

## MEDON MEETS A CYCLOPS? *ODYSSEY* 22.310–80\*

ὥς φάτο, τοῦ δ' ἤκουσε Μέδων πεπνυμένα εἰδώς·  
πεπτηῶς γὰρ ἔκειτο ὑπὸ θρόνον, ἀμφὶ δὲ δέρμα  
ἔστο βοῶς νεόδαρτον, ἀλύσκων κῆρα μέλαιναν.

So [Telemachus] spoke, and wise Medon heard him; for he had crouched down and was lying under a chair, and had wrapped around himself the newly flayed skin of an ox, avoiding grim death. (*Od.* 22.361–3)

Immediately following the death of the suitors, near the end of *Odyssey* 22, we witness three scenes of supplication in quick succession. The first and unsuccessful suppliant is Leodes, the only suitor to survive, albeit briefly, the *Mnesterophonia*. The second and third suppliants, respectively, are the bard Phemius and the herald Medon. Leodes pleads directly with Odysseus for his life, citing his previous conduct, that he had said or done no wrong to the women of the household. He also claims that he had actually attempted to keep the suitors' bad behaviour in check, an assertion corroborated by the narrator's own words (21.146–67). Odysseus rejects Leodes' plea and decapitates the prophet, putting a sudden end to his supplication (22.310–29).<sup>1</sup> After this failed supplication, Phemius nervously considers either seeking refuge at the altar of Zeus Herkeios, located in Odysseus' courtyard, or directly supplicating Odysseus. He chooses the latter and also appeals to Telemachus as witness that he sang for the suitors only under compulsion (330–53). Telemachus intervenes and Medon, who overhears Telemachus' plea for mercy on behalf of Phemius and Medon, suddenly jumps up, throws off the ox hide under which he has escaped notice, grasps Telemachus by the knees, and asks the young man to vouch for and save him from Odysseus too (354–77).

These three scenes of supplication, moving as they do from hostility, to seriousness, to humour, certainly take us, in an almost step-by-step fashion, from violence to levity. Opinion among commentators, in fact, is nearly universal that this discovery of Medon

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<sup>1</sup> For a thorough discussion of supplication and a bibliography of previous scholarship, see F.S. Naiden, *Ancient Supplication* (Oxford, 2006); for these three supplications: pp. 3–4 and 11. See also M. Dreher, 'Die Hikesie-Szene der Odyssee und der Ursprung des Asylgedankens', in A. Luther (ed.), *Geschichte und Fiktion in der homerischen Odyssee* (Munich, 2006), 61–75, at 55–6; K. Crotty, *The Poetics of Supplication: Homer's Iliad and Odyssey* (Ithaca, NY and London, 1994), 121–9 and 151–6; V. Pedrick, 'Supplication in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*', *TAPhA* 112 (1982), 125–40, at 133–4; J. Gould, 'Hiketeia', *JHS* 93 (1973), 74–103, at 80–1.

under an ox hide is intended to evoke humour and provide relief from the high tension and drama of the *Mnesteroiphonia*.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, Odysseus himself genuinely smiles for the first time in the poem when Medon hastily throws off the newly flayed skin and grasps Telemachus by the knees in supplication (22.371).<sup>3</sup> This transitional scene, however, accomplishes more than simply lending humour and providing respite to the audience at a crucial point in the narrative. This deeper significance derives from an earlier incident, the escape of Odysseus and his men from the Cyclops. Although some have noted that the herald's method of concealment hearkens back to the seals' skins under which Menelaus and his men hide in order to ambush Proteus (4.436–40),<sup>4</sup> the larger context suggests that Medon's escape is an allusion to Odysseus' own and more recently narrated escape from the cave of the Cyclops.<sup>5</sup> This allusion is, in fact, part of a much larger web of allusions to the *Cyclopeia* on Ithaca, which ultimately point to a central issue of the *Odyssey*: the problem of the reintegration of Odysseus into the post-heroic world of Ithaca.

There are several factors that favour such a reading of Medon's method of escape. First are the numerous references to the *Cyclopeia* in the Ithacan sequence. The earliest is in Book 13. When Odysseus awakes on the shore of Ithaca but is unaware that he is finally home, he exclaims (13.200–2):

ὦ μοι ἐγὼ, τέων αὐτὲ βροτῶν ἐς γαῖαν ἰκάνω;  
ἦ ῥ' οἷ γ' ὕβριστάι τε καὶ ἄγριοι οὐδὲ δίκαιοι,  
ἦε φιλόξενοι καὶ σφιν νόος ἐστὶ θεουδής;

'Oh no! Whose land have I come to now? Are they violent and savage and unjust, or are they friendly to strangers and god-fearing men?'

<sup>2</sup> W.B. Stanford, *Homer: Odyssey Books XIII–XXIV* (London, 1965<sup>2</sup>), 386, at line 362; M. Fernández-Galiano, J. Russo and A. Heubeck, *A Commentary on Homer's Odyssey*, vol. 3: *Books XVII–XXIV* (Oxford, 1992), 282–3, at lines 362–3; I.J.F. de Jong, *A Narratological Commentary on the Odyssey* (Cambridge, 2001), 540, at line 371.

<sup>3</sup> A point noted by both Stanford (n. 2), 386, at line 371 and Fernández-Galiano (n. 2), 284, at line 371. Odysseus does smile at 20.301, but this smile, as Stanford remarks, is more of a 'sardonic humourless grimace' occasioned by Ctesippus' verbal and (attempted) physical abuse of Odysseus; see also D. Lateiner, *The Sardonic Smile: Nonverbal Behavior in Homeric Epic* (Ann Arbor, 1995), 193–5, for more on this sardonic smile. For the meaning of Odysseus' smiles and how these smiles occur at important points in the action, mirroring the different stages of the hero's resumption of power on Ithaca, see D.B. Levine, 'Odysseus' Smiles: *Odyssey* 20.301, 22.371, 23.111', *TAPhA* 114 (1984), 1–9 (5–7 for an analysis of this particular grin).

