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"The One Who Plants Evils": A Contrapuntal Reading of Othering and Identity Politics in "Odysseus's Tale of Trials" from Homer's *Odyssey*

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Abstract

Othering, as the basic political economy of identity construction, has been operative in human societies since ancient times, but it has been conceptually investigated only in recent times. Employing contrapuntal reading, the deconstructive strategy adapted by Edward Said from classic Western music, the present paper deals with the issue of identity politics in "Odysseus's Tale of Trials" from Homer's *Odyssey* to unravel the ideological subtext of this canonical romantic epic and give voice to the figures monsterized and suppressed by the hero and the narrative voice. It is argued that *The Odyssey* has significantly contributed to the construction of Western subjectivity, giving a sense of national or cultural identity to both ancient Greek people and modern Western man via setting them in opposition to their others. However, upon a contrapuntal reading, Odysseus is no different from the so-called savage, barbarous, villainous others he confronts in his quest and the identity constructed for both parties is merely a matter of convention and discursive power. Thus, the findings of this study challenge the commonsensical identity politics at work in Western culture, in the hope of paving the way for further critical readings of such classical texts and reevaluating their translations.

Keywords: othering, romantic epic, national identity, contrapuntal reading, "Odysseus's Tale of Trials"

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Introduction

In modern Western thought, the concept of "otherness" or "alterity" has been approached from various perspectives, most prominently phenomenology, psychoanalysis, and postcolonialism. By Mary Klages's (2012) account, as the antithesis of "self" or "subject," the other is simply "everything the self is not"; thus, if the self is normally associated with rationality, self-consciousness, goodness, morality, beauty, normalcy, freedom, culture, masculinity, whiteness, and other conventionally positive values, the other is imaged as irrational, impulsive, evil (or bad), immoral, ugly (or monstrous), abnormal, enslaved, savage, feminine, and non-white, among other so-called negative qualities in common-sensical discourses (61). Indeed, the self or subject cannot be conceptually defined without being contrasted with the other. As that which "remains irreducible to the subject"s conscious experience," the other "transcends […] the realm of the already known" and, thus, "threatens sameness, the realm of the subject"s known world" or its identity as the self (Strehle 2013: 181).

That is why the self always tries, consciously or not, to negate, inferiorize, monsterize, suppress, control, oust, or destroy the other—a process referred to as "othering" or "otherizing" in contemporary critical theory (Tyson 2023: 366). Albrecht Classen (2005) holds that all military conflicts stem from "hostility against or disregard of the Other, whose own identity is not acknowledged but instead is treated as a dangerous challenge, if not an actual threat, to the existence and social construct of the" self (1692). To take an example, ancient Greek thinkers and citizens, including Plato and Aristotle, the originators of Western philosophy and the fathers of "wisdom," contemptuously referred to people other than Greek (*Έλληνες* / *Hellenes*), especially the people from Asia Minor, as *βάρβαρος* ("barbarous" / "barbarian"), thereby deeming themselves naturally good and the non-Greek naturally evil. Originally, the rationale behind this nomenclature was the unintelligibility of their language (*βαρβαρόφωνος*, meaning "of unintelligible speech"), which did not sound like their own language, yet later it gradually turned into an essential foreignness, evilness, and hostility (Grosby 2005: 3).[1]

A literary genre in which selfhood and othering have been customary since ancient times is "epic," a term that covers a vast variety of denotations in the history of literature, yet there are a number of conditions shared by all expansive definitions of primary epics. Paul Innes (2013) offers one such definition: "grand narratives that incorporate various myths of origin intermingled with memories of historical events and personages" (1). Over time, epic narratives play a significant part in developing a sense of national identity:

> the local variations that are already familiar from the earlier periods begin to take on associations that could be regarded as part of a longer process of nation-building. As a sense of shared cultural identity begins to emerge, […] the production of epic can later be appropriated for nationalistic purposes. (Innes 2013: 8)

It should be noted that in discussions of ancient epics the term "nation" does not necessarily refer to the recent sense of nation-state established in modern political theory, but rather to a broader cultural uniformity or ethnic unity possessed by a people living in a shared geographical territory. As mentioned above, even the citizens of ancient Athens considered themselves a uniform group (the self / "us") which was distinct from and superior to other ethnic or cultural groups (the other / "them"). Accordingly, the nationalistic implications of epic and the mechanism of othering deployed in it also hold true for such ancient epics as the Homerian narratives. Since the implied audience of such narratives "lives much later than the events narrated in the poems," the epic text regards the present "as a sort of a continuation or even fulfilment of the past" (Toohey 1992: 8). It is for the same reason that Heda Jason (1977) calls this genre "ethnopoetry" (3).

Even though Homer's *Odyssey* (c. 8th cent. BCE) verges more on the genre of "romance" than epic in the strict sense of the term,[2] it shares many elements with epic narratives, not least a grand scope, heroism and great achievements, wars, quest and trials, supernatural creatures, struggle with evil forces (enemies of the self), stylistics features like epithets, and perhaps more importantly being part of the Westerners' common cultural memory. Indeed, *The Odyssey* has generally been categorized as an epic rather than romance, despite the fact that it relates the story of "an individual hero": the hero, albeit apparently individual, has been representing a whole nation, race, or culture for centuries. Jason (1977) regards it as representative of a sub-type of epic, namely "romantic epic" (31). Albert Cook (1974) regards *The Odyssey* as an "epic" on the grounds that it possesses "epic adequacy," i.e., "a view of experience large enough to pose completeness for the life of the protagonist" (445).[3] Cook goes on to argue that the heroes of the most prominent epics written after *The Odyssey* "resemble Odysseus more closely than they do Achilles," the hero of *The Iliad* (446). Irad Malkin (1998) accentuates the idea that over time Odysseus has served as a "national" hero for the Greek people (4, 6). Peter W. Rose (2019) adumbrates that *The Odyssey* can be categorized as a prototype of the "national epic," owing to its "focus on Telemachus and […] the real world of Ithaka" (122). Besides, he concurs with many other critics in that Odysseus is an Everyman figure and the origin of the Western man's identity (92), not solely that of the inhabitants of ancient Ithaca. Even if Homer is not expected to have thought in "national" terms, over centuries his work has carried crucial implications for the identity of the Western man.

Purpose and Scope of the Study

The dominant narrative voice in epic texts, including *The Odyssey*, patently shapes their heroes' identities through differentiating them from an other, holding back the voice of the other so as to throw his own "good" cultural identity into sharp relief and give an inferior, evil character to the other.[4] Nonetheless, reading the text contrapuntally or polyphonically with the critical approach provided by Edward W.

Said (1994a, 1994b), one can take issue with such a binary opposition and deconstruct it, such that the suppressed other may also find a voice. In this way, by dismantling the binary opposition Greek / barbarian in Homer's epic poetry, with the floor given to the so-called barbarian (non-Greek) nations, the Greeks would be represented as the savage monsters. This considered, the purpose of the current paper is untying the self / other binary in "Odysseus's Tale of Trials" from Homer's *Odyssey* (bks. IX-XII) to unravel its ideological subtext and give voice to the others marginalized and subdued by the dominant narrative voice.

