

## Oppositional Ideologies in Euripides' *Cyclops*

Euripides' *Cyclops* has often been compared with its source material *Odyssey* IX (Katsouris 1997), and more recent readings survey the drama's interface with the intellectual and socio-political milieu of contemporary Athens (Konstan 1990; O'Sullivan 2005; Marshall 2005). However, these two methodologies for exploring the *Cyclops* have generally developed in isolation. While studies of the latter variety have acknowledged Polyphemus' engagement with intellectualist theories with oligarchical or tyrannical implications, namely Calliclean egoism, Odysseus has frequently been neglected or mischaracterized. I submit that Euripides' choice to minimize Odysseus' aristocratic status and replace his heroic individualism with a civic mentality can be read as a politicized symbol of democratic ideology.

By altering Homer's account of the myth, particularly in his depiction of Odysseus and Polyphemus, Euripides has affixed a modern veneer to the Homeric antithesis of civilized communal life and savage isolation. While the *Cyclops* engages with political and intellectual trends at Athens throughout the play, the first episode in particular demonstrates that Euripides assimilates the hero to a "modern" citizen whose principles conform to Athenian democratic norms, while he renders the Cyclops a caricature of an Athenian elite whose espousal of natural law exposes his anti-democratic proclivities. Rather than seeking to gain *xenia* and *kleos* as in *Odyssey* IX, the Euripidean Odysseus is forced to land to secure provisions for his men following a storm, which he prefers to acquire by barter rather than forcible appropriation. By transforming Odysseus' motivations from a selfish pursuit of personal advantage with aristocratic connotations to a desire to aid his men through peaceful barter, Euripides renders him more palatable to the *demos* and heightens his contrast with the Cyclops. Similarly, Euripides

transforms Polyphemus from a barbaric herdsman to a slave-owning landowner who engages in aristocratic pursuits like hunting that exemplify his elite lifestyle. The newfound emphasis on Polyphemus' divine descent in *Cyclops* and his possession of ancestral treasure (342-44), which he bestows on his guests in a perverted act of ξενία, are also suggestive of his enhanced status.

The allusions to παρρησία, or free speech, (λέγομεν ἐλευθέρως, 287), a quintessential democratic right (O'Sullivan 2013), and Athenian pretexts for their policy of imperialism (290-96) in Odysseus' plea provide the hero with a democratic flavor and link him to Athens' hyperactive foreign policy, known as πολυπραγμοσύνη, which was emblematic of Athens' national character by the mid-fifth century. Although Odysseus does seek ξενία from the Cyclops, he frames his request by appealing to mortal (νόμος, 299-301) rather than divine law (θέμις, *Od.* 9.268-71). Such a change suggests that due to Athenian suspicions of the institution, Euripides has attempted to limit *xenia*'s typically aristocratic connotations and underscore its compatibility with civic law due to demotic suspicions of the institution. In contrast, Polyphemus advocates a theory of justice reminiscent of notions espoused by wealthy Athenians who spurned the city's political norms and traditional morality (O'Sullivan 2005). In this regard, Euripides reframes Polyphemus' cannibalism as a transgressive pleasure sanctioned by theories of natural law (Hunter 2009) rather than simply a brutal act indicative of his primitive nature. The Cyclops' description of his lifestyle (323-38) recalls the ἀπραγμοσύνη favored by conservatives and caricatures views held by aristocrats predisposed towards oligarchy (Konstan 1990).

By contextualizing Euripides' reception of Homer within recent Athenian political and intellectual developments, it becomes apparent that Odysseus embodies a democratic Athenian perspective and remains the hero of the drama. Similarly, Polyphemus' innovative characteristics highlight the callousness of those who advocate theories of natural justice that prioritize

individual advantage over communal wellbeing. As scholars increasingly accept a date of 408 BCE for the drama, Euripides' decision to imbue his work with political imagery is unsurprising, as it was produced during a period of profound tensions between proponents and opponents of democracy following the oligarchic coup of 411. Odysseus' triumph over the Cyclops both celebrates Athens' democratic conventions and promotes her citizens' reliance on leaders who place the community before their own self-interest and exemplify Athens' democratic tradition.

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