

πίονα μῆλα: Animals and Divine Vengeance in the *Apologoi*

In this paper, I argue that the narrative of the *Apologoi* establishes an unnoticed contrast between Odysseus' impious treatment of animals and Polyphemus and Circe's loving care for animals. This contrast challenges Odysseus' self-presentation in the *Apologoi* as a civilized leader opposing the forces of chaos (Rinon and Dougherty), and complicates our interpretation of Odysseus' leadership (Loney), through likening Odysseus to transgressive characters who suffer divine vengeance.

In the first section, I argue that Polyphemus' care for animals aligns him with the noble swineherd Eumaeus. Polyphemus treats his flock of sheep well, caring for them tenderly through daily pasturing and milking. Homer describes his regular action of milking in language that reveals its affinity with the divine order of things (*kata moiron*, e.g. IX.245) Polyphemus also speaks affectionately to his pet ram, evincing individual knowledge of the ram's behavior (IX.446-460). Further, Polyphemus' rams are described as healthfully plump with thick fleece (IX.425-426).

Similarly, the noble swineherd Eumaeus shows care for Odysseus' pigs, building them sturdy pens and guarding them with fierce dogs (XIV.5-22). Polyphemus milks his ewes before eating his own meal; similarly, Eumaeus puts the needs of the pigs above his own comfort, sleeping outside for their protection (XIV.525-533). Ultimately, these actions connect Polyphemus with Eumaeus, and assimilate both characters to the model of leadership outlined in *Odyssey* X.410-418, where Odysseus cares for his men as mother animals care for their young.

In the next section, I argue that Circe's kind treatment of animals also links her to the noble Eumaeus and to the model of good leadership as nurturing care outlined in *Odyssey* X.410-418. Circe treats the pig-companions well, giving them food to eat and housing them in sturdy sties. I argue that the adjective *pukinous* (X.283) describing the pigs' sties, can be translated "sturdy" or "compact" rather than "packed in", suggesting that, in contrast to stuffing the pigs in a close-packed sty, Circe keeps them in sturdy and cozy housing. Further, when Circe releases the men

from their spell, they are similar to fat pigs in their ninth year, suggesting that they have benefitted from good nutrition and care. The alignment of Circe and Polyphemus with the noble Eumaeus presents a contrast with the behavior of Odysseus, whose plunder of Polyphemus' animals and blatant sacrifice of the pet ram assimilates him to the transgressive actions of the companions and suitors.

In the final section, I argue that Odysseus' impious treatment of animals likens him to the companions and suitors and destabilizes his role as a good leader within the *Apologoi*. After Odysseus and his companions escape the Cyclops' cave, they steal the Cyclops' sheep; most painfully, Odysseus sacrifices Polyphemus' beloved pet ram to Zeus (IX.548-555.) In murdering his host's pet, Odysseus flagrantly violates *xenia*; even more disturbingly, he offers this shocking sacrifice to Zeus himself, the god of the guest-host relationship. Zeus does not heed Odysseus' sacrifice (IX.551-555) underscoring the impiety of his cruel act.

Furthermore, the companions on Thrinacia transgress similarly, eating the cattle of the Sun and incurring divine wrath and punishment. Just as Odysseus sacrifices the ram, so the companions attempt to atone for their misdeed by offering the slaughtered cattle as a sacrifice. However, troubling omens attest that their sacrifice too is not accepted: The hides move and the meat moans on the spits (XII.352-396.) The companions are punished by the gods, just as Zeus plots evil for Odysseus after he sacrifices the ram (IX.551-555).

Ultimately, Odysseus' seizure of Polyphemus' sheep and slaughter of his ram assimilates him to the companions' transgressive eating of the Thrinacrian cattle, and to the greedy suitors, who devour his flocks and neglect his pet dog, Argos. The suitors are described repeatedly as rapacious eaters who thin Odysseus' flocks while lounging in his house; they steal Odysseus' livestock just as he stole Polyphemus'. Furthermore, they neglect his dog, with whom he shared a deep bond of affection: Lacking Odysseus' protection, Argos is cast off, and in a heartbreaking scene Odysseus sees his elderly dog dying on a pile of dung, covered with ticks (XVII.290-305).

Odysseus, like the companions and suitors, mistreats animals and experiences divine

retribution. The contrast between his impious behavior and the loving care exhibited by Polyphemus and Circe serves to complicate his self-portrayal as heroic leader within the Apologoi.

Works Cited

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