This particular episode has been selected because it is the most representative section of the narrative in terms of othering and identity politics. "To display his heroic abilities," similar to most mythological and epic narratives, in this episode "the epic hero needs some form of a crisis or war or quest" (Toohey 1992: 10; see also Martin 2005: 10, 14-15), and every war is built around a process of othering performed by both parties (Honarmand 2019: 56, 67). In "Odysseus's Tale of Trials," Odysseus confronts the Cyclops as the epitome of otherness, represented as a non-human, demonic, strange, repulsive, evil monster while, as discussed below, such a misrepresentation and stereotypification or, more precisely, monsterization and demonization of the Cyclops are effected by the identity politics governing the dominant discourse of this romantic epic narrative and do not present a verisimilar image of his true essence.

Significance of the Study

In *The Odyssey*, othering looms large, not least in characterizing Odysseus, the protagonist and "hero" of the narrative. According to Rose (2019), the Greek subject (the self) is described in Homer's text as good and civilized, whereas the non-Greek subject (the other) is presented as evil and savage because of not only "their lack of ships, agriculture, viniculture, and architecture, but also […] their lack of a specifically Greek social organization" (138). Since *The Odyssey*, alongside *The Iliad*, functioned as a standard model for diverse sorts of creative writing in later periods, the heroic identity constructed by them and its corollary value system gradually grew into the dominant identity of the Western "man." This is a point conceded by Peter Toohey (1992), who argues that "[t]hese epics helped shape Greece and Rome […] and they [in turn] helped shape the European mind" (19). Likewise, Laura M. Slatkin (2005) believes "[t]he *Odyssey*, with the *Iliad*, is often regarded as a foundation poem in western [*sic*.]—or, more precisely, European—culture" (327). In the same line of argument, Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno (2002) concede that Odysseus "turns out to be the prototype of the bourgeois individual" (35), i.e., the modern Western subjectivity, because *The Odyssey*, as a classic(al) epic, represents and reconstructs the identity of man more exactly and more generally than does the modern genre of the novel.[5] Therefore, a critical exploration of identity construction and othering in this text can shed light not only on the *modus operandi* of identity

formation in ancient Greek culture but also more broadly on its mechanism in modern Western civilization.

Review of the Related Literature

Homer's *Odyssey*, together with *The Iliad*, has long been an object of praise, scrutiny, and criticism for generations of writers and critics. In sooth, the entire Western canon is often summarized in these two works, which served as a source of inspiration for many of the masterpieces created in the last two millennia. From the mid-twentieth century, with the rise of literary and cultural theory, *The Odyssey* has been explored and critiqued from different perspectives, providing an account of which certainly goes beyond the limited scope of the present paper.[6]

The representation of the other and the construction of the self's identity in Homer's text are naturally informed by the narrative discourse in which they are produced and operate. The question of the Homeric narrator and his objectivity has been addressed by Scott Douglas Richardson (1990), who denies the narrators of *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* any objective or detached status: "By making judgments on the action, the narrator is not affording us a better vision of the story but is shaping our evaluation of what we see, […] his engrossment with their deeds and woes eliciting our engrossment" (158). As a result, if the quest pursued by the epic hero ends in a particular realization, the knowledge acquired by the protagonist accords with the narrator's value system. Indeed, the epic narrator is presented as the quintessence of wisdom (160), meaning that the values advocated by the narrator should be taken at face value. Thus, the epic narrator is necessarily partisan simply because he is retelling the story of a hero who is representative of an entire race or nation: "No reader of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* can believe that the poet is neutral, that he does not differentiate between the glorious acts of the heroes and the villainy of Thersites, Polyphemos, and the suitors" (165).

One of the studies attempting to resist the traditional readings of *The Odyssey* is the one offered by Gijs van Oenen (2001), who focuses on the formation of the protagonist's identity and compares it with Penelope's. In this study, which of course does not deal with the political economy of othering in *The Odyssey*, the author adopts the Deconstructive approach for dealing with this problem and tries to subvert the cultural and gender stereotypes constituting the basis of traditional interpretations, yet the trouble with van Oenen's reading is that in practice he redoubles the very same traditional, humanistic conceptions of subjectivity he claims to be dismantling since he incorporates in his theory of identity formation the element of the individual's conscious will and personality. In an attempt to resist the clichéd readings of Homer's characters, van Oenen argues that both Odysseus and Penelope are far more complex and singular than could be summarized in such stereotypical descriptions as "the cunning hero" (Odysseus) and "the faithful wife" (Penelope). Calling Odysseus "the archetype of man" (225), van Oenen postulates that while confronted with the forces

of contingency during his quest, Odysseus shows idiosyncratic behaviors that defy the above-mentioned stereotypes advanced by previous interpretations.

There is only one point in van Oenen’s essay where he refers to the role of the other in identity formation: drawing upon Jacques Lacan’s psychoanalytic theory, he writes: “[t]he dimension of experience […] captures our self-understanding as being interconnected by countless ‘threads’, or relations to others” (229); however, the problem of the subject’s relations to others is never taken up by the author in the rest of his study. In the final analysis, van Oenen’s theory, which can be delineated as a pragmatist attitude toward identity construction, does not amount to a clear, cogent understanding of identity politics in *The Odyssey* because of the confusing position he assumes toward the notion of identity as an admixture of contingency and personality. His act of deconstruction fails when in justifying the characters’ conduct he has to resort to conventional psychology and humanistic conceptions of individuality.

Another study attempting to resist the traditional readings of *The Odyssey* is Mark Buchan’s (2004), for whom the key event in the poem is the blinding of Polyphemus the Cyclops by Odysseus, which Buchan promises to read resistantly, i.e., “to look at the blinding from the perspective of its victim” (18) and to challenge Odysseus’s moral position, which represents Greek ethics. Nevertheless, as Buchan’s book unfolds, this promise is never fulfilled for twofold reasons. First, his attitude toward the narrative’s victimized other is all too reductive as the Cyclops is reduced to just one trait: “Odysseus never calls the Cyclops he blinds ‘Polyphemus’; […] he always addresses him as ‘Cyclops’. This suggests that Odysseus is reacting to the single eye in the middle of the forehead of his adversary” (19). Polyphemus, whose real name literally means “of much speech,” is seen by Odysseus, the narrator, and, as a result, the poem’s audience solely and derogatorily as a Cyclops, originally denoting “circle-eyed,” and his other traits as a different being are simply ignored (21). To give another example, one can bring up Buchan’s contention that “the universe of the Cyclopes is static,” in contrast with those of Odysseus and other Greek people (29). Therefore, it can be observed that Buchan, too, falls into the trap of the conventional stereotypes reproduced by traditional and dominant readings of the text. Second, counter to what he claims, all through his analysis, Buchan is totally sympathetic toward Odysseus and the Greeks, i.e., the victimizers he intends to critique.

