

Heroic Man and *Polymetis*: Odysseus in the *Cyclopeia*

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In memoriam
Alfred Heubeck

THE TRADITIONAL interpretation of the *Cyclopeia* focuses on the triumph of Odysseus' cunning intelligence (*metis*) over the Cyclops' brute force (*bie*): the *aristeia*, as it were, of Odysseus the "many-wiled man" (*polymetis*). In a recent restatement of the traditional view, J. S. Clay accordingly characterized the hero of the *Cyclopeia* as the "quintessential man of *metis*."¹ As the *aristeia* of Odysseus *polymetis*, the *Cyclopeia* has become a virtually emblematic tale demonstrating the superiority of the civilized life to the primitive life, still largely sunk in nature.²

No doubt the traditional interpretation is a sound one; yet an unresolved problem remains. In this adventure Odysseus is far from acting consistently as the quintessential man of *metis*. D. B. Monro, for one, noted a quite uncharacteristic lack of prudence on the part of the *polymetis*: he is "the leader who thrusts himself, against the advice of his wiser companions, into the monster's cave, who tricks and then provokes him by useless and foolhardy threats."³ More recent critics echo Monro's comments. In W. B. Stanford's view, Odysseus' "foolhardy boastfulness" after the escape from the cave shows a "general lack of prudence and self-control," which he finds "quite uncharacteristic of his usual conduct."⁴ Kirk goes so far as to note a serious

¹ *The Wrath of Athena* (Princeton 1983) 112f. The *Cyclopeia* is, she observes, the most "Odyssean" of all the adventures, as Odysseus is here wholly on his own: "neither divine protection nor divine enmity influence the action."

² Largely, not entirely: that the Cyclopes do have the rudiments of *techne* and something resembling an inchoate social order is an important point made in structuralist treatments of the *Cyclopeia*: see G. S. Kirk, *Myth: Its Meaning and Functions in Ancient and Other Cultures* (Berkeley 1970) 162ff; N. Austin, *Archery at the Dark of the Moon* (Berkeley 1975) 143ff.

³ *Homer's Odyssey* (London 1900) 29, quoted in L. G. Pocock, *Reality and Allegory in the Odyssey* (Amsterdam 1959) 97.

⁴ W. B. STANFORD, *The Ulysses Theme* (Oxford 1954 [hereafter 'Stanford']) 77f.

inconsistency in the *ethopoiia* of Odysseus: the “dangerously conceited victor over the Cyclops” does not accord with the general portrait of Odysseus throughout the epic action.⁵ Both authors explain the discrepancies as a result of the conflation of conflicting traditions: Stanford (77) assumes that in the *Cyclopeia* Odysseus has retained much of his “pre-Homeric shape and ethos”; Kirk (365) sees in the Cyclops-adventure “clear signs of multiple creation” and explains the inconsistency in Odysseus’ *ethopoiia* by assuming “the conflation of different themes and different kinds of materials” not uncommon in oral poetry.

The term “multiple creation” suggests how little the oralist assumption of divergent traditions differs ultimately from the analyst assumption of multiple authorship. All Kirk seems to do here is restate the analyst argument in oralist terms. Indeed, both schools share the tendency to explain difficulties without resolving them—not, at least, in terms of the transmitted text. Often a resolution may not be feasible, and we must choose between different explanations; in that case the assumption of multiple traditions may be the preferred alternative, as it leaves the text intact. Nevertheless, the appeal to conflicting traditions risks becoming a facile *passe-partout* for explaining difficulties that precludes attempts at resolving them. The present study tries to find a resolution: it will argue that the traditional interpretation of the *Cyclopeia*, although sound in principle, is incomplete. There is a further dimension to the Cyclops adventure—and, by the same token, to Odysseus’ character—that forms a counterpoint to the theme of intelligence triumphing over mindless force. The traditional interpretation, ignoring as it does this other dimension, is forced to see Odysseus as a man of *metis* only. As a result, the recklessness he displays in the finale of the *Cyclopeia*, and the gasconery he indulges in, cannot be understood but as inconsistencies in *ethopoiia*.⁶ Once we begin to

⁵ G. S. KIRK, *The Songs of Homer* (Cambridge 1962 [hereafter ‘Kirk’]) 364f.

