

# Odysseus versus the Cyclops

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MONSTERS HAVE probably always been with us. They are so good for exploring the margins of civilisation that they must have been invented in very early times. Indeed, male and female monsters are already present in the oldest poems of the Western world, the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* of Homer. In the ninth book of the *Odyssey* Homer describes how Odysseus landed on the island of the Cyclopes.<sup>1</sup> With his comrades he visited the cave of one of them, Polyphemus, who locked the Greeks in and started to have them for dinner. In the end Odysseus managed to get him drunk, told him that his name was 'Nobody,' blinded his one eye and escaped underneath the Cyclops' sheep with his surviving comrades. The monstrous Cyclops has often fascinated scholars and the episode has regularly been analysed. Unlike most other Homeric episodes, though, variants of this one have been found in countries as far apart as France, Turkey and Estonia. Their unexpected presence is the reason that the following analysis will not limit itself to Homer, but will also look at the folkloric parallels. Subsequently, we will try to answer the following questions. First, what is the connection with the variants of the story outside Greece (§ 1)? Secondly, who were the Cyclopes according to Greek tradition (§ 2)? And finally, are there narrative or ritual traditions behind the figure of Polyphemus and his cannibalistic activities (§ 3)? Let us start with the non-Homeric variants.

## 1. *The travelling Cyclops*

After Homer, the story of the Cyclops immediately became popular and we find already early representations in numerous places outside Attica, the main producer of ancient Greek vase paintings (Touchefeu-Meynier 1992:1017). In fact, the story was so popular that during the Roman Empire people even dreamt of the Cyclops or his cave (Artem. 1.5, 26). But similar stories to Homer's have also been re-

<sup>1</sup> The most helpful studies of the Cyclopes in general are Brelich 1958:332-36; Detienne, Vernant 1978:75-87; Auffarth 1991:292-344; Touchefeu-Meynier 1992.

corded by modern folklorists, and in an analysis of Odysseus' encounter with Polyphemus Walter Burkert uses these tales as independent evidence to explain the motif of the escape underneath the ram.<sup>2</sup> Is such an approach justified?

It is now nearly two hundred years since scholars started to note folklore versions of the Polyphemus episode. The discovery seems to have been made first by the German scholar H.F. von Diez (1751-1817), who had been Prussian *chargé d'affaires* in Constantinople. In 1815 he discovered in the Royal Dresden Library a sixteenth-century manuscript with a collection of unknown Turkish stories, *The Book of Dede Korkut*. The stories are situated in the heroic age of the Turkish tribe of the Oghuz, who in the eleventh century became the most important power in what later would be the Ottoman empire, but they were probably recorded around 1400 in North-East Anatolia.<sup>3</sup> To his surprise Von Diez read the following story:

A Cyclops-like figure terrorised the land of the Oghuz, who invoked the help of their seer Dede Korkut. He persuaded the monster to be satisfied with two persons and 500 sheep a day. When a mother had to give up her second, last son, she went to the great Oghuz hero Basat, who finally agreed to get rid of the monster. The 'Cyclops' pushed Basat's arrows away like flies, grabbed the hero and put him into his boot. When Basat had liberated himself, he put a spit into his eye and left his cave wrapped in the skin of a ram.

The 'Cyclops' did give him a ring, but Basat killed him shortly afterwards.<sup>4</sup> Von Diez recognised that this episode was inspired by Odysseus' confrontation with Polyphemus and only fifty years later the lesser known of the Grimm brothers, Wilhelm (1786-1859), had already collected ten more versions, among which some came from Northern Europe (Grimm 1857). About a century later there appeared the first monograph, with 221 variants from all over the world, and the industry of modern folklorists has since added many more.<sup>5</sup>

Wilhelm Grimm thought that the versions of the Estonians, Finns, Greeks,<sup>6</sup> and other peoples all derived from the same primeval original and that it was irrelevant that those from Northern Europe had been noted down more than 2500 years after Homer. Many later folklorists equally did not concern themselves with the precise chronology determination of their versions. Apparently, the romantic idea of the people as the carrier of age-old traditions made such questions superfluous. Moreover, the folklore versions often contained additional motifs which

2 Burkert 1979:33; similarly, Calame 1995:139-73. Burkert 1987:46 is more careful: '... a widespread type of folktale which, even if it were ultimately dependent on some *Odyssey*, owed its success to its intrinsic structure and dynamics, and not to special poetical skill.'