This reminds us of Eric A. Havelock’s (1978) conventional description of Polyphemus and his race, which is in harmony with the dominant readings of the text: the Cyclops “is a monstrous thing, not really human,” a “giant” whose reply to Odysseus only affirms his “atheism” (159); “the Cyclops, compared with a Hellene, is not only a savage outside society and law but stupid” (160). However, the only “crime” committed by the Cyclops is to be different from the Greeks or Hellenes, who believe in Zeus and other gods and goddesses. In fact, Buchan and Havelock not only fail to provide a resistant reading and give voice to the victim’s desire but

by treating him as an object or the object of Odysseus's and Poseidon's desires they reinforce and perpetuate the same traditional, dominant readings of the text in which Polyphemus is represented as the evil other.

In a study on what he terms "proto-racism," Benjamin Isaac (2006) holds that primary instances of racism can be traced back to ancient Greek and Roman cultures. He begins by rejecting the conventional view that in ancient Greece there existed only ethnic or cultural and not racial prejudices. Isaac demonstrates that the racism practiced back then was not biological-deterministic, neither was it conducive to systematic persecution of the marginalized races, yet one can observe an early form of racism or a kind of proto-racism in ancient Greek culture, and the way ancient Greek thinkers and politicians rationalized those racial prejudices is the same employed by modern European thinkers, who were deeply influenced by ancient Greek philosophers. The core of this proto-racism was the idea that we are superior and others are inferior. To Isaac, othering occurs in all human societies and the representations generated of the other are rarely built on factual, objective observations of external reality: "Hostility towards foreigners occurs in every society […]. An essential component of such hostility is always the tendency to generalize and simplify, so that whole nations are viewed as if they were a single individual with a single personality" (33; cf. Said's critique of Western Orientalism). That the Greek people deemed themselves superior was so natural(ized) to them that no one ever thought of questioning it—exactly the same picture presented through the narrator's as well as the protagonist's discourse in *The Odyssey*. This was the inception of the Westerner's identity, for Odysseus was treated as the prototypical Western / European man in the following centuries: "the ancient ideas are found in Greek and Latin literature. This literature was widely read for centuries in the West and the ideas found there had a profound influence on later generations" (33). Furthermore, contrary to Malkin's (1998) claim, Isaac (2006) believes that the ancient Athenians assumed a sort of racial identity: "the Athenians regarded themselves as a 'race' in modern terms. […] these ideas were influential later, as well, for they appear in authors who were read widely ever since the Renaissance" (40). One may go still further and state that they maintained a "national" identity that was based on a sense of the superiority of the self and the inferiority of other nations and races.

Richard Ned Lebow (2012) argues that *The Iliad*'s and *The Aeneid*'s representation of the other borders on modern psychology's findings based on empirical evidence and, thus, is truer to life than Immanuel Kant's and G. W. F. Hegel's conceptions. According to the latter, the collective identity of the nation is a sort of self-knowledge created when citizens are encouraged to become aware of who they are as a result of external conflicts with other nations. National identities are consolidated by stereotyping and demonizing the other as well as "institutional memory" or "official constructions of the past fostered or imposed on society by the state" (87). In Lebow's opinion, despite the fact that *The Iliad* "helped to create and sustain a

strong sense of community among […] Greeks,” it does not depict the Trojans—i.e., the military enemy of the Greeks—as demonized or essentially inferiorized by the latter: “Trojans and Greeks are each other’s ‘other,’ but do not require this other to become themselves. Both groups possess strong identities prior to the war” (50, 103). Lebow’s intriguing survey does not include Homer’s *Odyssey*; for this reason, its conclusion cannot generally represent the political economy of othering in Homer’s entire *oeuvre*. The structure and subject of *The Odyssey* are quite distinct from those of *The Iliad*, in spite of being authored by (apparently) the same figure and belonging to the same genre, culture, and historical period. In sharp contrast to Lebow’s reading of *The Iliad*, the present contrapuntal reading reveals that the other is most often than not marginalized, demonized, and excluded by the central discourse of *The Odyssey*.

Before the establishment of Poststructuralism and Postmodernism, Western studies of *The Odyssey* mainly approached the text in a traditional, ethnicist fashion since—as is the case with A. W. H. Adkins (1972) and Bernard Knox (1996), among others—they considered Odysseus as the perfect hero and paragon of good and higher values. With the advent of Poststructuralism in the 1970s, literary critics embarked on rereading Homer critically and deconstructively.[7] In the essays collected by Beth Cohen (1995), for instance, the authors take a critical stand on the representation of women in *The Odyssey*. Nevertheless, these studies cannot be counted as contrapuntal readings in the technical sense of the term, as the marginal characters are still overshadowed by the dominant voice of the text and are not properly given voice in those critical analyses.

The Saidian strategy of contrapuntal reading has not been deployed to analyze the issue of identity politics and the construction of cultural / national identity via othering in Homer’s *Odyssey*. Aiming to investigate the ideological subtext of the episode selected from this romantic epic and its possible ethical implications, the qualitative critical reading offered in this study is built upon the observation and interpretation of the theme of othering and the way the narrative voice constructs the sympathetic epic hero’s identity by placing him in opposition to an other, who is subsequently inferiorized, marginalized, and represented as evil and odious.

Theoretical Framework and Research Methodology

Contrapuntal or polyphonic reading as a strategy for critical reading of literary works was advanced by the Postcolonialist critic Edward W. Said in *Culture and Imperialism*, where it was used to unravel the colonial / imperial subtext of the apparently impartial English novel. The idea was taken from the theory of classic Western music in which “counterpoint” is literally defined as “note against note” or “melody against melody” and more technically as “music consisting of two or more lines that sound simultaneously” (Apel 1974: 208). It is sometimes treated as synonymous with the term “polyphony,” defined as the quality of a musical piece “that combines several simultaneous voice-parts of individual design, in contrast to monophonic music, which

consists of a single melody, or homophonic music, which combines several voice-parts of similar, rhythmically identical design" (Apel 1974: 687). Adapted by Said in the context of literary theory, counterpoint designates the simultaneous existence of various and often conflictual voices within a single text. According to Said (1994a), in classic Western music characterized by counterpoint,

> various themes play off one another, with only a provisional privilege being given to any particular one; yet in the resulting polyphony there is concert and order […]. In the same way, I believe, we can read and interpret English novels, for example, whose engagement […] with the West Indies or India, say, is shaped and perhaps even determined by the specific history of colonization, resistance, and finally native nationalism. (59-60)

Although in his work Said never mentions Mikhail Bakhtin's name, his notion of contrapuntal / polyphonic reading clearly bears the mark of Bakhtin, who has been credited with introducing the concept into literary theory. In his account of Fyodor Dostoevsky's novelistic style, Bakhtin (1999) delineates polyphony (or counterpoint) as the existence of a "plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses" that are all "fully valid" and gives Dostoevsky's novels as the *locus classicus* of this quality in prose fictional narratives:

> What unfolds in his works is not a multitude of characters and fates in a single objective world, illuminated by a single authorial consciousness [which would be "monologic"]; rather a plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with its own world, combine but are not merged in the unity of the event. (6)

As conceived of by Bakhtin, polyphony / counterpoint, then, is the state or condition of presenting a multiplicity of authorial, narratorial, and characterological voices in a fictional narrative text that can be heard and recognized all at once, without any one of them predominating over or controlling the others. The difference between the Bakhtinian and Saidian versions arises from the point that the latter relies on the assumption that often the voice of the peripheral minorities are suppressed and dominated by the narrator or the center of consciousness, to the extent that only through revealing the ideological subtext and emboldening the peripheralized can we discern the voice of the other, and that is the exact reason why Said brings in the deconstructive strategy of contrapuntal reading, which has also been inspired by Michel Foucault's theory of discourse, power, and knowledge.

