

“Stephen’s problem, like ours, was not actually one of creating the uncreated conscience of his race, but of creating the *uncreated features of his face*. Our task is that of making ourselves individuals.”¹

This excerpt from Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man* teasingly parodies academic discourse on Joyce’s character, Stephen Dedalus. This same playful comparison to Joyce would later lead Ellison to describe his novel as ‘the portrait of the artist as a rabble-rouser’².

The quote, while partially in jest, reveals something about Ellison’s use of intertextuality and myth. The link between Joyce and Ellison has been well documented by critics, most notably by Robert List, who characterised Joyce as Ellison’s ‘Irish mentor’³. But the passage also demonstrates Ellison’s acute awareness of scholarly discussion around Joyce. So while his *Invisible Man* may claim that ‘no one of us’ (354) could grasp his teacher’s meaning, by the end of the novel the meaning becomes clear. *Invisible Man*’s rejection of the Brotherhood’s collectivism in his confrontation with Brother Jack, ‘an episode that explicitly responds to Odysseus’s encounter with Polyphemus’⁴, is prefigured in this passage. Stephen and *Invisible Man*’s struggles are virtually identical in this sense. Patrice Rankine calls this ‘Ellison’s privileging of the individual over groups... the novelist’s heroic individualism.’⁵

A less obvious reference may be in this mention of ‘no one’ (354). This could echo the ‘nobody’⁶ name that Odysseus used to trick the Cyclops in Book Nine of the *Odyssey*. It’s no surprise, then, that this passage comes at a point in the novel in which *Invisible Man* has just been given a new name.

This triangle of intertextuality is best described by Henry Louis Gates Jr. in his seminal work *The Signifying Monkey*. He wrote, echoing Eliot, ‘all texts Signify upon other texts, in motivated and unmotivated ways.’⁷ In this sense, Ellison’s reference to Joyce here signifies on, and accrues meaning in, the rest of *Invisible Man*’s journey through the text. In a similar sense, Ellison signifies back on Stephen’s struggle with colonialism, linking their experience. This perhaps suggests a certain universalism through oppression, what List refers to as ‘the complex black-Irish connection.’^{8,9}

¹ Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (London: Penguin, 2001), p. 354. All further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

² Ralph Ellison, ‘The Art of Fiction’, in *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison* (Toronto: Random House, 2003), p. 220.

³ Robert List, *Dedalus in Harlem* (Washington D.C: University Press of America, 1982), p. 4.

⁴ Justine McConnell, *Black Odysseys: The Homeric Odyssey in the African diaspora since 1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 90.

⁵ Patrice D. Rankine, *Ulysses in Black: Ralph Ellison, Classicism and African American Literature* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), p. 143.

⁶ Homer, *The Odyssey*, Trans. Robert Fagles (London: Penguin, 2004), p. 223.

⁷ Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. vi.

⁸ List, p. 16.

⁹ He draws this connection more explicitly than I have reason to go into, saying that ‘Ellison and Wright were profoundly influenced by Joyce’s treatment of “race” and ethnicity when they observed unsettling analogies existing among oppression in Ireland, in the United States, and in Africa.’ List, p. 6.

This universalism is bolstered by both works' reworking of Homeric myth. This method of signifying in order to accrue meaning is the theme by which we are able to group these three texts together. Both *Ulysses* and *Invisible Man* make heavy, and clearly motivated, reference to the *Odyssey* in order to signify on some element of their own text. In particular, the use of the Cyclops myth in both texts can be seen as signifying the ways in which ideological structures of collective thought exclude minority voices within their movements.

This manifests in *Ulysses* in an episode in Barney Kiernan's pub in which the Citizen, based on the Irish Nationalist figure Michael Cusack, gradually becomes drunkenly anti-Semitic and threatening towards Leopold Bloom, the novel's anti-heroic stand in for Odysseus.