3 Diez 1815; Spies 1981 (date).

4 Lewis 1974:140-50. The exact date of the individual tales is impossible to establish.

5 Hackman 1904; Burkert 1979:156 note 13 (with earlier bibliography); Naumann 1979.

6 But the Greek parallels are not impressive: Faure 1967 and 1970; Imellos 1984.

made them appear to be independent from the Homeric version. A good example is the oldest version recorded in Western Europe and already noted by Wilhelm Grimm. In his *Dolopathos* (ca. 1190) the Cistercian monk Johannes from Alta Silva in the Lorraine relates the following story:

Robbers had heard that a giant (*gigas*) possessed a great amount of gold. They decided to rob him but were taken prisoner. The giant immediately selected the fattest among them to be cooked alive. After him all the robbers were eaten until the story-teller, who was forced to participate in the cannibalism, was the last one left. Through a trick he managed to blind the giant, but he could not escape until he had wrapped himself into the skin of a ram and thus got free. The giant gave him a ring, which forced him to betray his position. That is why the giant could continuously trace him until he cut off the finger with the ring.<sup>7</sup>

Unfortunately, in a second robber adventure Johannes tells that the name of the cannibal was Polyphemus. So, directly or indirectly, he had derived his story from a text of Homer. But how? The learned monk had some knowledge of Greek mythology and even of Greek itself, as illustrated by his explanation of the title: *Dolopathos: id est dolum vel dolorem patiens, ex greco latinoque sermone compositum* (4.7-8).<sup>8</sup> However, by the time of Johannes, the Greek text of Homer was no longer known (Kullmann 1988): after the fall of the Roman Empire knowledge of Greek had disappeared fairly quickly in the West, and even scholars such as Isidore of Seville or the Venerable Bede had only a superficial and defective knowledge of Greek;<sup>9</sup> what remained known of Greek was chiefly based on Greek and Latin parallel texts of the Bible and Greek-Latin wordlists.<sup>10</sup> Theoretically, Johannes could somehow have learned of the story via the Latin tradition, since Odysseus' encounter is told in detail by the mythographer Hyginus (*Fab.* 125), but this is not very likely. Hyginus was not a popular author: the one manuscript to survive the Middle Ages was written around AD 900 in Beneventan script and its fragments have been discovered only in Bavaria.<sup>11</sup> Given that Johannes is also the first Western author to use motifs from the *Book of Sindebad*, it is more attractive to think of a Crusader or pilgrim to the Holy Land via Byzantium as his (ultimate?) source, but other possibilities such as merchants can of course not be excluded (Fehling 1977:89-97, 1986:191-207). In any case, the knowledge of the Homeric Cyclops must have been fairly recent, since a Homeric colouring is still absent from the account of the Cyclopes with their *unum oculum* in the *Liber monstrorum* (ca. AD

7 Hilka 1913:73-75, tr. Gilleland 1981:64-66. Cutting of finger: Burkert 1996:37-40.

8 For Johannes' erudition see Gilleland 1978; Maaz 1993.

9 Berschin 1980; Noble 1985; Berschin 1985; Kaczynski 1988; Herren 1988.

10 See, in addition to Berschin 1980, 1985, especially Aerts 1985, 1995 and 1996; Osborne 1990.

11 Reeve 1983. For other possibilities see Herren 1999, an excellent survey.

900), which is nearly literally based on an episode from *Aeneid* III (588ff) and does not betray the slightest familiarity with the *Odyssey* (1.11: Bologna 1977:46). Neither, somewhat later, does Adam of Bremen (d. ca. 1081) in his *History of the Archbishops of Hamburg*, who only mentions the giant size and abnormally blood-thirsty dogs of the Cyclopes (4.41).

The *Dolopathos* is not unique in betraying literary influence. For example, a Sicilian fairy tale calls the giant Ciclopu (Pitré 1875, no. 71) and in an Icelandic version the two heroes (monks in this case) remark that in Latin the giant is called *monoculus* (Settegast 1917:7). Admittedly, most of the folklore versions miss the Homeric 'Nobody' episode and have added a scene with the ring similar to the one in the *Dede Korkut* version, but it is hardly to be doubted that directly or indirectly they all ultimately derive from Homer.<sup>12</sup>

That conclusion was not the one always drawn by folklorists. In more recent times, one of them noted that various features of medieval versions of the Polyphemus episode occurred on Greek vases but were absent from Homer: Cyclopes with two or three eyes (below, § 3), more Odyssean comrades than are mentioned in the *Odyssey*, and the roasting by Polyphemus of one of Odysseus' comrades instead of eating him raw.<sup>13</sup> Yet it would go much too far to deduce from these variants, as folklorists do, that they point to an independent oral tradition which for two millennia went underground and only emerged during the Crusades. All these differences can easily be explained as variations by an artist who knows how to make a familiar story interesting to his audience.

In fact, in recent years it has become increasingly clear that the oral tradition is highly vulnerable. Only when a story is connected with a rite, a certain object (such as a statue or a ruin) or an activity of vital importance for the community (§ 3), may we expect archaic traditions to survive relatively unchanged over a long period of time.<sup>14</sup> Classical motifs in modern fairy tales invariably turn out to be derived from literary influences:<sup>15</sup> we must never forget that Western Europe remained exposed to Greek myth because of the popularity of Ovid in the Latin school curriculum (Burkert 1984).