In Foucauldo-Saidian terms, "'[k]nowledge' is always a matter of representation, and representation a process of giving concrete form to ideological concepts, of making certain signifiers stand for signifieds" (Ashcroft & Ahluwalia 2001: 65). Based on Said's argument, the novelistic text might appear on the surface a harmonic or univocal whole but, beneath the surface, it is an amalgamation of various and often opposing discourses, each retaining its difference but seemingly unified with the others through the narrator's dominant discourse, which gives order to this vocal chaos.

A contrapuntal reading can dissect the structure and texture of text and bring to the fore the distinctness of each of the underlying, marginalized voices.

Adopting the critical method of contrapuntal reading as a deconstructive strategy provided by Said in his Postcolonialist theory, the present qualitative, library-based study deals with the issue of identity politics in "Odysseus's Tale of Trials" from Homer's *Odyssey* to unravel the ideological subtext of this canonical romantic epic, give voice to the figures monsterized and suppressed by the protagonist and the narrative voice, and demonstrate how the hero's identity is established and revered via othering. Thus, the questions addressed by the present study are as follows: how are the protagonist's others represented in "Odysseus's Tale of Trials" by the narrative voice and the protagonist himself? What does a contrapuntal reading of identity politics in Homer's text reveal about the nature of the hero's others?

Results and Discussion

The Odyssey is the story of Odysseus's exile and wanderings after the Trojan War and before returning his home in Ithaca. The Greek Odysseus is a larger-than-life character, the sole survivor of the company returning from the War. As Adeline Johns-Putra (2006) remarks, the entire narrative "is centered on Odysseus' cunning," inasmuch as the very "first line establishes Odysseus' wiliness as key to his character" (32). Johns-Putra also reminds us that Odysseus is not "the only one to display such cunning, for his wife Penelope is routinely described as 'circumspect' and his son Telemachus as 'thoughtful'" (32). What is interesting is that in their victory they are assisted by the goddess Athena and, besides, "its hero's desire coincides with the life-affirming plan of an ethical Zeus" (King 2009: 81). Therefore, as Homer's text suggests, the heroism advocated by the god of gods is grounded "not on physical strength but on guile" (Johns-Putra 2006: 33). That granted, Aristotle's dictum that the epic "followed tragedy to the extent of being an imitation of *good men* in the medium of metrical language" (Aristotle 1982: 1449b/50; emphasis added) is hardly surprising. However, in other ancient texts, Odysseus is not always so positively portrayed. For example, in the works of Pindar, Sophocles, Euripides, and Virgil, he is depicted as a deceitful and conniving demagogue (see Haviaras 1993: 88; Hall 2008: 37; & Cairns 2004: 193-94), although it is the Homeric positive depiction that has remained the most popular over centuries.

From the moment he embarks on his voyage to the moment he returns home, with various tricks, cheatings, and conspiracies, Odysseus tries, as it were, to establish his identity by setting himself off against his others. His heroism is naturally constructed through the dominant discourse of the narrator of *The Odyssey*, which causes the narratee and, accordingly, the implied reader to believe that the uninformed, "innocent" Odysseus is still alive and deserves an appropriate return while the suitors' behavior toward his family in his absence is pictured as inappropriate and evil (Slatkin 2005: 316, 319). Nevertheless, this suspense-building technique would

be no more than a dramatic irony in the service of the narrator's ideology. As we shall see, the notions of good and bad are nothing but mere conventions established by the Homerian narrator, who seeks to indoctrinate his narratee with a sense of morality that presents as positive only those people or acts that are associated with the center. To this aim, the narrator basically identifies with the hero and tries to orient the narratee toward his own ideas / values and imbue them with his own feelings. This occurs, on the one hand, via shortening the distance between the narrator (and consequently the narratee) and the epic hero and, on the other hand, through maintaining the distance between the narrator (and consequently the sympathetic narratee) and the antagonist(s).

A similar point is conceded by Katherine Callen King (2009), who addresses how the narrator ("poet" in her own terms) "turns a potentially blameworthy fact—his hero's failure to achieve homecoming for his companions as well as himself—into something that reflects positively on the hero's endurance" because responsibility is placed upon "the companions' 'very own recklessness' [… and] their overwhelming desire to take the easier way" (82). Odysseus's men, albeit not evil, are treated by the narrator as "morally weak" since they "fail to be heroic in a situation where heroic endurance is required; they lack the strength and conviction to risk death in order to do what is right" (82-83). Thus, how a character like Odysseus is pictured depends on the ideological positions and orientations of the narrator and implied author of the text at issue. The decisive factor in this respect is whether he is counted as the self or the other, and if we focus on the image offered in *The Odyssey*, we can see how the Homerian narrator's sympathies go out to the Greeks in general and Odysseus in particular.

If one reads Homer's text contrapuntally, one realizes that although on the surface Odysseus represents wisdom, civilization, and humanity, underneath he is no different from a savage, barbarous villain, of the kind he opposes on his homeward journey. His pride and cruelty are reflected through his plunders and savagery—acts boldly attributed by Odysseus, his associates, and, of course, the narrator to the other. The tale of his "trials" is boastfully retold by himself in book IX: after the Trojan War, on their way back home Odysseus and his men sack a city called Ismarus, slaughter its inhabitants, rape its women, plunder its treasures, and still regard themselves as civilized and righteous: "I sacked / the town and killed the men. We took their wives / and shared their riches equally among us" (Homer 2020: 97). The city of Ismarus was located in southern Thrace and its people, referred to as the Cicones, were regarded as enemies by the Greeks because they had allied themselves with the Trojans during the War (Mandelbaum 2003: 509, 517). Given this historical information, one recognizes the rationale behind the othering of non-Greek people: they are not essentially evil, but represented so in the narrator's discourse only because they are the political enemies of the Greeks, that is, they only follow a different set of values.