In a similar sense, the most explicitly Cyclopean figure in *Invisible Man* is Brother Jack. He is the leader of the Brotherhood, an obvious analogue to the Communist Party. Brother Jack 'begins to close Invisible Man out of the inner politics of the organization when the latter fails to conform completely to its ideology.'¹⁰ This is because 'The protagonist realizes that the Brotherhood could not "speak for [him]," or Tod, because it did not fully regard his humanity.'¹¹ In other words, there is a suggestion that the failure to recognise African American issues signals 'that issues of class struggle have often been made to outweigh those of race.'¹²

While Ellison plainly did not lift the pub scene from Joyce wholesale, he did reconfigure and play around with some of Joyce's major themes. This is because both textual uses of the Cyclops clearly originate from the same idea. Both reveal the inherent hypocrisy of a political ideology's foundations through excluding the minority protagonist. In this essay I will explore both of these main figures in relation to Homer, counter-hegemonic ideology and oppression. However, I will also examine the limitations of this focus on Homeric signification in order to explore subversive readings of alternate Cyclopean figures in tandem with other influences. This approach creates a more complex relationship between the Cyclops figures and oppression created by the dominant ideologies found in the texts.

Many Homeric parallels found in both texts interweave the reinterpretation of the Cyclops and ideology itself. An example is the Homeric Cyclops 'vomit[ing]'¹³. Both texts rework this into a similar bluster of anger at the protagonist's moment of self identification. Indeed, the passages are almost identical. The Citizen begins:

Puffing and blowing with the dropsy and he cursing the curse of Cromwell on him, bell, book and candle in Irish, spitting and spatting out of him and Joe and little Alf round him like a leprechaun trying to peacify him.¹⁴

In contrast, Brother Jack's bluster begins:

spluttering and lapsing into a foreign language, choking and coughing and shaking his head as I balanced on my toes now, set to propel myself forward; seeing him above me and the others behind him as suddenly something seemed to erupt out of his face. (473-474)

¹⁰ Rankine, p. 143.

¹¹ Rankine, p. 143.

¹² McConnell, p. 95.

¹³ Homer, p. 223.

¹⁴ James Joyce, *Ulysses* (London: Penguin, 2000), p. 444. All further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

In Joyce, the ‘spitting and spatting’ (444) paralleling Polyphemus’ vomit is accompanied by a confused cluster of symbols relating to Irish oppression (‘Cromwell’), language (‘in Irish’) and myth (‘leprechaun’) (444). These are all topics discussed and referenced heavily throughout the chapter, suggesting that the Citizen is in some sense regurgitating his identity as Irish in response to Bloom’s self identification as Jewish. Irish Nationalism as a purely racial ideology is thus reduced to a confused, cannibalised amalgam of history and myth to be vomited up at the first sign of dissent.

Brother Jack also ‘lapse[s] into a foreign language’ (473), but instead of Irish it is ‘presumably Russian’¹⁵. This retroactively steeps Jack in Communism as an ideology by ‘The narrator’s speculation that Jack obtained his glass eye at the same place where “he learned the language he lapsed into”’¹⁶ and ‘in moments of stress, thinks in Russian.’¹⁷ This ties the Cyclops imagery directly to his association with the Soviet Union and therefore to Communism itself.

As mentioned, the catalyst for both outbursts is the protagonist’s self identification. Just as Odysseus shouts from his ship ““Odysseus, / raider of cities, *he* gouged out your eye, / Laertes’ son who makes his home in Ithaca!””¹⁸ Bloom traces his lineage through Jewish historical figures: ““-Mendelssohn was a jew and Karl Marx was a jew and Mercandante and Spinoza. And the saviour was a jew and his father was a jew. Your God.’ (445) This final example is what reveals the Citizen’s hypocrisy and causes him to vomit ideology; He cannot reconcile Catholicism as central to Irish Nationalism while excluding those of the religion upon which Christianity was founded. In doing this, Neil Davidson claims ‘Joyce thus aligned Ulysses’ most indicting portrayal of Irish jingoism with the spirit of both political anti-Semitism and religiously based anti- Jewishness’.¹⁹