12 As was already observed by Meuli 1976:639-40 (1921<sup>1</sup>).

13 Röhrich 1976:234-52, 326-28 ('Die mittelalterlichen Redaktionen des Polyphem-Märchens und ihr Verhältnis zur ausserhomerischen Tradition').

14 Note also the view of the influential early modern historian Keith Thomas 1986: 120-1: 'Authentic oral tradition, unaffected by any written text, is never easy to find.'

15 As has been persuasively argued by Fehling 1977:89-97 and 1984:79-92; Moser 1979. It is curious but typical that this discussion has been completely ignored by Hansen 1997.

## 2. *The Cyclopes in and outside Homer*

Let us now turn to the Greek tradition. Recent research has increasingly realised that Homer was an independent poet who regularly, to a larger or smaller extent, modified pre-existing traditions in order to fit them into his own epics.<sup>16</sup> In order to find out whether Homer has done so also in the case of the Cyclopes, we will first look at the non-Homeric tradition. The oldest certain mention of Cyclopes outside Homer occurs in that mine of mythological information, Hesiod's *Theogony*. He tells that they were like the gods (142) and that their works displayed 'strength and powers of invention' (146). Both these qualities appear in the Cyclopean tradition. When after ten years Zeus' battle against the Titans still proved unsuccessful, the goddess Ge (Earth) predicted victory if Zeus would release 'the Cyclopes who had been hurled down into the Tartarus' by their father Ouranos for reasons obscure to us. So Zeus killed their 'gaoleress Kampe' and in gratitude the Cyclopes forged his thunder, flash and lightning-bolt, and in addition a helmet of invisibility for Hades and the trident for Poseidon.<sup>17</sup> Our source, the late mythographer Apollodorus, seems to derive this episode, directly or more probably indirectly, from a lost Archaic epic, the *Titanomachy*, but he also follows Hesiod, who gives as the names of the Cyclopes: Brontes, 'Thunder,' Steropes, 'Lightner,' and Arges, 'Flash' (140).<sup>18</sup> Given their early role as smiths, it is not surprising that mythographers (historians?) related that the Cyclopes were the first to make weapons in a Euboean cave, Teuchion (*P Oxy.* 10.1241). This primacy is confirmed by the Hellenistic historian Istros, according to whom they were the inventors of weapons in bronze (*FGrH* 334 fr. 71). Orphic poets even stated that the Cyclopes instructed Hephaistus and Athena in the art of casting statues (Orph. frs. 178-80 Kern). The Cyclopes were out of place in the 'new order' instituted by Zeus: they belonged to the divine generation before Zeus and they practised the dangerous activity of making weapons. That is probably why according to an early tradition Apollo killed them or, according to a later and 'softer' version, their sons.<sup>19</sup> However, later poets did not want the Cyclopes to disappear from the mythological scene altogether and made them into helpers of Hephaistos. They settled them in the volcanic area of Sicily or adjacent islands, and as assistants of the divine smith they became popular in Roman art; as such they were even occasionally alluded to in later inscriptions with literary pretensions.<sup>20</sup>

16 See for a good introduction to this problem Rutherford 1996:1-8.

17 Hes. *Theog.* 504-5; Apollod. 1.1.2 and 2.1, 3.10.4; see also Pind. fr. 266 Maehler; Nollé 1993:no. 3.

18 Pherec. *FGrH* 3 fr. 46 also mentions a Cyclops named Aortes; Hyg. *Fab.* 157 a Euphemus, which H.J. Rose in his edition (1933) unnecessarily changed into Polyphemus.

19 Pherec. *FGrH* 3 fr. 35a; Eratosth. [*Cat.*] 29; Apollod. 3.10.4; Hyg. *Fab.* 49 (sons).

20 Helpers: Eur. *Cyc.* 20; Thuc. 6.2; Callim. *Hymn* 3.46ff; Nisbet and Hubbard on Hor. *Carm.* 1.4.7; add *PMich.* 760. Roman art: Touchefeu-Meynier 1992:nos. 32-41. Inscriptions: *SEG* 30.1254, 34.1308.