<sup>4</sup> Stanford (n. 2), 386, at line 362; Fernández-Galiano (n. 2), 283, at lines 362–3. The adjective νεόδωρος, which is used in both scenes to describe the animal skins that conceal Menelaus and his men (4.437) and Medon (22.363), appears to be responsible for the focus on parallels with Menelaus. This is not to suggest that Menelaus' hiding under a seal's skin cannot be recalled here as well. Hiding under animals or animal skins and even inside animals (i.e. the Wooden Horse) is a common theme in a poem almost obsessed with the opposition of concealing and revealing (cf. E. Block, 'Clothing makes the man: a pattern in the *Odyssey*', *TAPhA* 115 [1985], 1–11, on clothing, disguise and lying). Note too Odysseus' earlier disguise as beggar to infiltrate Troy (4.242–9), and Calypso, whose very name suggests 'concealing' and 'covering', and Odysseus' clever adoption of the name that is 'no-name'. The numerous references to the *Cyclopeia* in these scenes, I argue (see below for details), prepare us to view Medon's method of escape as belonging to this same series of allusions.

<sup>5</sup> B.B. Powell, *Composition by Theme in the 'Odyssey'*. Beiträge zur klassischen Philologie 81 (Meisenham am Glam, 1977), 46 correctly sees a parallel here with Odysseus' escape from Polyphemus, but he simply mentions this in passing and does not develop the point further: 'a variation of the ruse by which Odysseus saved himself and his men from Polyphemus'.

Odysseus utters this same phrase just two other times in the poem, the first on his awakening on Scheria (6.119–21), and the second before he sets out to reconnoitre the land of the Cyclopes (9.175–7). Now, finally on the shores of Ithaca, he is asking, in effect, whether this land will be inhabited by people like the Phaeacians or the Cyclopes. And the answer, interestingly, is both. Just as Odysseus will recombine elements of the *Cyclopeia* in his own palace so, too, will the Ithacans represent examples of both good *xenia* (Eumaeus and Penelope) and bad (the suitors and their partisans: especially Melanthius and Melantho).

Book 20 opens with an even more explicit reference to the *Cyclopeia*. As Odysseus lies down to sleep on the night before the archery contest, he hears his maids running about the place for a night-time tryst with the suitors. This causes him to exclaim aloud to himself (20.18–21):

τέλαθι δῆ, κραδίη· καὶ κύντερον ἄλλο ποτ' ἔτλης,  
ἦματι τῷ, ὅτε μοι μένος ἄσχετος ἦσθιε Κύκλωψ  
ιφθίμους ἐτάρους· σὺ δ' ἐτόλμας, ὄφρα σε μήτις  
ἐξάγαγ' ἐξ ἀντροιο οἰόμενον θανέεσθαι.

'Come on now, heart, endure! You endured another and more shameful thing on that day when the Cyclops, irresistible, devoured my good men; but you bore it until your cunning led you, certain you were dead, out of the cave.'

Odysseus' reference to these past events is an important reminder to himself that, just as he had then to endure Polyphemus' cannibalism,<sup>6</sup> so now, too, he must endure the maids' infidelity and the suitors' devouring of his goods, if he is not to be the victim again, this time in his own 'cave'. For his own palace has become a very dangerous place. The parallels with his former situation are obvious: if Odysseus had followed his first impulse and killed Polyphemus, he and his companions would have perished inside the cave; if he punishes the maids now, he will lose the element of surprise and the 108 suitors will make quick work of him.<sup>7</sup>

This dilemma leads Odysseus' thoughts to another and related problem: what to do after the suitors are dead. Still unable to fall asleep, he is visited by Athena. He asks the goddess a most pertinent question, 'What happens if I do kill the suitors?' (20.41–3):

πρὸς δ' ἔτι καὶ τόδε μεῖζον ἐνὶ φρεσὶ μερμηρίζω·  
εἶ περ γὰρ κτείναμι Διός τε σέθεν τε ἔκητι,  
πῆ κεν ὑπεκπροφύγοιμι; τά σε φράζεσθαι ἀνωγα.

'There's something else too, and more important, on my mind: "If you and Zeus will it and I kill the suitors, how could I possibly escape and to where? Come on and think this over.'"

<sup>6</sup> When Odysseus, enraged at Polyphemus' first meal of man-flesh, contemplates stabbing the monster, he suddenly realizes that to do so would mean their certain doom since they would not be able to remove the stone from the cave's entrance (9.299–305). For a thorough discussion of the similarities between these two situations, see J. Strauss Clay, *The Wrath of Athena: Gods and Men in the Odyssey* (Lanham, MD, 1997<sup>2</sup>), 121–5.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. also Odysseus' deliberation about how to respond to Melanthius' abuse at the spring of the Nymphs (17.204–38). There, too, he chose restraint to keep his true identity hidden.

Just as he must think twice before he acts in the matter of his maids, so here too must Odysseus keep his wits about him. If he does not, he will be caught in his own house and be surrounded again, this time not by a band of Cyclopes, but by his own townspeople. In fact, this is just what Odysseus successfully avoids by advising Telemachus, immediately after the *Mnesterophonia*, to bring in Phemius and the maids, who are to sing and dance so that anyone passing by would imagine that the house is celebrating a wedding (23.137–40):

μη πρόσθε κλέος εὐρὺ φόνου κατὰ ἄστῳ γένηται  
 ἀνδρῶν μνηστήρων, πρὶν γ' ἡμέας ἐλθέμεν ἔξω  
 ἄγρον ἐς ἡμέτερον πολυδένδρεον. ἔνθα δ' ἔπειτα  
 φρασσομέθ' ὅτι κε κέρδος Ὀλύμπιος ἐγγυαλίξει.

'Lest the rumour of the suitors' slaughter spread through town before we get out to our many-treed farm. And there, then, we'll see what plan Olympian Zeus will hand us.'

Even earlier, when faced with a similar situation, Odysseus, to prevent the suitors from alerting the townspeople, stationed Eumaeus at the one spot (ὄρσοθύρη) where his opponents could conceivably carry the news of their ambush to the outside (22.126–30). This idea was first aired by Eurymachus after Odysseus had refused his offer of a settlement (22.75–8). A little later, Agelaus attempted to implement the same plan and urged his companions to get to that very spot to raise the alarm (22.132–4). Whether captive or captor, Odysseus' forethought nearly always renders his enemies resourceless.

These, then, are some concrete examples of the poet returning to the theme of the *Cyclopeia* immediately upon the arrival of Odysseus on Ithaca and even on the very night before and day of the *Mnesterophonia*. In a sense, Odysseus' home has become the Cyclops' cave; to escape these dangers Odysseus must employ both self-control and cunning: his signature qualities as embodied in the epithets πολύμητις and πολύτλας.

