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## Cyclopes and Moon-men: The Relationship Between Hospitality and Civility in the *Odyssey* and *True History*

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The *Odyssey* is a tale full of strangers, scary monsters, and human emotions, igniting imaginations since it was composed. The *True History*, written by Lucian in the second century CE, is a fictional travel narrative based on the adventures of the *Odyssey*. In it, Lucian narrates fantastical adventures, rivalling Odysseus in strangeness, but with one major caveat: it is all a lie, as he tells his readers at the outset.<sup>1</sup> In his parodic take on the *Odyssey*, Lucian (as narrator) meets numerous strange people and creatures, and focuses on his interactions with them. The idea of hospitality, or *xenia*, plays a central role in both stories. This article explores the importance of hospitality, especially through the reception and parting gift aspects of *xenia*, as a way of illustrating Greek ideas of civility. In the *True History*, specifically Lucian's interactions with the Moon-men, he uses the framework from the *Odyssey*'s scenes of guesting to show that being Greek, being civilized, is not innate, but a series of rituals that can be learned: anyone can become civilized.

Beyond their themes, the two stories share other similarities. Both stories are, in many ways, first-person narratives in which the person telling the story is also the protagonist of the story: in the *Odyssey*, Odysseus spends books 9-12 unravelling his travels to the Phaeacians, whereas Lucian's tale is, from the outset, a personal narrative of his adventures. We are, as an audience, forced to believe them, unable as we are to join them, relegated instead to only hearing their stories. Lucian perhaps states this more obviously: his story is clearly a lie, designed for entertainment.<sup>2</sup> But regardless of truth, we are only hearing one person's perspective. The narrators often judge characters as uncivilized through their actions or appearances, and that can be the only description we are given. Thus, we must rely on the narrator's perspective, one which

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<sup>1</sup> Lucian, *True History*, trans. A. M. Harmon, Loeb Classical Library 14 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1913), 1.2.

<sup>2</sup> Lucian, *True History*, 1.2.

tends to portray characters who don't conform to Greek ideals as uncivilized. These stories are just as biased as they are fantastical, using the ideas of the cultures they were created for. It is some of those biases that this article sets out to explore.

Unlike the *Odyssey*, which is seen as the epitome of Greek literature, the *True History*--and Lucian himself--is representative of a more diverse Classical society: the Roman empire. The second century CE was a time of change in the Roman empire: new cultures from Germany to the Middle East were welcomed into the growing empire, and Roman emperors from Trajan through the Antonines encouraged an appreciation for Hellenic culture. However, the reality of this diversity was complex--living in a Roman province did not necessarily make someone a Roman citizen, either by their own estimation or in the eyes of the law, and living under Roman control, especially at the outskirts of the empire, could have a very small impact on daily life. Nevertheless, the Roman empire was an amalgamation of peoples, with a wide variety of languages spoken and deities worshipped, and such differences were often made more visible by the commonality of Roman rule. Lucian is able to take advantage of the changing empire: born in Syria, speaking Aramaic, he was educated in the Greek tradition (as were the best of the Roman elites), and became a prolific writer and philosopher.<sup>3</sup> His writing draws on past literature while also interacting with contemporary ideas and genres. The *True History* is especially illustrative of this style, "a parody of travellers' tales" that embellishes historic Greek writing to the point of absurdity,<sup>4</sup> and Lucian incorporates these well-known texts and cosmopolitan culture

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<sup>3</sup> "Lu'cian (Loukiānos)," *The Oxford Companion to Classical Literature*, ed. M. C. Howatson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199548545.001.0001/acref-9780199548545-e-1842?rskey=2c3vp1&result=2>.

<sup>4</sup> "Lu'cian (Loukiānos)," *The Oxford Companion to Classical Literature*.

into his works. His allusions to the *Odyssey* are especially illustrative, showing the new perspective Lucian has on ideas that had already existed for hundreds of years.

Throughout the *Odyssey*, very clear ideas about what is civilized and what is not are at play. The epic sets up a dichotomy between people who are characterized as civilized and those who aren't, using ideas of Greek hospitality to reinforce and show those distinctions. In the Homeric world, hospitality was constructed as an elaborate ritual with many steps, in which the stranger, or *xenos*, was welcomed into the host's house.<sup>5</sup> At the crux of this ritual is the word *xenos* (ξένος or ξεῖνος in Greek), which can mean "stranger," "foreigner," or "guest-friend."<sup>6</sup> Thus, the relationship and the acts associated with it come to be called *xenia*. It was seen as a mark of Greek civility that hosts treated people according to the rules of *xenia*, respecting and taking care of their guests. In general, the *Odyssey* focuses on a society that relied heavily on proper behavior, and "the best sign of a character's worth and merit is to be seen in his understanding of and adherence to...society's conventions."<sup>7</sup> Thus, characters who follow the societal convention of *xenia* are seen as using proper behavior, demonstrating civility from the Greek perspective. By tracking two aspects of *xenia*--reception and gift-giving--and the degree to which they are followed, we can see whether or not groups are seen as civilized--whether or not they follow the ritual.