Given that forging iron requires physical strength, it is understandable that the Cyclopes were also considered to have been giants, as immediately after Hesiod and Homer the Spartan poet Tyrtaeus mentioned their 'size and strength' (12.3) and a later tradition ascribed to them the building of the first altar. In view of their negative characterisation overall, it is not surprising that this feat is recorded only once. On the other hand, early traditions ascribed imposing buildings to the Cyclopes, such as the walls of Mycene and Tiryns, and as builders they remained famous all through antiquity.<sup>21</sup>

However impressive these activities may seem to us, the Greek upper-classes looked down upon those who had to work for a living. That is why Sophocles referred to the artisan Daedalus as 'living by his hands' (fr. 164a Radt) and why the Cyclopes were disparagingly named 'Bellyhands,' a description already existing in the fifth century and lending further support to the antiquity of the 'building' tradition.<sup>22</sup>

Do these mythological representations also in some way reflect a historical reality? Hesiod mentions only three Cyclopes and later notices do not give the impression of a larger group either. In fact, a group of smiths is not unique in Greek mythology. Similar groups of people who are closely associated with iron working and similarly abnormal in their physical appearance have been reported for the island of Rhodes, where the local smiths, the Telchines, were represented as half-man, half-seal, and for Crete, where the smiths of Mt Ida were called Daktyloi, 'Tom Thumbs'—smiths could evidently be represented larger or smaller than normal people.<sup>23</sup> Such representations may look strange to us, but all over the world the smith was a kind of outsider, whose work placed him outside the normal activities of hunting or agriculture.<sup>24</sup> It is clearly this marginal position that led to these 'monstrous' representations. The consistency with which smiths are represented as groups also suggests that early Greek smiths did not work alone. However, the mythological imagination tends to simplify real life in order to make the narrative more effective. It may well be that iron working groups consisted of more than three workers, but we have no evidence to decide the point.

In Homer we encounter a different kind of Cyclops. When Odysseus lands in the land of the Cyclopes, it initially looks as if he has disembarked in a land of

21 Pind. fr. 169a.7 Maehler; Bacchyl. 11.77; Pherec. *FGrH* 3 fr. 12; Soph. fr. 227 Radt; Eur. *HF* 15, *IA* 1499; Hellanicus *FGrH* 4 fr. 88; Eratosth. [*Cat.*] 39 (altar); Verg. *Aen.* 6.631; Strabo 8.6.8; Apollod. 2.2.1; Paus. 2.25.8; *Anth. Pal.* 7.748; schol. on Eur. *Or.* 965; *Et. Magnum* 213.29; Eust. *Il.* p. 286.21.

22 R. Kassel and C. Austin on Nikophon F 6-12; Lloyd-Jones and Parsons on Antimachus 77 SH; Wilamowitz-Moellendorff 1959:272: 'offenbar aus altionischer Mythographie.'

23 Detienne, Vernant 1978:244-6, 254-5; Dasen 1993:196-97; Graf 1999.

24 Eliade 1971; Margarido, Germain-Wasserman 1972; Marold 1973; Hauck 1977.

Cockaigne. Here nature supplies everything without human effort, since the Cyclopes need not sow or plough (108-9). But the initial impression soon proves to be deceptive, since the lushness of nature is just one more sign of the absence of a normal human community.<sup>25</sup> In fact, the Cyclopes have no political institutions or laws (106, 112), and do not live in houses but in caves (113-5), a kind of habitation normally only ascribed in Greece to its primeval inhabitants or to faraway peoples.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, they are unfamiliar with commerce (127ff), agriculture (134) and ships (136). In the light of this absence of civilisation, it is not surprising that they are called 'arrogant' (106).

Within this uncivilised community Polyphemos is even less civilised. He is 'monstrously tall' (187, 191) and has a 'thundering voice' (257). His cave is situated far away from the other caves; he never goes to visit other shepherds with his herd (188); he always eats alone,<sup>27</sup> and he does not 'rule' over a wife and children (115, 188). Moreover, he distinguishes himself from the civilised Odysseus by his culinary behaviour. He is not only a cannibal, but even an uncivilised one, since each day he smashes some of Odysseus' comrades against the ground 'like young dogs' (!) and evidently consumes them raw (289).<sup>28</sup> In addition to this ignorance about the proper way of preparing meat, the Cyclops is also ignorant of the right way of drinking, since Odysseus can make him drunk by supplying him with exquisite wine. For the Greeks wine mixed with water was *the* drink par excellence and neighbouring peoples were regularly represented as either drinkers of milk or as ignorant of the right way of drinking wine, correctly diluted with water.<sup>29</sup> It is now hardly surprising that Polyphemos even lacks the most elementary qualities of normal human life, piety and hospitality (272ff).

It is part of Homer's art that he does not stress the monstrous appearance of the Cyclopes.<sup>30</sup> Admittedly, he does tell that Polyphemos is a giant and thus able to throw rocks (481), but he does not explicitly mention that the Cyclopes have only one eye.<sup>31</sup> However, this is the implication of Odysseus' blinding Polyphemos by putting a red-hot stake (below) into only one eye. The physical description is only partly mirrored by the vase-painters. They clearly try to picture him as a hairy giant, but there are very few early representations of a one-eyed Cyclops; most vases

25 In Greek culture lushness of nature is never a good sign, cf. Gould 1987.

26 Buxton 1994:104-08; Buxton 1990; Siebert 1990.

27 See also Braund 1995; for some more examples, Bremmer 1999<sup>2</sup>a:46-7. For *monophage* ('solitary eater') as insult see Ar. *Ve.* 923; Amipsias fr. 23 K.-A.