⁶ N. Austin, “Odysseus and the Cyclops: Who is Who?” in C. A. Rubino and C. W. Shelmerdine, *Approaches to Homer* (Austin 1983) 3–37, describes this duality in the Odysseus-figure in the *Cyclopeia* in terms of Freudian-Lacanian psychoanalysis—a postmodernist essay that is as wittily written as it is eccentric and arbitrary. Austin interprets the Cyclops-adventure as a child’s fantasy (“little Tommy Tucker telling the story because milk is his obsession” [10]) and distinguishes two narrators in the person of Odysseus: inside the cave Odysseus regresses to the level of the tiny tot motivated by the dual wish “to discover a cannibalizing giant, and . . . to mutilate the giant in revenge. . . . Outside the cave the tiny tot reverts to normal size. He becomes the adult, Odysseus sacker of cities” (16). These two narrators remain separate although they are “two identities of a single psyche contesting with each other” (16). It was inevitable that psychoanalysis should seize upon the *Cyclopeia*; one only wonders why it took so long.

perceive the adventure as a tale of contrapuntal themes, Odysseus' imprudent behaviour becomes intelligible and ceases to be an inconsistency.

I

In Euripides' *Cyclops* Odysseus is in search of food and fresh water when he encounters Polyphemus. This is the most natural motivation for involving Odysseus; but the poet of the *Odyssey* seems to have avoided it consciously by having the hero and his little armada land first on the Island of the Goats. There they find in abundance all the provisions they require: no need, therefore, to visit the cave of Polyphemus. Obviously the poet is making a point by showing Odysseus avidly in search of this adventure, by contrast to those that follow, in which he becomes involved quite involuntarily.⁷

What, then, are Odysseus' motives for seeking the encounter? "Inquisitiveness and acquisitiveness," as Stanford has it.⁸ His handy formula succinctly sums up the *communis opinio*: curiosity and greed are said to be the two among several traits in Odysseus' character that mark him off as the "untypical hero."⁹ On the face of it this seems to apply well enough to the Cyclops adventure: Odysseus is indeed curious (*Od.* 9.174–76) and does have a strong desire to obtain gifts (228f). But if these traits are claimed to be uncharacteristic of Heroic Man—and, in the case of acquisitiveness, even unbecoming—Stanford's formula is as arguable as it is handy. For to call Odysseus an "untypical hero" because of his alleged acquisitiveness is to question his heroic nature, and the formula therefore needs examining.

Kirk's description of Odysseus' character as "a curious mixture of heroic and intellectual qualities" (364) is a more appropriate characterization. To be sure, his intellectual curiosity does distinguish Odysseus from the traditional heroes as the *Iliad* presents them: Odysseus *is* different. But this, by itself, does not render him less heroic. His

⁷ K. Reinhardt, "Die Abenteuer der Odyssee," *Von Werken und Formen* (Bad Godesberg 1948) 52–162, divides the adventures of the *apologoi* into sought adventures (Book 9), imposed adventures (10 and 11), and feared and suffered adventures (12). Reinhardt shows that this reflects a development in Odysseus' character: the adventure-seeking hero becomes the adventure-fearing sufferer; his experiences have changed him. Austin notes that there is no external necessity for Odysseus to seek out Polyphemus: "Odysseus himself chooses to adventure among the Cyclopes" (*supra* n.6: 15).

⁸ W. B. Stanford, ed., *The Odyssey of Homer I* (London 1950) 354: "Note O.'s motives—inquisitiveness and acquisitiveness—very typical of himself and many later Greeks."

⁹ Stanford 66ff.

intellectual curiosity may be uncommon in Heroic Man, but the way in which Odysseus pursues his interest in fresh knowledge is of a piece with the traditional heroic attitude and bespeaks the hero. Heroic Man, as we know him from the *Iliad*, usually does as it pleases his *megaletor thymos*; he follows, as is his wont, the impulses arising from his proud heroic temper.¹⁰ In like fashion Odysseus, feeling the urge to know the land and customs of the Cyclopes, instantly sets out to gratify it, no matter how dangerous it may turn out to be. The point is that intellectual curiosity does not belie his heroic status. Yet this does not exclude, as we shall see, a potential conflict between the intellectual and the heroic.

