

**'The Cyclops story in the *Odyssey* is an exploration of what it means to be civilised.'**

**Discuss.**

Throughout Book IX of the *Odyssey*, Homer consistently presents the reader with unflattering and dogmatic descriptions of Polyphemus, the Cyclops. In discussing the concept of whether this episode allows us to more clearly define what it is to be civilised, we must therefore closely examine the more subtle elements to the character and lifestyle of Polyphemus. We cannot simply take the 'grim and grisly monster,'<sup>1</sup> as Griffin sums up, at face value, which is what phrases such as ἄγριον, οὔτε δίκας ἐὺ εἰδότα οὔτε θέμιστας,<sup>2</sup> used in description of Polyphemus, would have us believe. This essay will seek to explore the social structure and race of the Cyclopes as a whole, as well as both the customs and character of Polyphemus himself, and the actions of Odysseus and his companions, before coming to a conclusion as to whether this episode in Homer's *Odyssey* really does offer an adequate exploration as to what it means to be civilised.

First of all, let us consider what it was to be civilised in the ancient world which the Cyclopes inhabited. Several critics have argued that there are key elements that any race must possess in order to be described as a civilisation. Government, even in its most rudimentary form as a type of assembly or council, social structure, and technical skill are among the most frequently mentioned.<sup>3</sup> Feldman refers to the scene at the start of Homer's *Iliad*, describing it as, 'Greek government as Homer revered and loved it.'<sup>4</sup> He then goes on to explain this concept of government through the existence of an assembly organised by the Greeks themselves, as well as of some form of social structure through the presence of a commander, Agamemnon.<sup>5</sup> Monro, in reference to an early Cretan civilisation, claims that it possessed, '...a common language of government and literature,'<sup>6</sup> implying both structure and literary skill, while Abbott explains that an ancient race of Greeks who lived in settlements and kept animals were also, '...able to manufacture vases of elegant shape and good workmanship.'<sup>7</sup> It seems, therefore, that these ideas were key in defining what made up a civilisation in early Homeric Greece. It is yet to be determined, however, whether the Cyclopes

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<sup>1</sup> Griffin A.H.F. (1983) 'Unrequited Love: Polyphemus and Galatea in Ovid's 'Metamorphoses', *G&R*, 30.2, 190

<sup>2</sup> Homer, *Odyssey*, 9.215.

<sup>3</sup> Feldman A.B. (1952) 'Homer and Democracy', *CJ*, 47.8, 337 ; Monro D.B. (1905) 'The Place and Time of Homer', *The Classical Review*, 19.5, 239 ; Lubbock J. (1868) 'On the Origin of Civilisation and the Primitive Condition of Man', *Transactions of the Ethnological Society of London*, 6, 328 ; Whately R. (2012) *Introductory Lectures On Political Economy*, Dublin, Ulan Press, 68 / Abbot E. (1886) 'The Earliest Inhabitants of Greece', *The English Historical Review*, 1.3, 418 & 26.

<sup>4</sup> Feldman, 337.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 337.

<sup>6</sup> Monro, 239.

<sup>7</sup> Abbott, 418.

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themselves possessed any of these, and thus whether they qualify as a civilised race. Since the Cyclops episode in the *Odyssey* focuses around the individual Polyphemus, it is he who we must now examine in greater depth as our archetype of the Cyclopean race.