In addition to these references to the events and dilemmas Odysseus encountered and overcame in the Cyclops' cave, there are also many repeated elements from the *Cyclopeia* which actually cast Odysseus in the unexpected role of Polyphemus,<sup>8</sup> a role that has received too little scholarly attention.<sup>9</sup> A brief review of the more obvious

<sup>8</sup> This is not to suggest that Odysseus' situation and actions on Ithaca simply repeat Polyphemus' in the cave. Odysseus, as I will demonstrate below, reprises significant elements of the ogre's role there, but he also repeats some of his actions as Polyphemus' captive (e.g. he keeps the suitors from announcing their plight to the townspeople, which is parallel to Odysseus' assumption of a false name to render Polyphemus' cries for help useless). Odysseus, thus, combines in this action his former role as captive (keeping his enemy from seeking help) and Polyphemus' former role of captor (keeping his opponents shut in).

<sup>9</sup> For an excellent but somewhat brief discussion of Odysseus as Cyclops, see M. Alden, 'An intelligent Cyclops?', in *Σπονδές στὸν Ὅμηρο. Μνήμη Γ.Θ. Κακριδῆ* (Ithaki, 1993), 75–95, who lists many of the following parallels between Polyphemus and Odysseus. Alden herself does not offer a convincing explanation for this pairing of hero and ogre other than to appeal (p. 76) to S. Fenik's discussion of doublets (*Studies in the Odyssey*. Hermes Einzelschriften 30 [Wiesbaden, 1974], p. 142), suggesting only that the *Cyclopeia* is a preparatory doublet for Odysseus' return to Ithaca as an intelligent ogre. While I agree with her characterization of Odysseus as an intelligent Cyclops, I offer a different solution to this unexpected pairing in the pages that follow. For additional discussion of the interconnectedness of Odysseus and Polyphemus, see particularly W.T. Magrath, 'Progression of the lion simile in the "Odyssey"', *CJ* 77.3 (1982), 205–12; N. Austin, 'Odysseus

details will suffice to illustrate this fact. Odysseus comes home to find his house occupied by strangers, who are slaughtering his animals, drinking his wine and eating his food, a situation not unlike the one Polyphemus experiences when he returns home only to find Odysseus and his men eating his cheeses, drinking his milk, and planning to steal his sheep (9.215–27). Just as Polyphemus makes certain his captives cannot escape by placing a huge door on his cave's exit (9.240–3), so too Odysseus locks the suitors in his house and blocks their escape (21.240–1). Odysseus' size and strength are also considerably greater than the suitors'. Our hero claims that Polyphemus lifted a massive rock and put it into place over the cave's entrance as easily as a man puts a lid on a quiver (9.313–14). This brief archery simile looks forward to the slaughter of the suitors by a master Bowman, who is also a master storyteller, which two roles are combined in the narrator's description of Odysseus as he strings his bow on Ithaca. There the narrator notes that this bow, which no suitor is able even to bend (21.249–55; 24.170–1), is strung by Odysseus as easily as a bard fits a string to his lyre (21.404–11). And Odysseus does all this while seated (21.420)! Just as Polyphemus' size shocks Odysseus (9.187–92), so too do the suitors stare in amazement at the beggar's mighty arms and legs as he prepares to fight Irus (18.66–71). And Antinous recalls seeing Odysseus years ago and comments on his exceptional strength, noting that there is no man among them now like Odysseus was then (21.85–95). Descriptions of blood and brains also abound in both the Cyclops' cave and in Odysseus' palace. Polyphemus dashes the heads of Odysseus' companions against the rock like puppies, and their brains and blood wet the ground (9.289–90); he also tells his favourite ram that he would splatter his cave with Nobody's brains, if he could just get hold of that good-for-nothing Nobody (9.458–60). Athena likewise assures Odysseus that the suitors' blood and brains will splatter the threshold (13.394–6). And in the case of Antinous, Odysseus' first kill, the blood that flows from his nostrils is described with an adjective, ἀνδρόμεος 'of man, human' (22.19), that appears only four times in the *Odyssey*; the other three occurrences are all applied to Polyphemus' meals of man-flesh (9.297, 347, 374).<sup>10</sup> Odysseus' first victim, then, is connected semantically with the Cyclops' victims, which suggests that the type of slaughter that is to follow Antinous' death will be as bloody and inexorable as Polyphemus'. Then there is Theoclymenus' eerie vision (20.351–7) of the suitors' coming death, which includes a description of the beautiful walls and pillars spattered with their blood. And Odysseus and his allies, after the suitors have been routed by Athena and

and the Cyclops: who is who?', in C.A. Rubino and C.W. Shelmerdine (edd.), *Approaches to Homer* (Austin, 1983), 3–37; and E.J. Bakker, 'Polyphemus', *Colby Quarterly* 38.2 (2002), 135–50. The suitors, too, act in many ways like Polyphemus, particularly in their eating and drinking and treatment of strangers. Ctesippus, a suitor described as knowing ὀθμείστια (20.287), an adjective applied to Polyphemus' thoughts as well (9.189), even goes so far as to throw an ox's hoof at Odysseus as a ξείνιον (20.287–303), an obvious reference to Polyphemus' promise to eat Nobody last as a ξείνιον (9.355–70). For detailed discussion of this and other features shared between Polyphemus and the suitors, see especially S. Reece, *The Stranger's Welcome: Oral Theory and the Aesthetics of the Homeric Hospitality Scene* (Ann Arbor, 1993), 165–87. Cf. also Alden (this note), 75–6, 89–94; Powell (n. 5), 43–6; and S. Saïd, 'Les crimes des prétendants, la maison d'Ulysse et les festins de l'*Odyssee*', in *Études de littérature ancienne* (Paris, 1979), 9–49. There is, of course, much more to be said about the poet's use of narrative repetition in general, and Odysseus' reprisal of the *Cyclopeia* on Ithaca in particular. Just such a study forms a chapter in my dissertation 'Narrative patterns in the *Odyssey*: repetition and the creation of meaning' (Diss., University of Virginia, 2008), 59–104, which I am currently revising for publication.