The Homeric epic begins by slowly laying out the ideas of *xenia*, the proper procedure that should be followed when guests arrive. We learn this along with Telemachus, as he greets

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<sup>5</sup> Steve Reece, *The Stranger's Welcome: Oral Theory and the Aesthetics of the Homeric Hospitality Scene* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 6-7, in which he includes 25 possible steps.

<sup>6</sup> Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, and Henry Stuart Jones, "ξένος, ὄ," *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1948).

<sup>7</sup> Charles Fuqua, "Proper Behavior in the *Odyssey*," *Illinois Classical Studies*, 16, No. 1/2 (Spring/Fall 1991), [www.jstor.org/stable/23064337](http://www.jstor.org/stable/23064337): 58.

Athena, disguised as Mentos, in his house, and later travels to Pylos and Sparta, where he is received by Nestor and Menelaos, respectively. In book 1, Telemachos struggles to greet Athena-Mentos properly. At first, when he sees Athena-Mentos, βῆ δ' ἰθὺς προθύροιο, νεμεσσήθη δ' ἐνὶ θυμῷ / ξείνον δηθὰ θύρησιν ἐφεστάμεν.<sup>8</sup> (He walked straight to the outer door, being displeased with himself in his heart / keeping a stranger by the door for a long time).<sup>9</sup> Because Telemachos feels bad that he has failed to greet the visitor properly, we can infer that greeting arriving guests quickly is an important aspect of *xenia*. As a comparison to Telemachos, we meet the suitors, who ignore Athena-Mentos' arrival; it is from them that Telemachos must get away in order to learn what true hospitality and civilization look like, which he does in the households of Nestor and Menelaos.

The scenes in Pylos and Sparta are especially illustrative of proper hospitality when compared to the state of affairs in Ithaka. In them, Nestor and Menelaos provide examples for both Telemachos and the audience of what appropriate reception looks like. In illustrating how well they follow the rituals of *xenia*, we can also see how the hosts are presented as civilized, upstanding Greeks to emulate. When Telemachos arrives at Nestor's, we see what it means to properly receive guests.

οἱ δ' ὡς οὖν ξείνους ἴδον, ἀθρόοι ἦλθον ἅπαντες,  
 χερσίν, τ' ἠσπάζοντο καὶ ἐδρίασθαι ἄνωγον.  
 πρῶτος Νεστορίδης Πεισίστρατος ἐγγύθεν ἐλθῶν  
 ἀμφοτέρων ἔλε χεῖρα καὶ ἴδρυσεν παρὰ δαιτὶ  
 ...  
 οἱ δ' ἐπεὶ ὤπτησαν κρέ' ὑπέρτερα καὶ ἐρύσαντο,  
 μοίρας δασσάμενοι δαίνθοντ' ἐρικυδέα δαῖτα.  
 αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ πόσιος καὶ ἐδητύος ἐξ ἔρον ἔντο,  
 τοῖς ἄρα μύθων ἄρχε Γεργήνιος ἱππότα Νέστωρ.  
 “νῦν δὴ κάλλιόν ἐστι μεταλλῆσαι καὶ ἐρέσθαι

<sup>8</sup> Homer, *The Odyssey, I-XII*, ed. W. B. Stanford (London: Bristol Classical Press, 1996), 1.119-20.

<sup>9</sup> All translations are the author's, unless otherwise noted.

ξείνους, οἳ τινές εἰσιν, ἐπεὶ τάρπησαν ἐδωδῆς.”<sup>10</sup>

And so when they saw the *xenoi*, they went, all of them together,  
And welcomed them with open arms, and invited them to sit.  
Peisistratus, son of Nestor, approaching first,  
Took both their hands and sat them by the feast

...

And when they roasted the superior meat and drew it forth,  
Having portioned it by lot, they had a splendid feast.  
But when they let go the desire for food and drink,  
Geronian Nestor, the horseman, spoke first among them.  
“Now it is better to inquire and ask  
The *xenoi* who they are, since they have enjoyed food.”

Here, Nestor and his family demonstrate the proper way to greet guests. The most important part of welcoming *xenoi* is to incorporate them into the host’s household activities, taking them from the status of “stranger” to that of “guest.”<sup>11</sup> The Pylians do just this, physically welcoming Telemachus and Mentor, inviting them to sit down and join the sacrificial feast and religious rites that accompany it. The feast itself is a crucial element in the process of *xenia*: “the sharing of a feast is one of the most intimate means by which a stranger is welcomed into a home, for the banquet is the primary locus for participation in *xenia*,” according to Steve Reece.<sup>12</sup> Thus, Nestor’s invitation, his prioritization of feeding the *xenoi* before questioning them, shows the respect he has for hospitality. Nestor, as well as Menelaus in Sparta,<sup>13</sup> establishes what proper *xenia* looks like; moreover, by following those precepts, he shows himself to be civilized.

The rituals of reception are also followed by the Phaeacians, thus presenting them as a civilized society. Odysseus has spent the past several years escaping hostile tribes, living with

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<sup>10</sup> Homer, *The Odyssey*, 3.34-7, 65-70.

