

# EURIPIDES' CYCLOPEAN SYMPOSIUM

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THE PENULTIMATE SCENE OF EURIPIDES' *Cyclops* has disappointed many critics. Those who defend it do so simply because it is funny. No one has remarked that this scene is crucial to the play's argument—it is here that Odysseus defeats the Cyclops, reversing their earlier confrontation, and it is here that he finally supplants Silenus and takes control of the chorus.

Criticism of the scene is widespread but hardly consistent. Duchemin found it "remarquablement réduit" and supposed that the author was rushed; she has been followed by Arnott and Wetzel.<sup>1</sup> Schmidt, following Bernhardt, thought it "leider sehr weit ausgesponnen."<sup>2</sup> Lasserre concluded that "l'action n'en est pas touchée;"<sup>3</sup> to Masqueray it was "peu motivée."<sup>4</sup> Arrowsmith found that "this initial sympathy [for Odysseus] is nonetheless quickly alienated . . . by Polyphemus' transformation into a drunken, almost lovable, buffoon."<sup>5</sup> The scene's defenders have generally argued only that it is amusing, *iocossissime inventa*,<sup>6</sup> and they qualify even this: the farce "must obviously depend on the ingenuity of the actors;"<sup>7</sup> "the poet had made a firm decision and he must have seen the consequences."<sup>8</sup>

The one critic to have studied the scene in detail, L. E. Rossi, argues

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<sup>1</sup>J. Duchemin, *Le Cyclope d'Euripide* (Paris 1945) xvii; P. D. Arnott, "The Overworked Playwright: a Study in Euripides' *Cyclops*," *G&R* 8 (1961) 165; W. Wetzel, *De Euripidis fabula satyrica, quae Cyclops inscribitur, cum Homérico comparata exemplo* (Wiesbaden 1965) 102. Duchemin was anticipated by P. Masqueray, "Le Cyclops d'Euripide et celui d'Homère," *REA* 4 (1902) 188: "il semble . . . n'avoir eu d'autre idée que de terminer sa tâche au plus vite." See also W. Schmid, "Kritisches und exegetisches zu Euripides' *Kyklops*," *Philologus* 55 (1896) 59. (These discussions and those in note 2 are hereafter cited by author's name.)

<sup>2</sup>J. Schmidt, *Euripides' Verhältnis zu Komik und Komödie* (Grimma 1905) 6. See also D. J. Conacher, *Euripidean Drama* (Toronto 1967) 319: "the most original and diverting passages in the play undoubtedly occur in the first (or pre-prandial) interview . . ."

<sup>3</sup>F. Lasserre, "Le Drame Satyrique," *RivFC* 101 (1973) 297.

<sup>4</sup>Masqueray 179.

<sup>5</sup>W. Arrowsmith, *The Cyclops* (Chicago 1956) 6.

<sup>6</sup>G. B. Newcomer, *De Cyclope Homérico atque Euripideo* (diss. Berlin 1899) 25, cited by Wetzel, 100 n.3.

<sup>7</sup>R. Sri Pathmanathan, "A Playwright Relaxed or Overworked?" *G&R* 10 (1963) 127.

<sup>8</sup>R. G. Ussher, "The *Cyclops* of Euripides," *G&R* 18 (1971) 177.

that it is a typical satyric travesty of normal Greek custom.<sup>9</sup> The Cyclops reclines on the ground, not a couch: "il far coricare docilmente a terra un mostro mitico sia una caratteristica violazione . . . del codice etico del gesto" (34). Also the Cyclops is dissuaded from the *komos*: "insegnare le regole del simposio e dissuadere dal *κῶμος* doveva suonare al pubblico come una stonatura violenta" (30). Therefore the Cyclops is a fool who deserves defeat: "il grido di vittoria sul barbaro ignorante consiste nel voler dare proprio al *κῶμος* mancato la funzione di chiave per il lieto fine del dramma" (31).