28 For the Greek view of cannibalism see most recently Hughes 1991:188; Buxton 1994:200.

29 Graf 1980; Marzullo 1995-96:177-78.

30 *Contra* Burkert 1995:149, who suggests that Homer simply forgot to mention the detail.

31 This was already noted by Accius *apud* Gellius 3.11.5.

give him two, and several, mostly later ones, even three eyes.<sup>32</sup> Still in Euripides' *Cyclops* Polyphemus sometimes seems to be depicted as having two eyes, sometimes one eye (Seaford 1984:100), although Cratinus calls him *monommatos* (F 156 K.-A.).<sup>33</sup>

In Greek mythology, the nature of mythological figures is often determined not only by their activities but also by their genealogy. Whereas the Hesiodic Cyclopes are children of Ouranos and Gaia, the father of Polyphemus was Poseidon (Gellius 15.21.1). In pre-Homeric times the later god of the sea had occupied a more important position in the Greek pantheon. Apparently, he had originally been closely connected with the world of the warrior, including initiation. In this context he was also associated with macho and monstrous figures, such as Kaineus and Kerkyon.<sup>34</sup>

When we now compare the Homeric representation of the Cyclopes with the mythical tradition outside Homer, it is clear that besides their name and giant appearance Homer has borrowed very little else from the Cyclopean tradition. This difference already caused problems in antiquity and as early as the fifth-century mythographer Hellanicus the solution was looked for in different kinds of Cyclopes, a solution also adapted by modern scholarship.<sup>35</sup> This seems unnecessary. There is no reason to deny Homer the skill of invention and adaptation, as more recent scholarship has started to recognise (above). Instead of depicting the traditional activity of the Cyclopes, Homer has transformed the one marginal activity, that of smiths, into another one, better suited to the narrative, that of herdsmen: Polyphemus tends his lambs (277f) and he makes cheese (240f). Does that mean that Homer completely neglects their iron working activities? Perhaps not. When Odysseus puts the red-hot stake into Polyphemus' eye, Homer compares the foaming blood with the boiling water in which a smith cools a big axe or a hatchet. Would it be too far-fetched to see in this comparison also a subtle reference to the iron working activities of the Cyclopes?

In his analysis of Odysseus' confrontation with Polyphemus, to which we will turn next, Walter Burkert (1979:31) writes that he would immediately forget the details of the Cyclopean life, if he ever had to memorise this story. I am sure this is true, since *we* are fascinated by the confrontation proper, but this makes it all the more important not to neglect Homer's picture which was evidently important to *him*. It is not difficult to recognise in his enumeration of all these details the robust

32 Touchefeu-Meynier 1992:nos. 17-31, 1997:1017. For a possible Near Eastern origin of the one-eyed monster see Knox 1979; Poljakov 1983.

33 For Polyphemus in the *Cyclops* see now Mastromarco 1998.

34 Poseidon: Bremmer 1987, 2001. Kaineus: LIMC. Kerkyon: Choerilus fr. 1 Snell-Kannicht.

35 Hellanicus *FGrH* 4 fr. 88; A. Heubeck on *Od.* 9.106-15.



self-confidence of a civilisation which is proud of its achievements and looks down on those who have not yet reached that level of refinement. It is exactly the mentality we would expect at the beginning of the Archaic Age when colonisation brought the Greeks into contact with all kinds of foreign and often less developed peoples. Homer, then, very much depicts the Cyclopes as Victorian authors depicted 'savages'.<sup>36</sup>

### 3. *A pre-existing story?*

If Homer hardly used the original Cyclopean tradition, the question becomes legitimate whether he perhaps drew upon other traditions originally unconnected with the Cyclopes. This is the direction taken by Walter Burkert in his challenging observations on Polyphemus. According to Burkert, in his portrayal of the Cyclops Homer drew on a primeval mythological tradition, even older than the birth of the very first Indo-European community. Burkert approached the problem by putting the question whether there exists a parallel to a giant, who lives far away in a cave and tends a large herd of cattle. If put in this way, the question is not difficult to answer. As Burkert (1979:33) saw, there is only one figure who fits this description: the Lord of the Animals.