<sup>11</sup> Julian Pitt-Rivers, “The Stranger, the Guest, and the Hostile Host,” *Contributions to Mediterranean Sociology: Mediterranean Rural Communities and Social Change; Acts of the Mediterranean Sociological Conference, Athens, July 1963* (Paris, The Hague, Mouton, 1968), <https://macalester.illiad.oclc.org/illiad/illiad.dll?Action=10&Form=75&Value=287500>, 16.

<sup>12</sup> Reece, *The Stranger’s Welcome*, 22.

<sup>13</sup> Homer, *The Odyssey*, 4.15-67.

divine, enchanting women, and visiting the land of the dead. But when he arrives at the hall of Alkinoos, the Phaeacian king, the expected rules of *xenia* return. Although the Phaeacians are not necessarily Greek, they act as a liminal space between Odysseus' travels and his return to Ithaca;<sup>14</sup> the scenes on Phaeacia act to reincorporate him into Greek society, and thus Greek ideas of proper behavior and civility play an important role in their society.

The exchange in the Phaeacian palace begins with displays of civility from both Odysseus and the Phaeacians. When Odysseus first enters the hall in Phaeacia, he greets the queen and king respectfully: αὐτὰρ ὁ βῆ διὰ δῶμα πολύτλας δῖος Ὀδυσσεύς... ὄφρ' ἴκετ' Ἀρήτην τε καὶ Ἀλκίνοον βασιλῆα<sup>15</sup> (but bright, much-enduring Odysseus walked across the hall...so that he might supplicate Arete and Alkinoos the king). Once the Phaeacians see Odysseus prostrate himself, they treat him as a *xenos*, with all the rights and rituals attached to it. Indeed, Echeneos, one of the Phaeacian noblemen at the feast, scolds Alkinoos for not treating Odysseus as the customs dictate:

Ἀλκίνο', οὐ μὲν τοι τόδε κάλλιον οὐδὲ ἔοικε,  
 ξεῖνον μὲν χαμαὶ ἦσθαι ἐπ' ἐσχάρη ἐν κονίησιν·  
 οἷδε δὲ σὸν μῦθον ποτιδέγμενοι ἰσχανόωνται.  
 ἀλλ' ἄγε δὴ ξεῖνον μὲν ἐπὶ θρόνου ἀργυροῦ  
 εἴσον ἀναστήσας, σὺ δὲ κηρύκεσσι κέλευσον  
 οἶνον ἐπικρῆσαι, ἵνα καὶ Διὶ τερπικεραύνῳ  
 σπείσομεν, ὅς θ' ἰκέτησιν ἅμ' αἰδοίοισιν ὀπηδεῖ.  
 δόρπον δὲ ξεῖνῳ ταμίη δότῳ ἔνδον ἐόντων.<sup>16</sup>

Alkinoos, it does not seem good for you that the very pretty stranger  
 Sits on the ground, in the ashes by the hearth;  
 And these men, having received your word, let them stop.  
 But come, indeed, standing him up, seat the stranger  
 in a silver-studded throne, and order the heralds  
 To mix fresh wine, so that we may pour a libation  
 To Zeus the Thunderer, who accompanies travelers and singers together.

<sup>14</sup> Reece, *The Stranger's Welcome*, 104.

<sup>15</sup> Homer, *The Odyssey*, 7.139-41.

<sup>16</sup> Homer, *The Odyssey*, 7.159-66.

And let the housekeeper, of the ones being inside, give the *xenos* dinner.

Here, Echeneos tells Alkinoos the proper treatment of Odysseus, which we saw in Pylos and Sparta: give him a seat at the table and feed him before anything else. This sequence reinforces the proper treatment of *xenoi*, as well as that of strangers towards their hosts. As Steve Reece says, “the Phaeacian episode appears to be a paradigm of proper hospitality,”<sup>17</sup> and provides an example of hospitality for Odysseus. It parallels the proper treatment of guests that we have just seen established and exemplified by Nestor and Menelaus towards Odysseus’ son.

The other bookend of the *xenia* ritual is the giving of parting gifts to the *xenos* when they leave. Gift-giving is an important part of *xenia* and symbolized the beginning of a continued relationship between the two parties, with the assumption that the guest would return the favor if the host ever visited them.<sup>18</sup> Gift-giving, much like the reception of *xenoi*, occurs throughout the epic, underscoring its importance in civilized Greek society. The scene at Menelaus’ palace in Sparta sets the bar for what proper guest-gifts are, and how the interaction between host and guest should go:

