

Odysseus and Polyphemus in the *Odyssey*

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IN THE first chapter of *The Homeric Odyssey*, Professor Page analyzes the story of Odysseus and Polyphemus.¹ On the basis of previous studies by folklorists and classicists, and of his own close reading of the text, he concludes that the story told in *Odyssey* 9 differs from the usual versions of a tale found “through Europe and beyond” (p.3) in five particulars: (1) Polyphemus eats his victims raw, not cooked on a spit; (2) he is blinded by a heated olive-wood stake, not by the metal spit used for the cooking; (3) he is put to sleep by “excessive indulgence in wine” (p.4), not as a result of his meal; (4) Odysseus says that his name is ‘Nobody’, not ‘Myself’; (5) Odysseus and his men are almost killed when Odysseus shouts out his real name, not when a magic ring, a gift of the giant, begins to shout ‘Here I am’.²

Although Page does say (p.14) that “the entire story of Polyphemus is most carefully constructed and most firmly settled in its place among the adventures of Odysseus,” his analysis is independent of the rest of the *Odyssey*. He treats the story as one of a number of “*Weltmärchen*, universal folk-tales, independent of each other and of the main theme of the *Odyssey*,” which are “fitted into the framework of that main theme, the folk-tale of the Returning Hero,” but which otherwise have nothing to do with it (pp.1-2). In this paper, I try to show that the five differences from usual versions of the tale, which Page finds in the story of Odysseus and Polyphemus as told in Book 9,

¹ Denys L. Page, *The Homeric Odyssey: The Mary Flexner Lectures delivered at Bryn Mawr College, Pennsylvania* (Oxford 1955) 1-20. For references to earlier studies, see p.18, especially nn.1 and 5.

² The common tale, according to *ibid.* p.4, is as follows: “The hero, with companions, is prisoner in the cave of a one-eyed giant shepherd; some or all of the companions are cooked by the giant on a spit over a fire; the giant sleeps after his heavy dinner; the hero takes the spit, heats it in the fire, and plunges it into the giant’s eye; the giant opens the door of the cave in the morning to let his sheep out and the hero escapes by walking out on all fours dressed in a sheep’s skin or (less often) by clinging to the underside of a sheep.” There is a sequel in which the hero mocks the giant and is almost captured by him.

can best be understood in terms of the *Odyssey* as a whole, since each is clearly connected with a main theme or motif of the poem.

The presence of so many themes and motifs in Book 9 makes it thematically typical of the entire poem, and offers the reader a convenient way into it. This will become clearer if we consider one by one the five details in which the story told in Book 9 differs from Page's norm.

1. Polyphemus eats his victims raw, not cooked on a spit. In almost all other versions of the folk-tale, the giant shepherd cooks his victims over a fire on a metal spit.³ Page conjectures (p.11) that "the cooking of human victims . . . was rejected as being a deed of the utmost barbarism, outside the law prescribed by tradition to the Odyssean storyteller." He is certainly right to focus on the opposition between barbarism and law, which is important in Book 9 and in the *Odyssey* in general. The characters whom Odysseus encounters are (9.175–76 = 6.120–21, 13.201–02 [cf. 8.575–76]):

ἢ ῥ' οἷ γ' ὕβρισταί τε καὶ ἄγριοι, οὐδὲ δίκαιοι,
ἦε φιλόξεινοι, καὶ σφιν νόος ἐστὶ θεουδής.

Polyphemus,

ἄγριον, οὔτε δίκας εἶ εἰδότα, οὔτε θέμιστας (215),

is obviously among the former.⁴ But Polyphemus' eating his victims raw itself enhances his barbarism; it is, by Homeric standards, a more savage act than eating them cooked. In *Iliad* 4.34–36, when Zeus wants to indicate what Hera would have to do before she could satisfy her anger, he says:

If you could walk through the gates and through the towering ramparts and eat Priam and the children of Priam raw, and the other Trojans, then, then only might you glut at last your anger.⁵

At *Iliad* 22.346–48, Achilles wishes

. . . that my spirit and fury would drive me to hack your [Hektor's] meat away and eat it raw for the things that you have done to me.