<sup>10</sup> Both Saïd (n. 9), 40–1 and Reece (n. 9), 174–5 discuss this connection but to make a different point, that the poet is linking the punishment visited upon the suitors with that applied to Polyphemus.

simply run for any cover they can find, pace back and forth throughout the halls and strike the suitors on the head and the ground is said to flow with blood (22.308–9; 24.183–5). Finally, in a manner reminiscent of Polyphemus' sitting in the doorway of his cave and waiting for Odysseus and his companions to attempt to escape, Odysseus, perhaps recalling the earlier escape of Phemius and Medon, returns to the slaughtered suitors lying in the blood and dust to see if any are trying to escape death by concealment (22.381–2).<sup>11</sup>

In addition to the above reminiscences of the *Cyclopeia*, all of which favour a reading of Medon's successful escape as one more reference to the events in that dark cave, Medon's situation also corresponds more closely to Odysseus' in the cave than to Menelaus' on the beach. Odysseus hides under a ram to escape a menacing monster who knows no mercy (9.424–61); Menelaus lies under a skin to ambush a god (4.435–55). The former is defensive, seeking to escape certain death, the latter aggressive. Moreover, the hide with which Medon is concealed is the by-product of the suitors' depredations on Odysseus' herds, a fact made clear by the adjective applied to this ox hide (νεόδαρτον, 22.363). Thus, Medon attempts to escape detection under the hide of an animal that belongs to Odysseus, just as Odysseus escaped death beneath an animal that belonged to Polyphemus. The shared predicament and method of escape, then, of both Odysseus and Medon are alone sufficient reason for reading Medon's escape as an allusion to Odysseus' own. The palace has become the cave and Odysseus the Cyclops.

In the moments following Leodes' death, Phemius' deliberations and choice are also instructive. After he witnesses Leodes' failed supplication, Phemius weighs anxiously two options: to seek refuge at the altar of Zeus Herkeios, or to grasp Odysseus' knees. Phemius chooses the latter. The bard's rejection of the first option indicates that he fears Odysseus would ignore his appeal to Zeus. Perhaps the outcome of either choice would have been the same, had it not been for the intervention by Telemachus, to whom Phemius appeals as witness of his innocence (22.350–5). Odysseus himself suggests that it was Telemachus who saved Medon and, by association, Phemius (22.372). Phemius' fear here also appears to have a solid basis in fact; Odysseus had, after all, just killed the most 'innocent' of the suitors, who also happened to be a prophet.<sup>12</sup> Bards also have a special relationship with the gods, as is made clear in Phemius' appeal to Odysseus, and Medon is a herald, a role in Homeric epic considered sacrosanct.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> 22.381–2: *πάπτηνεν δ' Ὀδυσσεὺς καθ' ἑδὸν δόμον, εἴ τις ἔτ' ἀνδρῶν | ζωὸς ὑποκλοπέοιτο, ἀλύσκων κῆρα μέλαιναν* 'And Odysseus looked carefully throughout his home to see if any of the men, still alive, was concealing himself and escaping grim death.'

<sup>12</sup> Leodes' benign character and status as prophet are sufficient reasons to ponder the morality of Odysseus' action here; cf. Fernández-Galiano (n. 2), 276, at line 318. For the moral questions raised by the death of Leodes and the *Mnesterophonía* in general, see K. Crotty (n. 1), 151–6 and J. Svenbro, *La parole et le marbre: aux les origines de la poésie grecque* (Lund, 1976), 19–21.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. also Demodocus' relationship with the divine as noted by both the narrator and Odysseus himself (8.62–4, 477–81, 487–91, 499). For a discussion of the difference in status between Demodocus and Phemius as poets and Odysseus' attitude to each, see S. Besslich, *Schweigen-Verschweigen-Übergehen: Die Darstellung des Unausgesprochenen in der Odyssee* (Heidelberg, 1966), 101–4. For the sacrosanctity of heralds and their function in Homeric epic, see R. Mondí, 'The function and social position of the *kérux* in early Greece' (Diss., Harvard University, 1978), especially 1–5; L.-M. Wéry, 'Die Arbeitsweise der Diplomatie in homerischer Zeit', in E. Olshausen and H. Biller (edd.), *Antike Diplomatie* (Darmstadt, 1979), 13–55, at 29–34; H. van Wees, *Status Warriors: War, Violence and Society in Homer and History* (Amsterdam, 1992), 32–4 and 277–80; H. Singor, 'War and International Relations', in K.A. Raaflaub and H. van Wees (edd.), *A Companion to Archaic Greece* (Malden, MA and Oxford, 2009), 585–603, at 588; and W.G. Thalmann, 'Heralds', in M. Finkelberg (ed.), *The Homer Encyclopedia*, vol. 2 (Malden, MA and Oxford, 2011), 346–7.



Furthermore, when Odysseus dismisses the pair, he instructs them to wait in the courtyard until he is done cleaning up the palace. They are said to walk over to the altar of Zeus Herkeios, located in the courtyard, and to sit in constant fear for their lives, expecting death at any moment.<sup>14</sup> Perhaps Odysseus is as ἀθεμίσιος as Polyphemus, making up the rules in his own house,<sup>15</sup> as do the Cyclopes (9.114–15) and as these two suppliants fear. Odysseus does summarily reject the suitors' initial offer of compensation for their wrongs (22.44–67), a rejection itself reminiscent of Polyphemus' harsh dismissal of Odysseus' appeal to Zeus as overseer of ξενίη (9.277–8). That is, both Polyphemus and Odysseus treat with equal contempt any notion of recompense or mercy based upon an appeal to customary behaviour: Polyphemus dismisses ξενίη and its guarantor just as Odysseus refuses any recompense except the wholesale slaughter of the suitors.<sup>16</sup>

Finally, there is the curious epithet Odysseus applies to the poet Phemius in this scene: πολύφημος. This adjective appears first in our text as a description of the assembly in Book 2 (150) and here is applied to the Ithacan bard (22.378).<sup>17</sup> All other occurrences of this word in the poem are as the proper name of the Cyclops who threatens Odysseus and his men with death. In a context where the *Cyclopeia* has repeatedly been evoked, the use of an epithet that is the equivalent of the Cyclops' name would surely be noticed by an attentive audience.<sup>18</sup> The scenes, in fact, which immediately follow the use of this epithet are notable for Odysseus' violence and bestial behaviour. First, we are told that Odysseus looks carefully throughout his home to see if any of the suitors is hiding and escaping death (22.381–9), a detail that recalls the Cyclops sitting in his cave and feeling the backs of his sheep (9.415–61), hoping to find Nobody and his men among them. Then Odysseus, all bespattered with blood, is described in a simile as a lion having just eaten his prey (22.401–7), a simile that he shares only with Polyphemus (9.291–2).<sup>19</sup> Finally, the