δώρων δ’ ὅσσ’ ἐν ἐμῷ οἰκῷ κειμήλια κεῖται,  
 δώσω ὃ κάλλιστον καὶ τιμηέστατόν ἐστι.  
 δώσω τοι κρητῆρα τετυγμένον ἀργύρεος δὲ  
 ἔστιν ἅπας, χρυσῷ δ’ ἐπὶ χεῖλα κεκράανται·  
 ἔργον δ’ Ἡφαίστοιο· πόρεν δέ ἐ Φαίδιμος ἦρωες,  
 Σιδονίων βασιλεύς, ὅθ’ ἐδὸς δόμος ἀμφεκάλυψε  
 κεῖσέ με ωοστήσαντα· τεῖν δ’ ἐθέλω τόδ’ ὀπάσσαι.<sup>19</sup>

Whichever treasures of gifts lie in my house,  
 I will give you the one which is prettiest and most honored.  
 I will give you a ready-made mixing bowl, which is  
 All silver, and the rims are tempered with gold.  
 And it is the work of Hephaestus; and the hero Phaedimus,  
 King of the Sidonians, gifted it to me when his house received

<sup>17</sup> Reece, *The Stranger’s Welcome*, 102.

<sup>18</sup> Reece, *The Stranger’s Welcome*, 35.

<sup>19</sup> Homer, *The Odyssey*, 4.613-19



Me there, heading home. And I wish to send it with you.

Menelaus gives Telemachus a treasure that corresponds to how he views Telemachus: he is an important guest and accordingly, receives a beautiful, symbolically important present.<sup>20</sup> The elaborate krater is “a gift worthy of his guest, one Telemachus can in turn pass on if he wishes. The nature of gift exchange in Homeric society is such that gifts with a history have extraordinary value.”<sup>21</sup> By presenting such a gift to Telemachus, Menelaus shows immense respect for the young man, in turn underscoring his civility--he places such great value on the *xenia* relationship with Telemachus that he deems such a valuable gift worthy.

The Phaeacians provide another example of proper guest-giving. They lavish Odysseus with gifts before he sets out for Ithaka (on a ship they provide him with and man, no less):

εἶματα μὲν δὴ ξείνῳ ἐϋξέστη ἐνὶ χηλῶ  
 κεῖται καὶ χρυσὸς πολυδαίδαλος ἄλλα τε πάντα  
 δῶρ', ὅσα Φαιήκων βουλευφόποι ἐνθάδ' ἔωεικαν·  
 ἀλλ' ἄγε οἱ δῶμεν τρίποδα μέγαν ἠδὲ λέβητα  
 ἀνδρακάς· ἡμεῖς δ' αὖτε ἀγειρόμενοι κατὰ δῆμον  
 τισόμεθ'·<sup>22</sup>

Indeed garments for the *xenos* lie in a polished coffer  
 And skillfully-worked gold and all the other  
 Gifts, as many as the Phaeacian councilors brought here;  
 But come, let us give a large three-footed cauldron  
 Apiece; and we, again, gathering together throughout the deme  
 Will pay.

Here, the entire city is expected to give gifts to Odysseus, as an honored guest, in some way or another. Much like the gift Menelaus gives Telemachus, the Phaeacians honor Odysseus with the

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<sup>20</sup> It is noteworthy that the first gift Menelaus presents, horses and a chariot, is not seen as an appropriate gift by Telemachus, who must sail back to Ithaka (Homer, *Odyssey* IV.589-608). Menelaus, however, listens to his guest and corrects his mistake, ensuring that the ritual of *xenia* is still followed, and his guest is still respected.

<sup>21</sup> Reece, *The Stranger's Welcome*, 90.

<sup>22</sup> Homer, *The Odyssey Volume II: Books 13-24*, trans. A. T. Murray, rev. George E. Dimock, Loeb Classical Library 105 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1919), 13.10-5.  
<https://scaife.perseus.org/reader/urn:cts:greekLit:tlg0012.tlg002.perseus-grc2:13>.

gifts they give him--precious metals, hand-made clothes--as well as the sheer amount, physically showing the large value they place on their relationship with him. *Xenia*, and gift-giving in particular, is woven into the social fabric of the Phaeacians, and its prevalence in Phaeacian culture underscores their civility.

Polyphemus the Cyclops, however, provides a negative example of hospitality in general. Thus, Odysseus' interactions with Polyphemus prove *xenia*'s role in seeing someone as civilized. As Maxwell Stocker points out, "the fact that Odysseus defines the Cyclopes negatively, not in terms of what they have, but in terms of what they lack [*xenia*], emphasizes the protagonist's view that these absent attributes are crucial of his own homeland and of a civilized society."<sup>23</sup> Polyphemus specifically denies Odysseus and his men guest rights, traps them in his cave (as opposed to offering them shelter), and eats the companions (perverting the shared feast). When Polyphemus first notices the Greeks in his cave, he greets them in an unusual way:

ὦ ξεῖνοι, τίνες ἐστέ; πόθεν πλεῖθ' ὑγρὰ κέλευθα;  
 ἦ τι κατὰ πρῆξιν ἦ μασιδίως ἀλάλησθε,  
 οἷά τε ληιστῆρες, ὑπεῖρ ἄλλα, τοί τ' ἀλόωνται  
 ψυχὰς παρθέμενοι κακὸν ἀλλοδαποῖσι φέροντες;<sup>24</sup>

Oh strangers, who are you? Whence did you sail the watery road?  
 Either on some voyage or did you wander aimlessly,  
 And in such a way as pirates, upon the sea, who wander indeed  
 Setting at risk their souls, bringing evil to foreigners?