The cupidity ascribed to Odysseus is an altogether different matter. It is said to be apparent mainly in Odysseus' concern with gifts, those he hopes to obtain from the Cyclops (9.228f, 266–68) and those he does obtain from the Phaeacians (11.356–61, 13.40–42), to which his thoughts first turn when he awakes in Ithaca (13.203, 297f, 215f, 217–19, 230). Since antiquity many critics—ranging from the scholiast, who called him “acquisitive” (*philochrematos*), to Felix Jacoby, who contrasted the heroic spirit (*Heldengeist*) of the *Iliad* with the alleged mercantile spirit (*Händlergeist*) of the *Odyssey*—have railed against this attitude.¹¹

It is hard to see how Odysseus' concern with gifts could have given rise to such heavy charges. By the time he arrived in Phaeacia the loss of his booty, won at Troy and elsewhere, was total and meant that he would have to return home empty-handed. This would impair his honour, and Odysseus, true to the heroic code, should be expected to

¹⁰ W. Schadewaldt, “Furcht und Mitleid?” *Hermes* 83 (1952) 132, describes Heroic Man as *thymos*-centered: “das auf den *thymos* gestellte Menschenbild Homers.” It would therefore be tempting simply to use *thymos* to denote the impetuosity of Heroic Man and oppose it to the terms denoting intellectual faculties, such as *metis* and *noos*. This would, however, create a false antithesis: it would be wrong, according to E. L. Harrison (“Some Notes on Homeric Psychology,” *Phoenix* 14 [1960] 63ff), “to see the key in its [*i.e.*, the *thymos*] Homeric usage in terms of the emotional to the exclusion of the rational.” *Odyssey* 9 provides two cases in point. What checks Odysseus' heroic impulse to stab the sleeping giant—*i.e.*, what restrains his *megaletor thymos*—is a *heteros thymos*, “another impulse” (9.302), after which reflection sets in and leads to a rational assessment of the situation. This issues in the *ariste boule*, which is said to appear *kata thymon* (9.318). In order to avoid this false antithesis I shall therefore, at the risk of appearing pedantic, use the phrase *megaletor thymos* to denote the heroic temper insofar as it is opposed to *metis* or *noos*.

¹¹ Σ Q *ad Od.* 7.225; F. Jacoby, “Die geistige Physiognomie der Odyssee,” *Die Antike* 9 (1933) 159–94 (= *Kleine philologische Schriften* I [Berlin 1961] 107–38). More recently S. G. Farron (“The *Odyssey* as an Anti-aristocratic Statement,” *StudAnt* 1 [1979–80] 59–101) has overstated the case for viewing the *Odyssey* as a political *Tendenzschrift*.

try everything to avoid that. Hence his concern with gifts. It is their honorific aspect that is important here. The material goods a hero would accumulate in the course of his expedition he would bring home as the measure of his success and the palpable token of his prowess and esteem; a homecoming with rich possessions, obtained by force or received as guest-gifts, was therefore a point of honour. Conversely, returning empty-handed was tantamount to admitting failure. This is why acquiring as many gifts as possible from the Phaeacian nobles is so important to Odysseus, and why his first concern on his arrival is for his newly-gained possessions. Those who attribute Odysseus' preoccupation with the Phaeacian gifts to unheroic and ignoble acquisitiveness might as well attribute to gluttony a hero's claim to the portion of honour at a feast. The same applies to Odysseus' wish to obtain gifts from the Cyclops. A brief analysis of the opening of the Cyclops adventure will bear this out.

Arriving at the Cyclops' cave, Odysseus and his comrades find it vacant, its owner out herding his animals in the pasture. Everything in the cave is beyond the human scale, suggesting a monster as its inhabitant. A foreboding of impending danger seizes Odysseus' comrades. Their urgent advice is to take some of the sheep and cheeses and leave as quickly as possible for the ship. Odysseus will have none of it: he decides that they will stay and meet the owner of the cave. Now, if Odysseus' motive for embarking on the adventure were indeed acquisitiveness, as Stanford and others claim, he should have listened to his comrades and accepted their advice.¹² It cannot have escaped his perceptive eye that the Cyclops' economy is a primitive one solely geared to the production of dairy products for his own consumption. Thus it was highly unlikely that he could obtain from the Cyclops more, or different, things as gifts than what he could take himself—as his comrades timidly advise—without risking his and their lives. However, to steal some cheeses and then make off would be beneath the dignity of Heroic Man.¹³ Odysseus therefore insists that he get the little that can be had as guest-gifts from the Cyclops himself. Proud Homeric hero that he is, he is accustomed to obtaining his possessions either by fighting or as gifts in recognition of his honour. This is the significance of the gifts Odysseus expects to

¹² Cf. W. Nestle, "Odyssee-Interpretationen I," *Hermes* 77 (1942) 52; F. Focke, *Die Odyssee* (Stuttgart/Berlin 1943) 166f.