One of the most significant trials Odysseus has to complete is his confrontation

with Polyphemus the Cyclops. The Cyclops were "a race of uncivilized, man-eating demons with one eye in the center of their foreheads who lived in mountaintop caves and tended sheep" (Mandelbaum 2003: 510), "a lawless people whose crops grow without any work being done, thanks to the gods" (Baldick 1994: 115). What is at stake here is that they were supported by the gods. It is probable that the "noble" Greeks envisaged them as demons merely because culturally and morally they bore no similarity to the Greeks. The Cyclops Odysseus faces in his odyssey is a solitary shepherd called Polyphemus, the son of Poseidon—the god of sea and Zeus's brother—and the nymph Thoösa; that is, this Cyclops could also have been a noble figure had he been able to find a voice in society. Originally, he is the offspring of a top-ranked god, and it is probable that, since he did not tie in with the norms of Zeus and the Greeks, he was represented as a demon by the dominant cultural discourse and, consequently, by the dominant voice of Homer's text. The way he is misrepresented, stereotyped, and demonized by the narrator is reflected in the epithets used by Odysseus (and in similar cases by the narrator) to describe the Cyclops, e.g., "lawless" (Homer 2020: 98), "wild" (101), "lacking knowledge of the normal customs" (101), "unmoved" (102), "with no pity in his heart" (104), "giant" (101, 105), "fool" (νήπιος),[8] "idiot" (106), and "wild man" (107). On the other hand, the epithets employed for describing Odysseus as a good, superior, and sympathetic figure include "with tact" (60), "more sensible than other humans" (6), "Lord" (15), "brave" (17), "mastermind" (18, 233), "long-suffering" (27, 77, & 188), "glorious" (30), "great" (33, 73, 139, 162, 183, 186, 198, 219, & 223), "spirited" (40), "steadfast" (42), "good" (43), "godlike" (51, 60, 149, 172, 240, & 245), "informed by many years of pain and loss" (59), "glory of the Greeks" (142), "self-restrained" (162), "strong-willed" (195, 208, & 271), "sharp-witted" (205), "canny" (263), and "unwavering" (289), among other things.

Odysseus's intrusion into the Cyclops's territory also features strongly here. Arriving at an exotic island, Odysseus and his men intend to explore it. They enter a cave full of sheep and in the absence of the owner plunder his belongings and, then, brashly call him lawless and uncivilized:

> [...] my heart suspected
> that I might meet a man of courage, wild,
> and lacking knowledge of the normal customs.
> We soon were at the cave, but did not find
> the Cyclops; he was pasturing his flocks.
> [...] My crew begged, "Let us grab
> some cheese and quickly drive the kids and lambs
> out of their pens and down to our swift ships,
> and sail away across the salty water!"
> That would have been the better choice. But I
> refused. I hoped to see him, and find out
> if he would give us gifts. In fact he brought

no joy to my companions. […] (100-101)

Before leaving with the stock they have stolen, the owner of the cave, Polyphemus, returns and captures them. Using his wiliness, Odysseus encourages the Cyclops to become drunk; then, with the help of his men, he savagely blinds Polyphemus when he is asleep, taking his belongings and escaping the island. In his treatment of Polyphemus, Odysseus is not only brutal but also self-consciously proud of his own brutality; for instance, addressing Polyphemus, he says: "If any mortal asks you how / your eye was mutilated and made blind, / say that Odysseus, the city-sacker, / Laertes' son, who lives in Ithaca, / destroyed your sight" (107). In this way, he highlights both his cruelty and his national identity, thereby revealing how the self's identity is being constructed in this narrative and what values should actually be attributed to the Greeks. Equally, addressing the Cyclops in their first encounter, Odysseus declares:

> We are proud to be the men of Agamemnon,
> the son of Atreus, whose fame is greatest
> […] for sacking that vast city
> and killing many people. Now we beg you,
> […] to grant a gift, as is
> the norm for hosts and guests. […]
> Zeus is on our side, since he takes care
> of visitors, guest-friends, and those in need. (102)

Such monstrous acts are thus considered an honor for the men of Agamemnon, and if the other defends himself, he is instantaneously labeled as savage while the Greeks, whatever crimes they may commit, would remain the quintessence of goodness and civility. Furthermore, in the Cyclops's cavern, the assertive Odysseus regards himself as a "guest-friend" protected by the god of gods while in reality he is an unwanted intruder, bold to the extent that he even expects "a gift" from his "host."

This brings us to the concept of *xeínia* (hospitality) in ancient Greece and its cultural implications, as *The Odyssey* has been designated "the epic of *xeinia*" (Slatkin 2005: 319). Hospitality, in the context of ancient Greek culture, actually handles the mutual relationship between the self (host) and the other (guest) and crystallizes the quality of being human, in so far as no violation of this norm would be tolerated by Zeus "the hospitable" (*xeínios*), the enforcer of the law. As King (2009) reports, "[i]n *The Odyssey*'s moral program, adherence to the norms of hospitality differentiates bad and beastly beings from civilized, fully human beings" (83; see also Havelock 1978: chap. 9). The narrative voice of *The Odyssey* contends that the Cyclops flouts the law of hospitality and, by insinuation, Zeus's authority on the grounds that the Cyclops, who are essentialized in the poem as a race with "a complete lack of social and political organization," express great disdain for "the record of human achievements," that is, the glorious victory secured by Odysseus and his fellow Greek warriors in the Trojan War (Slatkin 2005: 322). Instead of lionizing Odysseus

(as guest) and celebrating his victory, the Cyclops (as host) ruthlessly derides him, and this gives the lie to the hospitality law. Thus, the narrator constructs Odysseus's identity as morally superior and (mis)represents the Cyclops as savage and uncivilized. Slatkin (2005), recapitulating the poem's dominant discourse and redoubling the dominant readings of this episode, admonishes the Cyclops for this disrespect solely because "each Cyclops is a law unto himself" (322) and does not surrender to the law imposed by external forces. Sure enough, the ability or courage to defy an authoritative force that attempts to subdue all other voices and enact its own value system as the genuine one is deemed disrespect only by the domineering force. If the defying marginalized body is accorded the central position in this "mutual" relationship, evidently this heroic feat of rebellion to create one's own values will be wholly positive, reminiscent of the Nietzschean Overman.

Even if we consider the Cyclops's behavior as a form of disrespect to the law of hospitality, how could we justify Odysseus's brutal reaction, which does not square in the slightest with the behavior expected from a guest? Having ruthlessly blinded the Cyclops and despoiled his cavern, on their way to the ship Odysseus and his men even take his flocks and "share them out fairly":

> We beached our ship and disembarked, then took
> the sheep that we had stolen from the Cyclops
> out of the ship's hold, and we shared them out
> fairly, so all the men got equal portions.
> But in dividing up the flock, my crew
> gave me alone the ram, the Cyclops' favorite.
> There on the shore, I slaughtered him for Zeus,
> the son of Cronus, god of Dark Clouds, Lord
> of all the world. [...]. (Homer 2020: 108)

This unseemly comportment on the guests' part goes against the same Greek code of conduct that reckoned the Cyclops's behavior inhospitable. Modern readers might be driven to find the episode under consideration deeply ironic as, despite the biased narrator's sustained effort, it tends to evoke sympathy in modern readers most probably with the Cyclops, not with Odysseus and his men. Such contrapuntal readers would not possibly find Odysseus's stratagems shrewd and interesting; the so-called hero's bearing rather underscores the victimization of the subjugated Cyclops.

