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Monster and Hero?: Rethinking Polyphemos and Odysseus in Homer's *Odyssey*[1]

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In this article I will challenge the supposed binaries between monster and hero by offering a new reading of the Odyssey *which invites us to rethink the monstrosity of one of Homer's most memorable monsters, the Cyclops Polyphemos, and the monstrosity of the poem's eponymous hero, Odysseus. While most definitions of the word monster have negative connotations usually referring to appearance, it can also be related to behaviour. By drawing on Cohen's Seven Theses as set out in his book* Monster Theory *and comparing the behaviour of both the supposed 'monster,' Polyphemos and his antagonist hero, Odysseus, I will show through selected examples from the text that a close reading of the* Odyssey *reveals signs of ambiguity and ambivalence towards both characters – breaking down the binaries between the two and creating a more sympathetic understanding of the ancient Cyclops.*

'Why is your killing justified, and mine is not?'[3]

As long as human beings have existed there have been monsters. Shortly after the emergence of *Homo sapiens,* monsters were first depicted in prehistoric wall art of Western Europe about 20,000–25,000 years ago.[4] Believed to be used as an allegory to explain the fears of the unknown, they have been employed as cultural metaphors for the fears and anxieties of a given society ever since. Stories of monsters came to a peak in Classical antiquity particularly in ancient Greece and with them stories of heroes (and gods) to defeat them. While some heroes such as Herakles and Achilles have often been presented as problematic and transgressive, they still typically represent order and civilization while monsters represent 'chaos' and a threat. Thus, stories that tell of the vanquishing of monsters by heroes thereby establish the legitimacy of that civilization.[5]

Considered abnormal and different, monsters are placed in the position of the Other. As Wendy Reid Morgan asserts, the negative words abnormal, different, and other, are dependent on their counterpart positive terms, normal, same, and self. Defining what one is also defines what the other is not.[6] This sets the boundaries, and binaries, of what

1 A version of this paper was first presented at the 'Monster Conference' hosted by *Limina Journal* in collaboration with ARC Centre of Excellence for History of Emotions and the Department of Classics, University of Reading, 6-9 September 2022. I would like to thank all the conference organisers and participants for making it possible and for their feedback.

2 ORCID: 0000-0001-8108-6368.

3 Nick Dear, *Frankenstein* (London, Faber and Faber, 2011), 41. Dear's play is based on Mary Shelley's novel and was premiered at the National Theatre, London, on 5 February 2011.

4 David D. Gilmore, *Monsters: Evil Beings, Mythical Beasts, and All Manner of Imaginary Terrors,* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 1, 23-24.

5 For a more detailed discussion of this hypothesis see: D. Felton, 'Rejecting and Embracing the Monstrous in Ancient Greece and Rome', in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous,* (London and New York, Routledge, 2016), 103-131.

6 Wendy Reid Morgan, *Constructing the Monster: Notions of the Monstrous in Classical Antiquity,* (unpublished

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is the inclusive acceptable Norm of a given society and what is the excluded unacceptable Other. In Homer's *Odyssey*, the eponymous hero, Odysseus sets himself up as the civilised/Norm Greek Self by which all others must be measured. Thus, placing himself as the binary opposite of the ancient Cyclops Polyphemos who he conceives as being the savage barbarian Other. Therefore, any analysis of Polyphemos in the role of the monstrous barbarian Other must be compared with that of his literary antagonist and corresponding Self, the normative represented civilised hero Odysseus. This is a principle that Odysseus himself uses when he encounters Polyphemos in Book 9. However, monsters such as Polyphemos are particularly problematic as they can blur the boundaries between these two binaries, belonging to both the world of humans and of beasts. It is these perceived binaries that this article sets out to challenge.

Polyphemos is particularly important to any discussion on monsters and monstrosity because, as Paul Murgatroyd observes, he is not only one of the most famous of the monsters from Classical antiquity, but also one whose origins lie in the oral tradition of pre-classical folktales.[7] Further, both as the antagonist of Odysseus and as the unrequited lover of the sea-nymph Galatea, he has featured in a variety of art forms ever since, from antiquity through to modernity. Although not widely documented, one of Polyphemos's most notable representations in modern literature is probably as the Creature in Mary Shelley's nineteenth-century novel *Frankenstein*.[8] In her correspondence with the essayist Leigh Hunt, who considered Polyphemos as being 'pathetic' rather than 'monstrous,' Mary Shelley described her novel as 'a book in (favour) defence of Polypheme'; a book which itself, through ambiguity and ambivalence, also challenges the binaries between its monster and hero.[9]