Rossi's analysis is ingenious but probably wrong. First, the sympotic ritual seems to have the requisite elements: couch, cups, wreaths, wine-pourer. We even have a demonstration from Silenus of proper drinking posture. The aberrations seem less a mark of the Cyclops' depravity or stupidity than of the conditions of setting (grass for couch: the bucolic solution) and of plot (if Silenus hogs the wine, the Cyclops cannot be put to sleep). Moreover, even if the odd aspects of the symposium prepare the audience for the Cyclops' fall (Rossi is a bit vague on precisely what the "key" unlocks),<sup>10</sup> they in no way depend on the absence of the *komos* but are odd in their own right. The symposium really becomes perverted only when the Cyclops enters the cave. Then the bacchic elements of wine, women, and song are inverted: the wine, we are told, will soon be very bitter (589, cf. 619) and the garland of a different sort (517); the Cyclops will find a torch instead of a bride (515); and the result is that his screams, instead of being a sympotic paeon, are a victory paeon to Odysseus (664).<sup>11</sup> As Lasserre has noted, "l'ivresse joue un grand rôle, mais elle n'influence pas plus l'action que les dérogations aux règles symposiaques traitées en parodie de banquet qu'a si judicieusement discernées Rossi . . ."<sup>12</sup>

The scene is an inversion less of normal Greek practice than of the negative action that has preceded. In the first place, the unbearable absence of Dionysus has been relieved. The chorus bemoaned the lack of wine,

<sup>9</sup>L. E. Rossi, "Il *Ciclope* di Euripide come *κῶμος* 'mancato,'" *Maia* 23 (1971) 10-38.

<sup>10</sup>My guess is that Rossi is trying to explain why the transforming power of wine does not solve Odysseus' dilemma. The Cyclops' uncharacteristic friendliness when under the influence of the wine might be thought to foreshadow a peaceful reconciliation as civilization is brought to the barbarian. The rejection of the *komos*, then, would not be to Odysseus' credit: we would have "a juxtaposition of two related types of civilized brutality" as Arrowsmith phrases it ([above, note 5] 9).

<sup>11</sup>This reverses his earlier tuneless singing that accompanied the wailing of Odysseus' men (425-426, cf. 489-490) and recalls the chorus's statement that they would rather hear the Cyclops dead than the sound of the Asian lyre (443).

<sup>12</sup>Lasserre (above, note 3) 297. Conacher (324) seems closer to the mark than either Rossi or Lasserre: "the monster has offended horribly against the laws of hospitality and it is by Odysseus' 'hospitable' treatment of him . . . that he is undone."

women, and song (64–81), but their invocation of Dionysus is answered by the appearance of Odysseus with his sack of Dionysian wine.<sup>13</sup> It is only a matter of time before the Cyclops drinks the wine, becomes sexually aroused (581 ff.) and favors both audience (503–510) and the cave's occupants (425–426) with a song. The chorus's complaint of 64–81 is answered by their evocation of sympotic bliss in 495–502: blessed is he who drinks, wenches, and sings *paraklausithyra*. The Cyclops' maw is filled now with a cargo of wine (505–506) not, as before, with human flesh (362).<sup>14</sup> Before his was a harborless heart (349) but now *he* is so drunk he can hardly swim (577).

The scene contains a second reversal, in Odysseus' relation to the Cyclops. Before, Odysseus was accused of stealing (223), was betrayed by Silenus (230), and led into the cave; now Silenus supports him (540), is himself accused of stealing (547), and led into the cave. Now the Cyclops belches Dionysus (523) rather than farting against Zeus (328).<sup>15</sup> He identifies with Zeus (582–586) rather than defying him. Even his earlier reference to drinking milk and being wrapped in skins by the fire (323–331) is reversed as he is now told it is good to drink to the warmth of the sun (542).<sup>16</sup>

In fact, the two scenes between Odysseus, Silenus, and the Cyclops are parallel: both have triple dialogue (222 ff. = 519 ff.) and end with double prayers by Odysseus based on the need to preserve his Trojan reputation and the gods' honor (350 ff. = 599 ff.). In both scenes the Cyclops depends on Silenus' judgment (273 = 539) and gives Odysseus a gift (342 = 550) after having asked his name (275 = 548). Earlier Silenus said he would damn the Cyclops' eye if he could kiss the wine (172–174) and accused Odysseus of wishing to beat, blind, and enslave the Cyclops (234–240); now he gets to kiss the wine (553) and we know that his earlier accusation

<sup>13</sup>So Odysseus is called a *κρόταλον* (104) and the wine comes from Maron, who is not a priest of Apollo as in Homer but the son of Dionysus. Because of the satyrs, Odysseus thinks at first that he has come to "Bacchus' city" (99) but he is quickly corrected (115 ff.).

<sup>14</sup>The echo picks up the earlier image of the wineskin and cup as a sympotic ship in tow (151). See W. J. Slater, "High Flying at Paestum: Further Comments," *AJA* 81 (1977) 556. A further nautical image may lurk in v. 92: we expect *εἰσβεβῶτες* not *ἐμβεβῶτες*.

