

GUEST-GIFTS AND NOBODIES IN *ODYSSEY* 9

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MILMAN PARRY's remarkable studies have driven the two opposing parties in the Homeric controversy closer together. Not that the Analysts have given ground; but Unitarians have felt it necessary to go so far towards the enemy camp as to admit that "Homer" depended largely on materials which were traditional, or "formulaic," as Parry termed them. According to the "Neo-Unitarian" position, the man we call "Homer" came late in a tradition of oral composition. What he did was merely to draw heavily, even exclusively, on pre-fabricated elements—not only phrases and lines, but entire episodes—and give final shape to the two poems as we know them. Homer turns up as the *Bearbeiter* in disguise.¹

Parry's careful analysis of Homeric diction and his investigations into the technique of modern oral composition have made it impossible to deny that Homer depended on his predecessors. What still remains in dispute, however, is the extent of this dependence; how far can we trace an individual shaping hand in the Homeric poems? Unitarianism casts its net wide, but some who call themselves by that title are perhaps too quick to yield before the Analysts' onslaught. They seem quite ready to agree that Homer's contribution was slight: not merely that he used bricks of epic phrasing which he found ready-made and lying at his feet; whole walls had been built by earlier craftsmen, they admit, and Homer

¹E. R. Dodds describes the situation, comparing "naive Unitarians" to a religious sect whose "fundamentalist faith in the integrity of the Homeric Scriptures . . . forbade them to make any concession whatever to the infidel But the purity of the original faith soon declined. Old difficulties were rediscovered, heresies arose, and breaches appeared in the monolithic structure" (Page 11 of Dodds' chapters on Homer in *Fifty Years of Classical Scholarship*, ed. by Maurice Platnauer [Oxford 1954]). Dodds, an Analyst of the more moderate type, sees the gap being bridged: "One may even feel that between the more moderate spokesmen of the two schools the difference is now largely one of terminology: what the analysts call nuclei or prototypes, the unitarians call sources; what the analysts call expansions, the unitarians call interpolations" (*ibid.*, p. 12). This means, in effect, that Unitarians have come over to the Analysts' side: "the main positive work of the unitarians in recent years has been directed towards the exploration of 'Homer's sources.' This is really *the old analytic game in a new form* . . ." (*ibid.*, p. 12, my italics).

For a presentation in English of the more radical views of German analysis see Denys Page's *Homeric Odyssey* (Oxford 1955). Parry's pupil and continuator A. B. Lord has provided a complete bibliography of Parry's work in *AJA* 52 (1948) 43-44. Lord himself argues from modern bardic practice to conclusions about Homeric technique in his recent *Singer of Tales* (Cambridge, Mass. 1960).

was content simply to prop them up and cement them into his structure.

It is in the interests of a more full-bodied Unitarianism to insist that Homer brought to his traditional craft an individual talent which can be discerned not only in the larger artistic structure of the poem, but also in many of the complicated and finely-wrought sub-plots and episodes. There is manifest (for those who care to look) both in the particular episodes and in the poem as a whole, an interplay of motives, ideas, and themes too studied to have been transmitted crudely from one version to another. This paper is an attempt to focus attention on one such example of Homer's originality. Whatever we like to think about one-eyed giants in universal folklore or the availability of a ready-made epic diction, the intricacy of thematic development in *Odyssey* 9 must give us pause: it is more easily accounted for (I submit) on the hypothesis that one man's creative genius is responsible for this version of the story.

My approach was suggested by two modern comments: (1) "No single detail in the life of the heroes receives so much attention in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* as gift-giving, and always there is frank reference to adequacy, appropriateness, recompense. . . . The whole of what we call foreign relations and diplomacy, in their peaceful manifestations, was conducted by gift-exchange."² (2) "The trick with the name *Nobody* does not occur in the folk-tale versions of our story. It is characteristic of another common folk-tale . . ."³ (though in a footnote [p. 19, n. 8] the author admits that "the name *Nobody* is almost unexampled in the folk-tales, which use 'Myself,' or 'Myself-I-did-it,' or the like"). I shall attempt to show that these two dominant themes, the guest-gift and the play on the name *Outis*, are spun out skilfully and woven together with consummate artistry in the *dénouement*. The sources of Homer are beyond discovery, but the adroitness with which these two themes are developed and blended strongly suggests that he transformed the raw material at his disposal into a sophisticated work of art.