In her analysis of the poem, King (2009) makes a case against the "amoral" Poseidon, claiming that he represents not only the grave dangers of the sea in general but also "amoral personal vengeance" as he is angrily determined to avenge his son by punishing Odysseus (85). In keeping with the poem's dominant discourse and its traditional readings, King goes on to argue that Poseidon's wrath "certif[ies] that the hero's *endurance and resourcefulness* are *truly heroic*" (85; emphasis added). In this account, Poseidon is called "amoral" simply because he pines for his son Polyphemus, who has been callously and unfairly mutilated and robbed by Odysseus. This

renders the Greek notion of heroism highly suspect: viewed contrariwise, Odysseus's "endurance and resourcefulness" could be easily replaced with "whimsicality and cravenness." That is, were Poseidon or the Cyclops placed in the position of internal focalizer in a sustained manner, they would be described in positive terms and Zeus and Odysseus in negative terms.

The Cyclops, who works outdoors as a shepherd, is a lower-class subject depending on the whim of the upper-class Greeks who possess the means of power and representation. Unsurprisingly, it follows that the Cyclops is not given the floor in this text. Furthermore, the irony is that the Cyclops is said to be doomed to become blinded by Odysseus:

> He groaned, "The prophecy!
> It has come true at last! […]
> Telemus […]
> told me that Odysseus' hands
> would make me lose my sight. I always thought
> somebody tall and handsome, strong and brave,
> would come to me. But now this little weakling,
> this little nobody, has blinded me;
> by wine he got the best of me. (Homer 2020: 107)

Moreover, the manner in which Odysseus is described by Polyphemus here exposes the true identity of the Greek hero: he is not at all brave or handsome; rather, he is cowardly and petit. At this point, actually the narrative's dominant discourse faces a rupture, and for a brief moment the voice of the victimized Cyclops comes to the surface. We momentarily see the so-called hero through the other's eyes, and this implies how all such identities are constructed and represented as a result of discursive power.

Perhaps, the Cyclops is not "less than fully human," cruel, or savage and the negative picture offered here is merely the narrator's and Odysseus's misrepresentation of this suppressed figure. There is at least one point in the poem where the Cyclops is illustrated as "godlike" by Zeus (Homer 2020: 6). This may be counted as another moment of "misspeaking" by the narrative voice,[9] when the dominant discourse is disrupted and the self inadvertently represents the other in terms normally employed to describe the self. Put differently, this rupture reveals that all those negative, stereotypical qualities have been enforced on the Cyclops, i.e., they are what Odysseus and the Homeric narrator want us to think of this originally divine being (son of the rival god Poseidon).

It is worth remembering that Odysseus, as the narrator asserts throughout the text, is a trickster, "a complicated man" (Homer 2020: 5) ("the man of many wiles or stratagems" in other English translations[10]). When he disguises himself as a beggar toward the close of the story, he describes himself to others from the apparently external viewpoint of the beggar in this way: "No man on earth / knows better how

to make a profit” (Homer 2020: 226). Elsewhere, he dubs himself “the mastermind” (233) and his son Telemachus thus sums up his personality: “you have the finest mind in all / the world; no mortal man can rival you / in cleverness” (270). Similar epithets are deployed by other characters such as Old Halitherses, Elpenor, the phantom of great Heracles, Thoughtful Antenor, and Eupeithes (18, 124, 136, 306, & 286 respectively). Moreover, the following descriptions are utilized by the narrator: “complicated man” (5), “the clever mastermind of many schemes” (93), “wily Odysseus, the lord of lies” (96), “crafty” (218, 239), “the trickster” (225), “devious” (227), “the cunning strategist” (238), “scheming” (233, 284), “the master planner” (257), “the master of every cunning scheme” (266), and “lying” (283). Cunningness is a hereditary characteristic in his family as his “noble” grandfather Autolycus is also referred to as a man “who was the best / of all mankind at telling lies and stealing” (229). What is more, this is regarded as a god-given quality: “Hermes gave him this talent to reward him / for burning many offerings to him” (229). More significantly perhaps, Odysseus is named “stout-hearted” (ταλασίφρων) by Zeus[11] and one whose “plans are always changing” by Calypso (60). Athena, “second only to Zeus as object of reverence” and the goddess who “embodied the spirit of truth and wisdom” (Mandelbaum 2003: 508), asserts to Odysseus:

> To outwit you
> in all your tricks, a person or a god
> would need to be an expert at deceit.
> You clever rascal! So duplicitous,
> so talented at lying! You love fiction
> and tricks so deeply […]
> […]
> […] No man can plan and talk like you. (Homer 2020: 155; see also 156)

This granted, it is not unlikely that the negative image in this text we see of the Cyclops and all other marginal figures, pushed to the periphery by the Greeks, is another upshot of Odysseus’s many wiles, considering that by and large he is placed in the position of the central focalizer of the narrative. The Cyclops is thus othered as the source of evil and is ultimately overcome by Odysseus, the representative of good. If we admit that the Cyclops is evil only to Odysseus’s eyes, then we might say that it is not Poseidon—who seeks revenge against his son’s tormentor—that is hateful or horrible but Odysseus himself, who bestially and mercilessly blinds the Cyclops with recourse to lie, deceit, and guile. Odysseus is the man of twists and turns who at almost all times avoids coming face to face with his enemies. He deems himself guileful but, indeed, he can be called cruel, brutal, savage, evil, horrifying, cowardly, and unjust.

In a study that deals with the notions of ethnicity and proto-colonization in *The Odyssey*, Malkin (1998) argues that attributing to the ancient Greeks the othering of non-Greek nations or ethnicities is totally anachronistic, a projection of our modern

mind on the archaic period, because the ancient Greeks had no sense of themselves as a unified nation or of Greece as a unified geographical territory. Consequently, the identity of the inhabitants of the place later referred to as "Greece," so claims Malkin, was not constructed based on the binary opposition of Greek / barbarian, and it was not until the fifth century A.D. that

> following the Persian Wars in the east and the wars with the Carthaginians, Etruscans, and various Italic populations in the west, a stronger sense of a victorious pan-Hellenism under siege emerged to encourage the identification of mythical Trojans as barbarians and historical "Greeks" as "not others." (18)

Malkin goes on to argue that the "Ancient Greek religion [… with i]ts polytheistic and especially its polyheroic nature allowed […] for a comprehensive perception of humanity contradictory to the idea of an absolute other" (17). That is, the Greek people of the archaic period deemed the gods of alien cultures identical to their own gods, only with different names and descriptions, suggesting that Greek mythology was treated as universal. This notwithstanding, as we clearly observe in Homer's narrative, contrary to Malkin's claim, Odysseus already practices othering, at least on an individual level.