Some critics have agreed upon the fact that the Polyphemus presented by Homer in the *Odyssey* is a fairly unpleasant character. Glenn writes that Homer describes him as, '...a fiendish, brutal ogre',<sup>8</sup> while Hernandez argues that he is portrayed as, '...a savage monster'<sup>9</sup> and Griffin concludes that he is, '...an horrific character.'<sup>10</sup> There are definitely elements within Book IX that support these claims, and which are surely designed to disgust the reader. Polyphemus' sickening and soporific belching is mentioned in both the *Odyssey*<sup>11</sup> and Virgil's *Aeneid*,<sup>12</sup> where the revolting nature of the situation is highlighted by Virgil's use of the word *saniem*. This word is elsewhere used in descriptions of the grotesque, such as in Lucan's description of the fates of Cato's soldiers when faced with the snakes in the Libyan desert in his *Bellum Civile*<sup>13</sup>, a scene that, although having several functions, is also likely to have been written to conform to the bloodthirsty tastes of the time.<sup>14</sup> Thus Virgil's use of *saniem* also heightens the grisly image of Polyphemus presented to the reader. Seneca also uses the idea of belching to highlight the perverted satisfaction of Thyestes once he has eaten his own sons in perhaps his greatest tragedy, *Thyestes*.<sup>15</sup> Not only does this action of Polyphemus' thus reinforce his representation as a monstrous character, therefore, but Mader describes the notion of belching in ancient society as, '...a noisy obligato in such scenes of dissolute revelry.'<sup>16</sup> Thus do we also get the impression of an uncivilised Polyphemus, who perhaps does not know how to behave in civilised society. The Cyclops' fearsome strength and huge size are also frequently mentioned by Odysseus as he narrates the episode to the Phaeacians<sup>17</sup>, describing him as δεισάντων φθόγγον τε βαρὺν αὐτόν τε

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<sup>8</sup> Glenn J. (1972) 'Virgil's Polyphemus', *G&R*, 19.1, 59.

<sup>9</sup> Hernandez P.N. (2000) 'Back in the Cave of the Cyclops', *AJP*, 121.3, 348.

<sup>10</sup> Griffin, 191.

<sup>11</sup> Homer, 9.374.

<sup>12</sup> Virgil, *Aeneid*, 3.632-3.

<sup>13</sup> Lucan, *Bellum Civile*, 9.770, 783, 795.

<sup>14</sup> For examples of viciousness and brutality, often performed in the arena for the pleasure of the people of Rome, carried out in the Neronian era, see Tacitus, *Annales*, 15.44, Cassius Dio, *Historiae Romanae*, 62.12-14, and Clement I (2007) 'First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians' in: *Apostolic Fathers*, London, Baker Academic, M.W. Holmes (ed.), 6.2. This is too enormous a subject to be suitably dealt with here, but it is important to take note of, particularly in Lucan's copious use of the word *saniem*.

<sup>15</sup> Seneca, *Thyestes*, 911.

<sup>16</sup> Mader G. (2003) 'Thyestes' Belch (Seneca, Thy. 911-2)' *CQ*, 53.2, 635.

<sup>17</sup> There lies a key issue within this point; Odysseus' unreliability as a narrator. This subject has been widely discussed throughout modern scholarship, even to the point of claiming that Odysseus invented the whole scenario. Yet this essay is primarily concerned with the presentation of the Cyclopes by Homer through Odysseus as it is given to the reader, and so this topic cannot be reasonably broached here. For more information, see Beck D. (2005) 'Odysseus: Narrator, Storyteller, Poet?', *Classical Philology*, 100.3, 213-27 ; Richardson S. (2006) 'The Devious Narrator of the *Odyssey*', *CJ*, 101.4, 337-59 ; de Jong I.J.F. (2006) 'The

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πέλωρον<sup>18</sup>. The great Polyphemus is also able to lift a huge boulder and place it over the door, described as so big that not even ten wagons could lever it off the ground,<sup>19</sup> as well as being enormous enough to smash two of Odysseus' men together just as if they were σκύλακας<sup>20</sup>. This word is particularly poignant, since through employing the concept of a creature as stereotypically gentle and pathetic as a young puppy, it epitomises the helplessness of Odysseus' men in the face of such brute strength. Hesiod uses the same word to describe one such noise made by the many heads of Typhoeus from Tartarus,<sup>21</sup> before going on to claim that such a noise was θαύματ' ἀκοῦσαι.<sup>22</sup> The emphasis here is on wonder and awe though, and not on a fear of such noises. Through this description of Odysseus and his men, therefore, it seems hard to imagine that Polyphemus is frightened, and reacts as he does because of that. It is more probable that he reacts in as violent a manner as he does simply because he is unaware of the concept of *xenia*, and places no importance on it. Homer's use of the word σκύλακας certainly implies that the Greeks are at that moment no threat to the huge Cyclops. In this way, then, does Homer present Polyphemus as a noisy and degenerate creature, which, I would argue, if not quite setting him up as the concrete antithesis of what it means to be civilised, places him firmly *within* the realm of the uncivilised.