¹³ A. Podlecki, "Guest-gifts and Nobodies in *Odyssey* 9," *Phoenix* 15 (1961) 128, offers a slightly different emphasis: "Given the tradition of divinely sanctioned hospitality of this type, Odysseus is right to reject his companions' proposal to steal and run."

receive from the Cyclops: they are important as a *geras*, a gift of honour, the tangible token of the hero's superior reputation.

Far from representing unheroic greed for gain (*kerdos*), Odysseus' second motive for seeking out the Cyclops turns out to be Heroic Man's perennial quest for honour, *philotimia*. Sheer *kerdos*, one is tempted to speculate, might have kept Odysseus out of trouble in the Cyclops' cave; he would then have heeded his comrades' unheroic advice, and they would have left unharmed with as much booty as they could carry. This, he states in retrospect, would have been "more profitable" (9.228: *kerdion*).

II

The Odysseus, then, who embarks on the Cyclops adventure is the essential Heroic Man. The temporal setting of Book 9 is, after all, the year of the sack of Troy. With the attack on the Cicones, the Sacker of Cities simply continues on a smaller scale what he has been doing during the previous decade. If this adventure strikes the reader as no better than a pirates' raid, he would do well to remember what Thucydides (1.5.1f) has written about piracy in an archaic warrior society: far from causing disgrace, it imparted reputation (*doxa*) and honour (*kosmos*) to its practitioners. In the encounter with the Lotus-Eaters Odysseus resists regression to a life of passive hedonism which is the antithesis of the heroic life. Corsair adventurer and explorer, Odysseus represents throughout Book 9 a variation of traditional heroism. The heroic spirit has remained the same; Heroic Man has only exchanged traditional warfare for adventurous seafaring, the one requiring as much prowess and steadfastness as the other.¹⁴

To understand fully the *Cyclopeia* one must grasp the heroic spirit in which Odysseus seeks this adventure. From it derives its other, hitherto neglected, theme. For the *Cyclopeia* is as much the tale of the humiliation of the heroic self and its subsequent restoration as it is the tale of Odysseus' resourcefulness (*polymechanie*) and cunning mind (*metis*) triumphing over the Cyclops' brute force and mindless savagery. Both themes cohere by way of an inner tension and thus provide a structure for the *Cyclopeia*: the humiliation of his heroic ego is the price Odysseus has to pay for the triumph of his *polymechanie*;

¹⁴ H. Bengtson, *Griechische Geschichte* (Munich 1960) 90, and W. Schadewaldt, "Homer und sein Jahrhundert," in *Von Homers Welt und Werk* (Leipzig 1944) 112-15, hold that the *Odyssey* reflects the age of the voyages of discovery undertaken by aristocratic adventurers that preceded the period of colonization in the seventh and sixth centuries.

the restoration of his heroic self, in turn, threatens to undo what his *metis* has achieved.¹⁵

The first sight of the monstrous Cyclops, dumping a huge bundle of firewood with a terrible crash, sends the heroes of the Trojan War scuttling away to the far recesses of the cave: no doubt a natural, yet scarcely heroic, response. Then comes the first insult to Odysseus' proud heroic ego: the Cyclops fails to take notice of the famous Sacker of Cities. His chores take precedence over his distinguished guest. His chores done, the Cyclops perfunctorily addresses the Achaeans with a rude "who are you?"; and with all the contempt the sedentary feels for nomadic tribes of seafarers, adventurers, and other such dubious vagrants, he surmises "pirates? or merchants and similar troublemakers?" The monster's voice evokes another fit of terror in the hearts of the Achaeans. This is hardly a promising prelude to a visit from which Odysseus expects to receive the homage due to a great hero of the Trojan War, along with guest-gifts as the tangible expression of his fame and reputation.

It has not yet dawned on Odysseus that this cave might not be a place where the heroic etiquette is honoured. Thus, the first shock overcome, Odysseus launches a proud introduction of himself and his comrades as heroes of the Trojan War, without, however, revealing his name: "with pride we claim we are the host of Atreus-son Agamemnon, whose name now is the greatest under the sky, since so mighty a city and so numerous a host he destroyed" (9.259–66). Heroic grandeur does not seem to impress the Cyclops,¹⁶ and Odysseus' grand gesture soon passes into humble supplication (266f).