The first words Polyphemus speaks to Odysseus and his companions are questions, ones that are only appropriate once a host has fed his guests (he also insults them, insinuating that they are robbers).<sup>25</sup> Moreover, the Cyclops does not offer the men food at all; instead, he makes a feast

<sup>23</sup> Maxwell Stocker, "11. Identity and the Protagonist in Greek and Egyptian Narrative Poetry," *Current Research in Egyptology 2016*, ed. Julia M. Chyla, Joanna Dębowska-Ludwin, Karolina Rosińska-Balik, and Carl Walsh (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2017), 167, [www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1pk86n6.17](http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1pk86n6.17).

<sup>24</sup> Homer, *The Odyssey*, 9.252-5.

<sup>25</sup> Homer, *The Odyssey*, 3.69-70.

out of them. Compared to the Pylians and the Spartans, the Phaeacians we've just met, Polyphemos' complete disregard of *xenia* is especially blatant. In this first scene with the Cyclops, we are introduced to a creature that does not respect the rules of hospitality and is thus portrayed as uncivilized.

As the sequence continues, Polyphemos also perverts the idea of gift-giving. When Polyphemos asks Odysseus' name, he promises a gift in return: “μοι τεὸν οὔνομα εἰπέ / αὐτίκα νῦν, ἵνα τοι δῶ ξείνιον, ᾧ κε σὺ χαίρης”<sup>26</sup> (tell me your name / right now, so that I may give you a guest-gift, which you may enjoy.)<sup>27</sup> While this seems as though Polyphemos is finally beginning to conform to the rules of *xenia*, becoming civilized, we soon see otherwise. When he tells Odysseus what the guest-gift will be, he is still as savage as ever: “Οὔτις ἐγὼ πύματων ἔδομαι μετὰ οἷς ἐτάροισι, / τοὺς δ' ἄλλους πρόσθεν· τὸ δέ τοι ξεινήϊον ἔσται.”<sup>28</sup> (I will eat Nobody last among the companions, / and the rest first; this will be your guest-gift.) The audience realizes that this is not a proper guest-gift--making you watch your friends be eaten, with your own death impending. The fact that Polyphemos proposes this as a suitable gift underscores that he does not respect the laws of *xenia*. As Reece says, “this response clearly places Polyphemos outside the bounds of normal Greek society. Odysseus can no longer expect his host to observe the Greek laws of hospitality.”<sup>29</sup> Either he does not recognize them, or he willfully perverts them; both of these options show just how uncivilized the Cyclops is, and how far from civilization Odysseus has travelled.

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<sup>26</sup> Homer, *The Odyssey*, 9.355-6.

<sup>27</sup> It is also noteworthy that Odysseus, in this moment, lies to Polyphemos, giving his name as Οὔτις, and disregards *xenia* and the trust that underlies it.

<sup>28</sup> Homer, *The Odyssey*, 9.369-70.

<sup>29</sup> Reece, *The Stranger's Welcome*, 134.

Moreover, descriptions of Polyphemus in the epic strengthen the idea that he is not civilized. When Odysseus and his crew first arrive at the Cyclopes' island, Polyphemus is described as physically different from the Greeks:

ἔνθα δ' ἀνὴρ ἐνίαυε πελώριος, ὅς ῥα τὰ μῆλα  
οἶος ποιμαίνεσκεν ἀπόπροθεν· οὐδὲ μετ' ἄλλους  
πωλεῖτ', ἀλλ' ἀπάνευθεν ἐὼν ἀθεμίστια ἦδη.  
καὶ γὰρ θαῦμ' ἐτέτυκτο πελώριον, οὐδὲ ἐφκει  
ἀνδρὶ γε σιτοφάγῳ, ἀλλὰ ῥίῳ ὑλήεντι  
ὑψηλῶν ὄρέων, ὃ τε φαίνεται οἶον ἀπ' ἄλλων.<sup>30</sup>

And there, a monstrous man often slept, who indeed tended  
His flocks alone, far away; nor did he live among others,  
But, being far away, he knew lawless things.  
For he was made an astonishing monster, not looking like  
A grain-eating man, but a wooded peak  
Of lofty mountains, which appears alone, apart from others.