We must also consider the race of the Cyclopes as a whole, however. I have already argued that some form of political or social structure must be in place in order for a people to qualify as civilised. Homer mentions this theme, and specifically the Cyclopes' notion of it, just prior to Odysseus' landing on their island. He writes, in reference to the Cyclopes; τοῖσιν δ' οὔτ' ἀγοραὶ βουληφόροι οὔτε θέμιστες,<sup>23</sup> before going on to say that θεμιστεύει δὲ ἕκαστος παίδων ἢ δ' ἀλόχων.<sup>24</sup> Thus it seems that the Cyclopes seem to live independently from one another,<sup>25</sup> and have very little, or no, organised social structure. How, therefore, can they claim to be a civilised race? Hernandez describes them as, '...a primitive society of beings who are neither exactly human nor yet inhuman.'<sup>26</sup> Polyphemus, however, seems himself to be an anomaly within his own race, since he lives apart from the other Cyclopes and shepherds his flocks

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Homeric Narrator And His Own Kleos', *Mnemosyne* 4, 59.2, 188-207 ; Rainer F. (1991) 'The Hybris of Odysseus', *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 111, 16-28 ; Scully S. (1987) 'Doubling in the Tale of Odysseus', *The Classical World*, 80.6, 401-17.

<sup>18</sup> Homer, 9.257.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 9.241-2.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 9.289.

<sup>21</sup> Hesiod, *Theogony*, 834.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 834.

<sup>23</sup> Homer, 9.112.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 9.114-5.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 9.113-4.

<sup>26</sup> Hernandez, 353.

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separately.<sup>27</sup> In fact, his way of living is described as **ἄθεμίστια**<sup>28</sup>, a word which the Greek-English lexicon, compiled by Liddell and Scott, defines as, 'lawless, godless'.<sup>29</sup> Homer uses the same word in Odysseus' speech while disguised as a beggar to the suitors in Book XVIII of his *Odyssey*. Here Odysseus relates the word to his previous fictional life of wickedness, involving looting, violence, and crime.<sup>30</sup> Such activities can hardly be regarded as civilised. Yet despite the fact that Polyphemus is himself perhaps an irregularity among his people, it cannot be claimed, as I have argued, that the Cyclopes themselves represent the epitome of civilisation. It would seem, therefore, that Polyphemus stands as an even more barbaric specimen of his people. Lubbock writes that, '...at some times for centuries some races have been stationary [in progressing towards a state of civilisation], or even have retrograded.'<sup>31</sup> It could be argued that Polyphemus represents a more socially backward version of his own people - he lives alone, he has no family - indeed, the closest thing that could be called his family are his sheep, as his **κριὲ πέπτον**<sup>32</sup> in address to his most prized ram shows - and he appears to be ignorant of the rules of *xenia*, an important theme which I shall discuss later on.

Although I have outlined the ways in which the Cyclopes are presented as uncivilised, it is certainly the case that there are elements in Book IX which fight for their status as a civilised race. For a start, Polyphemus has a fire in his cave.<sup>33</sup> In the ancient Greek myth of Prometheus, fire represents the very foundation of civilisation for men, as outlined by *Kratos* in the opening lines of Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*; **τὸ σὸν γὰρ ἄνθος, παντέχνου πυρὸς σέλας, θνητοῖσι κλέψας ὤπασεν**.<sup>34</sup> Of particular note here is the phrase **παντέχνου πυρὸς σέλας**. Prometheus goes on to claim that as a result of the gift of fire **πολλὰς ἐκμαθήσονται τέχνας**.<sup>35</sup> Plato also writes a similar thing in his *Protagoras*, writing that art and skill could not be acquired without fire, **ἀμήχανον γὰρ ἦν ἄνευ πυρὸς αὐτὴν κτητὴν τῷ ἢ χρησίμῳ γενέσθαι**.<sup>36</sup> Thus it seems clear that fire was seen as representing the source of all civilisation and technical skill for men, and thus the fact that it is present in Polyphemus' cave is surely an important step on the Cyclopes' path towards civilisation. Even though Scott argues that the fire, '...has little or no significance in

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<sup>27</sup> Homer, 9.187-9.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 9.189.

<sup>29</sup> Liddell H.G. & Scott R. (1996) *A Greek - English Lexicon*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 31.