<sup>14</sup> 22.378–80: ὧς φάτο, τὼ δ' ἔξω βήτην μεγάροιο κιόντε· | ἐξέσθη δ' ἄρα τὼ γε Διὸς μεγάλου ποτιβομόν, | πάντοσε παπταίνοντε, φόνον ποτιδεγμένο αἰεὶ 'So he spoke, and the two made their way out of the hall and sat down beside the altar of great Zeus. Both of them kept looking anxiously all about, death always in their thoughts.' Phemius and Medon's constant expectation of impending doom, even after their supplications were successful, indicates their fear of Odysseus' 'lawlessness'; see Naiden (n. 1), 122–9, for (divine) punishment visited upon a *supplicandus* who betrays his pledge. K.F. Ameis, C. Hentze and P. Cauer, *Homers Odyssee*, vol. 2.2 (Leipzig and Berlin, 1911), at line 380 suggest that the pair take a seat at the altar of Zeus precisely because they are not yet certain of their safety.

<sup>15</sup> Noted also by Alden (n. 9), 86–7, and reiterated by Bakker (n. 9), 137. There are shades here too of Achilles' rejection of both Agamemnon's offer in *Iliad* 9 and of Hector's pleas for burial in Book 22; cf. Crotty (n. 1), 152.

<sup>16</sup> We have already seen positive examples in the results of offers made to offended parties in Book 8: Poseidon to Hephaestus (347–58), and Laodamus to Odysseus (396–415). Cf. also Ajax's appeal to Achilles to accept the traditional compensation for loss (*Iliad* 9.632–6). And here, moreover, Eurymachus reminds Odysseus that many of these suitors are his very own people (22.54–5: σὺ δὲ φεῖδεο λαῶν | σῶν). See Crotty (n. 1), 151–6, for the poet's choice to put this request in Eurymachus' mouth.

<sup>17</sup> See Bakker (n. 9), 137–43, for an insightful analysis of this epithet and its application here to Phemius.

<sup>18</sup> It may be worth mentioning that, when πολύφημος first appears as an adjective to describe the Ithacan assembly (2.150), the narrator has just recently informed us that one of Aegyptius' sons, Antiphus, had the distinction of being the Cyclops' last meal of man-flesh (2.15–20). Likewise, in this adjective's second appearance, the scene is rich in Cyclopean themes.

<sup>19</sup> Unlike the *Iliad*'s over 40 examples, lion similes in the *Odyssey* are relatively rare. Of the seven that appear in our poem, five are applied to Odysseus, one to Polyphemus, and one to Penelope: of Odysseus: 4.332–40 = 17.124–31, 6.130–6, 22.401–7, 23.48 = 22.402; of Polyphemus: 9.291–2; of Penelope: 4.791. The lion similes applied to Polyphemus and Odysseus belong to the marauding

killing of the maids and the mutilation of Melanthius bring the episode to its bloody end.<sup>20</sup>

The foregoing analysis has made it clear how Medon's escape from death under an ox hide is clearly an allusion to Odysseus' escape from the Cyclops. What remains is for us to discuss the import of this scene, one in which Medon plays Odysseus and Odysseus Polyphemus. As I mentioned above (note 9), Alden proposed that Odysseus' reprisal on Ithaca of Polyphemus' role was motivated for two reasons: (1) Homer regularly uses doublets as a structural device; (2) this doublet should be viewed as preparatory for Odysseus' return to Ithaca. On this last point, she continues: 'If Polyphemus is not a very bright returning ogre, Odysseus might be an intelligent one. Further, he might have learned how to handle the role from Polyphemus' mistakes' (p. 76). It surely is true that Odysseus does learn from his own mistakes and perhaps from others', and Fenik's discussion of doublets, to which Alden appeals here, does indeed reveal just how much repetition can aid the oral poet as a structural device and even emphasize some major poetic themes.<sup>21</sup> But Alden's explanation does not sufficiently address why our poet would go so far as to associate his hero so closely with a man-eating beast, a not so very positive association. An answer, however, can be found in a more recent approach to repetition in the Homeric epics, one that studies repetition on a large scale.

Narrative repetition, or repetition that covers a vast distance such as the reprisal of the *Cyclopeia* on Ithaca, has recently been analysed as an oral poet's tool not only for composition but, and most importantly, as an aid in the creation of meaning for his audience. Both Steven Lowenstam and Bruce Loudon, for example, have demonstrated that it is very often the *differences* in repeated actions, words or characters that provide the

lion type. The simile applied to Penelope is a beleaguered lion simile, a different class of lion similes than the aggressive lion type: D.F. Wilson, 'Lion kings: heroes in the epic mirror', *Colby Quarterly* 38.2 (2002), 230–54, at 231–2; see also C. Moulton, *Similes in the Homeric Poems* (Göttingen, 1977), 123–4, for analysis of 4.791. The single lion simile applied to Polyphemus emphasizes his animal savagery (H. Fränkel, *Die homerischen Gleichnisse* [Göttingen, 1921], 69–70), noting how he ate Odysseus' companions, bolting them down flesh, bones, guts and all. What clearly links Odysseus in this scene with Polyphemus, then, is not only the fact that both are compared to lions but that the emphasis in both similes is on the bestial nature of the two characters; for this interpretation of these shared similes, see also Magrath (n. 9). For a discussion of the importance of lion similes to the overall plan of the *Odyssey*, see Wilson (this note), 230–54; for a different interpretation of lion similes, see J.M. Redfield, *Nature and Culture in the Iliad: The Tragedy of Hector* (Durham, NC, 1994<sup>2</sup>), 186–92. Cf. also W.C. Scott, *The Artistry of the Homeric Simile* (Lebanon, NH, 2009), 115–18, for this lion simile. Scott's interpretation, that the lion simile here simply emphasizes Odysseus' role as a just king, applied as it is after the conflict, ignores the echo of the lion simile applied earlier to Polyphemus (9.291–2).