¹⁵ As this essay concentrates on the elucidation of this structure, I cannot deal with many of the other important aspects of the *Cyclopeia*. For these I refer the reader to the various interpretations and analyses of this episode, e.g. D. Muelder, "Das Kyklopedendicht der Odyssee," *Hermes* 38 (1903) 414ff; W. Nestle (*supra* n.12) 46ff; D. L. Page, *The Homeric Odyssey* (Oxford 1955) 1ff; J. Glenn, "The Polyphemus Folktale and Homer's *Cyclopeia*," *TAPA* 102 (1971) 133ff; S. L. Schein, "Odysseus and Polyphemus in the *Odyssey*," *GRBS* 11 (1970) 73–83; R. Mondi, "The Homeric Cyclopes: Folktale, Tradition, and Theme," *TAPA* 113 (1983) 17ff; G. S. Kirk (*supra* n.2) 162ff; N. Austin (*supra* n.2) 143ff and (*supra* n.6) 3–37; H. Eisenberger, *Studien zur Odyssee (=Palinogenesia 7* [Wiesbaden 1973]) 130ff; Clay (*supra* n.1) 112ff; R. Newton, "Poor Polyphemus: Emotional Ambivalence in *Odyssey* 9," *CW* 76 (1983) 137ff; C. W. Brown, "Odysseus and Polyphemus: the Name and the Curse," *CompLit* 18 (1966) 193ff; and especially Podlecki (*supra* n.13).

¹⁶ Reinhardt (*supra* n.7) 82 sees here a parallel to Odysseus' pointless arming against Scylla, a grand, heroic, yet futile gesture: "Das Verfehlt dieser Selbstvorstellung scheint fast von derselben Art wie jenes Hintreten in Wehr und Waffen eines Iliashelden angesichts der Fangarme der Skylla. Das Spiel mit dem Gegensatz zwischen den beiden Welten [*i.e.*, the heroic world and fairy-tale world of the *apologoi*] ist das gleiche."

Sensing that this might not be good enough, Odysseus adds an appeal to the giant's piety: as strangers and guests they are under the protection of Zeus Xenios, who will punish any wrong done to them (269–71). Nothing could be more out of place than such an appeal. With all the sarcasm his dim wit can muster, the Cyclops lets Odysseus know that he must be a very foolish man indeed if he thinks that an appeal to the Olympian gods could impress the Cyclopes and that he, Polyphemus, would spare them out of fear of Zeus (274–79). Lest there be any doubt in the hero's mind that in the Cyclopes' savage world the code of civilized life is honoured only in the breach, the ogre suits his actions to his words by inverting the sacred host-guest relationship in the most grotesque manner: instead of inviting his guests to eat, he eats his guests.¹⁷

Being forced to witness with utter helplessness the horrible deaths of two of his comrades is the next humiliating blow to Odysseus' heroic self (9.295): ἀμηχανίη δ' ἔχε θυμόν. The hero's helplessness is all the more poignant as Odysseus has himself to blame for the disgraceful death his friends have suffered: it was, after all, his heroic *philotimia* that has brought about this situation, which—worse still—does not even allow the hero to carry out his duty as leader and friend by avenging the death of his comrades. The ogre asleep, Odysseus feels the urge of his *megeletor thymos* (299) to overcome *amechanie*, eradicate shame, and restore his wounded honour through an heroic *tisis*, an act of revenge. Intent on destroying the Cyclops, he draws his sword only to be held back by another impulse (*heteros thymos*, 302): his heroic urge is thwarted by the sudden realization that *tisis* might be a fine heroic gesture but would mean their certain ruin as well. Imprisoned in the Cyclops' cave, Odysseus and his men would perish in inglorious obscurity, for who but the Cyclops could remove the huge boulder blocking the exit?