<sup>30</sup> Homer, 18.139.

<sup>31</sup> Lubbock, 328.

<sup>32</sup> Homer, 9.447.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 9.328, 378-9 et al.

<sup>34</sup> Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*, 7-8.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 256.

<sup>36</sup> Plato, *Protagoras*, 321d.

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the economy of the *Odyssey*,<sup>37</sup> what is important is that it is *there*. Its existence is more meaningful than its function, in terms of the Cyclopes' status as a civilised race.

Whately, in his *Political Economy*, writes that, 'The ancient Germans who cultivated corn...who not only had numerous herds of cattle, but employed the labour of brutes...these cannot with propriety be reckoned savages.'<sup>38</sup> The Cyclopes themselves seem to fulfill only one of these conditions, however. Homer mentions that they do not actually have to till and cultivate crops, but that, **τά γ' ἄσπαρτα καὶ ἀνήροτα πάντα φύονται**.<sup>39</sup> Likewise, they do not appear to keep slaves or employ others. They do, however, have a great affinity for keeping livestock. As has already been argued, Polyphemus appears to be especially devoted to his flocks. In fact the first description given to the reader is one of his cave surrounded by sheep and goats,<sup>40</sup> moments after Odysseus and his comrades discern the flocks of the other Cyclopes from their ships.<sup>41</sup> What is more, Polyphemus actually divides up his flocks into age and species, showing a remarkable degree of organisation and structure. Homer writes that they were **διακεκρίμενοι δὲ ἕκασται ἔρχατο**.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, Polyphemus makes cheese; **ταρσοὶ μὲν τυρῶν βρῖθον**.<sup>43</sup> These two activities together seem to jar with the concept of the Cyclops as, '...a fiendish, brutal ogre...'<sup>44</sup> and instead give the impression of a domesticated and pastoral character who is at home in his cave and among his sheep.<sup>45</sup> Therefore perhaps it is a little unfair to reduce Polyphemus down to a wild and barbaric monster, since it is clear that he is not only reasonably intelligent, but also fairly domesticated. There is one point, however, that clashes significantly with this idea; Polyphemus does not cook his food. Instead, he simply eats it raw, and

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<sup>37</sup> Scott J.A. (1924) 'Why Did the Cyclops Build a Fire?', *CJ* 19.4, 238.

<sup>38</sup> Whately, 68.

<sup>39</sup> Homer, 9.109.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.183-4.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.166-7.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.220-1.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.219.

<sup>44</sup> Glenn, 59.

<sup>45</sup> Schein has suggested that the cave of Polyphemus is representative of a mother's womb (Schein S.L. (1996) *Reading the Odyssey: Selected Interpretive Essays*, Princeton, PUP, 25.), and thus symbolises safety and familiarity. While I cannot give this convincing argument the attention it deserves here, it is important to note that there is a definite attachment of Polyphemus to what he sees as his own. In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, it is when Polyphemus notices the object of his affections, the nymph Galatea, locked in the embrace of Acis behind a rock, that he grows angry. In Virgil's *Aeneid*, it is when the blinded Polyphemus senses Aeneas and his companions on his island that he loses his temper. Just so in the *Odyssey* is the Cyclops at home in his cave. He grows angry when Odysseus and his comrades violate it, and is at his most docile when unaware of their presence (note **κρίε πέτρον** in 9.447 while Odysseus and his men are hidden under the sheep). Thus, in determining whether the actions of Polyphemus are an exploration of what it means to be civilised, it is important to consider that Odysseus himself is also at fault for violating what is perhaps one of the most valuable possessions the Cyclops owns - his cave. Therefore his arguably uncivilised actions may not be entirely his own fault, but rather the unwitting punishment that Odysseus and his companions have brought upon themselves for committing a very valid crime.