Virtually all hunting peoples on earth appear once to have worshipped a divine figure who was considered to be the owner of the game. This Lord or Lady of the Animals looked after the animals and prevented hunters from hunting more than was necessary. In addition to the more general Lord or Lady of all the animals, there were also Lords or Ladies of different kinds of animals, included those of the sea. It is amazing that descendants of this figure, which so clearly belongs to the vanished world of the hunting peoples, could maintain themselves in conservative and once more remote areas of Europe, such as Switzerland and the Tirol, until last century, witness the following Tirolian tradition about certain giants:

They (the giants) protected the singing birds, ... and sheep; hunters were even forbidden to kill the first category. They opened the stables to sheep which had been kept indoors too long, set free badly treated cattle and punished cruel people through avalanches. They cried for sheep with fatal accidents.<sup>37</sup>

Given the persistence of this tradition in Western Europe, it is hardly surprising that we also find its offshoots in ancient Greece. As has often been seen, among the gods Artemis, especially, and Pan incorporated elements of the Lord or Lady of the Animals complex.<sup>38</sup> Among heroes, it is the enigmatic figure of Heracles in whose

36 For the contrast between Odysseus and the Cyclopes see also Calame 1977a, 1977b; Vidal-Naquet 1983:39-68; Calame 1985:157-60; O'Sullivan 1990; Auffarth 1991:292-344.

37 I quote from the splendid study of the Lord of the Animals in Western Europe by Röhrich 1976:142-95; further bibliography, Bremmer 1983:129.

myths the Lord of the Animals stayed alive. Time and again he is pictured as the hero who manages to steal cattle from a monster living far away in a cave. His most famous opponent is probably Geryon, who lives on Erytheia, the 'Red Island,' even beyond Okeanos, and in Greece various herds of cattle were said to descend from Geryon's original herd; according to Roman myth, he also robbed the cattle from Cacus.<sup>39</sup> Burkert persuasively connects these raids of Heracles with rituals in which shamans of primitive hunting peoples acted out a fight with the Lord or Lady of the Animals in order to take possession of the precious game. This shamanistic origin does not of course mean that Heracles himself once was a shaman. Apparently, the myths continued to be handed down because of the continuing importance of game and in Archaic times they became clustered round Heracles, the most powerful Greek hero.

Already in the last century the resemblance between the myths of Heracles and Indian Visvarupa had been noticed. In the *brahmanas* it is told how Indra killed this demon, whose name means 'of many shapes,' and liberated the cattle he had hidden in his cave. Burkert compared this Visvarupa with one of Heracles' opponents, Periklymenos, the 'very famous,' who, thanks to his father Poseidon,<sup>40</sup> could change himself in all kinds of shapes until Heracles shot him in the shape of a bee and liberated the cattle of Neleus from his cave (Burkert 1979:86).

If we combine Periklymenos' characteristics—Poseidon, cattle and his name—we seem to come very close to Polyphemus. Burkert thinks that Polyphemus derived his name 'The very famous' from the fame of the story. If that would have been the case, the Cyclops should have had a different name first. This seems highly improbable, since in Greek myth poets hardly ever changed the name of their main protagonists; changing names were left to wives and minor figures. It seems more likely that the name of Polyphemus is a calque on that of Periklymenos. Just like Periklymenos, the Cyclops is a non-human figure, the owner of a large herd, living in a cave, 'very famous,' and closely associated with Poseidon, his father. Moreover, the land of the Cyclopes is close to that of the gods (*Od.* 7.206), just as the shamans had to fetch their game from the *Jenseits* and Heracles had to travel to the Far West. Burkert, then, seems rightly to have recognised the figure of the Lord of the Animals in the background of Polyphemus.

Burkert also considers another element of the confrontation as referring to pre-historic times. According to him, Odysseus could have blinded Polyphemus with a sword instead of behaving like Palaeolithic man and hardening a stake made from Polyphemus' club in the fire. However, it seems very unlikely that this ele-

38 Artemis: Burkert 1985:149f. Pan: Borgeaud 1979:100-1.

39 Geryon: Burkert 1979:83-5. Cacus: Bremmer, Horsfall 1987:53.

40 Eur. *Phoen.* 1156-7; Apollod. 3.6.8; Hyg. *Fab.* 157; schol. on Pind. *Nem.* 9.57a.

ment of the myth eventually reaches back into prehistory. First, the invention of weapons or tools is rarely a theme in hunting myths (Bauer 1993). Secondly, the blinding of Polyphemus is nowhere part of the myths and stories surrounding the Lords and Ladies of the Animals. There is therefore no narrative tradition to support Burkert's suggestion. Thirdly, hardening of spears by fire was still very common in the time of Homer and later periods. It was a technique available to those who had no iron tools, such as less developed peoples like Libyans and Mysians (Her. 7.71, 74), barbarians like the Germans or the poor, such as the followers of Cataline; in fact, Vergil frequently associates it with peasants or mentions it as a make-shift weapon.<sup>41</sup> On the other hand, the use of fire to harden Polyphemus' club once again distinguishes the civilised Greek from the 'savage' Cyclops. A club was typical for those at the margin of civilised society, like Heracles, and remained so well into the Middle Ages (Widengren 1953:93). By using fire, Odysseus favourably distinguishes himself from the Cyclops, who possessed only a 'natural' weapon and did not even use fire for his meals.<sup>42</sup>