Heroic Man's *megeletor thymos*, bent as it always is on seeking honour and glory, has led Odysseus into a situation that causes the

¹⁷ In Austin's view (*supra* n.6: 12f) Odysseus' enjoyment of a dinner uninvited is a violation of the guest-host protocol; this is presumably a conclusion drawn from 231f, ἔνθα δὲ πῦρ κήαντες ἐθύσαμεν ἠδὲ καὶ αὐτοὶ τυρῶν αἰνύμενοι φάγομεν, which suggest that Odysseus and his comrades help themselves to some cheese while waiting for the Cyclops. Newton (*supra* n.15: 139f), referring to the same lines, avers that Odysseus even slaughtered one of the Cyclops' sheep and thus committed, as the first offender, "a breach of the *xenia*-ritual." But this assertion is not borne out by the text, which simply says that they ate some cheese (though ἐθύσαμεν remains puzzling). If Austin and Newton were right, the entire ethos of the *Cyclopeia* would have to be seen differently; and while I do not wish to exclude this as a possibility, the textual evidence for this interpretation is simply too tenuous.

hero humiliation and a feeling of helplessness. Finding himself thrown into a world quite incongruous with his own, a world of primal savagery in which the heroic code has no validity, Odysseus painfully learns the limitation of the heroic. To give in to the impulses of his *megaletor thymos*, as the traditional hero is wont to do, would be not only ruinous, but also self-defeating even in terms of the heroic code: for a slow death in the obscurity of the Cyclops' cave would be no more compatible with the heroic code than being eaten alive by an ogre. This savage world renders invalid even the heroic principle of ἡ καλῶς ζῆν ἢ καλῶς τεθνηκέναι.¹⁸ Thus the imperative of the moment is survival. The only alternative to ignominy is to escape from a world in which heroic acts become empty gestures and cannot even secure an honourable death. This means that Odysseus has to rely on his intellectual qualities in order to extricate himself from the unheroic condition into which his heroic *megaletor thymos* has brought him. Only his *polymechanie*, guided by *metis* and *dolos*, will free him from his unheroic *amechanie*. This requires the determined suppression of his *megaletor thymos*, as its headlong impetuosity could thwart all endeavours of his *metis*.

Metis, *polymechanie*, *dolos*: by traditional standards these do not easily accord with the heroic ideal.¹⁹ An Achilles or Ajax would certainly spurn them as guiding principles of their actions. When Odysseus realizes that he has to rely on them rather than his heroic qualities, the Cyclops adventure has reached the point at which it begins to develop into the emblematic tale of intelligence triumphing over brute force—without ceasing to be at the same time the story of the humiliation, and eventual restoration, of Odysseus' heroic self.

Odysseus' intellectual strength alone, however, does not suffice to gain freedom from the Cyclops and safety for his men: only in union with Odysseus' *tlemosyne*, his exemplary endurance and steadfastness, will his *metis* be able to sustain its control over his *megaletor thymos*. For the strategy Odysseus devises for their escape (the *ariste boule* of 9.318) will entail more humiliations bound to provoke his heroic temper. The plan implies the calculated loss of four more of his comrades: with the same helplessness as before, so unbearable to the heroic temper, Odysseus is forced to witness their wretched deaths at

¹⁸ The well-known words of the Sophoclean *Ajax* (479f). On Ajax as the *homericotatos* of the tragic heroes see G. M. Kirkwood, "Homer and Sophocles' Ajax," in M. J. Anderson, ed., *Classical Drama and its Influence* (London 1965) 51ff.

¹⁹ On the range of the meaning of *metis* see Clay (*supra* n.1) 113; on its ambiguity *vis-à-vis* the heroic ideal, M. Detienne and J.-P. Vernant, *Les ruses de l'intelligence: la mêtis des Grecs* (Paris 1974) 19f (quoted by Clay 33).

the hands of the ogre. This puts his *tlemosyne* to a severe test, which is most severe when it comes to the trick with the name, the greatest triumph of his *metis*.²⁰ By calling himself “Nobody” when Polyphemus asks for his name, Odysseus thwarts any future attempts of the Cyclops to secure aid from his kinsmen and also protects himself against the Cyclops’ revenge, by withholding the name required for an effective curse. During his escape, tied under the belly of a ram, the famous Sacker of Cities must endure the Cyclops’ insulting epithets *aner kakos* (453) and *Outis outidanos* (460, “worthless Nobody”). It is all part and parcel of the brilliance of his escape plan, yet militates heavily against Heroic Man’s dignity and honour. Could one conceive of Achilles or Ajax submitting to such humiliations?

III

Thus by giving up his *onoma klyton* (9.364), his famous name on which the hero’s honour and glory are fastened, and by calling himself a nobody, Heroic Man inflicts upon himself the ultimate outrage: self-abnegation. For the sake of self-preservation he has to sacrifice his heroic self. The most splendid stratagem Odysseus’ *metis* can devise constitutes at the same time the extreme humiliation of his proud heroic ego: where his *metis* is most triumphant, his heroic *megaletor thymos* suffers its deepest abasement.