Malkin's (1998) claim would be disproved particularly if one takes into account the story of the Cyclops and their religio-mythological background in *The Odyssey*. Malkin might be right when he maintains that talking about national identity in Homer is a matter of backward projection on the part of modern readers, yet what he seemingly does not account for is the idea of "cultural"—rather than "national" or "ethnic"—identity, which is governed by the same mechanism that constitutes national identity, namely othering. Hence, such claims would not actually be tenable: "Looking at the world not from a central, superior culture […] but from a multiplicity of points of observation and reference," the ancient Greeks "explored and colonized a world that seemed not absolutely other but probably more of the same" (18). Othering, in the sense of opposing the self's identity to an other's, is a general cognitive process and does not need to be necessarily ethnic. In the case of Odysseus, even if the acts of othering were individual, he later became the prototype of the Greek self, the prototypical "hero," thereby gradually a collective Western identity was built upon the otherizing of foreign cultures modeled in Odysseus's endeavors. This is what Malkin himself admits: "the images of Odysseus, Diomedes, and others open the door to the thoughts and collective representations of those who are (for us) inarticulate explorers / settlers" (21). This is justified by the fact that over time Odysseus happened to serve as a "national" hero for the Greek people: "Sometimes he was regarded as a progenitor of royal houses or entire peoples or as a city founder. For Ithaca he became the national hero, and Greeks sailing to (or past) Ithaca dedicated tripods at his seaside shrine" (4). What is important is that the *Nestoi* (= stories about the heroes returning home from the Trojan War), among other narratives in ancient Greek mythology, not only helped to shape the identity of Greek citizens but also

formed the foundation of European or Western identity in general. What the Greeks offered the Westerners “was the Trojan Cycle, adaptable to an aristocratic heroic code and sufficiently flexible to articulate and accommodate local genealogical and group identities” (6).

Odysseus’s brutality, cowardliness, and savageness are represented once again near the end of the story, in his treatment of his old, innocent nurse and the way he has the “unfaithful” handmaids slaughtered:

> Odysseus grabbed her throat with his right hand
> […] and whispered,
> “Nanny! […]
> You fed me at your breast! Now after all
> my twenty years of pain, I have arrived
> back to my home.
> […] Be silent;
> no one must know, or else I promise you,
> […] I will not spare you when I kill the rest,
> the other slave women, although you were
> my nurse. (Homer 2020: 230-31)

All the more so, if we take into account the butchery of the suitors in book XXII, which purports to be Odysseus’s conclusive victory as *the* hero. Naturally, as long as Odysseus regards himself as the point of reference, the behavior exhibited by anyone associated with him, including his family, will be exemplary (see Slatkin 2005: 325), especially when the disguised Odysseus slaughters his wife’s suitors, who assumed he was dead. No doubt, from the viewpoint of the unaffected guests—the suitors who are waiting in front of Odysseus’s house for Penelope’s reply and later are massacred by Odysseus and his son Telemachus—Odysseus will no longer stand as the standard of value. There seems to be no essential distinction between what Odysseus, as a “guest,” does to the Cyclops and what the suitors, equally as “guests,” do to his family, in which case it is a matter of sheer convention that Penelope deems the suitors’ conduct an “unholy” (οὐδ᾽ ὁσίη) act of “wickedness” (κάκη)[12] but her own husband’s just and holy goodness.

To the prevailing discourse, the suitors are no different from the Cyclops or the servingwomen because they all challenge the hero’s values. For this reason, in her traditionalist reading of the poem, King (2009) oddly maintains that the suitors “show themselves to be as uncivilized as the Cyclopes or Laistrygones, monsters who eat their guests” (91). This is supposed to be the reason why they are not apt for wooing such a divine figure as Penelope and, thus, deserve complete annihilation. That to the narrator they are on a par with the Cyclops and all other “others” points to the manner in which the dominant ideology constantly endeavors to homogenize the others as univocally evil. All differences are ostensibly patched up to the self’s advantage, and this implies how the hero’s identity is contingent upon the others’ one and selfsame “identity.”

At one point in her analysis, King (2009), as it seems, inadvertently contradicts her own argument by holding that "the poet [= narrator] has made the suitors seem like animals, which readies the audience to accept the coming slaughter" (97). This gives us the impression that the suitors are not essentially evil or inhuman, but rather they are made appear so by the narrator, who retains the means of representation and does not hesitate to otherize anything that conflicts with the central character's ideology. The suitors are actually "the mainstay / of Ithaca, the island's best young men," to borrow Odysseus's own words (Homer 2020: 270), and the real rationale behind this othering lies in the fact that these members of Ithacan aristocracy are the political rivals of King Odysseus and a serious threat to Telemachus's future throne (see King 2009: 89). For the partisan narrator, who identifies with Odysseus, this would be reason enough to oust the suitors and give precedence to one's own self. After all, Odysseus is Zeus's favorite, "blessed by Zeus" (Homer 2020: 60; see also 6), so the conventions of the genre of epic, together with the narrator's prejudiced discourse, necessitates that Odysseus's good fortune be guaranteed. However, as for the others, the poem is most tragic as it terminates with death, misfortune, and agony, and all this is instigated by Odysseus and the divine concord. Curiously enough, traditional critics of the poem insist that

> we can be sure that the life of pain contemplated in the *Odyssey* is fruitful, not sadistic. The ultimate object is recognition and the sense of one's own existence, not the pain itself. […] Nothing less than the death of 108 suitors [...], and the readiness to kill the suitors' kinsmen, will get Odysseus recognized in Ithaca. (Dimock, Jr. 1974: 424)

Then, it comes as no surprise to learn that in the ancient Greek language Odysseus's name originally means "one who willingly causes pain in others," "one who plants evils," "one who hates," or "one who is hostile" (Dimock, Jr. 1974: 407). Odysseus's recognition is achieved at the enormous expense of the others' lives and values and trampling on their right to exist and recognize their existence. If that is the case, then one is urged to query if this is the real value or prime purpose of the epic as the highest of all classical literary genres.

The above discussion runs counter to the conventional Hegelian dictum echoed by historians of literature that the "epic poet" remains detached from what he narrates all through his verse:

> On account of the objectivity of the whole epic, the poet as *subject* must retire in face of his *object* and lose himself in it. Only the product, not the poet, appears […]. […] because the epic presents not the poet's own inner world but the objective events, the subjective side of the production must be put into the background precisely as the poet completely immerses himself in the world which he unfolds before our eyes. (Hegel I975: 1048-49)

The epic narrator or "poet" in traditional terms, as exemplified by the narrative voice in Homer's *Odyssey*, inevitably indulges in the process of othering because

he is recounting the story of his nation as "a social relation of collective self-consciousness" (Grosby 2005: 10). The inevitable role of othering in constructing one's national or cultural identity is elucidated by Benedict Anderson (2006) as follows: "[t]he nation is imagined as *limited* because even the largest of them, encompassing perhaps a billion living human beings, has finite, if elastic, boundaries, beyond which lie other nations. No nation imagines itself coterminous with mankind" (7; emphasis in the original). Nationhood as a collective self-consciousness and the sense of a shared past, a common cultural heritage, and a communal identity is expressed and constructed through the discourse of epic and other similar literary genres, among other forms of cultural production. Even if for certain reasons the other is tolerated—whether in actual life or fictional works—and not ousted by the self, the element of condemnation or the negative emotions and attitudes toward the other do not simply fade away. As Maurice Cranston (2006) explains, "[w]e do not tolerate what we enjoy or what is generally liked or approved of" but those who "were once thought to be wrongdoers" or "are still generally regarded as evils" and threaten our integrity (507). After all, "to tolerate" denotes to endure something bad, unpleasant, or dangerous.[13]