³ Page, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.1) 9, 19 n.16. Cf. O. Hackman, *Die Polyphemsage in der Volksüberlieferung, akademische Abhandlung* (Helsingfors 1904) 164, to which Page refers.

⁴ The barbarism and lawlessness of the Cyclopes as a group are stressed in 105ff. That of Polyphemus is obvious throughout the story, e.g. in 273ff.

⁵ This and subsequent quotations from the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are from R. Lattimore, *The Iliad of Homer* (Chicago 1961) and *The Odyssey of Homer* (New York 1968).

And at *Iliad* 24.213–14, Hecuba, speaking of Achilles, says:

. . . ; I wish I could set teeth
in the middle of his liver and eat it. That would be vengeance
for what he did to my son. . . .

Both Hecuba's and Achilles' wishes are impossible of fulfillment. They differ only in that Hecuba, in her grief which can know no vengeance, is beyond the human pale, while Achilles only wishes that he might become so savage. For both of them, as for Zeus, cannibalism is the most extreme, least civilized deed of which they can think.

The Cyclops' savagery is emphasized in the description of how he devoured two of Odysseus' companions (292–93):

. . . like a lion reared in the hills, without leaving anything,
[he] ate them, entrails, flesh and the marrowy bones alike.

The overall effect of Homer's having Polyphemus eat Odysseus' companions raw, rather than cooked, is to sharpen the portrait of him as savage, monstrous and lawless.

2. Polyphemus is blinded by a heated olive-wood stake, not by a metal spit. As Page observes (p.4), the usual folk-tale in which the giant shepherd is blinded by a heated metal spit is well-constructed, because "one action follows necessarily from another throughout. The fire provides the spit, the spit provides the giant's dinner and the hero's weapon. . . ." In Book 9, since the Cyclops eats his victims raw, there is no straightforward provision of a weapon for Odysseus to use. Homer makes Odysseus and his men find and use a huge olive-wood club, which Polyphemus happens to have in his cave.

In terms of the narrative itself, the substitution of the stake for the spit seems to weaken the story by breaking the flow of action from action. But in terms of the entire *Odyssey*, the substitution constitutes one of five occasions on which olive wood or an olive tree is somehow associated with Odysseus' salvation.⁶ In 5.234–36, Calypso gives Odys-

⁶ C. P. Segal, "The Phaeacians and the Symbolism of Odysseus' Return," *Arion* 1.4 (1962) 17–64, mentions (p.62 n.31) "the saving aspect of the olive tree for Odysseus." Cf. p.63 n.41. H. N. Porter, ed., *The Odyssey of Homer* (New York 1962) 5–6, has seen in the three olive trees "an elaborate recurrent image which punctuates, as it were, the narrative, marks its major stages, . . . by symbols evoking the idea of death and rebirth." Cf. G. E. Dimock Jr, "The Name of Odysseus," in *Essays on the Odyssey*, ed. C. H. Taylor Jr (Bloomington 1963); 54–72, who finds (p.72) that "the fruitfulness of trouble has been hinted at . . . particularly by the image of the olive." Dimock's article first appeared in *The Hudson Review* 9 (Spring 1956) 52–70, and is also reprinted in *Homer: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. G. Steiner and R. Fagles (Englewood Cliffs 1962) 106–21. All page references to Dimock's article will be to the reprint in Taylor's volume.

seus an ax with which to build the raft that will carry him from Ogygia: its handle is of olive wood. At the end of Book 5, after he has struggled to safety on Scherie, Odysseus falls asleep protected by thick, intertwined wild and domesticated olive trees (5.477).⁷ In 13.116–23, the Phaeacian crew which has brought Odysseus back to Ithaca puts him, asleep, and his possessions by the trunk of the slender-leaved olive tree located at the head of the harbor of Phorcys, near the cave of the nymphs; and in 13.372–73 Athene and Odysseus sit down in the same place to plan destruction for the suitors. Finally, in 23.173–204, Penelope's testing of Odysseus and his proof to her of his identity involve his knowledge that the foundation-post of their bed was a rooted olive tree; it is upon this bed that they reunite in love and fall asleep (23.295–96).