The cannibalistic activities of Polyphemus may also be suggestive. In 1923 the French folklorist Pierre Saintyves (1870-1935) published a study of the fairy tales of Perrault, in which on the basis of *Tom Thumb* he postulated that those tales in which a cannibalistic giant keeps children or young men prisoner once were connected with rites of initiation. Those African tales which he quoted as proof do indeed refer to rituals, but this is not the case with the fairy tales of Perrault, which mostly derive from literary sources (Dekker 1983). But if this example is not very persuasive, the connection of some fairy tales with rites of initiation was also argued by the famous Russian folklorist Vladimir Propp and has been accepted by the authoritative *Enzyklopädie des Märchens*.<sup>43</sup>

A typical example of such fairy tales, which has not been yet cited in this context, was recorded in the Caucasus in 1913:

A king was unable to have children until he met a stranger who gave him an apple cut in two. By eating the parts his wife would get sons, of whom the stranger would request one. When the sons grew up, the stranger indeed returned and took one boy with him. He educated him into a strong young man. One day, the youth heard from one of the houses in his neighbourhood a voice which told him that each day his educator consumed a prisoner from that house. Through a ruse the youth managed to let his educator fall into the big kettle in which he cooked his prisoners. He opened the houses and the prisoners appeared all to be *young men*. During two days

41 Tac. *Ann.* 2.14 (Germans); Sall. fr. 87 (Cataline); Verg. *Aen.* 7.506 and 524, 11.894, 12.298; Prop. 4.1.27-28.

42 For eating raw see Segal 1973-74.

43 Propp 1946; Bausinger, Ranke 1977:735.

they cooked their educator until his flesh was separated from his bones (apparently he was a kind of giant!). Then everybody went home. After some more adventures the strong youth became king.<sup>44</sup>

Here we see a boy who grows up with a cannibal far from his parental home. He escapes precisely at the age of becoming adult. In historical times, the young novices of 'primitive' tribes do not stay with real cannibals but with the adult males who keep them under control by intimidation. In the narrative world pretences can become reality, but the loss of the ritual means that we cannot reconstruct its historical context. The presence of a kettle, however, in the story seems to point to rites of rebirth. Kettles figure also in Greek myth, for example in Medea's 'cooking' of her father-in-law Pelias (Halm-Tisserant 1993). In the context of our theme it is important to note that among many tribes the cannibalistic opponent of the novices is the Lord of the Animals (Brelch 1969:36-37).

Cannibalism is also a theme in a curious ritual complex in Magnesia, a remote Greek region, where the Hellenistic traveller Heraclides observed the following ritual:

On the top of Mt Pelion there is a cave, the so-called cave of Cheiron, and a sanctuary of Zeus Aktaios.<sup>45</sup> That is where the young men of the highest Magnesian classes climb to at the time of the ascent of Sirius, when the heat is at its height. They are selected by priests and are girded with fresh, thrice-shorn sheepskins. It is that cold at the top! (2.8 Pfister).

Apparently, our observer thought that he saw a group of mountaineers, who had armed themselves against the cold.<sup>46</sup> Burkert (1983:112, 130-34), on the other hand, has argued that we have here the description of a sacrifice after which, in order to atone for the killed sheep, the youths ascend to the sanctuary and cave of Cheiron. One need not follow Burkert here in his suggestion of atonement in order to recognise that there is more to the description than just a day out mountaineering. Unfortunately, the exact meaning of the Greek expression for the mountaineers, *tôn politôn hoi epiphanestatoi kai tais hêlikiais akmazontes*, is not that easy to establish. My translation takes as its point of departure the fact that *hêlikia* is a term often used for the age-group of the young men; in fact, on Crete an adolescent was called a *balikiotes*.<sup>47</sup>

Certainly, young men would well fit an expedition associated with Cheiron, who was *the* Greek mythical educator and in his cave raised many Greek heroes, in

44 Levin 1978:26-35 (abbreviated).

45 For interesting descriptions of Mt Pelion see Janssens 1975; Louis 1975.

46 For the ritual see most recently Henrichs 1998:38-40.

47 Cf. Chantraine 1968: s.v. *hêlikia*, who compares Hesych. s.v. *balikiôtes: synephêbos. Krêtes*. This translation is also preferred by Borgeaud 1979:117 n. 11 ('des jeunes gens') and Bonnechere 1994:147 ('certains aristocrates, parmi les plus jeunes').

particular Achilles and Jason (Gisler-Huwiler 1986), and indeed he appears on local coins (Head 1911:II.300). There were even whispers of pederastic activities in his cave, and elsewhere in Thessaly he was connected with cannibalism,<sup>48</sup> both motifs sometimes connected with rites of initiation.<sup>49</sup> Regarding the name of the sanctuary of Zeus our traveller clearly made a mistake. As local inscriptions demonstrate, the epithet of Zeus was Akraios not Aktaios. The sanctuary was the centre of the Magnesians confederacy and the priest of Zeus Akraios one of its chiefs;<sup>50</sup> this sanctuary must have been the place where once the Magnesians youths were declared adult.