The adventure begins at line 105 with a short introduction. Odysseus describes the Cyclopes in traditional terms, "arrogant, lawless" (106). This should not be taken to imply that he had already discovered what sort of men they were; he is here speaking in the light of later knowledge. We then have a long description of the marvellous island, stretching out from the harbour of Cyclops-land and shrouded in mist.⁴ Odysseus and

²M. I. Finley, *World of Odysseus* (New York 1954) 63-64.

³Page (*op. cit.*, n. 1) 5.

⁴I would not attach much significance to what may perhaps be a first mention of the *outis*-theme at line 146: the mist around the island is so thick that οὐ τις τὴν νῆσον ἐσέδρακεν ὀφθαλμοῖσιν. It is not impossible that the last word is meant to foreshadow Odysseus' later blinding of the Cyclops.

his men hunt the goats sent by the nymphs, eat, and spend the night. Next morning, Odysseus leaves eleven ships on the island and takes only his own on a reconnaissance mission, to discover what manner of men inhabit the land, "whether they are insolent, wild and unjust, or hospitable" (φιλόξεينوι, 176). From 182 to 186 we have a description of the lofty cave and court; at 187 ff. the poet makes Odysseus break the "historical" sequence in what might be called a "flash-ahead" to give his audience—and the poet's—the results of his discovery. In the time-sequence of the story Odysseus does not yet know that the inhabitant is a lawless monster.⁵ Odysseus takes the twelve best of his companions and a sack of wonderful wine given him by Maron—ὁ δέ μοι πόρεν ἀγλαὰ δῶρα, he says at 201, in a double foreshadowing of the gift-theme. The wine had been given to Odysseus as a gift and he takes it as a gift for the host he hopes to find. At 213–15 we are given the reason, artistically if not logically convincing: Odysseus had forebodings of things to come, that he would find a man clothed in might, wild, οὔτε δίκας εὖ εἰδότα οὔτε θέμιστας (215).⁶

Odysseus and his men enter the cave and notice the cheeses, lambs, kids, and milk-pails. His companions want to take some of the cheese and livestock and be gone, but Odysseus refuses; he wants to see the man, he says, εἴ μοι ξείνια δοίη (229). By his statement of motive here Odysseus lays himself (or the poet) open to the charge of naivety,

⁵Page (*op. cit.*, p. 19, n. 14) comments: "In 187 ff. the poet gives the misleading impression that Odysseus already knows what sort of person the Cyclops is. This is deliberately done in order that we may see nothing incongruous in the following description of the wine which he thinks fit to provide for the emergency. A moment later (216 ff.) we see through the deception: Odysseus has not yet seen the Cyclops, and has no more reason to expect trouble than he had in 175 ff., when his mind was quite open." Of course, Odysseus takes the wine simply as a guest-gift; his foreboding is intended to explain (in advance) his later use of it as a sedative. Page's use of the words "misleading," and "deception" shows that he refuses to Homer's audience—and to us—even a vague knowledge of what sort of people the Cyclopes were. Homer would not have understood his difficulty.

⁶The Cyclops' lawlessness (emphasized throughout the book), of which Odysseus' first suspicions are later brutally verified, is intimately connected with the guest-gift theme. At 175–6 "hospitable" and "having a god-fearing mind" are equated, and this attitude is contrasted with insolence, brutality, and injustice. Hence, also, Odysseus' appeals to Zeus Xenios; the implication at the end is that the Cyclops' blinding is a punishment for the impiety of refusing hospitality to strangers as well as for cannibalism.