Obviously, in some essential way Homer associated olive wood and olive trees with Odysseus. The recurrence of this motif in Book 9 is one link between this book and the rest of the poem. Odysseus' blinding of Polyphemus with the olive-wood stake is an expression of his identity in the same way as are his skillful building of the raft, his struggling ashore and to safety in Scherie, his accumulated wealth and relationship to the nymphs in Ithaca, his plotting the suitors' destruction with Athene, and his rôle as Penelope's husband. Each of these exhibits a facet of the complete Odysseus; each is similarly associated with the wood of the olive.⁸

It is worth noting that both the absence of a metal spit and Polyphemus' eating his victims raw emphasize an important trait of the giant: his technological primitiveness. Although, since he has milk-

⁷ I follow the scholiasts B, P, Q, T (Dindorf I, p.292) *ad loc.* in taking φυλίης (477) as a kind of wild olive: φυλία εἶδος ἐλαίας, μυρρίνης ὁμοία φύλλα ἐχούσης, οἱ τὸ ἀγριέλαιον λέγουσιν. But the identification is uncertain and the evidence inconclusive. See H. Ebeling, *Lexicon Homericum* II (Lipsiae 1880) 455, *s.v.* φυλίη, for ancient evidence, and J. van Leeuwen et M. B. Mendes da Costa, *Homeri Odysseae Carmina*³ (Leiden 1897) 129, *ad loc.* W. W. Merry and J. Riddell, *Homér's Odyssey, Books I–XII*³ (Oxford 1886) 250 *ad loc.*, state: "It (φυλίη) is generally and best taken . . . as=ἀγριέλαιος, 'wild olive'."

⁸ Professor J. A. Coulter has called my attention to Porphyry, *De antro nymphaeum* 32–33, where the olive tree at the head of the harbor of Phorcys near the cave of the nymphs (13.102–04) is made to symbolize that ὁ κόσμος . . . ἔστι φρονήσεως θεοῦ καὶ νοεράς φύσεως ἀποτελεσμα . . . Ἀθηνᾶς μὲν γὰρ τὸ φυτόν, φρόνησις δὲ ἡ Ἀθηνᾶ. In 33, Porphyry calls the olive tree ἀειθαλής, and refers to its use in supplications and *κτήφανα* for athletic victors. All this is appropriate to Odysseus, who has successfully returned to Ithaca by his own mental powers and with Athene's help, who has so often survived when he seemed about to die (that quality for which the olive tree is properly called ἀειθαλής), and who is a suppliant to the nymphs and Athene (13.355–60).

pails (247), he should have a spit or pot with which to cook his victims, Homer portrays him as so undeveloped as not to have these utensils, and reduces the rôle of the fire in his cave to providing light.⁹ This is in accordance with the presentation of the Cyclopes as pastoralists, ignorant of planned agriculture (107–11) and community organization (112–15), and without skilled carpenters to build ships adequate even to reach the small island near their land, let alone to cross the sea to other societies (125–30). The contrast between Polyphemus' primitiveness and Odysseus technological skill is obvious. Odysseus applies this skill to cutting and sharpening the olive-wood club into a stake, and when he is blinding the Cyclops (382–94), his activity "is described in images of the arts of civilization, metal-working and shipbuilding."¹⁰ Throughout the *Odyssey*, Odysseus' character and salvation are associated with his technological skill, as when he builds himself a raft or a bed. By portraying in Book 9 the technologically primitive Cyclops and the skilled Odysseus, Homer takes up a theme of fundamental importance throughout the poem, and clarifies by the use of analogy and contrast who Odysseus is and what he stands for.¹¹

3 and 4. Polyphemus is put to sleep "by excessive indulgence in wine," not as a result of his meal. Odysseus says that his name is 'Nobody', not 'Myself'. These two departures from the usual folk-tale are considered together here, both because they go closely together in the narrative—Odysseus lies about his name (363–67) immediately after he has made the Cyclops drunk (347–62)—and because, while they are found in certain other folk-tales, each is foreign to the tale of the blinding of and escape from a giant shepherd.¹² Homer has introduced these motifs into Book 9 because they allow him to portray most strikingly Odysseus' characteristic craftiness and resourcefulness, those qualities on account of which he is repeatedly called *πολύμητις* and *πολυμήχανος* throughout the poem, and which are so often responsible for his survival.

