admittedly involves technical difficulties, it is still worth observing that the painters of the two surviving seventh-century vases on which Polyphemos' face is preserved have made no attempt whatever to portray his eyes as anything but normal. See Touchefeu-Meynier (above, note 62) 11–12 (#2, 3); and B. Fellmann, *Die antiken Darstellungen des Polyphemabenteuers* (Munich 1972) 10–14 (#BL 1, BL 2). In fact, it is not until the late sixth century that we begin to see traces of a recognizable attempt on the part of the painter to represent this unique trait of Polyphemos. See Fellmann 24–25, Touchefeu-Meynier 17, 73–76. Significantly, the first unambiguous and full view of the single frontal eye is preserved on the fifth-century Richmond Crater, illustrating a satyr play on the subject of the blinding of Polyphemos. It may well be a representation of a scene from Euripides' *Cyclops*: cf. Courbin (above, note 62) 37–39, Fellmann 32–33, Touchefeu-Meynier 20–21.

in the epic tradition out of which the *Odyssey* grew, and I have argued that the passage 9.107–15 is a poetic remnant of this earlier characterization. Second, at some point in the evolution of the *Odyssey* the folktale of the hero who escapes from a blinded cannibalistic ogre was brought into the tradition as one of Odysseus' adventures. The ogre was introduced into the poem as a Cyclops, in spite of the fact that the tale demanded that this ogre have several characteristics that the traditional Cyclopes did not: he had to be one-eyed, a shepherd, and maliciously evil—a cannibal in fact.

Not only was he made a Cyclops, but he was placed into a community of Cyclopes, and this brings us to the third element, which holds together the first two and helps to blend the whole episode thematically into the *Odyssey*: the hospitality theme. To this end the poet has altered in some respects the traditional image of the Cyclopes: they are now impious and hubristically violent, and the golden-age simplicity of their existence is construed as loutish ignorance. But the *Odyssey* never does attribute explicitly to all the Cyclopes those aspects of Polyphemus which would constitute a dramatic break with tradition: his single eye, his cannibalism, and his descent from Poseidon.

Later writers make explicit what the *Odyssey* leaves its audience to infer, and there is an ever-widening gap in the subsequent literary history of the Cyclopes. The popular success of the Polyphemus episode guaranteed that in all future literary treatment any Cyclopes associated with Polyphemus or the Odyssean adventure would take on all the attributes of Polyphemus, a process already completed by the time of Euripides' *Cyclops*:

ὕν' οἱ μονῶπες ποντίου παῖδες θεοῦ  
Κύκλωπες οἰκοῦσ' ἄντρ' ἔρημ' ἀνδροκτόνοι. (*Cyc.* 20–21)

The Cyclopes in this branch of the tradition thus become entirely distinct from those in the other—the smiths of Zeus and the assistants of Hephaistos—who are not imagined as one-eyed or wicked at all, let alone cannibalistic.

I end with one final observation. If the development that I have outlined is valid, it means that we should not attempt to wrestle some etymology out of the word κύκλωψ which would in any way connect it with eyes, round or otherwise (an endeavor labeled as γελοῖως as early as the Odyssean scholia); it follows from this interpretation that the word originally will have referred to a group of mythological figures with nothing unusual about the number or shape of their eyes. There is no reason therefore to suppose that the second element in the name κύκλωψ signifies “eye” or even “face” at all: it may simply be the same nominal suffix that we find in names like Πέλοψ and Κέκροψ (both with shortened suffix vowel) and the Κέρκωπες. Moreover, any attempt to explain the origin and original significance of the Greek Cyclopes that is

based on the notion of a single eye cannot be valid. This is certainly not to deny that there may be some religious, psychological, or naturalistic significance in the conception of a one-eyed creature; but in the case of the Cyclopes that significance must be sought in the cross-cultural realm of early European folklore rather than specifically in the history of Greek mythological thought.