<sup>20</sup> 22.457–73 (maids) and 474–77 (Melanthius). In the latter case, Melanthius' genitals are actually fed to the palace dogs. It is unclear whether Eumaeus, Philoetius and Telemachus are mutilating his corpse, or whether they are torturing him first. See Fernández-Galliano (n. 2), 304–5, for comment on the ambiguity of these lines. Despite this ambiguity, such actions were clearly brutal, associated as they were with the activities of a certain Echetus, an ogre of sorts introduced as a threat by Antinous, first to Irus and then to Odysseus (18.78–87; 21.305–10).

<sup>21</sup> See, for example, Fenik's discussion ([n. 9], 173–89) of Eumaeus and Philoetius, particularly his comments on p. 180, and also those on pp. 231–2. While Fenik does analyse contrasting elements in doublets, the doublets themselves are not viewed as the contrastive element. In other words, Eumaeus and Philoetius are not paired to point out an essential difference between the two, but to reinforce the portrayal of their loyalty. It is the juxtaposition of those two with the disloyal Melanthius and Melantho that Fenik points to as emphasizing important poetic themes. This is very different from the approach to repetition that I will discuss below.



richest material for the presentation of ideas for the audience.<sup>22</sup> ‘Mirroring’ of this sort accomplishes much more than merely preparing the audience for events to come; it provides a point of comparison, a means to interpret actions by the intentional juxtaposition and repetition of similar actions and situations. This repetition, then, of phrases, scenes and imagery, that depends *not* on the principle of *sameness* (except, of course, to alert the audience’s attention) but on the principle of *difference* is dynamic and suggests to the audience possible answers, but does not narrowly determine meaning, as does the type of repetition that simply equates character *A* with character *B*. This latter type of equation is evidenced in the suitors’ adoption of Polyphemic habits on Ithaca.<sup>23</sup> To compare the suitors with Polyphemus, however, merely emphasizes their transgressive behaviour, their lack of respect for social conventions. *A* here is essentially equal to *B*: both parties violate the guest–host relationship, and both are punished by Odysseus. But Odysseus’ taking on so many of Polyphemus’ attributes on Ithaca is more intriguing precisely because it is so unexpected.

With our poet’s predilection for repetition with variation in mind, we can now attempt to answer what possible point there may be in Medon’s encounter with an Ithacan Polyphemus. On the one hand, the pairing of Odysseus and Polyphemus is obvious: there is no doubt that the use of extreme force, Cyclopean even, allows Odysseus and his few allies to defeat all 108 opponents. Odysseus needs here to be supremely powerful. Yet without his trademark μῆτις, Odysseus’ βίη would have been for naught. His triumph depends on his ability to combine successfully the apparent polarity of μῆτις vs βίη that is nowhere more vividly described than in the *Cyclopeia*.<sup>24</sup> Odysseus’ combination of cunning and force, that synthesis of βίη and μῆτις, is the winning ingredient in his eventual return home and defeat of the suitors and their parents. In this respect, he clearly is different from the Cyclops; he is, as Alden suggests, an intelligent Cyclops. But, as I mentioned above, any association with Polyphemus cannot be so easily dismissed. The fact that Odysseus is likened to an ogre at all, and one that is the poem’s most bestial and most opposed to human norms of behaviour, must be accounted for. There is, I would argue, in Odysseus’ assumption of Cyclopean βίη an implicit threat of becoming too violent, too monstrous.<sup>25</sup> The danger, in fact, of the hero crossing or, rather, blurring the boundary between the human and bestial worlds is also a concern of the *Iliad*.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>22</sup> S. Lowenstam, *The Scepter and the Spear: Studies on Forms of Repetition in the Homeric Poems* (Lanham, MD, 1993), 1–12 is the best place to go for a review of previous work on the subject of narrative repetition and for a succinct and persuasive discussion of this principle of repetition with variation as a method of the presentation of ideas to an audience. Both of B. Louden’s studies, *The Odyssey: Structure, Narration, and Meaning* (Baltimore and London, 1999) and *The Iliad: Structure, Myth, and Meaning* (Baltimore and London, 2006), provide further evidence of this type of repetition as a structural and thought-provoking device.

<sup>23</sup> See n. 9.

<sup>24</sup> This polarity or opposition between μῆτις and βίη has attracted much commentary: for a discussion of μῆτις in Greek thought in general, see M. Detienne and J.-P. Vernant, *Cunning Intelligence in Greek Culture and Society*, tr. J. Lloyd (Chicago, 1978), especially 57–105 for Zeus’ successful wielding of both μῆτις and βίη; see also G. Nagy, *The Best of the Achaeans: Concepts of the Hero in Archaic Greek Poetry* (Baltimore and London, 1999<sup>2</sup>), 42–58, and Clay (n. 6), 95–132, for this opposition in Homeric epic. For more recent treatment, see also E. Cook, *The Odyssey in Athens: Myths of Cultural Origins* (Ithaca, NY and London, 1995), 149–52 and 189–94, and ‘“Active” and “passive” heroics in the *Odyssey*’, *CW* 93.2 (1999), 149–67; and Wilson’s (n. 19) discussion of the same.

<sup>25</sup> A threat made more palpable by all the repetitions of motifs from the *Cyclopeia* and especially by Odysseus’ reprisal of Polyphemus’ role in his own home.

<sup>26</sup> C.P. Segal, *The Theme of the Mutilation of the Corpse in the Iliad* (Leiden, 1971), 33–47 and ‘The raw and the cooked in Greek literature: structure, values, metaphor’, *CJ* 69 (1974), 289–308,

It just so happens that we have Odysseus' response to such a characterization of him as dangerous and bordering on the bestial. He would have us believe that his exhibition of Cyclopean might and mercilessness is simply the proper response to and correction of bad behaviour. He blithely lumps all the suitors into one category despite the fact that not all of them were nearly as guilty of wrongs as Antinous and Eurymachus.<sup>27</sup> Odysseus offers an uncomplicated judgement on the *Mnesteroiphonia*, reassuring in its folktale simplicity, when he says that Phemius and Medon have been spared in order to tell others ὡς κακοεργίης εὐεργεσίη μέγ' ἄμεινων 'that good behaviour is far better than bad' (22.376). This is all very nice and comforting for Odysseus, but we have the distinct impression, supported by Odysseus' own admission, that without Telemachus' intervention Phemius and Medon would likely have met the same fate as Leodes; these two suppliants, moreover, are truly innocents,<sup>28</sup> as was Leodes, according to the narrator (21.146–7). There is something dangerous and excessive in Odysseus' behaviour here. Perhaps one could excuse this brutal 'justice' if the *Mnesteroiphonia* were the only scene in which Odysseus exhibited such extremely violent behaviour, but Odysseus does not stop here. Indeed, the poem's final lines call into question his glib summary of the slaughter of the suitors.<sup>29</sup>