Homer shows that he is familiar with the usual version of the story,

⁹ In 251, Polyphemus catches sight of Odysseus and his men immediately after lighting the fire. Cf. W. B. Stanford, *The Odyssey of Homer I*² (New York 1964) 356, on line 234.

¹⁰ Segal, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.6) 34.

¹¹ There are clear and important contrasts between the Cyclopes and the Phaeacians, too. See Porter, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.6) 8–9, and Segal, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.6) 33–35.

¹² See Page, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.1) 3–8, 19 n.8. The inebriation of the Cyclops is borrowed from a type of folk-tale in which a man "inebriates a devil or demon in order to capture him and force him to reveal some knowledge or perform some act" (p.6).

in which the giant falls asleep as a result of his meal, for this is precisely what happens to Polyphemus in 296–98:

But when the Cyclops had filled his enormous stomach, feeding
on human flesh and drinking down milk unmixed with water,
he lay down to sleep in the cave sprawled out through his sheep.

Odysseus wishes to slay the sleeping Polyphemus with his sword, but on second thought does not do so (ἔτερος δέ με θυμὸς ἔρυκεν, 302), since he and his men would then be trapped within the cave, unable to move the heavy boulder from the entrance. The expression ἔτερος θυμὸς is unparalleled in Homer, but is a catachresis of traditional language for the sake of describing Odysseus' unique intelligence and resourcefulness.¹³ These mental qualities had already been illustrated in 281ff, where Odysseus, εἰδότα πολλά, deceitfully (δολίοις ἐπέεσσιν) tells Polyphemus that his ship was totally wrecked. They are also evidenced later in Book 9 by the device of sharpening and heating the olive-wood club, as well as by the ruse of concealing himself and his men under the sheep's bellies.¹⁴ But there are no more striking applications of Odysseus' cleverness and intelligence than the inebriation of the Cyclops and the use of the name 'Nobody'.

Page points out (p. 7) that the use of the wine is carefully prepared by its repeated mention earlier in the book. In 161–68 the wine and its history are first described, and in 196–211 this history is amplified and the special strength and nature of the drink are stressed (208–11):

Whenever he [Maron] drank this honey-sweet red wine, he would pour out
enough to fill one cup, then twenty measures of water
were added, and the mixing bowl gave off a sweet smell;
magical; then would be no pleasure in holding off.

The powerful effect that the wine might have on the Cyclops is im-

¹³ ἔτερος . . . θυμὸς has attracted a certain amount of scholarly attention. Van Leeuwen and Da Costa, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.7) 204, write: "verba corrupta, nam vox θυμὸς pro sententia usurpari non potuit." The scholiast *ad loc.* (Dindorf II, p.430) glossed θυμὸς by the word λογισμὸς, but this is too simple-minded. B. Snell, *The Discovery of the Mind*, transl. T. Rosenmeyer (Cambridge [Mass.] 1953) 14, writes: "But thymos may . . . serve as the name of a function, in which case we render it as 'will' or 'character'; and where it refers to one single act, the word once more transcends the limitations of our 'soul' or 'mind'. The most obvious example occurs *Od.* 9.302 where Odysseus says: 'Another thymos held me back'; each individual impulse, therefore, is also a thymos." Obviously, Odysseus has a second thought, but this thought is too impulsive to be translated by λογισμὸς ('calculation') or sententia ('idea').

¹⁴ On the escape by clinging to the sheep's bellies, see Page, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.1) 13–14.

plied in 297, where it is said that he was eating human meat and drinking unmixed milk (ἄκρητον γάλα πίνων, cf. 249). Page (pp.7–8) argues that only wine can be drunk ἄκρητον, and that the poet forgets both that winegrapes grow in the land of the Cyclopes (110–11) and that Polyphemus himself drinks a domestic wine (357–58). He suggests that the phrase ἄκρητον μέθυ πίνων would be more appropriate. But, leaving aside the invention of an otherwise unknown phrase, this is to miss the effect of making the Cyclops more susceptible to drunkenness by portraying him, temporarily, as a milk drinker, and to insist on an un-Homeric consistency of detail.