Most definitions of the word monster have negative connotations and often refer to appearance such as 'any imaginary creature that is large, ugly, and frightening'. However, it can also be used in relation to behaviour as in 'a person of repulsively unnatural character or exhibiting such extreme cruelty or wickedness as to appear inhuman'.[10] It is often presupposed that the 'large, ugly and frightening' is also extremely cruel and wicked; he 'resembles his crime before he has committed it'.[11] While monsters have always existed, Monster Studies as an academic field of study is relatively new and was greatly influenced by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's pioneering work, *Monster Theory: Reading Culture.* In the first chapter he unpacks the meaning of the concept of monsters by setting out seven theses to understanding their cultural formation. In 'Monster Culture (Seven Theses)' Cohen singles out Polyphemos as a significant monster, citing him as the prototype of his Thesis V.[12] Although Polyphemos exemplifies the concepts that Cohen crystalises in all seven

PhD thesis, Melbourne, Deakin University, 1984), 5.

7 Paul Murgatroyd, *Mythical Monsters in Classical Literature,* (London and New York, Bloomsbury, 2007), 165.

8 Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *Frankenstein,* (New York, Penguin Books, [1818] 2018).

9 Leigh Hunt, *The Correspondence of Leigh Hunt, Edited by his Eldest Son,* Two Volumes, (London, Smith, Elder and Co, 1862), 129; Betty T. Bennet, (ed), *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley,* Volume I, (Baltimore, MD., The John Hopkins University Press, 1980), 91. My thesis examines how the ambiguities and ambivalence present in Homer's Odyssey influenced the development of the character of Polyphemos throughout antiquity and into modernity, most notably in Mary Shelley's nineteenth-century novel *Frankenstein*. Her novel, in turn, invites the modern reader to rethink the supposed binaries between, and the monstrosity of, antiquity's Polyphemos *and* Odysseus – monster *and* hero of Homer's *Odyssey*. I would like to thank my supervisors Joanna Paul (The Open University), M. A. Katritzky (The Open University) and Genevieve Liveley (University of Bristol) for all of their ongoing help and support.

10 All definitions refer to the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) online.

11 Michel Foucault, *Abnormal: Lectures at the Collège de France* 1974-1975, trans. Graham Burchell, (London and New York, Verso, 2016), 19.

12 Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, 'Monster Culture (Seven Theses)', in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture,* Jeffrey Jerome

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of his theses, the Cyclops, as portrayed in Homer's *Odyssey,* is particularly important to Theses III, IV and V and it is these three Theses that I will be drawing on for my analysis in this article. Having described the monster's bodily appearance as being a transgression of the laws of nature (Thesis III), Cohen emphasises cultural differences as its most defining feature asserting that these are reflected in its deformed, or racially different features (Theses IV and V). Many of Cohen's theses reflect the findings of Morgan in her anthropological thesis on monsters in classical antiquity, who also singles out Polyphemos for special attention as does Robert Garland's seminal work on deformity and disability in the Graeco-Roman world.[13] Garland also touches on Homer's ambiguity and ambivalence towards both the 'monster', Polyphemos *and* the eponymous 'hero' Odysseus in relation to Odysseus's (and the Greeks's) attitude towards cultural Otherness. In this article I will be examining the ambiguity and ambivalence in more detail, as well as comparing appearance, cultural differences, and behaviour. This analysis will explore the supposed binaries between monster and hero and invite us to rethink the monstrosity of both Polyphemos *and* Odysseus, subsequently reaching a more sympathetic understanding of the ancient Cyclops.

Homer's *Odyssey*

In the Introduction to the 1831 edition of her novel *Frankenstein*, Shelley claimed that 'Every thing must have a beginning … and that beginning must be linked to something that went before.'[14] This is as true for Homer's *Odyssey* as it is for Shelley's novel. Therefore, being the first extant literary depiction of Polyphemos, Homer's *Odyssey* constitutes a beginning, a beginning that is linked to an amalgamation of myths and folktales that went before. Whilst the poem as a whole is a variant of the returning husband/hero, the 'Cyclopeia' of Book 9 is mainly based on the folktale of 'the ogre-blinded.'[15] However, just as Shelley gave a modern sympathetic voice to the ancient Cyclops, Homer took the otherwise two-dimensional folktale characters and imbued the ogre with more three-dimensional qualities able to evoke pity in his audience, and made his hero 'complicated.'[16] The overall story is the tale of the homecoming of the Greek hero Odysseus after ten years of warring and the final sacking of the city of Troy by the Greeks. However, after being blown off course he enters a kind of magical 'Wonderland' where he incurs the wrath of the sea-god Poseidon after blinding his son, the Cyclops Polyphemos. As a result, Odysseus's journey home takes another ten years and he returns to find his home besieged by potential suitors who, believing him to be dead, are plotting against his son and competing for marriage to his wife.