Suppressing his *megaletor thymos* to the point of self-effacement is too great a sacrifice. What is suppressed is bound to return, and does so with a vengeance after the escape from the cave. Not yet safe, and while his ship is still within the reach of the man-eating monster, Odysseus’ heroic ego reasserts itself by taunting the giant (475f):

Κύκλωψ, οὐκ ἄρ’ ἔμελλες ἀνάλκιδος ἀνδρὸς ἑταίρους
ἔδμεναι ἐν σπηϊ γλαφυρῶ κρατερῆφι βίηφι.

Odysseus’ taunts (475ff, 502ff, 523ff) are reminiscent of the boast (*euchos*) with which the heroes of the *Iliad* like to seal their victories.²¹

²⁰ That the name trick ranks as the most brilliant achievement of Odysseus’ *metis* is obvious from the elaborate word-play οὔτις . . . μήτις . . . μήτις at 405–11, as Podlecki (*supra* n.13: 130) was the first to point out. Cf. Schein (*supra* n.15) 79ff; N. Austin, “Name Magic in the *Odyssey*,” *CSCA* 5 (1972) 1–19; G. E. Dimock Jr, “The Name of Odysseus,” *Hudson Review* 9 (1956) 52–70.

²¹ Eisenberger (*supra* n.15) 141. Compare, for example, the boasts of Hector (*Il.* 16.830ff) and Achilles (22.221ff). With reference to R. Schroeter (*Die Aristie als Grundform homerischer Dichtung und der Freiermord der Odyssee* [diss. Marburg 1950]), Eisenberger (137, 140) goes much further when he argues that the *aristeia*-pattern underlies Odysseus’ victory over the Cyclops; the *euchos*, he maintains, is but

Odysseus savours his victory to the full. But his taunting voice exposes them to the furious giant's missile, which barely misses the ship, creating a wave that threatens to wash it back into the clutches of the ogre. No sooner has this danger been averted with great difficulty than Odysseus prepares for the next taunt—to the horror of his comrades, who plead with him for prudence. But to no avail; Heroic Man will have none of it (500): *ὡς φάσαν, ἀλλ' οὐ πείθον ἐμὸν μεγαλήτορα θυμόν.* His *megeletor thymos* out of control, Odysseus is carried away to reveal his name proudly (504f): *φάσθαι Ὀδυσσῆα πολυπόρθιον ἐξαλαῶσαι, νῆδον Λαέρτῳ, Ἰθάκῃ ἐνὶ οἴκῳ ἔχοντα.* Odysseus tops his *euchos* with an insult to Poseidon (523–35). Although Odysseus and his crew do survive the giant's second missile and escape unharmed, Odysseus' imprudent gasconade has most baneful consequences: the boastful revelation of his name has laid him open to the Cyclops' curse. Twice in this adventure Odysseus gives in to the urging of his *megeletor thymos* and twice he comes to grief because of it.

Odysseus' *metis* triumphs over the Cyclops' brute force but cannot sustain its control over his heroic temper. At the last minute, Odysseus allows his *megeletor thymos* to get the better of his *metis*, thus jeopardizing escape. In the finale of the adventure Odysseus seems to be bent on snatching defeat from the jaws of victory: all of a sudden he displays an attitude that flies in the face of the reason that has guided his actions to his victory over the Cyclops' brute force. His unexpected and ostensibly unintelligible change in attitude seriously impairs his victory. As a result, Odysseus incurs the destructive wrath of Poseidon invoked by the giant's curse.

Yet is Odysseus' behaviour so unexpected or even actually unintelligible, as some critics think it is? It has its own logic, if one takes into account that Odysseus is, after all, a traditional hero who lives by the heroic code.²² By reclaiming his famous name, under danger and still at great risk, he ceases to be the Nobody he was forced to become

one among many *aristeia*-motifs in the *Cyclopeia*. He equates the description of the pole with that of the armour in an typical *aristeia*, for example, and the hardening and sharpening of the pole with a *hoplopoia*, etc. In my view, this goes too far.