Invisible Man also metaphorically reveals his lineage in his self identification as black. He aligns himself with the ‘traitor’ (466) Tod Clifton rather than with the Brotherhood. When Invisible Man’s protestation that Tod was shot “Mainly because he was black.” (469) fails to rouse the Brothers’ sympathies, he at once blinds the Cyclops and self identifies by calling him ‘Marse Jack’ (473). This also reveals the Brotherhood’s inherent hypocrisy by switching the title ‘Brother’ with ‘Master’, implying a master/slave relationship as opposed to the supposedly equal one. Furthermore, the explicitly racialized slang ‘Marse’ (473) further recalls not only slavery in a specific, American context but also signals Invisible Man embracing his own cultural heritage and the horror that accompanies it. Requiring slang for ‘master’ *is* his cultural inheritance, just as Odysseus has inherited Laertes’ title. Alternatively, this more metaphorical self-identification could be used as a reminder that, because of slave names, Invisible Man has no genealogy to speak of. This is compounded by the fact that, of course, he remains unnamed.

There is therefore a suggestion that Invisible Man blinds Brother Jack via his self identification. This is an interesting amalgam of the beats in Homer: the self-identification, vomiting and blinding all take place in direct sequence. The combination signals the culmination of Ellison’s ‘repudiation of leftist authoritarianism’.²⁰

¹⁵ Barbara Foley, *Wrestling with the Left* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), p. 310.

¹⁶ Foley, p. 313.

¹⁷ Foley, p. 313.

¹⁸ Homer, p. 227.

¹⁹ Neil Davidson, “‘Cyclops’, Sinn Féin, and “The Jew”: A Historical Reconsideration’, in *Journal of Modern Literature*, Fall, 1995, Vol.19 (2), p. 246.

²⁰ Foley, p. 4.

However, in *Ulysses*, while Bloom's self identification causes the Citizen's vomit, it does not blind him. His metaphorical blinding comes in the form of the 'sun... in his eyes' (446). This could be taken literally or, as R. J. Schork suggests, as a euphemism for 'a person who is drunk'²¹. This could simply be one of *Ulysses*' 'comic near-misses'²² with Homer, but could also be linked explicitly to Irish Nationalism. This is because the Citizen is drunk on the 'wine of the country' (381). This line is not only mirroring Polyphemus' boast that 'Our soil yields the Cyclops powerful, full-bodied wine'²³, but is also suggesting that the Citizen's attempt to 'murder' (446) Bloom has been thwarted by his own nationalistic tendencies. In Joyce, despite warnings that 'Ireland sober is Ireland free' (402), the narrow-minded Cyclops blinds himself through his home-grown drunkenness.

The Cyclops' physical appearance is central in Homer. The Citizen is physically coded as Cyclopean from his introduction. For example, the Citizen's gigantism and ogre-like qualities are foregrounded as a metaphor for racialized Irishness. Odysseus describes Polyphemus as a 'giant'²⁴, a 'monster'²⁵, and 'built like no mortal who ever supped on bread'²⁶. In *Ulysses* this becomes an excessive, parodic description: 'a broadshouldered deepchested stronglimbed frankeyed redhaired freely freckled shaggybearded widemouthed... hero.' (382) The descriptions of size and strength are intermingled with stereotypical Celtic traits such as 'redhaired' (382) and 'freely freckled' (382). Joyce therefore creates a connection between this ogre-like physicality and militant Irish nationalism. The inclusion of these supposedly typical traits focuses the embodiment of Irishness primarily through the lens of race. This theme is repeated when the Citizen makes it clear that despite being 'born here' (430), he does not consider Bloom Irish.

The *Odyssey* also focuses on the Cyclops' strength, suggesting it through the 'immense stone the monster wedged to block his cave!'²⁷ *Ulysses* also links this to race. Joyce does this by describing the Citizen as 'The champion of all Ireland at putting the sixteen pound shot.' (410) This becomes analogous to the boulder thrown by the blinded Cyclops at Odysseus' ship, and foreshadows his throwing of the biscuit tin. However, the 'all Ireland' (410) immediately points towards nationalism, which is confirmed when he suggests that sport should be encouraged 'for the development of the race' (410). The race, singular, is used to exclude Bloom from his nationalist rhetoric.