Burkert (1983:131) has perceptively connected this ritual with the Polyphemus passage. He pointed out that in folklore versions of the episode the hero escapes not under the ram but wrapped in its skin. Given the debatable value of these versions as proper parallels (above, § 2), it is more important to note that to escape hanging under sheep is in practice hardly possible and looks like the narrative version of a ritual dressing up in ram's skins. Moreover, as Burkert points out, the cannibalistic meal is the turning point for Odysseus. After the encounter with Polyphemos he has still nine more years to wander before returning, restoring order and becoming the king of Ithaca. In a similar way, it was told of the Arcadian Olympic winner Damarchos (*ca.* 400 BC) that after a cannibalistic feast in honour of Zeus Lykaeos he had to wander around 'as a wolf' for nine years in order to return in the tenth year as human and adult.<sup>51</sup> It seems not unreasonable to conclude that the ritual witnessed by our Hellenistic traveller in some way might have been connected with rites of initiation, however obscure that connection may be to us now or to Heraclides.

In various ways, then, Odysseus' encounter with Polyphemus seems to refer to a background in rites of initiation.<sup>52</sup> This is perhaps not surprising. We know that various important Greek myths were closely associated with rites of initiation, such as Jason and the Argonauts (Graf 1988, 1997) or Meleager and the Calydonian Hunt (Bremmer 1988c). Initiatory motifs also abound in myths connected with important figures of the Trojan War, such as Paris, Hector, Achilles, Philoctetes and Odysseus himself (Bremmer 1978). As poets often acted as initiators/educators in Greece—but also elsewhere, as, for example, in the already mentioned Turkish *Book of Dede Korkut*—it would be strange if they had not woven initiatory motifs into the myths which set standards for the young novices to follow (Bremmer

48 Eratosth. *Cat.* 40 (pederasty); Monimos *apud* Clem. Al. *Protr.* 3.42.4 (cannibalism).

49 Pederasty: Bremmer 1991. Cannibalism: below on Damarchos.

50 Burkert 1983:113-4. Priest as chief: Ruge 1930:470.

51 Bremmer 1978:13-4 (nine years); Buxton 1988 (werewolves).

52 For some further comparative observations see McCone 1996.

1988b:3). In the time of Homer the traditional rites of initiation for the elite youths had mostly disappeared, disintegrated or been reinterpreted in many parts of Greece.<sup>53</sup> This is why, I suggest, we do not find a standard initiatory scenario underlying his poems. Yet the transvestism of Achilles and Dionysos, the change of name of Paris, the wound in the foot of Philoctetes, and Odysseus' hunt with his maternal uncles all show that Homer, too, elaborated a tradition in which initiatory motifs played a major role.<sup>54</sup> Even if we are no longer able to trace its precise background, Odysseus' encounter with Polyphemus would perfectly fit such a context.

#### 4. Conclusion

It is time to reach a conclusion. We have seen that early Greek mythology knew a group of smiths, the Cyclopes. Homer borrowed the name of these monstrous figures, but very little else of their tradition, in his tale of Odysseus and Polyphemus. In addition to employing initiatory motifs, he used the Cyclopes as a foil to Odysseus to stress the civilisation and cleverness of his contemporary audience. His narrative shows that monsters need not always be employed to frighten the audience, as usually happens in the modern media, but can also be used for sociological explorations.<sup>55</sup> At the same time, Homer told such a good story that through oral and written channels it reached people in all corners of Europe and even beyond. A good monster always transcends national borders.<sup>56</sup>

53 For an illustrative example of the later reinterpretation of original rites of initiation see Graf 1978.

54 For detailed discussions of these motifs see Bremmer 1978, 1988, 1991, 1999b, 1999c.

55 There seems to be a growing interest in monstres. See, for example, *Faces of Monstrosity in Eighteenth-Century Thought*, a special issue of *Eighteenth-Century Life* 21 (1997) no. 2; Lecouteux 2000; Atherton 2002.

56 In this article I have made use of Bremmer 1984 and 1997. For information I am grateful to Jacqueline Borsje and Nicholas Horsfall. Ken Dowden helpfully corrected my English.

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