After cleverly making Polyphemus drunk (362), Odysseus falsely identifies himself (366):

Οὔτις ἐμοί γ' ὄνομα, Οὔτιν δέ με κικλήσκουσι. . . .

This use of the name ‘Nobody’ does not occur in any other version of the folk-tale of the blinding of the giant, but is a unique variant of another common tale, in which a man outwits a demon and, having given his name as ‘Myself’, escapes when the demon tells his fellow demons, who come to his aid, “Myself did it.”¹⁵ Homer has adapted this story to his own narrative, and, in changing the false name from ‘Myself’ to ‘Nobody’, has once more linked Odysseus’ behavior in Book 9 to motifs present elsewhere in the poem.

Everyone appreciates the pun in the name Οὔτις, but most readers overlook the more extensive punning which appears in 403ff. This punning is largely based on the similarity between μή τις = οὔ τις and μῆτις = ‘intelligence’, ‘device’, ‘plan’.¹⁶ When the other Cyclopes come to Polyphemus’ cave, in response to his cries, and ask why he has shouted and awakened them (405–06),

ἦ μή τις σευ μῆλα βροτῶν ἀέκοντος ἐλαύνει;
ἦ μή τις εἴ αὐτὸν κτείνει δόλω ἢ βίηφιν;

he replies (408)

ὦ φίλοι, Οὔτις με κτείνει δόλω, οὐδὲ βίηφιν,

meaning that the man Outis is killing him by a trick, not by force.

¹⁵ Page, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.1) 5, 18–19 nn.6–8.

¹⁶ As far as I know, the punning on μή τις–μῆτις has been discussed in detail only by A. Podlecki, “Guest-gifts and Nobodies in *Odyssey* 9,” *Phoenix* 15 (1961) 125–33, esp. pp.130–31. Stanford, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.9) 361, and *Ambiguity in Greek Literature* (Oxford 1939) 105 notes the *paronomasia*.

But the others understand him to say οὐ τις, ‘nobody’, rather than Οὐτις, a man’s name, and say (410–11):

εἰ μὲν δὴ μή τις σε βιάζεται οἶον ἔοντα—
νοῦσόν γ’ οὐ πως ἔστι Διὸς μεγάλου ἀλέασθαι. . . .

They appear to tell him, “If indeed nobody is doing you violence . . .,” and Odysseus’ heart laughs,

ὡς ὄνομ’ ἐξαπάτησεν ἐμὸν καὶ μῆτις ἀμύμων,

“at how my name utterly deceived [Cyclops] and my blameless intelligence.” This use of the word μῆτις, ‘intelligence’, suggests that in 405–06 the other Cyclopes, without realizing it, are asking, “Is intelligence driving away your flocks, is intelligence killing you?” It also would mean that in 410–11, again without being conscious of what they say, they tell Polyphemus, “If intelligence is doing you violence, —well, it’s impossible to avoid a disease from great Zeus.”¹⁷

The amusing paradox, that the μῆτις of Odysseus, a mental quality, βιάζεται, ‘does violence to’ Polyphemus, the embodiment of wholly non-mental physical force, is explicitly linked to a central theme of the *Odyssey* as a whole by 412,

ἀλλὰ κύ γ’ εὐχεο πατρὶ Ποσειδάωνι ἀνακτι.

Throughout the poem, Poseidon, the sea, an overpowering, natural brute force, is the great enemy of πολύμητις Ὀδυσσεύς. Just as in Book 9 Poseidon’s son, Polyphemus, is defeated by μῆτις and can’t escape a disease from Zeus, so in the larger poem Poseidon is overcome by Odysseus, by the express will of Zeus and with the constant aid of Athene, who is both Zeus’ daughter and Odysseus’ patron goddess; for as she herself tells Odysseus (13.298–99),

. . . ἐγὼ δ’ ἐν πᾶσι θεοῖσι
μῆτι τε κλέομαι καὶ κέρδεσιν. . . .

