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The Masking of the Truth

Perception is extremely powerful, influencing both the actions and opinions of the entire human race each day. It shapes how humans view other humans or living things, in a negative way more often than not. In *The Odyssey* by Homer, the interaction between Odysseus and the Cyclopes is manipulated in such a way that it favors Odysseus in many different ways. Odysseus writes his encounter with Polyphemus only after it is over, and describes it in a way to both alleviate his own wrongdoings and to mask that the true monster is not the Cyclops, but Odysseus himself.

The hypocrisy of Odysseus is a very common occurrence within Homer's epic. Odysseus describes the Cyclopes immediately as "arrogant and lawless" (Homer 107). This contradicts his own actions later on, such as entering the home of Polyphemus without permission (Homer 216). He diminishes the integrity of the Cyclopes when he is just as much of a criminal as he describes these "monsters" to be. Upon his first sighting of the land of the Cyclopes, Odysseus is appalled by the misuse of the land in which these people inhabit. His initial reaction is that "craftsmen would have made this island usable for the Cyclopes, / for there was nothing wrong with it at all..." (Homer 129-131). He feels the land is not being used to the best of its ability; in a way that his people would use it. His hypocritical actions and failure to consider the customs of others reveal his monstrous characteristics. His judgement against a culture contrary to his own immediately begins to show, and his true nature continues to be revealed as his contact with Polyphemus accumulates.

Despite Odysseus's constant labeling of the Cyclopes as monsters, in reality they are quite civilized. Although Polyphemus grabs Odysseus's men and very quickly bashes their head into the ground (Homer 287-290), this is his way of preparing his meal, just as humans do. Polyphemus would have never eaten Odysseus's men in the first place, had they not been a threat to him and his home. This ties back to Odysseus and his neverending attempt to mask that his men meet their demise because of his own wrongdoings. "He did not associate with others, but isolated himself... for he was indeed a mighty monster, quite unlike a man who makes grain into bread..." (Homer 188-190). Before the encounter between these two species begins, Odysseus is already solidifying his opinion of Polyphemus, and only allows his side of the story to be told; creating bias. His justification for Polyphemus being a so-called "monster" is that he looks unlike a man that would make bread. He exaggerates the monstrosity of the Cyclopes to turn the attention away from his own malicious deeds. Consequently, Odysseus's only reasoning behind Polyphemus being a monster is that this being is different from Odysseus and the Greek culture.

Throughout his encounter with Polyphemus, Odysseus never strays from the opinion of the Cyclopes being a mighty beast, as well as a threat to both him and his men. Polyphemus only becomes a threat after Odysseus initiates a dispute, through entering his home without permission. Odysseus enters first, through his own choice; he is the immediate threat. He then attempts to cover up this mistake through the process of his story-telling. Every negative encounter with the Cyclopes is a way for Odysseus to shield his own poor behavior, and to shift the attention to something he believes is far worse than himself. Through both his hypocrisy and his failure to accept any culture apart from his own, Odysseus attempts to mask that he is truly at fault, and that the true monster is not Polyphemus, but Odysseus himself.