During Odysseus's wanderings he encounters the Cyclops Polyphemos and this

Cohen, ed. (Minneapolis and London, University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 3-25. The full Seven Theses are: Thesis I: The Monster's Body is a Cultural Body; Thesis II: The Monster Always Escapes; Thesis III: The Monster is the Harbinger of Category Crisis; Thesis IV: The Monster Dwells at the Gates of Difference; Thesis V: The Monster Polices the Borders of the Possible; Thesis VI: Fear of the Monster is Really a Kind of Desire; Thesis VII: The Monster Stands at the Threshold … of Becoming.

13 Morgan, *Constructing the Monster*, 242-7; Robert Garland, *The Eye of the Beholder: Deformity and Disability in the Graeco-Roman World*, (Bristol, Bristol Classical Press, 2010), 91-96.

14 Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *Frankenstein*, (*London and New York, Penguin Books Ltd.* 1992), 8.

15 For an examination of the Polyphemos/Odysseus episode as a variant of 'the ogre-blinded' folktale see, for example: William Hansen, *Ariadne's Thread: A Guide to International Tales Found in Classical Literature*, (Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press., 2002), 201 and 289; Lowell Edmunds, 'Epic and Myth', in J. M. Foley (ed), *A Companion to Ancient Epic*, (Chichester, Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 31-44.

16 Homer, *Odyssey*, trans., Emily Wilson, (New York and London, W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2018), 1.1, 105.

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confrontation is Homer's version of 'the ogre-blinded' folktale recounted in Book 9. Odysseus and twelve of his crew venture inside Polyphemos's cave in his absence where they discover racks of milk and cheeses and well-tended lambs and kids. Odysseus's men want to take the food and animals and go back quickly to the ship, but Odysseus insists on staying to meet the owner in the hope of gaining even more acquisitions. They then eat some of the cheese and sit and wait. Eventually, Polyphemos returns home and seals up the entrance to the cave with a large rock. When he spies the trespassers, Polyphemos eats two of them and another four the next day. Odysseus gets him drunk on strong wine and Polyphemos passes out. While he sleeps, Odysseus and his men blind Polyphemos in his one eye with a red-hot stake. The next morning the Cyclops opens the cave to let out his sheep but unbeknown to him Odysseus has strapped his men to their underbellies and himself to the largest ram and they manage to escape from the cave and back to their ship with the Cyclops's animals. Odysseus then shouts out his name to Polyphemos as they sail away, thereby revealing his identity and their whereabouts. This enables Polyphemos to hurl rocks in the direction of his voice, almost capsizing the ship. He then prays to his father Poseidon cursing Odysseus, which brings about Odysseus's protracted journey home.

While most of the epic poem is narrated by the Muse through Homer as omniscient and therefore presumed a reliable narrator, in Books 9–12 Homer has Odysseus take over as bard and recount the story of his adventurous journey back home to Ithaca in his own words. At this point he has been washed ashore in the land of the Phaeacians where he is trying to secure passage home to Ithaca. Yet, even within Odysseus' own narrative there is evidence of ambivalence, he does not always show himself in the best light and there are moments of pathos for Polyphemos. Both in this episode and throughout the poem the two characters are connected in various ways in terms of appearance, societal situation, and behaviour, blurring the supposed boundaries between monster and hero, which will be unpacked next to explore the binary of monster and hero.

Appearance

In terms of appearance, the two characters, Polyphemos and Odysseus, are not disparate enough to clearly indicate singular monstrosity. At one point Odysseus calls Polyphemos 'a man' (9.187) but shortly afterwards 'not like men who eat bread' (9.192). From this it is clear Polyphemos must be anthropomorphic. By Odysseus's description of the stake Polyphemos uses for a staff as being the height of a large ship's mast (9.319-24), he must also be of an enormous height. Being an enormous one-eyed anthropomorphic man and yet not a man, places him in the category of Cohen's Thesis III, 'The Monster is the Harbinger of Category Crisis.' Polyphemos is abnormal, different, a mixed category that resists classification, making him dangerous as he 'threatens to smash distinctions.'[17] However, this transgression also means his physical form blurs the binaries between man and monster. From a different perspective, in the Cyclopes' land Odysseus is abnormal, and he is viewed by Polyphemos as 'puny, a no-good and a weakling' (9.516). Polyphemos does, however, also fit into Aristotle's view of the monstrous as a being that does not resemble its parents and, therefore, is 'contrary to Nature.'[18] Polyphemos, unlike the other Cyclopes, is the offspring of the Olympian god Poseidon and a sea-nymph named Thoösa

17 Cohen, 'Monster Culture (Seven Theses)', 6, 7.

18 Aristotle, *Generation of Animals,* trans. A. L. Peck, (Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 1942), 770 b 5.