It is worth noting, too, the ironic echo: Odysseus felt that he would come upon a man μεγάλην ἐπιειμένον ἀλκήν (214); the phrase is repeated *verbatim* at 514; the oracle to the Cyclops about Odysseus had foretold that the latter would be ἐπιειμένον ἀλκήν, but the Cyclops, in emphasizing his guest's worthlessness (Οὔτις οὔτιδανός), is blinded to (and by) his real strength, a superior type of ἀλκή, *metis*. A meditation on this reversal of rôles, expressed in exactly the same language, should encourage those who believe that the fetters of the formula can sometimes be broken.

against which Stanford⁷ offers the defence of Odysseus' "inquisitiveness and acquisitiveness." It must be emphasized again, however, that in the story as Odysseus is relating it, he does not yet have any solid reason to suppose that his unknown host will depart from the normal procedure of entertaining his guests hospitably and sending them off with the usual guest-gift. Given the tradition of divinely-sanctioned hospitality of this type, Odysseus is right to reject his companions' proposal to steal and run.

The Cyclops enters and they realize for the first time what sort of man they have to deal with; his menacing appearance and the clatter he makes send them scurrying off into a corner. When the Cyclops finally notices them he addresses them with what Stanford calls "boorish directness," ὦ ξείνοι, τίνες ἐστέ; (252). By calling them ξείνοι he admits the facts of the case: they are strangers and guests, and ought to receive a hospitable welcome. Odysseus brazens it out: "We're Agamemnon's men, come from Troy," and then, in a remarkable cluster of references to the guest-gift theme:

ἡμεῖς δ' αὖτε κιχανόμενοι τὰ σὰ γούνα
 ἰκόμεθ', εἴ τι πόροις ξεινήϊον ἤ καὶ ἄλλως
 δοίης δωτίνην, ἣ τε ξείνων θέμις ἐστίν·
 ἀλλ' αἰδεῖο, φέριστε, θεούς· ἰκέται δέ τοί εἰμεν.
 Ζεὺς δ' ἐπιτιμήτωρ ἱκετῶν τε ξείνων τε
 ξείνιος, ὃς ξείνοισιν ἅμ' αἰδοίοισιν ὀπηδεῖ. (266-271)

In a stout-hearted attempt to give the lie to his foreboding and to save a situation which appears increasingly desperate, Odysseus invokes the divine right of suppliant-guests and thrusts forward his claim to hospitality no less than five times in as many lines. But the Cyclops is having none of it: "I would spare neither you nor your companions to avoid the wrath of Zeus" (276-7). He demands to know the location of his guest's ship, but Odysseus, with characteristic acumen, sees through the question and spins a tale *δολίοις ἐπέεσσι*. His host reacts by snatching up two of Odysseus' men, dashing them to the ground, and eating them for supper. The next morning he has two more for breakfast.

The Cyclops leaves the cave and goes off to pasture his flock, and Odysseus is left "devising deep evil," if he "might somehow take vengeance" (316-17). From an olive club lying conveniently to hand, he and his men fashion a weapon, stripping it smooth, tapering the end to a point, and hardening it in the fire. The Cyclops returns and two more men make his supper. Odysseus offers him a bowl of the potent wine,

⁷W. B. Stanford (ed.), *Odyssey of Homer*, (2nd ed., London 1959) vol. 1. The "literary" approach of this, the most recent edition in English, continually refreshes.

which he says he was bringing as a *λοιβήν*.⁸ The Cyclops drinks one bowlful and asks for another, "and tell me your name," he demands, "right now, so I can give you a gift, which you'll enjoy," *καὶ μοι τεδὸν οὖνομα εἰπέ αὐτίκα νῦν, ἵνα τοι δῶ ξείνιον, ᾧ κε σὺ χαίρης* (355-6). Is the Cyclops' heart softening? Will he at last perform the duties of a god-fearing host? The theme of the exchange of gifts, so carefully brought to the surface of the story again and again, has provided a perfect opportunity for the introduction of the name-theme. In lavishing so much attention on the earlier motif, making it reasonable for Odysseus to expect a guest-gift from his host and having him press his claim to it as a religious obligation, the author has taken a great deal of trouble to build up to this climax. "How can we stand in a relation of guest-to-host, friend-to-friend, when I don't even know your name?" For a moment our hopes are raised by the apparent sincerity of the Cyclops' question. Odysseus can reply politely, after a third bowl of the wine has had its dizzying effect, "Cyclops, you ask me my name and I'll tell you. But you'd better give me my guest-gift as you promised. My name is Nobody. That's what they call me, my mother, father, and all my friends, Nobody" (364-7). The guest-gift motif has facilitated (and is itself justified by) the introduction of the *outis*-theme. The transition from one to the other has been effected with consummate skill. But the author is not yet through with the theme he has been at such pains to develop. Odysseus has claimed a gift, has given the Cyclops his "name." Now the Cyclops fulfils with brutal irony his promise to give a gift when he has found out his guest's name: "I'll eat Nobody last"; *τὸ δέ τοι ξεινήϊον ἔσται* (370).⁹ There follows the gorily picturesque scene of the sizzling eyeball.