Two scenes, in particular, highlight still more the ambiguity of Odysseus' actions on Ithaca and the damage that he has inflicted on his own people. The first occurs shortly after the *Mnesteroiphonia*. To impress the gravity of their current situation on Telemachus, Odysseus notes that when a man kills even one person he must go into exile, but that they have killed the city's support (ἔρμα πόλης), the best by far of the young men of Ithaca (οἱ μέγ' ἄριστοι | κούρων εἰν Ἰθάκῃ) (23.118–22), and that they must now find a means of escape to the country. Odysseus' choice of words here is revealing: the suitors would have formed Ithaca's fighting force and political elite in days to come; they would have been a support (ἔρμα πόλης) on which the city could depend in a time of need, the best of a generation and cut down by their own king. In other words, Odysseus' desire for revenge has outstripped his concern for Ithaca's future well-being,<sup>30</sup> one of those rare moments when Odysseus' foresight

at 298–9; Redfield (n. 19), 192–223; Cook (n. 23, 1995), 151–2 and (n. 23, 1999), 130–4; and Wilson (n. 19), 238–48.

<sup>27</sup> In addition to Leodes, there is also Amphinomus (18.117–57, 394–42), who speaks kindly to Odysseus and at whose knees Odysseus takes refuge from Eurymachus' missile. And the crowd of suitors as a whole, Antinous and Eurymachus excepted, reply with anger and fear at Antinous' violent treatment of Odysseus (17.409–87).

<sup>28</sup> As far as Telemachus is concerned (22.356–60), though some scholars assert that Odysseus' response to Phemius characterizes that poet as not so pure: 'Mitläufer' Besslich (n. 13), 104, and 'market poet' Bakker (n. 9), 142.

<sup>29</sup> The ambiguity of the *Odyssey*'s final scenes has received much attention: for recent discussion, see Clay (n. 6), 213–39; M.N. Nagler, 'Odysseus: the proem and the problem', *Classical Antiquity* 9.2 (1990), 335–56; Crotty (n. 1), 130–59; Cook (n. 23, 1995), 151–2; A.W.H. Adkins, 'Homeric Ethics', in I. Morris and B. Powell (edd.), *A New Companion to Homer* (Leiden, 1997), 694–713, at 712–13; and de Jong (n. 2), 586, at lines 24.528–48.

<sup>30</sup> The suitors' status as a support or prop on which Ithaca could depend is reiterated by Agamemnon's address to Amphimedon in Hades (24.106–8): Ἀμφίμεδον, τί παθόντες ἔρεμνὴν γαῖαν ἔδυτε | πάντες κεκρμένοι καὶ ὁμήλικες; οὐδέ κεν ἄλλως | κρινάμενος λέξαιτο κατὰ πόλιν ἄνδρας ἀρίστους 'Amphimedon, what happened that you all came down under dark earth, select men that you all are and age-mates? Not otherwise could anyone, when selecting men, have made a better pick of the best men in a city.' This statement, of course, also adds to the glory of Odysseus' feat.

seems to have failed him.<sup>31</sup> The extent of this loss is further emphasized in the second Ithacan assembly, when Eupheithes reminds his audience that Odysseus had already lost all of his own men (their relatives) and ships on the Trojan expedition, and that now, upon his return alone to Ithaca, he has also killed the best of the Cephallenians (24.426–9).

The second scene is also the poem's final one, in which it takes a thunderbolt from Zeus and Athena's verbal warning to check the hero's slaughter of his own people; this should give us pause (22.528–44). Athena, in fact, emphasizes this upcoming battle's destructive nature in her conversation with Zeus immediately prior to the fight. She asks whether he will prolong the bad/evil fighting (πόλεμόν τε κακόν) or bring about peace between the two parties (24.475–6).<sup>32</sup> Zeus recommends an end to these hostilities and a reconciliation. But once Laertes quickly dispatches Eupheithes, Odysseus and Telemachus begin to rout the Ithacans. The narrator informs us that these two would have destroyed all their own people if Athena had not intervened (24.528–30):

καί νύ κε δὴ πάντα ὄλεσαν καὶ ἔθηκον ἀνόστους  
εἰ μὴ Ἀθηναίη κούρη Διὸς αἰγιόχοιο  
ἦυσεν φωνῆ, κατὰ δ' ἔσχεθε λαὸν ἅπαντα.

And they would now have killed them all and left them no safe return home if Athena, daughter of aegis-bearing Zeus, hadn't shouted and stopped all the people.

The narrator's words to describe the Ithacans' near-total destruction here also include a rare adjective, a hapax in fact: ἀνόστους. In a poem that is itself a νόστος, the occurrence of the adjective ἄνοστος can be no accident. It suggests that the man who struggled to remember and obtain his own νόστος is willing to deprive his own people on Ithaca of their νόστος too, the very fate suffered by their relatives who had sailed to Troy with Odysseus. This adjective, then, artfully links Odysseus' former companions to the suitors' kinsmen. Moreover, the poem's narrator had actually made this connection earlier when he described Aegyptius, the first speaker in the first Ithacan assembly (2.15–24). There we were told that Aegyptius had four sons: one was Polyphemus' last victim, one a suitor of Penelope, and two lived with their father. The narrator, even in this early scene, hints at the magnitude of Ithaca's present losses and those to come at the hands of Odysseus. Aegyptius will have lost at least half of his children to Odysseus by the poem's end, a fate he shares with many Ithacans, and a disturbing fact to which the narrator has returned in the final scene.