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both of whom are two-eyed creatures of the sea while Polyphemos is monocular and land-bound. To Odysseus and his men, he is also 'large, ugly, and frightening.'[19] Although in terms of appearance, Polyphemos does indeed fit into any definition of a monster, apart from oblique references Homer does not describe the physical appearance of Polyphemos in any great detail and even his monocularity is only inferred, by use of the singular 'eye,' rather than directly mentioned, as is his bodily form. Thus, it may be that Homer's ambiguity about Polyphemos' appearance means that his physical Otherness may not be considered of great importance to the story and, therefore, any monstrosity must be illustrated through behaviour instead. It is by comparing the behaviour of Polyphemos and Odysseus that the binaries between the two break down, especially when combined with more subtle connections such as their names and societal situations.

Names and Societal Situation

By giving the Cyclops a name, Polyphemos gains individuality and stands out from the other Cyclopes as being different. Odysseus also stands out from his shipmates in the same way as in the entire poem only three other crew members are ever mentioned by name and only one of those on more than one occasion. One meaning of Polyphemos's name is 'one who is talked about a lot' or 'of much fame.' This 'fame' attributed to Polyphemos could be a reference to how well known the character is from the 'ogre-blinded' folktale, but it also links him to Odysseus.[20] Heroes crave fame and at the beginning of Book 9 of the *Odyssey* Odysseus reveals his identity to the Phaeacians declaring 'my fame reaches the heavens' (9.19-20). Polyphemos's name also links him to Odysseus through the suffix poly in the many epithets given to the hero such as: *polytropos,* of many devices; *polymetis*, much cunning; *polytlas*, much-enduring. The meaning of the name Odysseus is either 'full of anger and hatred,' or 'the subject of much anger and hatred.' This is something that can also be said about Polyphemos. After Polyphemos had eaten two of his men, Odysseus tells us he was left 'devising evil in the depths of my heart, if in any way I might take vengeance on him' (9.316-7). After he has been blinded, Polyphemos had similar thoughts towards Odysseus, promising that if he finds him 'then would his brains be dashed on the ground throughout the cave, some here, some there once I had struck him' (9.458-9).

> … **on the land's edge close by the sea** we
> saw a high **cave** … There a monstrous **man** spent his nights,
> who shepherded his flocks **alone and afar,**
> **and did not mingle with others, but lived apart,**
> obedient to no law. For he was created a
> monstrous marvel, and **was not like a man that lives by bread,**
> but like a wooded peak of lofty mountains, **which stands**
> **out to view alone, apart from all the rest.**[21] (9.181-92)

Polyphemos is othered by Odysseus by marking him out as different even within his own societal group. He creates an adverse view of the Cyclops from the outset with an

19 'Monster,' OED Online. https://www.oed.com/dictionary/monster_n?tab=meaning_and_use#35945948.
20 Definitions according to Liddell and Scott-Jones, https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/. For further discussion of Polyphemos' name see Egbert J. Bakker, 'Polyphemos', in *Colby Quarterly,* Volume. 38, Issue no. 2, June 2002, 135-150. For 'the ogre-blinded' folktale see, for example, Hansen, *Ariadne's Thread,* 201 and 289.
21 As with all other translations of the *Odyssey* unless otherwise stated: Homer, *Odyssey,* trans. A. T. Murray, revised by George E. Dimock, (Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge, MA and London, Harvard University Press., 1998), 9.181-92, 329-31.

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emphasis on words and phrases such as 'alone,' 'afar,' 'did not mingle' that emphasises the isolation of Polyphemos. This could be interpreted negatively as a rejection of or from society, a concept that, as Odysseus makes clear, is alien to the civilised Greek. Unlike the other Cyclopes who live in the mountains, according to Odysseus, Polyphemos's home is at the furthest point of the land beside the sea, he shepherds his flocks alone far from the other Cyclopes, he also lives far away from them and never visits anyone. However, during the epic poem, we witness the gradual isolation of Odysseus himself beginning with the breaking down of relations between himself and his men, continuing with growing carelessness of his leadership. This leads to more and more loss of life until, in Book 5, Odysseus arrives in Scheria, the land of the Phaeacians, completely alone, stripped of his ships, his crew, his treasures and even his clothes.