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he eats *everything*.<sup>46</sup> In fact, he is compared by Homer to a mountain lion; **τούς δὲ διὰ μελεῖστί ταμῶν ὠπλίσσατο δόρπον / ἦσθιε δ' ὡς τε λέων ὀρεσίτροφος, οὐδ' ἀπέλειπεν.**<sup>47</sup> Yet this comparison may simply serve to highlight the strength of the Cyclops, rather than show how barbaric he is. Homer uses the same phrase **λέων ὀρεσίτροφος**, in his *Iliad* to describe the fearsome advance of the Trojan Sarpedon against the Greeks.<sup>48</sup> The emphasis here is on the brute strength and power of the warrior, not on the fact that he is an uncivilised savage, which he clearly cannot be since he lives in the city of Troy, an establishment which most certainly possesses all the attributes required to define a civilisation that I have previously outlined. Therefore the image of the mountain lion may also serve to rather highlight the sheer brawn of Polyphemus over his barbarity. Still, however, there exists the fact that he gorges himself on the men of Odysseus in a most uncivilised manner, and that he does not prepare nor cook his impromptu meal.

There is one other important factor that we must consider in exploring what the Cyclops episode in Book IX has to say about the idea of being civilised, and that is the triumph of Odysseus and his men over Polyphemus. Perhaps the most important factor in this act is the olive-wood stake that Odysseus uses to blind the great creature.<sup>49</sup> The olive tree had been a tree of great significance to Athens and the Greeks since the first foundation myths of the capital, when Athena reportedly won a contest for the city through her gift of an olive tree to the Greeks.<sup>50</sup> This is also attested by Pausanias, many centuries later; **περὶ δὲ τῆς ἐλαίας οὐδὲν ἔχουσιν ἄλλο εἰπεῖν ἢ τῇ θεῷ μαρτύριον γενέσθαι τοῦτο ἐς τὸν ἀγῶνα τὸν ἐπὶ τῇ χώρᾳ.**<sup>51</sup> Herodotus also attributes the olive tree to Greece in particular when he claims that; **λέγεται δὲ καὶ ὡς ἐλαῖαι ἦσαν ἄλλοθι γῆς οὐδαμοῦ κατὰ χρόνον ἐκεῖνον ἢ ἐν Ἀθήνησι.**<sup>52</sup> Thus one could read the blinding of Polyphemus by Odysseus with an olive-wood stake as a triumph of the Athenian *polis* over the uncivilised, rural brute of the cave. The tree which represents Athens, and which the entire city is built upon, is the one used to conquer an arguably uncivilised beast. The symbolism is unmistakable. Blanchard West adds a convincing new dimension to this argument, claiming that although Odysseus is notably associated with the bow as a weapon, '...instead raw wood is a repeated element...'<sup>53</sup> and Cook succinctly sums up the significance of the olive in Greek mythology, writing that, '...the olive tree is a developed symbol of

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<sup>46</sup> Homer, 9.287-93.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 9.291-2.

<sup>48</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, 12.299.

<sup>49</sup> Homer, 9.319-20, 378-9, 382, 394.

<sup>50</sup> Hyginus, *Fabulae*, 164.

<sup>51</sup> Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, 1.27.2.

<sup>52</sup> Herodotus, 5.82.

<sup>53</sup> Blanchard West E. (2005/6) 'An Indic Reflex of the Homeric Cyclopeia', *CJ*, 101.2, 2005/6, 139.

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agriculture, technology, communal life and social stability,<sup>54</sup> all of which are elements important for a civilised society. Added to this is the simple fact that Odysseus leads a group of his men in a co-ordinated and organised assault upon the eye of the Cyclops.<sup>55</sup> This entire act, in almost every aspect of its accomplishing, represents the triumph of civilised structure over a creature who, in several aspects of his character, exemplifies qualities that civilisation most certainly ought not to champion.

One final element to this scene that must be considered is Homer's use of two separate, yet alike, similes to symbolise the blinding of Polyphemus. First of all, the poet compares the co-ordinated efforts of Odysseus and his comrades to labourers boring a hole in a plank of timber while building a ship.<sup>56</sup> Although this simile quite distinctly represents technical prowess and skill, it is particularly significant when read in conjunction with a previous statement by Homer regarding the lack of nautical skill among the Cyclopes. The poet writes; οὐ γὰρ Κυκλώπεσσι νέες πάρα μιλτοπάρηι,<sup>57</sup> before going on to claim that they do not even have ἄνδρες νηῶν ἐνι τέκτονες<sup>58</sup>. It almost seems, therefore, that the simile of the ship labourers later used by Homer is slightly derisive, since the Cyclopes are nowhere near developed enough to possess such skills. Cook's argument highlights this idea, since he claims that the mast of a ship, to which the olive-wood stake is compared, represents, '...one of the highest technological achievements of ancient man.'<sup>59</sup> It also perhaps shows how inferior Polyphemus is to Odysseus and his men, an idea which the hero himself rather arrogantly admits to.<sup>60</sup> Homer uses an simile in which the Cyclopes have no experience whatsoever in describing the triumph of Odysseus, and it is a triumph which tramples on the primitive way of living of the Cyclopes.