Conclusion

In Homer's "Odysseus's Tale of Trials," Odysseus, as the hero of a narrative that follows the mythological structure of quest and its related archetypes, is described by the narrator in such a way that as a Greek individual he is physically, psychologically, and morally superior to all non-Greek personages and, consequently, everything he does proves to be civilized, just, wise, right, and good. As was shown in the present paper, the dominant readings of this romantic epic text reaffirm this conventional discourse and prize its ethical or political implications. Nevertheless, if we read Homer's poem contrapuntally with the critical strategy provided by Edward W. Said, we realize that Odysseus, as the prototype of male subjectivity in Western culture, is no different from the so-called savage, barbarous "villains" he confronts on his homeward journey. Odysseus is Zeus's favorite; hence, he is the self and any character different from his and Zeus's discourse is the other, the conceptual framework against which Odysseus's identity is defined and established. Accordingly, a question arises here about the kind of values approved and perpetuated by the narrative voice in "Odysseus's Tale of Trials" and the ones suppressed in its subtext.

As was discussed, certain critics reckon that there could not have been any such thing as national identity in ancient Greece and consequently in Homer's *Odyssey* on the grounds that the ancient Greeks never thought of themselves as a unified nation in a sense close to the modern understanding of the term. Nevertheless, one can argue that since Odysseus has been the prototype of male subjectivity in both ancient Greek society and modern Western civilization, the identity built for him in this narrative can be parallel to a national identity, given that ancient Greek culture, as conveyed in such works as Homers', is one of the pillars of modern Western cul-

ture. Odysseus is the prototype not only of the trickster character in Western culture but also of the Western man in general. This certainly affects our understanding of his achievements, which are fulfilled through wiles and stratagems. On the other hand, whatever happens in the course of the narrative is filtered by the narratorial consciousness, suggesting that all notions of right and wrong or good and bad are nothing but mere conventions established by this agent, whose objective or function is to induce in the narratee / reader a sense of morality according to which only those people or acts count as good which are associated with the center, i.e., the self and its representative hero. Anything that does not conform to the self's standards is doomed to otherization, suppression, and destruction.

Interestingly, it is Odysseus and his men who intrude into the Cyclops's cave in his absence and pillage all his belongings simply because they see the poor Cyclops as lawless and uncivilized, which only means different from their own living standards or value system. On a different level, the same applies to Odysseus's mistreatment of his servingwomen and the suitors. Naturally, if we deconstruct the narrative discourse, the civility of Odysseus's mentality and behavior will be prone to serious criticism, to the extent that ironically the occurrences would evoke in modern readers sympathy toward the Cyclops or other callously victimized figures, rather than the epic hero, his men, his family, or the gods succoring them. Another piece of evidence corroborating such a contrapuntal reading is Polyphemus's genealogy: he is actually the offspring of a top-ranked god. The reason he is marginalized, demonized, and victimized by the Greeks simply is that his values are not in accordance with the norms of the Greeks and their gods.

The way the other is represented in Homer's text can be further explored using monster theory, a branch of cultural studies according to which generally the monstrous and the demonic are seen as symbolic representations of socio-cultural agitations shaping particular forms of collective behavior (see Cohen 1996 & Weinstock 2020). The so-called monster Polyphemus the Cyclops can be analyzed from this perspective to illuminate more the possible motivations behind the hero's and the narrator's attempts at otherizing him. In addition, one can extend the scope of such a study to the issue of othering in other Western and Eastern epics. Of course, the role of othering in forging cultural or national identity is by no means limited to literary texts; rather, it prevails in all text-types—including philosophical, legal, political, and scientific ones—as every kind of text is generated in a particular society and enunciated by a speaker / narrator belonging to that society, thereby explicitly or not carrying values peculiar to it. Thus, in further studies, other text-types in ancient Greek culture can also be examined with special reference to othering and identity politics.

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Notes

1. See also *Oxford English Dictionary* 2009: under “barbarous” & Ljunberg 2003: 65.
2. For the origin of this remark and its criticism, see Lebow 2012: 101.
3. This is consistent with Jacinto Chazo and Pilar Chazo’s analysis, based on which “[i]n the *Odyssey* are shown, for the first time in recorded history, in one linear narrative, the crossroads in human life, the key moments in which man expresses, restricts, and interprets himself, understands himself, acts autonomously, and goes in search of recognition for his existence” (Chazo & Chazo 1996: 12; qtd. in van Oenen 2001: 225).
4. It is important here to register the fact that the dominant voice we hear in the text is not necessarily that of the “actual author” (in this case, Homer as a historical figure) but from the perspective of the critical approach adopted in the present inquiry the voice and the resultant values established in and by the text are attributed to the “narrator” and the “implied author,” who are intra-textual entities conceptually distinct from the actual or real author (see Genette 1983: chap. 5 & Rimmon-Kenan 2002: chap. 7).
5. For rather similar remarks, see Buchan 2004: 19 & Hall 2008: 207.
6. For an account of the cultural history of the text and its readings, see Graziosi & Greenwood 2007 & Hall 2008.
7. For a brief survey of these studies, see Slatkin 2005.
8. Homer’s *Odyssey*, bk. IX, l. 442; omitted in Wilson’s translation (Homer 2020: 106). See <https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/t?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0136%3Abook%3D9%3Acard%3D409> (Retrieved on March 27, 2021). Translation studies scholars may find this problem interesting. It is clear enough how delicate translating classical texts is, especially when it comes to the textual representation of the self and the other. The discussion initiated by the present research can be taken as an implicit critique of Emily Wilson’s recent English rendering of *The Odyssey*: indeed, as she honestly but unconvincingly acknowledges in her note on her translation, she tends to omit many of the loaded but revealing epithets or descriptive phrases of the original ancient Greek text (see Wilson 2020: lxvi). Therefore, in a separate study within the critical frameworks of translation studies, one can probe into this significant problem and its implications for the theory and practice of literary translation, in particular the translation of classical epic texts.
9. For an account of this concept in Poststructuralism, see Bressler 2011: 117.
10. E.g., Homer 2003: 3.
11. Homer’s *Odyssey*, bk. V, l. 31; omitted in Wilson’s trans. (Homer 2020: 56). See <https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/t?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0135%3Abook%3D5%3Acard%3D1> (Retrieved on March 27, 2021).
12. Homer’s *Odyssey*, bk. XVI, l. 423; omitted in Wilson’s trans. (Homer 2020:

193). See <https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/t?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0136%3Abook%3D16%3Acard%3D393> (Retrieved on March 27, 2021).

13. See *Oxford English Dictionary*, under “tolerate.”

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