With the purpose of persuading Alcinous, the king of the Phaeacians, to provide him with safe passage home to the island of Ithaca, Odysseus recounts the story of his troubled travels so far including his encounter with Polyphemos in the 'Cyclopeia' of Book 9. After arriving at a deserted island, now usually referred to as Goat Island, where they hunted and feasted on an abundance of sheep and goats, Odysseus noticed smoke coming from the nearby homeland of the Cyclopes and took twelve of his men to go and investigate.[22] It was not necessity that caused Odysseus to risk his men's lives in this venture, they had everything they needed in the way of food and water on Goat Island, but pure curiosity and greed, hoping he would be able to accumulate further acquisitions in the form of guest-gifts or, if necessary, even theft.

> … we came to the land of the Cyclopes,
> an insolent and lawless folk, who … plant nothing with their
> hands, nor plow; but all those things spring up for them
> … wheat, and barley, and vines, which bear the rich clusters of wine …
> Neither assemblies for council have they,
> nor appointed laws, but they dwell on the peaks of
> mountains in hollow caves, and each one is lawgiver to
> his children and his wives, and they have no regard for one another. (9.105-15)

In his narrative Odysseus himself invites comparison between him and his men, and Polyphemos and the other Cyclopes by describing them and their way of life in purely negative terms in contrast to their own. As Kostas Myrsiades points out, this describes Odysseus and his values more than it does the Cyclopes.[23] Odysseus deems them arrogant and lawless (9.106) and criticises the fact that they do not have an agricultural system, they do not have councils or common laws but only make laws for their own children and wives, they live in caves on the mountain tops instead of in houses, and do not care for one another. Odysseus also criticises the Cyclopes for not having ships or skilled men to build and row them, which means they cannot visit other cities or even sail to the nearby Goat Island. The description of the Cyclopes and their land is interposed with a description of Goat Island which helps to emphasise the Cyclopes' Otherness in terms of their uncivilised existence and lack of *technê* ('art,' 'skill,' 'craft') in contrast to the technological skills of civilised Greeks that would have enabled them to, not just sail to the fertile island, but

22 The island opposite the Cyclopes's homeland has become known as 'Goat Island'. Homer does not name the island but according to Odysseus 'On it live wild goats innumerable, for no traffic of men prevents them, nor do hunters come there'' (*Odyssey*, 9.118-20).

23 Kostas Myrsiades, *Reading Homer's Odyssey*, (Lewisburg, PA, Bucknell University Press, 2019), 111.

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also to colonise it.[24]

Yet, the Cyclopes live in a type of primitive Golden Age of man, as described by Hesiod in *Works and Days* and in line with Cohen's Thesis IV, 'The Monster Dwells at the Gates of Difference.'[25] The 'abnormal' personal body is also reflected in the abnormal collective cultural practices. They resemble an 'anterior culture' which undermines and thereby threatens the more advanced cultural 'self.' Thus, if represented as monstrous, the displacement of the 'anterior culture' through colonisation would be justified and its eradication considered an heroic act.[26] Cohen's Thesis V, 'The Monster Polices the Borders of the Possible' extends the taboo of 'foreignness' warning against exploration and the very curiosity that leads Odysseus to investigate the land of the Cyclopes, for any being inhabiting the geographical realms beyond one's own cultural boundaries is likely to be 'cruel, and wild, and unjust' (9.175) and, therefore, monstrous.[27] But the primitive Cyclopes have no need to plough or sow or build ships and colonise another land, they live in peace with one another and are provided with all they need without toil. Polyphemos is even able to leave the entrance to his cave open during the day when he is absent with his flocks, without fear of another Cyclops entering and stealing his possessions. However, the same cannot be said about the behaviour of Odysseus and his men.

Behaviour

Odysseus measures the Cyclopes and their natural way of life against his own Greek identity and civilised culture, thereby, from Odysseus's perspective, placing them in the role of the monstrous Other. However, the Cyclopes may have a different way of life from that of the Greeks, but it is not a monstrous one and indeed, it is Odysseus and his men who act in an uncivilised manner when they enter Polyphemos's cave uninvited and eat his food. To the Cyclopes the Greeks are piratical invading foreigners. This is a role Odysseus and his men had already played out in Ismarus, which is referred to by Odysseus himself during the 'Cyclopeia,' thereby providing a link between the two episodes. When Odysseus set out from Goat Island to investigate the land of the Cyclopes, he said he took with him 'a goatskin of dark, sweet wine' (9.196) given to him by the priest Maro in Ismarus in return for sparing the priest's life during the raid. Parallels such as this form an internal intertextuality that invite comparison between the separate episodes.[28]