The second simile which Homer employs is one which compares the hissing of the heated olive stake in Polyphemus' eye to the hissing of hot metal plunged in cold water by a blacksmith.<sup>61</sup> Although quite clearly representing another type of technical skill, that of metalwork, and thus lending even greater credence to the previous simile and argument, this example is of particular note because it highlights the fact that, unlike other versions of the Cyclops myth, Odysseus uses a wooden stake to blind his captor, rather than a

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<sup>54</sup> Cook E.F. (2006) *The 'Odyssey' in Athens: Myths of Cultural Origins (Myth and Poetics)*, USA (NY), CUP, 107.

<sup>55</sup> Homer, 9.334-5, 382-4.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 9.384-6.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 9.125.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 9.126.

<sup>59</sup> Cook, 108.

<sup>60</sup> Homer, 9.414.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 9.391-3.



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metal spit.<sup>62</sup> As both Burgess and Russo explain, however, the most common form of weapon used in blinding the ogre of the typical myth is indeed a metal spit, with Burgess writing that it is often one previously, '...used to roast companions,'<sup>63</sup> and Russo claiming that, 'In many traditional versions the giant is blinded with a metal roasting spit...rather than the stake of olive wood...'<sup>64</sup> Although this essay could not possibly hope to analyse the 221 versions of the Cyclops myth compiled by Hackman in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>65</sup> in the version of the 'blinded ogre' myth, as told in the stories of Sinbad the Sailor, Sinbad's company is held captive by a cannibal ogre, '...from whose castle they manage to escape only by blinding him with a red-hot spit.'<sup>66</sup> Therefore perhaps the simile of the metalworker and the presence of iron implements in the text is mainly employed to draw attention to the importance of the fact that the Cyclops is *not* blinded with a metal tool, but with an olive-wood stake, the significance of which I have already proven.<sup>67</sup> Nevertheless, the simile still stands, just as the shipbuilding simile before it, as an example of technical skill and civilisation over the fearsome Cyclops.

Hernandez writes that, '...the Cyclopes seem wholly uncivilised...above all, they eat their guests.'<sup>68</sup> While I have already considered the state of civilisation that the Cyclopes exist in, in reference to their social structure, technical skill and propriety, it is also important to take into account their attitude towards guests.

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<sup>62</sup> The Cyclops myth is one which has been repeatedly told, albeit in many different variations, throughout millennia. It has clear links to an ancient Sanskrit epic poem, the *Mahabharata*, as well as the tales of Sinbad the Sailor, and the story of Dolopathos the Thief. Although this essay cannot adequately explore all these versions, it is important to note that Homer more than likely did not invent the episode. For more detail on this subject, see Blanchard West E. (2005/6) ; Calame C. (1995) *The Craft of Poetic Speech in Ancient Greece (Myth and Poetics)*, USA (NY), CUP, 139-44 ; Hackman O. (1904) *Die Polyphemsage in der Volksüberlieferung*, USA (MA), HUP.

<sup>63</sup> Burgess J.S. (2003) *The Tradition of the Trojan War in Homer and the Epic Cycle*, USA (MD), JHUP, 97.

<sup>64</sup> Russo R. (2005) 'The Heart of Steel: A Metallurgical Interpretation of Iron in Homer', *Bulletin for the History of Chemistry*, 30.1, 29.

<sup>65</sup> Hackman O. (1904) *Die Polyphemsage in der Volksüberlieferung*, USA (MA), HUP.

<sup>66</sup> Haase D. (2007) *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of Folktales and Fairy Tales*, USA (CT), Greenwood Press, 868.