More troubling still is this battle's coda. Athena's command to the Ithacans to cease fighting causes them to drop their weapons and flee in fear (24.533–6). This appears to be a reasonable place for Odysseus to seek peace, and he had surely heard Athena's words to the Ithacans, urging them to end this fighting without further bloodshed (24.531–2). Instead, we are told, Odysseus lets out a war-cry and, like an eagle that

<sup>31</sup> Odysseus also fails to see problems ahead on two other notable occasions: (1) when he taunts Polyphemus after escaping from the cave (9.475–542), and (2) when he nearly destroys another large part of his populace on Ithaca in the final battle with the suitors' relatives (24.528–30), a scene discussed below.

<sup>32</sup> These two lines appear in a similar form in the *Iliad* (4.15–6, 82–3). There they clearly refer to a war whose prolongation was, from a human perspective, certainly κακός. See also A. Heubeck (n. 2), 411–12, at lines 475–6.

swoops upon its prey, he pursues his unarmed and fleeing people (24.536–8). It is only Zeus' intervention that finally brings a halt to Odysseus' bloodlust. It is, after all, internecine warfare here that Odysseus has to be restrained from pursuing. This is not Troy, and the people are not Odysseus' opponents in a battle for glory and fame.

We see, then, that Odysseus' interpretation of events is both facile and untenable. But is Odysseus simply an ogre at the poem's end? As I mentioned above, we are interested in the differences between Odysseus and Polyphemus, and there are significant differences between our ambiguous hero and the wholly dangerous and bestial Polyphemus. Although the poem's final lines certainly highlight Odysseus' power and brutality, they also contain some positive depictions of Odysseus. While Polyphemus claims not to respect the gods, eats his guests, shows no mercy to suppliants and lives a life of isolation, Odysseus respects the gods and their wishes, can show restraint and clemency, and does wish to return to and re-enter Ithacan society. Moreover, it is this social aspect of our hero that is responsible, in part, for recalling Odysseus to human mores and restraint. This is most visible, in fact, in his encounter with Phemius and Medon.

In the scene with which we began, the rejection of Leodes' supplication and the sparing of Phemius and Medon, we see that Odysseus demonstrates that he, like the implacable and violent Polyphemus, can wield great strength and even display savagery yet, because of his μῆτις, is able to temper that power with mercy and restraint.<sup>33</sup> And Odysseus' restraint is further guaranteed by the intervention of Telemachus, whose plea on behalf of the two suppliants recalls his father to his former kindness and gentleness as a ruler.<sup>34</sup> And, thus, after Leodes' unsuccessful supplication of our hero (22.310–29), Medon and Phemius are the first petitioners to be granted clemency. In this humorous moment, at least, Odysseus rejects the bestial side of βίη. He will, of course, nearly destroy all his own people at the poem's end, but he will also in the end yield to the wishes of Zeus and Athena, who must herself be reminded to stop Odysseus' onslaught (22.528–44).

So, while Odysseus does adopt Polyphemic might and brutality on Ithaca, he is in the end not a Polyphemus. And the differences here are instructive, and two in particular stand out: (1) Odysseus' employment of cunning coupled with restraint and (2) the use of allies, two things Polyphemus so crucially lacked.<sup>35</sup> It is precisely when Odysseus' cunning has put him in a position of overwhelming advantage that the danger of becoming too brutal arises. And it is at each one of these crucial moments that an ally (first Telemachus and then Athena) leads him back to his former restraint and mercy. The repetition, then, of many elements of the *Cyclopeia* on Ithaca does much more than simply prepare us for Odysseus' clever defeat of the suitors. It shows us that Odysseus is not only πολύμητις and πολύτλας, but, at times, can even be πολύφρημος. What better way of dramatically representing the difficult balancing act between power and restraint than having Odysseus embody that very struggle in his own person?

<sup>33</sup> For the argument that restraint is an essential element of μῆτις, see Cook's (n. 23, 1999) analysis of the 'active' and 'passive' elements of heroism.

<sup>34</sup> First mentioned by Mentor to the assembled Ithacans (2.234).

<sup>35</sup> Polyphemus' conversation with his closest companion, his favourite ram (9.447–60), is proof enough of the importance of allies – see especially 456–7: εἰ δὴ ὁμοφρονεῖοις ποτιφρονήεις τε γένοιτο | εἰπείν ὅππῃ κείνος ἐμὸν μένος ἤλασκάζει 'If you could think like me and be gifted with speech (you could) tell me where that man is escaping my might.' For a discussion of the concept of *homophrosyne* in the *Odyssey* and this passage's connection with this theme, see S. Bolmarcich, 'ΟΜΟΦΡΟΣΥΝΗ in the "Odyssey"', *CP* 96.3 (2001), 205–13.

Finally, the poem's last lines emphasize the need for community and reconciliation, but also underscore the difficulty of achieving communal cohesion: it takes the gods' intervention to stop the complete destruction of the Ithacan populace by its very own leader, a man once known to rule as gently as a father. This ending may even reflect late eighth and seventh-century B.C.E. real-world concerns with the integration of the aristocratic or at least more powerful individuals into the nascent and more egalitarian (if only in the ideal) *polis*, where extreme and Polyphemic violence has no place in solving intra-*polis* disputes.<sup>36</sup> The internecine strife and subsequent peace with which the *Odyssey* ends, then, can be seen as an appeal to compromise.

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<sup>36</sup> This is a much debated topic. For some recent discussions with bibliography and summary of various views, see K.A. Raaflaub, 'A historian's headache: how to read "Homeric society"?', in N. Fisher and H. van Wees (edd.), *Archaic Greece: New Approaches and New Evidence* (London, 1998), 169–93; K.A. Raaflaub and R.W. Wallace, "'People's power" and egalitarian trends in Archaic Greece', in K.A. Raaflaub, J. Ober and R.W. Wallace (edd.), *Origins of Democracy in Ancient Greece* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2007), 22–48, at 24–32; W.G. Thalmann, *The Swineherd and the Bow: Representations of Class in the Odyssey* (Ithaca, NY and London, 1998), 239–305; I. Morris, 'The use and abuse of Homer', in D.L. Cairns (ed.), *Oxford Readings in Homer's Iliad* (Oxford, 2001), 57–91 and 'The eighth-century revolution', in K.A. Raaflaub and H. van Wees (edd.), *A Companion to Archaic Greece* (Malden, MA and Oxford, 2009), 64–80; and H. van Wees, 'Homer and early Greece', *Colby Quarterly* 38.1 (2002), 94–117, at 113–15.