Shortly after leaving the sacked city of Troy, Odysseus and his men were driven by the wind to the land of the Kikones and the coastal city of Ismarus where they slaughtered the men, looted their treasure, and raped the women.[29] Although they had once been allies of Troy, this invasion of the Kikones's land was an unnecessary and unprovoked attack on a people who were no longer at war with the Greeks. Odysseus, the self-proclaimed 'sacker of cities' (9.504) launched the attack still in the nature of the Iliadic hero but without just cause, making it, in the eyes of the Kikones, an act of piracy by marauding foreigners. Yet, Odysseus relays the information about the raid to his Phaeacian audience quite matter-

24 Homer, *Odyssey*, 9.125-30.

25 Hesiod, *Works and Days*, trans., Glenn W. Most, (Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2006), 109-26, 97.

26 Cohen, 'Monster Culture (Seven Theses)', 7-12

27 Cohen, 'Monster Culture (Seven Theses)', 12-16.

28 For further discussion on the internal intertextual links as an invitation to comparison between episodes see: Egbert J. Bakker, *The Meaning of Meat and the Structure of the 'Odyssey'*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013),157-69; and Maureen Alden, *Para-Narratives in the 'Odyssey'*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2020) 6. Bakker refers to them as 'interformularity' and Alden as 'para-narratives'.

29 Homer, *Odyssey*, 9.39-43.

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of-factly without any sign of either justification or remorse. Odysseus claims he then 'ordered that we should flee with a quick foot, but the others in their great folly did not listen' (9.43-5). If Odysseus's account of the episode is an accurate one and he did not wish to stay and feast, then the men's 'great folly' in ignoring their leader's command is the first sign of the decaying relations between Odysseus and his men. The delay gave time for a counterattack from the Kikones, which resulted in much loss of life of Odysseus's crew. Odysseus is always quick to blame Zeus, the leader of the Olympian gods, for his mishaps, which he did when he was blown off course by the North Wind while rounding the cape of Malea and into the 'Wonderland' of his wanderings (9.67). This could be interpreted as a punishment by Zeus for the *monstrous* attack on the Kikones. Indeed, this is implied by the link between the two episodes and Polyphemos's first words when he finds Odysseus and his men in his home. Polyphemos calls them *xenoi* – 'foreigners' or 'strangers' and asks if they are like 'pirates … who wander hazarding their lives and bringing evil to men of other lands?' (9.252-5). Just as in Ismarus, Odysseus had come ashore and into Polyphemos's home uninvited with the purpose of acquiring goods through theft if necessary. From Polyphemos's perspective Odysseus is the Other who neither knows nor conforms to the norms of Cyclopean culture (Cohen's Thesis IV).

> Then my comrades spoke and besought me first of all to take some
> of the cheeses and depart, and then speedily to drive to the
> swift ship the kids and lambs out of the pens, and to sail
> over the salt water. **But I did not listen to them** … (9.225-30)

Yet, Odysseus did not learn his lesson easily but repeated the same mistake when he set off to the Cyclopes's land. In order to satisfy his own greed and curiosity Odysseus placed his men in danger, once again, this time through his own choice of staying to feast on purloined food instead of escaping while they could.

> Two of them together he seized and dashed to the
> earth like puppies, and their brains flowed forth upon the
> ground and wetted the earth. Then he cut them limb from
> limb and made ready his supper, and ate them **like a**
> **mountain-nurtured lion**, leaving nothing – ate the entrails,
> and the flesh, and the bones and marrow. (9.289-93)

In terms of Polyphemos's behaviour, his monstrosity is demonstrated, not just by eating six of Odysseus's men with the intention of eating them all, but in the brutal and nonchalant way, according to Odysseus, he went about it. After eating two of Odysseus's men on the first night, the next morning Polyphemos ate two more before heading off up the mountainside to pasture his sheep, casually whistling as he went on his way.[30] This is reminiscent of Odysseus' casual attitude to the raid on the Kikones. That night when Polyphemos returned and ate two more men, Odysseus offered him the strong Maron wine he had taken with him and plied him with it until Polyphemos passed out drunk, spewing up the wine and human flesh in his sleep.[31] The wine that helped to cause the downfall of Odysseus and his men in Ismarus this time did the same for Polyphemos.