It is clear how the trick with the name ‘Nobody’, a point in which the story of Polyphemus differs from the usual tale of the blinding of the

¹⁷ For a different theory, also based on a pun (on οὐ τις and ὠτίς), of how the trick with the name ‘Nobody’ is connected with a basic theme of the poem, see R. Carpenter, *Folk Tale, Fiction and Saga in the Homeric Epics* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1958) 139–41. Carpenter’s notion is that “Odysseus told Polyphemus his boyish nickname ‘Big-ears’, and the giants had only themselves to blame for their misinterpretation.” Carpenter’s interpretation does not take into account the punning on μή τις–μῆτις.

giant shepherd, is directly connected with a theme which is important throughout the *Odyssey*.¹⁸

5. Odysseus and his men are almost killed when Odysseus shouts out his real name, rather than when a magic ring, a gift of the giant shepherd, begins to shout 'Here I am'. Such an episode with a ring is the usual ending of the tale. The ring is given by the giant after the hero has escaped from the cave; as soon as the hero puts it on his finger, it begins to shout its location; the hero cannot remove it, and escapes the giant only by cutting off his finger (Page, p.9). As Page notes, such a magical talking ring would be quite out of keeping with the realistic narrative in Book 9 and with the tendency everywhere in Homer to play down or suppress the supernatural. In these respects, the ending of the story in Book 9 is much better suited to the *Odyssey* than the ending with the ring.

But the ending of the story of Odysseus and Polyphemus is connected with the rest of the poem in far more significant ways than the mere avoidance of the supernatural. Odysseus calls out to the Cyclops twice. The first time, before he has identified himself, he says (475ff) that evil (*κακὰ ἔργα*) overtook him (Polyphemus)

. . . ἐπεὶ ξείνους οὐχ ἄζεο σὼ ἐνὶ οἴκῳ
ἐσθόμεναι· τῷ σε Ζεὺς τίσατο καὶ θεοὶ ἄλλοι.

Now one of the principal themes of the *Odyssey* is that *ξείνοι* and *ικέται* should be received with hospitality and gifts, since, as Odysseus reminds Polyphemus (270–71),

Ζεὺς δ' ἐπιτιμήτωρ ἱκετάων τε ξείνων τε
ξείνιος, ὃς ξείνοισιν ἄμ' αἰδοίοισιν ὀπηδεῖ.

Zeus in the *Odyssey* represents moral right, and such hospitality is a mark of civilization and morality. Repeatedly, the characters whom Odysseus meets prosper or suffer according to the attitude with which

¹⁸ Cf. Segal, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.6) 34. Porphyry, *De antro nymphaeum* 35, finds it significant that the harbor where the cave of the nymphs is located, and where the Phaeacians land Odysseus, is *Φόρκυος* . . . *Λιμὴν* (13.96). Phorcys is the grandfather of the Cyclops (1.71–72) and a god of the sea. For Porphyry, the sea represents matter (*ἡ ὑλικὴ σύστασις*), and Odysseus, symbolizing the spirit moving through becoming to being, is reminded by the name of the harbor that he is not yet free from the *μῆνις ἀλίων καὶ ὕλικῶν θεῶν*, which he still must expiate. According to Porphyry, Odysseus will be *παντελῶς ἔξαλος* . . . *καὶ ἄπειρος θαλασσίων καὶ ἐνύλων ἔργων* only when he carries out Teiresias' instructions (11.121ff) and encounters *τῆν τῶν ἐναλίων ὀργάνων καὶ ἔργων παντελεῖ ἀπειρίαν*.

they receive him and the hospitality they offer.¹⁹ Also, Odysseus' statement that Polyphemus was blinded *because* (ἐπεὶ) he did not dread to eat his guests, sets the Cyclops in a position analogous to that of the Suitors and the Companions, of Aigisthos and even of the Phaeacians:

αὐτῶν γὰρ φετέρησιν ἀτασθαλίησιν ὄλοντο (1.7).

This is a great moral theme of the poem, and the abuse of ξενίη, whether by guest or host, is its prime instance. In the case of Polyphemus, the abuse is particularly gross, for he not only eats his guests but he mocks them, ironically telling Odysseus that his ξεινήμιον will be to be eaten last (367–68).