The Cyclops shrieks for help; the other Cyclopes come and ask, "What's the matter?"

ἦ μή τις σευ μῆλα βροτῶν ἀέκοντος ἐλαύνει;

ἦ μή τις σ' αὐτὸν κτείνει δόλῳ ἢ ἐ βίηφιν;

(405-406)

The two themes have interlocked and acquired strength through two ironic exchanges, the Cyclops' inquiry before giving the "gift," Odysseus' reply and the Cyclops' Rabelaisian retort (but Odysseus will have the last laugh); now the guest-gift motif is allowed to fall into the back-

⁸Stanford comments, *ad. loc.*, "O. flatters the Cyclops by using the word *λοιβή* which implies an offering to a god," which may be right. Although the word is used in a sacrificial formula at *Iliad* 4.49 and 9.500, I am not convinced that it means anything more than "offering" here; nor do I believe that the present use substantiates the recondite theory of libations as "guest-gifts" at sacrificial banquets.

⁹Prof. G. M. A. Grube has drawn my attention to the emphasis put on this grim jest by Demetrius (*On Style* 130), for whom the brutality of the joke is much the most terrifying feature of the Cyclops-story, more fearful, even, than his cannibalistic tastes.

ground and the name-theme carries on alone. Odysseus has given his name as *Outis*; the Cyclops' neighbours can therefore echo it as *Metis*.¹⁰ What the Cyclopes mean is, "surely nobody is . . ." or, better though more clumsily, "it is surely not the case that someone is. . ." *Metis* is an equivalent of *Outis* which does double duty: on one level it is an exact verbal parallel of *outis*, so that when the Cyclopes ask, "There is *nobody* . . . is there?" the blinded giant can answer, "Yes, that's right, *Nobody* is killing me," *Οὐτίς με κτείνει δόλω οὐδὲ βίηφι* (408). He is superficially agreeing with them, giving them the negative answer they anticipate, and the paronomasia allows them to go on, "well, then, if nobody is doing violence to you, *εἰ μὲν δὴ μή τις σε βιάζεται* (410), it must be the will of Zeus from which there is no escape," and we are reminded of Odysseus' appeals to Zeus Xenios and the Cyclops' blasphemies. It is at this point that a third level of ambiguity is added; so far we have had only the pun on "nobody" and the name *Outis* which Odysseus had given the Cyclopes. Here we have the first suggestion of the noun *μητις* = "cunning, craft." For there is no grammatical reason why Homer should have phrased the reply of the other Cyclopes in just this way; as Stanford comments on line 410, "H. elsewhere always uses *οὐ* when the indicative follows *εἰ*." That Homer consciously intended the *outis-metis* play to have this third overtone is indicated by Odysseus' comment when the other Cyclopes have gone away: "My heart laughed *ὡς θνοῦ'* *ἐξαπάτησεν ἐμὸν καὶ μητις ἀμύμων* (414)," that is, my name, *Outis-Metis*, and my cunning, *metis*.¹¹ This ambiguity cannot have been a happy accident, devised in the heat of a bardic recital and promptly forgotten, for it recurs in Book 20, lines 19–21, where *metis* is even more ambiguous. Odysseus has by then returned to Ithaca; he finds the serving-girls' insolent laughter intolerable and consoles himself, "Endure, my heart: another more shameful thing did you once endure on that day when Cyclops unrestrained in daring ate my mighty comrades. You took courage, when *Metis* led you out of the cave. . . ." The primary reference is to Odysseus' wily trick, but the *Metis-Outis* theme is echoed as well. Stanford's note on the passage betrays his uneasiness

¹⁰*μή* is used in direct questions "which expect or anticipate a negative answer" (*LSJ* s.v. *μή*, C.I.a). The particle *ἤ* indicates that "the questioner has a special interest in the answer he expects" (*ibid.*, s.v. *ἤ* II).