<sup>67</sup> It is also important to consider the presentation of the race of the Cyclopes as a whole in Virgil's *Aeneid*, excluding the individual presentation of Polyphemus himself in Book III. Described by the poet as the smiths of Hephaestus, they seem to be adept at metalworking in their forges under Mt. Etna; *ferrum exercebant vasto Cyclopes in antro* (8.424). In fact, they are the very smiths of the gods themselves, with some crafting the thunderbolts of Jupiter (8.426-8), and others working for Mars (8.433-4), as well as the fact that they are called upon to assist in the production of Venus' shield for Aeneas himself (8.439-43). Whether these creatures are a different strain of the Cyclopean race, or whether it is because this scene is set centuries after the adventures of Odysseus is not made explicitly clear, but what is important is that the race of the Cyclopes have the *potential* to learn such skills. Thus it could be argued that the Cyclopes which Odysseus encounters, of which he meets arguably the most uncivilised individual of them all, as I have already argued, are merely a less progressed version of their Virgilian counterparts. This would agree with Lubbock's claim that, '...our history has on the whole been a steady progress towards civilisation...' (Lubbock, 328). They may be expert blacksmiths and metalworkers, and thus more civilised, by the age of the *Aeneid*, but during the Homeric period they certainly weren't, and this is the race which Odysseus encounters.

<sup>68</sup> Hernandez, 346.



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The theme of *xenia* and Polyphemus' consideration of it is one that has been discussed widely by scholars.<sup>69</sup> It is true that despite Odysseus' pleas for welcome and acceptance, Polyphemus merely responds by devouring several of his comrades,<sup>70</sup> and in civilised society it is surely the case that this treatment of guests would be an obvious and violent breach of the concept of *xenia*, yet I would argue that Polyphemus does not live in civilised society. As Homer makes clear, the Cyclopes lack social structure, technical skill and a system of law,<sup>71</sup> and Polyphemus himself lives even more detached, detached from his own detached race.<sup>72</sup> Hopkinson suggests that, '...Polyphemus' 'entertainment' of Odysseus and his men is the opposite of what is expected in civilised society.'<sup>73</sup> Yet I do not believe that the society of the Cyclopes *is* a civilised one, but rather a lawless and unruly society, in which Polyphemus, himself an outcast, takes solace only in his sheep and his pastoral pursuits and, with his seemingly minimal contact with the outside world, thus has absolutely no idea how to react when the sanctuary of his cave is invaded by strangers from a foreign land. This does not specifically excuse his violent behaviour towards Odysseus and his companions, but it at least accounts for it. Brown succinctly writes that, 'The rules of hospitality do not apply to the Cyclopes; in fact these beings lack the social structure on which the whole of *xenia* depends.'<sup>74</sup> This is precisely the point. The Cyclopes are an uncivilised race, each belonging to their own cave and their own family, as Homer clearly states; οὐδ' ἀλλήλων ἀλέγουσιν,<sup>75</sup> and lacking the majority of those qualities outlined by Lubbock, Whately, Monro, Feldman, and Abbot as defining what counts as civilised and what does not count. With this in mind, Polyphemus cannot be reasonably expected to conform to social customs of which he has no previous knowledge, nor are exhibited by his own people, of whom he has very little social interaction with anyway. The Cyclops episode within Homer's *Odyssey* is indeed an exploration of what it is to be civilised, but in a strangely peculiar way. The story explores a race which simply cannot be rationally called civilised, nor to which the concept of civilisation can even relate to, before gleefully revelling in the vanquishing of said race by another, separate race, who, on the other hand, represent everything that civilisation is, using a weapon which in its paradoxically primitive state stands as a distilled paradigm of Greek civilisation itself.

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<sup>69</sup> Hernandez, 345-8 ; Brown C.G. (1996) 'In the Cyclops' Cave: Revenge and Justice in *Odyssey* 9', *Mnemosyne* 4, 49.1, 23-5 ; Hopkinson N. (2000) *Ovid: Metamorphoses, Book XIII*, Cambridge (UK), CUP, 213 ; Griffin, 190-1.

<sup>70</sup> Homer, 9.267-71, 287-90.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 9.107-15.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 9.187-9.

<sup>73</sup> Hopkinson, 213.

<sup>74</sup> Brown, 23.

<sup>75</sup> Homer, 9.115.

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