<sup>15</sup>For a different interpretation of 328 see R. Seaford, "Some Notes on Euripides' *Cyclops*," *CQ* 25 (1975) 200 note 5.

<sup>16</sup>It is clear from 121 ff. that wine (and grain) are signs of civilization, and I think a neglected aspect of the Cyclops' "atheistic" speech (316–346) is its reflection of this. He sits by the fire and he drinks milk, whereas we know from Alcaeus and others that sitting by the fire drinking wine is a sympotic commonplace, see Rossi (above, note 9) 31 n. 68. Then he says that the earth must produce grass (for his flocks) rather than the grain we expect. I find it difficult, however, to view the Cyclops' later friendliness as a prelude to truly civilized behavior (see above, note 10).

has come true. Earlier the Cyclops thought Silenus had been pummelled (229);<sup>17</sup> now Odysseus warns against this (534). Earlier Silenus took a sip of the wine, was willing to die (166), and became sexually aroused (169); now the Cyclops too takes a sip, becomes "dead-drunk" (571), and is sexually aroused (581 ff.).<sup>18</sup>

At the same time, the drunk scene reverses the defeat of Odysseus inside the cave with the eating of the crew. After the Cyclops had spitted the men,<sup>19</sup> he prepared himself a bed of leaves beside the fire (386–387), as he later notes how soft the grass looks (541) when he prepares to recline and drink facing not the fire, as in the proverb, but the sun (542–543).<sup>20</sup> Also, the krater that was used in the earlier feast to hold milk is now filled with wine (388 = 545) and once again he is served by Odysseus. Thus the Cyclopean symposium demonstrates Odysseus' control by echoing, reversing, and in effect answering both the initial confrontation between the two and the disastrous banquet in the cave. Since it will be followed by the more blatant physical victory of Odysseus in the blinding, which is the mythically sanctioned victory, we have a precise balance of interior and exterior, myth and play.

A final reversal in the scene involves the relative positions of Odysseus and Silenus. At first the two were equated: both had a special relationship with Maron (141–142); both were suffering the same fate (110) and had drained to the full their labor (10 = 282). But gradually Odysseus replaces Silenus. Silenus began as the Cyclops' steward (31) and cupbearer (559), but Odysseus takes over both of these functions (406, 566). The Cyclops may still trust Silenus' judgment, but he knows Silenus is cheating him of the wine. Silenus' defeat in the symposium is important, then, not only because he must give up the wine if Odysseus' plan is to work but also because Silenus has lost his official function (and must be content with Ganymede's other, unofficial function). The result is that Odysseus takes over leadership of the chorus: earlier it was Silenus who told them to be quiet (81); now it is Odysseus (476, 624).

The emergence of Odysseus as captain of the chorus has been carefully prepared. After the Cyclops' brutish meal, Odysseus leaves the cave to tell the satyrs what happened and to enlist their aid. They agree readily and urge each other to grab the "torch's oarblade" (483), picking up Odysseus' image of the blinding as "rowing the drill" (461).<sup>21</sup> When Odysseus re-

<sup>17</sup>The wine caused his red face, see Schmidt 6, Duchemin 101, A. Lesky, *Die tragische Dichtung der Hellenen*<sup>3</sup> (Göttingen 1972) 501 versus Ussher (above, note 8) 173: "the injuries are clearly self-inflicted."

<sup>18</sup>For the idea of "dead-drunk" see Slater (above, note 14) 556.

<sup>19</sup>He heats his spit much as Odysseus will heat the brand (ἐγκεκαυμένους 393, κεκαυμένον 457).

<sup>20</sup>For the proverb see F. A. Paley, *Euripides* 3 (London 1880) 594.

<sup>21</sup>The connection is, I think, guaranteed by the triple repetition of "oar" within thirty lines (461, 468, 484).

turns, however, they display their typical cowardice and say that although they cannot help physically they know an Orphic song which will make the brand move (646–648). We should note that Odysseus, while criticizing their weakness, does not reject their offer but rephrases it in the nautical terms he had used when originally asking their help: they are to be the coxswains urging on him and his men (652–656).<sup>22</sup> Now we can understand both why Euripides used the Homeric simile of the shipbuilder to describe Odysseus' plan and why he had the shipbuilder "row" his drill, instead of "drilling" it: Odysseus is to row to the satyrs' chant.<sup>23</sup> Their assistance extends to the final scene, which they dominate, first playing out the *oûtis* joke on the Cyclops and then misdirecting him and thereby allowing Odysseus to escape.<sup>24</sup> In the final words of the play, the satyrs exit to become, as Odysseus had promised (468), his shipmates in reality (708).<sup>25</sup>