²² Cf. Aristotle (*Rh.* 1380b22–25) on 9.504: *ὀρθῶς πεποιήται (sc. φάσθαι Ὀδυσσῆα πολυπόρθιον) ὡς οὐ τετιμωρημένος εἰ μὴ ἤσθετο καὶ ὑφ' ὅτου καὶ ἀνθ' ὅτου* (quoted by Stanford [*supra* n.8] ad 508). Stanford, H. W. Clark (*The Art of the Odyssey* [Englewood-Cliffs (N.J.) 1967] 57), and Newton (*supra* n.15: 139) have observed that Odysseus is here acting according to the heroic code. Clay (*supra* n.1: 122f) emphasizes the element of *kleos* in Odysseus' revelation of his name: it snatches his accomplishment (the victory of his *metis* over the brute *bie* of the Cyclops) from oblivion. In her view it is Odysseus' self-assertion as a man of *metis*.

under the dictates of his *metis*. This attitude, flying as it does in the face of *metis*, is consistent with the heroic code. Odysseus' taunting of the Cyclops and, more important, the proud revelation of his name turn the blinding of Polyphemus from a mere act of self-defence and means of survival into a truly heroic *thesis*, an act of revenge that cancels his self-abnegation as a hero. "It was Odysseus, the Sacker of Cities, by no means an unwarlike weakling as you thought, who defeated you": with these words the heroic self is restored.

This antagonism between Odysseus' *megalētor thymos* and his calculating *metis* thus determines the structure of the *Cyclopeia* as a whole: when the one prevails, the other is impaired. Hence the ambiguous outcome of the adventure. For the moment it has a happy ending; Odysseus and his comrades survive and escape. With a view to the future, however, it ends disastrously, as the curse of the Cyclops exposes Odysseus and his comrades to Poseidon's wrath, which is to prove most destructive. Odysseus' inconsistent attitude in the Cyclops adventure reflects a fundamental ambiguity of the *Odyssey* as a poem in the tradition of the heroic epic: the heroic ideal is embodied by a *polymetis*.

In the end all critics can be said to have a point. In this adventure Odysseus is indeed the 'man of *metis*'; yet the traditional hero in him militates against him, thus causing Odysseus to behave in a way that leads critics to judge the conflicts they register as inconsistencies in the *ethopoia* of the protagonist. It is not, however, necessary to assume here the conflation of divergent traditions. The discrepancies emerge as *thematic*, pointing to a conflict in Odysseus' character.

It is a conflict Odysseus will transcend as the epic action progresses. As this is a topic that lies beyond the scope of this essay, a few remarks must suffice. In his magisterial analysis of the Homeric Odysseus-figure, Stanford characterizes Odysseus as "well-integrated both in his temperament and with his environment," a man "fully able to control conflicting passions and motives" (78). This is the character into which Odysseus will have grown by the end of his *nostos*. In the Cyclops episode Odysseus is not yet that well-integrated man, able to control conflicting motives; here Kirk's description of Odysseus' character as a "curious mixture of heroic and intellectual qualities" seems to be more apposite. It suggests, as does our analysis, that these qualities have not yet found their proper relationship to one another. Odysseus' experience of the limits and liabilities inherent in the heroic will enable him to see it in perspective and accord it its proper place in a view that is larger than the traditional heroic

outlook.²³ It is the Odysseus of Book 22, forgoing the customary *euchoi* and triumph over the slain enemy (413–16), who represents Stanford's well-integrated man.²⁴

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January, 1987

²³ G. deF. Lord, "The Odyssey and the Western World," in C. H. Taylor Jr, ed., *Essays on the Odyssey* (Bloomington 1963) 36ff, makes a strong and convincing case for a development and change in Odysseus. This is vigorously supported by E. M. Bradley, "The Hybris of Odysseus," *Soundings* 51 (1968) 33ff, and "The Greatness of his Nature: Fire and Justice in the Odyssey," *Ramus* 5 (1976) 37ff. With slightly different emphasis, Reinhardt (*supra* n.7) 79f; see also R. Friedrich, *Stilwandel im Homerischen Epos* (Heidelberg 1975) 147ff. To put the heroic in perspective does not mean that Odysseus discards it; yet both deF. Lord and Bradley seem to assert just this; see R. Friedrich, "On the Compositional Use of Similes in the Odyssey," *AJP* 102 (1981) 120ff.

²⁴ See Friedrich (*supra* n.23: *AJP*) 129ff.

The author wishes to thank Louise Young, whose constructive criticism has greatly improved this essay.