This passage is significant because it combines physical descriptors--such as πελώριος (“monstrous” or “large”) and ὑλήεις (“wooded”)--with moral judgements--the fact that Polyphemus is ἀθέμιστος, or “lawless.” Odysseus, speaking here to the Phaeacians, uses these words to show that Polyphemus did not treat him as a proper guest, that he is uncivilized not just because he didn't follow the rules of *xenia*, but also because he doesn't look or live like the Greeks. Polyphemus is as huge as a mountain peak, he lives alone, and the cyclopes don't gather in assemblies, like Greeks.<sup>31</sup> Polyphemus' lack of civilization is again seen when he eats

Odysseus' men:

ἀλλ' ὃ γ' ἀναΐξας ἐτάροις ἐπὶ χεῖρας ἴαλλε,  
σὺν δὲ δῶμα μάρψας ὥς τε σκύλακας ποτὶ γαίῃ  
κόπτ'. ἐκ δ' ἐγκέφαλος χαμάδις ῥέε, δεῦε δὲ γαῖαν.  
τοὺς δὲ διὰ μελεῖστί ταμῶν ὠπλίσσατο δόρπον·  
ἦσθιε δ' ὥς τε λέων ὄρεσίτροφος, οὐδ' ἀπέλειπεν...  
αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ Κύκλωψ μεγάλην ἐμπλήσατο νηδὺν

<sup>30</sup> Homer, *The Odyssey*, 9.187-92.

<sup>31</sup> Pura Nieto Hernández, “Back in the Cave of the Cyclopes,” *The American Journal of Philology* 121, No. 3 (Autumn, 2000), 346, [www.jstor.org/stable/1561773](http://www.jstor.org/stable/1561773); *The Odyssey* 9.106-15.

ἀνδρόμεα κρέ' ἔδων καὶ ἐπ' ἄκρητον γάλα πίνων,  
κεῖτ' ἔντοσθ' ἄντροιο τανυσσάμενος διὰ μήλων.<sup>32</sup>

But he, having sprung up, laid his hands upon my companions,  
And seized two together, and, like puppies, struck them  
Upon the earth; innards flowed out onto the ground, and soaked the earth,  
And tearing them limb from limb, he made dinner;  
He ate like a mountain-bred lion, leaving nothing behind...  
But when the Cyclops filled his great stomach  
Eating man meat and drinking unmixed milk,  
He laid in the cave, stretching out among the flocks.

Throughout this description, we can see how Polyphemus' behavior deviates from Greek ideals, further marking him as uncivilized, according to Greek standards. For starters, he eats humans, something Greeks see as inhuman, or at least "morally reprehensible."<sup>33</sup> The narrator also stresses that Polyphemus drinks milk unmixed (ἄκρητον), which can be read as "a little joke on the part of Odysseus-narrator at the expense of the primitive monster."<sup>34</sup> The joke hinges on the fact that Greeks drank wine with meals, and mixed it with water; Polyphemus is doubly in the wrong, because he drinks milk rather than wine, and does not water it down. By using the word ἄκρητον (unmixed), the narrator underscores the Cyclops' perceived lack of civility by Odysseus and the audience. Thus, in the epic's description of the Cyclops, we see the link between civility, behavior, and physical appearance, as well as reliance on customs of hospitality: they all reinforce each other.

Lucian uses these ideas of *xenia* from the *Odyssey* to create images of civility in his story. In particular, the scenes with the Moon-men show the role of hospitality in the text. In the

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<sup>32</sup> Homer, *The Odyssey*, 9.288-92, 296-8.

<sup>33</sup> Irene J. F de Jong, *A Narratological Commentary on the Odyssey* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 241,

<https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/narratological-commentary-on-the-odyssey/45A0163A65938D6E05FF315C2B631E53>.

<sup>34</sup> de Jong, *Narratological Commentary*, 241.

travellers' first meeting with the Moon-men, we see Endymion, their host, conforming to the implicit expectations of *xenia* that Lucian and his companions brought with them.

ἡμᾶς συλλαβόντες ἀνάγουσιν ὡς αὐτόν. ὁ δὲ θεασάμενος καὶ ἀπὸ τῆς στολῆς εἰκάσας, “ Ἕλληνες ἄρα,” ἔφη, “ὕμεῖς, ὦ ζένοι;” συμφησάντων δέ, “Πῶς οὖν ἀφίκετε,” ἔφη, “τοσοῦτον ἀέρα διελθόντες;” καὶ ἡμεῖς τὸ πᾶν αὐτῷ διηγούμεθα· καὶ ὅς ἀρξάμενος τὸ καθ’ αὐτόν ἡμῖν διεξῆει, ὡς καὶ αὐτὸς ἄνθρωπος ὢν τοῦνομα Ἐνδυμίων ἀπὸ τῆς ἡμετέρας γῆς κατεύδων ἀναρπασθεῖη ποτὲ καὶ ἀφικόμενος βαλιλεύσειε τῆς χώρας· εἶναι δὲ τὴν γῆν ἐκείνην ἔλεγε τὴν ἡμῖν κάτω φαινομένην σελήνην. ἀλλὰ θαρρεῖν τε παρεκελεύετο καὶ μηδένα κίνδυνον ὑφορᾶσται· πάντα γὰρ ἡμῖν παρέσεσθαι ὢν δεόμεθα.<sup>35</sup>

...having seized us, they brought us to him. And he, having looked and inferred from our equipment, said, “are you Greeks, *xenoi*?” And when we assented, “so how did you arrive, passing through so much air?” And we explained the whole thing to him. And he, beginning, told us about himself--that, being a man himself, named Endymion, was snatched from our earth, when he was sleeping, and arriving here, became king of the land; and he said that this land was the moon, shining down on us. But he encouraged [us] both to be confident and to suspect no danger; for everything we lacked, those things would be given to us.