30 Homer, *Odyssey*, 9.311-16.
31 Homer, *Odyssey*, 9.371-4.

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> … we took the
> fiery-pointed stake and whirled it around in his eye, and
> the blood flowed round it, all hot as it was. His eyelids
> above and below and his brows were all singed by the flame
> from the burning eyeball and its roots crackled in the fire. (9.378-94)

Polyphemos's deeds may appear to be the act of a monster, but Odysseus's retaliation is just as violent, and he appears to relish in recounting the blinding of the Cyclops in all its gruesome detail, which he performed with a brutality that is analogous to the monstrosity of Polyphemos's anthropophagy. Odysseus and his men sharpened Polyphemos's own staff and heated the point in the fire until it glowed red hot. They then plunged it much deeper into the Cyclops's eye than was required to merely blind him and thus going beyond an act of self-defence.

> Beloved ram, why is it that you go out through the
> cave like this, the last of the flock? Never before have you
> been left behind by the sheep, but are always far the first to
> graze on the tender bloom of the grass, stepping high, and
> the first to reach the streams of the river, and the first to
> show your longing to return to the fold at evening. But now
> you are last of all. Surely you are sorrowing for the eye of
> your master, which an evil man blinded along with his
> miserable fellows when he had overpowered my wits with wine. (9.447-54)

The brutality of the prolonged attack and the detail in which it is described evokes a level of pity for the Cyclops. This is increased when, the next morning, the now blind Polyphemos, opens the cave to let out his sheep and 'groaning and toiling in anguish, groped with his hands' (9.415-6) to make sure none of Odysseus' men were amongst them. Although unbeknown to Polyphemos, they were strapped to the underbellies of the sheep and making good their escape. Homer's ambivalence towards both Polyphemos and Odysseus is expertly demonstrated in Polyphemos's pathetic address to his favourite 'beloved ram', whose habits he knows intimately, while Odysseus clings to its underbelly as it makes its way out of the cave. At the same time as evoking further pity for Polyphemos the audience is encouraged to feel trepidation for Odysseus.

> Then we took out of the hollow ship the flocks of the Cyclops,
> and divided them … But the ram my well-greaved
> comrades gave to me alone …
> and on the shore I sacrificed him to Zeus …
> So, then, all day long till sunset we sat feasting on
> abundant flesh and sweet wine. (9.548-57)

Pathos shifts back to Polyphemos shortly afterwards when Odysseus and his men arrive back at Goat Island. Just as Polyphemos deprived Odysseus of six of his companions, after their escape Odysseus and his men slaughtered the entirety of Polyphemos's flocks, his sole companions, including his beloved ram, and feasted on them all.

As Odysseus and his men sail away, Polyphemos prays to his father, the sea-god Poseidon, cursing Odysseus to experience a similar fate to what had befallen him so that he may arrive home late 'and in distress, after losing all his comrades, in a ship that is

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another's; and may he find trouble in his house' (9.532-4). This foreshadows Odysseus' homecoming in Book 13, when he arrives on the island of Ithaca alone to find that in his absence, believing Odysseus to be dead, his house has been besieged by potential suitors to his wife and they spend their days feasting on Odysseus' herds and flocks. This echoes the two episodes of Odysseus and his men feasting on Polyphemos's flocks and the purloined food of the Kikones, thereby placing Odysseus and his crew in the role of the 'insolent suitors' (13.373) and, therefore, questioning Odysseus's own morality, and so-called civilised nature.

> Endure, my heart; a worse thing even than this you
> once endured on that day when the Cyclops, irresistible
> in strength, devoured my stalwart comrades; but you
> endured until your wit got you out of the cave where you
> thought to die. (20.18-21)

We are reminded of the episode with Polyphemos, again by Odysseus himself, when he recalls the incident the night before he wreaks his revenge on the suitors, thereby, once again, inviting comparison between the two episodes.

> There she found Odysseus
> amid the bodies of the slain**, all befouled with blood**
> **and filth, like a lion** that comes from feeding on an ox of
> the farmstead, and all his breast and cheeks on either side
> are stained with blood, and he is terrible to look upon;
> even so was Odysseus befouled, his feet and his hands above. (22.402-6)

Just like Polyphemos, Odysseus traps the trespassers in his home barring 'the doors of the stately halls' (21.387) and 'the gates of the well-fenced court' (21.388-9). He then slaughters the suitors, over one hundred of them, as well as twelve female slaves the suitors had taken as their sexual partners who, Odysseus himself acknowledges, only lay with them by force.[32] When one suitor was struck with an arrow through his throat, he knocked his food to the floor which became 'befouled' (20.21) by his own blood when he fell. This again recalls Polyphemos's beast-like killing of Odysseus' men when 'their brains flowed forth upon the ground and wetted the earth' (9.230-31). The suitor's food and blood become one and thus metaphoric anthropophagy on the part of Odysseus. Odysseus becomes Polyphemos as the returning homeowner whose reaction to finding strangers in their house eating their food is to kill them.[33] After the slaughter, the resemblance is complete when, just like Polyphemos, Odysseus is described once again as a lion 'all befouled with blood and filth.'