¹¹Stanford, in his note on line 408 comments: "The *Paronomasia* is further developed in *μητις* in 414, with a variation in 460." (This last is noticed by Eustathius on the line.) In his *Ambiguity in Greek Literature* (Oxford 1939), Stanford remarks, "This is the only place in Homer where ambiguity and paronomasia motivate a whole episode. Technically it is possibly the cleverest use in all Greek" (p. 105). But he does not elaborate on his suggestion, nor does he show how essential the guest-gift-theme is to the introduction of the name-theme, nor how the two themes are interrelated throughout the book.

with this distant echo in another part of the *Odyssey*: "it is just possible, even in *Oral Technique*, that this word is a deliberate echo of the famous *Οὔτις, μή τις, μήτις* episode in the cheating of the Cyclops." It is surely more than "just possible," and if "oral technique" entails lack of sophistication of this type, we can only conclude that Homer has here transcended its limitations.¹²

Blinded and in pain, the Cyclops sits in the cave entrance, hoping to catch the men as they try to escape, and expecting Odysseus to be *ἐνὶ φρεσὶ νήπιον* (419). He had called him a fool earlier, *νήπιός εἰς* (273), and a few lines later the poet can claim that the term applies more appropriately to the Cyclops himself, *νήπιος οὐκ ἐνόησεν* (442), for not discovering the ruse of their escape under the bellies of the sheep and the ram. This is more than a neat about-face, for it reinforces the *metis*-theme: by a twist of circumstances, Odysseus, whom the Cyclops had called a fool, shows himself to be a crafty fellow and makes the Cyclops look a fool in the end. When we remember that *δόλος* is a synonym for *μητις*, we can detect indirect hints of the *metis*-theme in Odysseus' *δολίους ἐπέεσσι* at 282, and the double reference to his *δόλω*, first by the other Cyclopes at 406 and echoed by the Cyclops himself at 408. The Cyclops hopes to catch Odysseus and his men by lying thus sprawled across the mouth of the cave, but once again Odysseus outwits him. "I took thought," Odysseus says proudly, "that all might turn out for the best, to discover some escape from death for my companions and myself"; *πάντας δὲ δόλους καὶ μῆτιν ὑφαίνον* (422).¹³ The note is again sounded at 448 where the Cyclops, noticing the unusual behaviour of his ram, addresses him, *οὐ τι πάρος γε λελλειμένος ἔρχεται οἴῳ*; but the Cyclops does not know that he has *Οὔτις* hanging on to his belly.¹⁴ Even now the Cyclops is not aware of Odysseus' original punning deceit, for he still thinks his name is *Οὔτις*, *ὃν οὐ πῶ φημι πεφυγμένον ἔμμεν δλεθρον* (455), and his final words refer to the evils which *οὔτιδανός πόρεν Οὔτις* (460).

At long last Odysseus and his men get away to their ship and sail to within shouting distance of shore. Odysseus taunts the Cyclops: "You've met evil," he calls, *ἐπεὶ ξείνους οὐκ ἄζω σῶ ἐνὶ οἴκῳ . . . τῷ σε Ζεὺς τίσατο* (478-9). Odysseus harks back to the earlier guest-gift theme: as

¹²Or should we not rather say that the case for oral composition has not yet been finally adjudicated?

¹³This "formulaic" phrase is used with equal skill at *Odyssey* 4.678, where there is an echo (by contrast) of Penelope's web. The image recurs with some variations of phrasing at *Iliad* 6.187 and 7.324.