Here, Endymion largely follows the rules of *xenia* as they are laid out in the *Odyssey*: he welcomes the strangers and promises to take care of their every need during their stay with him. When the travellers first arrive on the moon and Endymion greets them, he notices their Greek clothing, and tells them that he too is Greek.<sup>36</sup> According to Steven Smith, “the recognition of that similarity is articulated first from the perspective of Endymion, the apparent foreigner. When he sees the narrator’s clothing, Endymion wastes no time in telling the newcomers that he too is Greek.”<sup>37</sup> However, Lucian also includes language that would point to Endymion as uncivilized in the *Odyssey*, disobeying the rules of *xenia*. Much like Polyphemus, Endymion begins by asking his guests where they came from and how they got to the moon, making them explain

<sup>35</sup> Lucian, *True History*, 1.11.

<sup>36</sup> Lucian, *True History*, 1.11, quoted above.

<sup>37</sup> Steven D Smith, “Lucian’s *True Story* and the Ethics of Empire,” in *A Lucian for Our Times*, edited by Adam Bartley (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 83.

their story before he accepts them as guest-friends. Here, Lucian combines elements of proper *xenia* with actions that do not conform to the expected rules. But importantly, these deviations from the norm are not criticized by the narrator; instead, he accepts them in stride, and still treats Endymion and his other hosts with respect.

Another example of the Moon-men's civility and practice of *xenia* can be seen when Lucian prepares to leave the moon: they give Lucian and his companions parting gifts, following the proper customs from the *Odyssey*.

οὖν ἀσπασάμενοι τὸν βασιλέα καὶ τοὺς ἄμφ' αὐτόν, ἐμβάντες ἀνήχθημεν· ἐμοὶ δὲ καὶ δῶρα ἔδωκεν ὁ Ἐνδυμίω, δύο μὲν τῶν ὑαλίνων χιτῶνων, πέντε δὲ χαλκοῦς, καὶ πανοπλίαν θερμίνην.<sup>38</sup>

So taking leave of the king and those with him, we sailed away, having boarded our ship. But Endymion even gave me gifts, two glass chitons, and five of bronze, and a full set of lupine armor.

While the gifts are indicative of the society they came from, the exchange itself is a clear example of Greek *xenia*. Endymion, on behalf of the Moon-men, treats his guests properly by giving them guest-gifts upon their departure, even if these gifts are unorthodox.

Lucian presents a complicated image of the Moon-men, who don't completely obey the rules of guesting, but are still ultimately seen as civilized, accepted by Lucian and his companions. In doing so, Lucian structures the *True History* as a parody of the *Odyssey*, in which ideas of civility are more fluid. In the *Odyssey*, hospitality is a marker of civilization and Greekness--Nestor and Menelaus, who are portrayed as exemplary Greek men, show Telemachus and the audience how civilized Greeks treat their guests. And the Phaeacians, one of the first societies to welcome Odysseus since he left Troy, also follow the rules of *xenia*.

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<sup>38</sup> Lucian, *True History*, 1.27.

Polyphemus, conversely, perverts and ignores the ritual, and the epic accordingly portrays him outside the bounds of civility.

Lucian, however, uses the Moon-men to intentionally deviate from the dichotomy between civilized and savage that the *Odyssey* establishes. While they follow the expectations and rules of *xenia*, Lucian presents the Moon-men as very different from the Greeks. This imperfect alignment between the categories of Greek and civilized does exist to some extent in the *Odyssey*, as evidenced by the Phaeacians. It is this slippage that Lucian explores, building on what is hinted at in the epic, in his descriptions of the Moon-men, as well as other strange groups he meets throughout the narrative.

Although there are similarities between Endymion and the adventurers, and the Moon-men have taken the Greek Endymion as their leader, there are still things on the moon that the narrator finds foreign, and possibly horrifying.<sup>39</sup> He describes the society and natives on the moon, showing that their customs and appearances are very different from his.

πρῶτα μὲν τὸ μὴ ἐκ γυναικῶν γεννᾶσθαι αὐτούς, ἀλλ' ἀπὸ τῶν ἀρρένων· γάμοις γὰρ τοῖς ἄρρεσι χρῶνται...μέχρι μὲν οὖν πέντε καὶ εἴκοσι ἐτῶν γαμεῖται ἕκαστος, ἀπὸ δὲ τούτων γαμεῖ αὐτός· κύοσι δὲ οὐκ ἐν τῇ νηδύϊ, ἀλλ' ἐν ταῖς γαστροκνημίαις...ἐπειδὴν δὲ γηράσῃ ὁ ἄνθρωπος, οὐκ ἀποήσκει, ἀλλ' ὥσπερ καπνὸς διαλυόμενος ἀήρ γίνεται. τροφή δὲ πᾶσιν ἢ αὐτῇ· ἐπειδὴν γὰρ πῦρ ἀνακαύσωσιν, βατράχους ὀπτῶσιν ἐπὶ τῶν ἀνθράκων...καὶ γένεια φύουσιν μικρὸν ὑπὲρ τὰ γόνατα. καὶ ὄνυχας ἐν τοῖς οὐκ ἔχουσιν, ἀλλὰ πάντες εἰσὶν μονοδάκτυλοι. ὑπὲρ δὲ τὰς πηγὰς ἐκάστῳ αὐτῶν κράμβη ἐκπέφυκε μακρὰ ὥσπερ οὐρά...τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς περιαιρετοὺς ἔχουσι, καὶ ὁ βουλόμενος ἐξελὼν τοὺς αὐτοῦ φυλάττει ἔστ' ἂν δεηθῆ ἰδεῖν.<sup>40</sup>