This final image of the satyrs as Odysseus' crew is probably meant to recall Silenus' opening remarks about his glorious past when he smote the center of Enceladus' shield and gave orders to his satyric crew (5–8, 14–17). Odysseus gradually replaces Silenus until he too smites an Aetnean monster (in his central eye)<sup>26</sup> and gives orders to his satyric

<sup>22</sup>None of the terms used here (*ἐπεγκέλευε, κελυσμοῖς, κελυσμάτων*) need be nautical but this natural interpretation is widely accepted: Duchemin 184–185; Rossi (above, note 9) 22; Ussher (above, note 8) 177. These critics, however, assume that the image was chosen because of the presence of Odysseus' sailors, "pour commander la manœuvre aux matelots d'Ulysse" (Duchemin 185).

<sup>23</sup>I find myself anticipated in this by Duchemin 184. Wetzel is therefore wrong to say "ad ipsam rem scaenicam nihil Euripidi prodest haec similitudo" (98, cf. also 34) as is Masqueray (181) to argue that similes such as this "conviennent aux descriptions, elles ne peuvent guère, en général, être employées dans l'exposé d'un projet."

<sup>24</sup>I cannot agree with Schmidt (7) and Lesky (above, note 17) 502 that the *oûtis* joke has lost its meaning nor with G. Kaibel, "Kratinos' 'ΟΔΤΣΣΗΣ und Euripides' ΚΥΚΛΩΨ," *Hermes* 30 (1895) 73 that the purpose of having the chorus help is none other than "die prahlerische und feige Natur der Satyrn in zwei hübschen Szenen zu veranschaulichen." To Masqueray's complaint (188) that "nous cherchons en vain dans le drame la scène du bélier" one may respond that this scene of the chorus misdirecting the Cyclops is meant to recall their earlier attempts with the Cyclops' pet ram (49 ff.). One should note finally that we expect satyrs to be the trackers not the leader (e.g., *Ichneutai*).

<sup>25</sup>The development from sympotic ship to escape ship of the simile is paralleled by the development in fire imagery from the cooking fire (245, 308, 374) to the fire of wine (424, cf. 228) to the burning stake (458, 514, 593) and finally to burning Troy (694, prepared by 198, 351, 603).

<sup>26</sup>On Aetnean Enceladus see L. Escher, "Enkelados," *RE* 5 (1905) 2579: "Die gewöhnliche Version ist das E. unter dem Aetna (oder Sicilien) liegt . . ." The connection of the center of the shield with the Cyclops' central eye is much less certain, as is the equation of spear (*δόρυ* 5, 7) with boat (*δόρυ* 15, 19—marking Silenus' two adventures, both instigated by an action of Hera that causes Dionysus to travel) and then the replacement of this spear-boat by Odysseus' shipbuilding torch. Support for the idea of the spear-boat may be found in v. 15 where *δόρυ* is the object of both "grasp" and "guide."

coxswains, who eventually leave Silenus behind and go off to become Odysseus' crew. It is striking that Silenus is separated from his children, but his betrayal of them as well as Odysseus makes this only just. Silenus has become a surrogate Cyclops in his drunkenness and, whereas the Cyclops even when blinded is still a threat, Silenus is never heard from again.<sup>27</sup>

Thus we can see that the Cyclopean symposium is crucial to the action: in it Odysseus defeats both the Cyclops and Silenus. The *komos* is rejected simply because Odysseus wanted to exercise his particular talents. As he says, his desire is *δόλιος* (449), and the satyrs reply "we have always (*πάλα*) heard you were smart" (450, cf. 104). Odysseus' victory is confirmed in the final scene: the Cyclops is reduced to the position of his sheep—being led around (perhaps on all fours) by the satyrs, while Silenus has been totally supplanted. The Cyclops' traditional two weapons are useless: Odysseus has already endured the prophesied dangers, and we know that the rocks the Cyclops goes to hurl will miss their mark. Odysseus exits in triumph, followed by the satyrs who are now his.

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<sup>27</sup>Especially noticeable since he has just been mentioned (597). "Much more strikingly, he simply vanishes," D. F. Sutton, "Father Silenus: Actor or Coryphaeus?" *CQ* 24 (1974) 19. Ussher (above, note 8) 178 insists Silenus is on stage during the exodos while Pathmanathan (above, note 7) 124 argues, against Arnott (165), that "his absence would hardly be noticed."