32 Homer, *Odyssey*, 22.37.

33 It had generally been considered that any connection with the suitors was with Polyphemos, but in recent years some scholars have also observed the resemblance with Odysseus. In particular: Rick M. Newton, 'Poor Polyphemus: Emotional Ambivalence in *Odyssey* 9 and 17', *The Classical World,* Vol. 76, No. 3, (1983), 137-142; Pura Nieto Hernandez, 'Back in the Cave of the Cyclops', *The American Journal of Philology,* Vol. 121, No. 3, (Autumn 2000) 345-366; Tim Brelinski, 'Medon Meets a Cyclops? *Odyssey* 22.310-80', *Classical Quarterly,* 65.1 (2015), 1-13; and Alden, *Para-Narratives in the 'Odyssey'*, 246-254.

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Limits of Cohen's Theories in Summary

As I have illustrated, Cohen's Seven Theses are important to any discussion on monsters, as is the ancient Cyclops Polyphemos. While Polyphemos is, of course, relevant to all seven of Cohen's theses, I have concentrated on Theses III, IV, and V, which are related to appearance, race, and culture. As Morgan states, the Other can only be understood in comparison to the Self, but what that Self constitutes can itself be a matter of perspective. From most perspectives, and certainly for Odysseus, the Greeks, and Aristotle, Polyphemos does fit into Cohen's Thesis III: 'The Monster is the Harbinger of Category Crisis' and, as such, can be classed as the monstrous Other in terms of appearance. With his enormous height and his one eye, he is 'abnormal', 'different.' His anthropomorphic features as well as his dissimilarity to his parents, also place him as being hybrid, a mixed category and 'contrary to nature'. From Polyphemos's perspective, it is Odysseus who is different: he does not resemble the Cyclopes in size, or strength or monocularity. However, as any physical description of Polyphemos is kept vague, appearance cannot be considered of great importance to the status of monster in the story of Polyphemos's encounter with Odysseus. When considering his societal situation, culture, and behaviour, again, from Odysseus's perspective, Polyphemos also exemplifies Cohen's Theses IV: 'The Monster Dwells at the Gates of Difference,' and V: 'The Monster Polices the Borders of the Possible.' He is from a different race with different customs that may be considered primitive and savage, and Odysseus would have been better off not venturing into the Cyclopes's land. Again, from the perspective of the Cyclopes, Odysseus and his men are foreigners who do not understand or adhere to the Cyclopes's way of life.

However, it is when comparing Polyphemos' behaviour with that of Odysseus that the distinctions between the two break down. Odysseus' self-righteous superiority, as Garland observes, is called into question together with the hypocrisy of Greek civilisation with regard to the treatment of others.[34] Odysseus criticises the Cyclopes for having 'no regard for one another' (9.115), yet he disregards his own men, ultimately leading to the loss of life of them all and surmounts an unprovoked attack of slaughter, rape, and pillage, on the defenceless Kikones. Where Odysseus's monstrous behaviour not only mirrors but also magnifies that of Polyphemos is in his response to finding trespassers in his home. Polyphemos is brutal in his killing of Odysseus's men but Odysseus's unremittent slaughter of the suitors and female slaves, as well as the excessive violence in the blinding of the Cyclops, far exceeds the monstrous deeds of Polyphemos and definitely exhibits 'such extreme cruelty or wickedness as to appear inhuman.'[35]

Odysseus labels Polyphemos's killings as 'savage' (9.215), 'pitiless' (9.287), and 'cruel' (9.351), yet considers his own as being justifiable retribution.[36] Polyphemos may be considered a monster and Odysseus a hero but, as this article has demonstrated, by concentrating on similarities of behaviour rather than differences of appearance and culture, the concepts of Self and Other become blurred. Through Homer's ambivalence and ambiguity and the internal intertextuality that invites comparison of the various linked episodes, a close reading of the epic poem does make the audience rethink the monstrosity of both characters, Polyphemos *and* Odysseus, breaking down the supposed

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34 Garland, *The Eye of the Beholder,* 91-94.

35 'Monster,' OED Online. https://www.oed.com/dictionary/monster_n?tab=meaning_and_use#35945948.

36 Homer, *Odyssey,* 13.386. While it may be suggested that Odysseus's actions seem justified because of the support he gets from the gods, this delves into the notion of the monstrosity of the gods themselves which is addressed in my thesis but lies outside the scope of this article.

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binaries between the two and creating a more sympathetic understanding of the ancient Cyclops.

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