The first thing is that they are born not from women, but from men; for they use men in marriage....So each one, until 25 years old, takes a husband, and after those, he himself takes a wife. And they do not get pregnant in the womb, but in the calves....And whenever a man grows old, he does not die, but, dissolving in

<sup>39</sup> Smith, "Lucian's *True Story* and the Ethics of Empire," 85, argues that "the narrator's paradoxology suggests a general horror at the lability between active and passive, subject and object, life and death" that exists among the Moon-men.

<sup>40</sup> Lucian, *True History*, 1.22-5.



the way smoke does, becomes air. And their food is all the same; for whenever they light a fire, they roast frogs [which fly through the air] on the coals....they grow beards a little above the knees. And they don't have toenails on their feet, but are all one-toed. And over the butts of each of them, a cabbage grows, just like a big tail....They have removable eyes and anyone who likes, taking his out, guards them until he may need to see. So, putting them [back] in, he may see.

While this catalogue is seemingly objective, the strangeness that the narrator highlights suggests an underlying distance between Greeks and Moon-men; and if such distance exists, then the Moon-men are placed in opposition to the civilized Greeks, and can be understood as uncivilized. In these descriptions of the Moon-men's biology, the things they do differently, Lucian shows just how far removed they are from humans. But the fact that they can learn to practice and appreciate the ritual of *xenia* shows that it is not a behavior inherent to the Greeks. And because hospitality is representative of civility, the Moon-men are therefore as civilized as the Greeks, regardless of appearance.

In the scenes with the Moon-men, Lucian combines both civilized behavior and strange physical descriptions. Lucian structures this dynamic to move beyond the framework that the *Odyssey* establishes. In the epic, Greeks are shown as being civilized, and creatures like Polyphemus are not--although the Phaeacians don't fit neatly into either category. And so Lucian questions the assumptions the epic makes. While they follow the expectations of *xenia*, the Moon-men not only look different, but live in a society that does not always adhere to the norms and expectations of the Greeks. Lucian presents a complicated picture of the Moon-men, physically different but still using practices the Greeks see as civilized.

Lucian illuminates the rigidity of how the *Odyssey* structures civility and hospitality, and how that dichotomy oversimplifies reality. Thus, Lucian uses the *True History* to comment on ideas of civility in general. In the *Odyssey*, civility is often tied to Greekness. For Lucian, civility

is something that can be learned, rather than an innate quality for specific cultures and peoples. When the Moon-men, creatures who live completely different lives from humans, who don't even live on earth, take a Greek as their leader, make an effort to accept Greek customs into their lives, they are becoming civilized. Civility is not something that only Greeks can possess, but it can be learned, used by other people. The Moon-men are not portrayed in a negative light, like Polyphemus is, even when their way of life differs radically from Greek society. Instead, they incorporate ideas of *xenia* into their society, remaining distinctly different, but still civilized. In taking ideas from the *Odyssey* and using them to make his own point, Lucian moves beyond the limits imposed by the epic, pointing out its flaws by using its own logic. Strange creatures living on the moon can become just as civilized as the most upstanding Greek rulers.

Lucian uses the Moon-men, and his parody of the *Odyssey*, to comment on the empire in which he lives. Lucian himself writes in Greek, lives under the Roman Empire, and was born in Syria.<sup>41</sup> In some ways, Lucian himself is no more Greek than the Moon-men, may not consider himself a Roman by any standard.. However, the interactions with the Moon-men show us that it is possible to become close enough: you can learn to be Greek, civilized, even if you are different. Being born in Greece is less important than showing markers of Greekness, and in following ideas of *xenia*, that image of Greek civility can be achieved--and the same is true in the Roman empire, he suggests. Lucian uses a text that epitomizes the Greek literary tradition, and then parodies it to comment on the idea that being Greek equates with being civilized. If the Moon-men can treat strangers properly, what might that say about people like Lucian? Working within the framework of the *Odyssey*, Lucian exaggerates the distinctions that are drawn, and in

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<sup>41</sup> "Lucian," *Who's Who in the Classical World*, ed. Simon Hornblower and Tony Spawforth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110810105314345>.

doing so, shows how they are false, moving beyond what the epic claims and creating a travel narrative that better reflects the empire within which he lives.

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