

## Representing Difference in *Odyssey* 9

Traditional colonial readings of Book 9 of the *Odyssey* (Most 1989, Pucci 1997, Dougherty 1991) interpret the Cyclops episode as polarizing: the Ithacans appear to be civilized colonizers, and Polyphemus appears to be an uncivilized and inhospitable host. My paper builds on Rinon's criticism of this polarity (2007). It uses the difference between narrating and experiencing focalizations (de Jong 1992) to show the limits of these colonial readings. Although Odysseus' narrating focalization (his retrospective narration) does encourage his audience to see the Cyclops as Other, details of his experiencing focalization (his eye-witness, in-the-moment narration) identify similarities between himself and the Other. So, instead of a strictly polar colonial relationship, Odysseus' experiencing focalization supports the postcolonial idea of hybridity in the Mediterranean, or what Malkin calls the 'middle ground' of overlapping cultures (2004). My paper also accomplishes this reading by combining de Jong's structuralist narratology (2001) with Allan's recent work on narrative immersion (2020).

In section 1, I analyze Odysseus's introduction at the beginning of the Cyclops episode (9.106-142). As Scodel (2005) notes, this section is distinct from the rest of the narrative in chronology and focalization, since Odysseus' description of the Cyclopes (whom he has not encountered yet) is necessarily retrospective. Here Odysseus introduces the Cyclopes as lawless and outrageous, and as Pucci (1997) and Dougherty (1991) argue, he establishes a colonial relationship between the Ithacans, who settle the neighboring Island of the Goats, and the Cyclopes, who seem incapable of just that (9.116-142). Overall, this passage establishes an opposition between the civilized Ithacans and the uncivilized Cyclopes.

In section 2, I show how Odysseus shifts to the experiencing focalization at 9.142, and using Allan's (2020) framework for narrative immersion, I identify a series of immersive

passages in Odysseus' narration: the Ithacans' approach to the island (9.142-145), their reaction to Polyphemus' cave (9.181-186), their first visit inside the cave (9. 218-223), Polyphemus' care for his livestock (9.237-239), and his chore routine (9.244-251). All these immersive passages provide evidence against Odysseus' initial characterization of the Cyclopes. Polyphemus is not unskilled but built his cave and the baskets he uses to hold cheese. This displays craftsmanship (something that Odysseus' introduction denied the Cyclopes). Polyphemus is also generally organized and has a routine; he is not lawless. Finally, Odysseus' experiencing focalization shows that the Cyclopes function as a society, running to Polyphemus' aid, even though Odysseus' trick impedes them. Although Cyclopes are not like the Ithacans, they are also not entirely different: they possess the 'civilized' traits which Odysseus initially claims they lack. Through his 'experiencing narrative', therefore, Odysseus challenges the colonial reading his introduction establishes.

In section 3, I examine how Odysseus again returns to the narrating focalization. After each immersive passage, Odysseus inserts a comment from the narrating focalization in an attempt to limit how his audience might interpret what they just heard (9.186-192, 205-207, 213-215, 228-230). According to Allan (2020), these comments break the audience's immersion and prompt them to reflect on the passage that precedes them. However, instead of criticizing the evidence he presents with the experiencing focalization, Odysseus' narrating-comments subtly foreshadow how Polyphemus will default on the custom of guest friendship (9.186-192). Through these comments, Odysseus intentionally suppresses readings of his story that do not follow his polar ideology of difference.

In conclusion, my paper argues that in Book 9 of the *Odyssey* Odysseus intentionally touts a shallow view of difference and suppresses a more complex representation of alterity. I

will also suggest ways in which this examination of difference through focalization may shed new light on further episodes in Od. 9-12, such as Odysseus' encounters with Aeolus, the Laestrygonians, and Circe. Ultimately, this narratological reassessment of the *Apologoi* will show that Odysseus's narrative is an attempt at suppression and exculpation, not an indicator of growth and responsibility, as recently argued by Christensen (2018).

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