¹⁴Of course, what the Cyclops *says* is "You were never left behind before . . ."; but it seems inconceivable to me that the audience (literally that—whatever we believe about method of composition) would not have detected, in hearing the words *οὐ τι πάρος γε λελλειμένος*, a vibration sympathetic with the *outis*-theme; still less conceivable that this ambiguity was not consciously intended by the author.

ξείνοι they had a right to expect ξείνια and had prayed to Zeus ξείνιος. In return for Odysseus' taunt, the Cyclops hurls a mountain-top at them and they are all but driven back to shore, but by hard rowing Odysseus' men get twice as far away and try to dissuade him from further provoking the Cyclops. But he will have his say: "If anyone asks you who blinded you, say it was Odysseus, sacker of cities, son of Laertes, whose home is in Ithaca" (502-5). Stanford's comment is worth noting: "Aristotle (*Rhetoric* 2.3.1380 b 22) says that O. tells Polyphemos his name because the Greeks considered vengeance incomplete till the sufferer knows by whom and for what reason it was inflicted. But here the motif of the fulfilled oracle (cp. 508 ff.) is involved. Perhaps, also, Polyphemos needed to know O.'s name to curse him effectively. And O. proudly seals his greatest triumph with his name." The "oracle-motif" is certainly involved; the Cyclops feels cheated, for the oracle said that Odysseus would be a man *μεγάλην ἐπιειμένον ἀλκήν*, whereas he is really, the Cyclops insists, *ὀλίγος τε καὶ οὐτιδανὸς καὶ ἄκις* (515). But I suggest that the main reason for Odysseus' giving the Cyclops his right name is to provide a dexterous tying-up of the guest-gift theme. The Cyclops had said, sardonically, "You tell me your name and I'll give you a guest-gift." Odysseus gave him a false "name" and the "gift" which the Cyclops promised, that he would eat "Nobody" last, has proved an empty boast in its literal sense (for he did not eat "Nobody"), but has come true by ambiguous irony: the Cyclops did not eat "Anybody" (except Odysseus' companions) because Odysseus had escaped. Now that the Cyclops knows Odysseus' right name, he can make good his promise of a guest-gift. Once more the irony of his coaxing tone is apparent: *ἀλλ' ἄγε δέῃρ', Ὀδυσσεῦ, ἵνα τοι πᾶρ ξείνια θείω* (517), and, after a prayer to his father Poseidon to bring evil upon Odysseus, the Cyclops picks up a far bigger stone and hurls it at the ship—let that be your guest-gift, Odysseus.

Book 9 of the *Odyssey* may contain a germ of the familiar fairy-tale "Monster-outwitted-by-Mortal," and it cannot be denied that much of the language is "formulaic." Nevertheless, what traditional elements we choose to find here must not mislead us into believing that a universal and authorless folk-tale has simply found its way into an assorted grab-bag of other such tales that we call the "Odyssey," or that the incident "composed itself" on the lips of the bard, effortlessly and semi-automatically.¹⁵ On the contrary, I suggest that the two themes, guest-gifts

¹⁵ "Without writing, the poet can make his verses only if he has a formulaic diction which will give him his phrases all made, and made in such a way that, at the slightest bidding of the poet, they will *link themselves* in an unbroken pattern . . .," Parry, "Epic Technique," *HSCP* 41 (1930) 138 (the italics are mine). "Unlike the poets who wrote, he can put into verse only those ideas which are to be found in the phrases which

and the crafty Nobody, are introduced and interwoven with great care and subtlety. The intricacy of the whole design of the book forces us to acknowledge the master touch of a conscious and highly original creative genius whom we traditionally call "Homer."

The book is near its end. Odysseus and his men have had a close escape from the Cyclops' cave. The latter's second "gift" to them has failed of its intended purpose, but it performs the useful service of skillfully advancing the action, for it drives Odysseus' ship to the island where his other companions are waiting. There they divide the winnings of their escapade, the sheep and ram which they have stolen as a substitute for guest-gifts, and the book comes to a quiet close as they embark the next morning and sail on.

are on his tongue At no time is he seeking words for an idea which has never before found expression, so that the question of originality in style means nothing to him" (*ibid.*, pp. 146-7).