The other principal way in which the end of the story is thematically connected with the entire poem has been stated clearly by G. E. Dimock Jr in his essay on "The Name of Odysseus."²⁰ Dimock has understood that "In a way, the whole problem of the *Odyssey* is for Odysseus to establish his identity," and he has found the constant establishment and re-establishment of this identity in the pain and trouble Odysseus causes to others and to himself.²¹ The second time Odysseus taunts Polyphemus (502–05), he identifies himself by name, father, homeland and, in one of his most destructive aspects, as city-sacker. This boast is possible for Odysseus because of his deed of blinding, and both deed and boast are Odysseus' responses to the need to establish his identity. Before the act he was Οὔτις—οὐ τις, Nobody; afterwards he is Odysseus, the inflicter of pain.²² The desire to show this process of self-identification was perhaps Homer's chief reason both for the substitution of Odysseus' boasts and taunts for the magic ring and for grafting the folk-tale about the outwitting of the demon onto the tale of the escape from the giant shepherd, with the unique and basic change from the name 'Myself' to the name 'Nobody'.

Dimock has adduced further textual evidence concerning Odysseus as inflicter of pain. After he has been blinded, Cyclops is described

¹⁹ καὶ νόον ἔγνω, 1.3, refers to the attitudes of those whom Odysseus met—whether each was ἐνφρών or κακαφρών, friendly or hostile. Cf. 8.559. See Stanford, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.9) 207 *ad loc.*

²⁰ Dimock, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.6).

²¹ *ibid.* p.54 and *passim*.

²² *ibid.* p.58.

(415) as *ὠδίνων ὀδύνησι*, travailing in pains. Dimock (p.59) points out that *ὠδίνω* means basically 'to be in labor of childbirth' (cf. *Iliad* 11.269ff) and says that Odysseus' establishing his identity is metaphorically expressed in his adventure with Polyphemus as his being born, "casting [his] name in the teeth of a hostile universe." Such an interpretation is supported by the fact that the very words *ὠδίνων ὀδύνησι* suggest the name *Ὀδυσσεύς*, especially in the punning context where they occur, one line after the play on the words *οὐ τις-Οὐ τις* and *μή τις-μη τις*. It is strengthened, too, by the punning on the name *Ὀδυσεύς* and the verb *ὀδύσασθαι* at 1.60–62 and 19.407–09. (Perhaps a pun is to be heard, too, in 5.340.)²³ Dimock (p.59) connects Polyphemus' cave with the cave of Eileithuia, the goddess of childbirth, mentioned in 19.188; it is easy to think of it as a "womb/tomb symbol,"²⁴ to be in which is to be unborn, functionally dead, Nobody, but to emerge from which makes one alive, someone, in particular a giver of pain to the possessor of the womb. When Odysseus shouts his name to Polyphemus, he is asserting his existence as Odysseus. This would have been impossible if Homer had followed the usual ending of the story, with its magic ring. Once again it is clear that the poet departs from his source, the standard folk-tale, in such a way as to make the story of Odysseus and Polyphemus representative of a central problem and theme of the entire *Odyssey*.

The analysis of the Homeric poems is a well known, traditional part of Homeric scholarship. As I have tried to show in the case of the story of Odysseus and Polyphemus, such analysis, when it treats of a part of the *Odyssey* independently from the rest of the poem, is incomplete, until the details which it reveals are understood in the light of the major themes and motifs of the entire work.²⁵

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March, 1970

²³ On the significance of the punning on *Ὀδυσεύς-ὀδύσασθαι*, see Dimock, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.6) 54–55. Carpenter, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.17) 112–32, especially p.131, connects the name Odysseus, "originally something like Olixes or Olykios," with Salmoxis, and suggests that the cult of the sleeping bear "supplies thematic material . . . for the *Odyssey*" (p.132). Punning, especially on proper names, is a significant stylistic trait of the *Odyssey*. Cf. Porter, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.6) 297.

²⁴ I borrow the expression "womb/tomb symbol" from Porter, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.6) 6.

²⁵ Acknowledgment: This work was supported by a grant (no. 255) from the Columbia University Council for Research in the Humanities.