Brother Jack, on the other hand, is not physically coded as Cyclopean until the moment his glass eye falls out and he squints 'with cyclopean irritation.' (474) In contrast with the depiction of the Cyclops in the *Odyssey*, Jack is described as a 'short' (287) and 'insignificant looking' (287), with 'red [hair]' (291). Understood through the prism of this Cyclopean reading one might suggest that Ellison conceals this aspect of Brother Jack's character as a means of dramatic tension, revealing it to the reader only as the protagonist learns it. However, considered in a broader context, Brother Jack is in fact characterised through another form of signification: the public imagination. In *Wrestling with the Left*, Barbara Foley claims that in later drafts of *Invisible Man* Ellison coded Jack to resemble Jacob Golous, 'a prominent figure in the discourse of the early cold war'²⁸. Golous was allegedly 'a Russian-born naturalized American citizen who

²¹ R.J. Schork, *Greek and Hellenic Culture in Joyce* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1998), p. 98.

²² List, p. 283.

²³ Homer, p. 222.

²⁴ Homer, p. 217.

²⁵ Homer, p. 217.

²⁶ Homer, p. 217.

²⁷ Homer, p. 219.

²⁸ Foley, p. 313.

was... the key figure in a secret network of Communists working for the federal government and passing information to the Soviets.’²⁹ Furthermore, his appearance was reportedly ‘short and shabbily dressed, with “bright red” hair’³⁰. Therefore, in constructing the character Ellison used contemporary politics more prominently than any Homeric implications. The text’s ideological opposition to communism, and its clear reference to anti-Soviet, ‘the enemy within’³¹-esque propaganda, complicates the Cyclopean reading. Ellison himself commented on this tension between use of myth and reference to modernity, as Robert List elaborates:

Ellison cautions the overzealous reader and critic, however, not to view characters and their ordeals on the mythic level alone. For despite his assertion that “novels are ritualistic and ceremonial at their core,” characters and events must be understood on the level of the “specific form of social reality” from which they are drawn.³²

By preferencing Brother Jack’s physical signification as Soviet spy, Ellison grounds the character in the ‘specific form of social reality’³³ that is portrayed in the novel. This flags a danger with attempting ‘to “plug in” the plots of the *Odyssey* or the *Aeneid* into *Ulysses* and *Invisible Man*.’³⁴ There are limitations to this one to one comparison, ‘A critical dead end results’³⁵. In Ellison’s words, this approach ‘ignores the specificity of literary works’³⁶.

To me, this focus on Homeric analogues to the detriment of the text’s specificity leads to a single conclusion: *The Citizen* and Brother Jack are the clearest representations of Cyclops figures in the texts. But in both there are alternate, more complex Cyclopean figures lingering in the background. And while the authors’ opposition to militant Irish nationalism and Marxism is clear, both in the novels and in the virtually unanimous agreement amongst critics, these alternate Cyclopean figures complicate this framework. Specifically, they draw focus to criticism of the texts’ dominant ideologies: British imperialism and white supremacy.

For instance, though most critics agree that in *Invisible Man* blindness is used ‘as a metaphor for Communism’³⁷, Foley argues that in earlier drafts the theme was used for the opposite. She states that ‘Ellison’s drafts and notes for this section indicate that he considered complicating the text’s unifying trope of vision and blindness by adding the metaphor of Marxism as magnifying lens’³⁸. While this was just a consideration, there other Cyclopean figures throughout the text that resist narrow interpretation. In particular, the arena speech creates the suggestion that Cyclopean narrow-mindedness afflicts the victims of white supremacy, not just the perpetrators.

Likewise, Joyce’s opposition to militant Irish Nationalism is clear. But considering the chapter as a whole reveals that Joyce characterises Ireland itself, not just its nationalism, as Brutish and lawless. This echoes List’s analysis that claimed ‘both Joyce and Ellison were writing more complex protest novels which focus not only on the politics of one culture but on

²⁹ Foley, p. 313.

³⁰ Foley, p. 313.

³¹ Foley, p. 313.

³² List, p. 245.

³³ List, p. 245.

³⁴ List, p. 283.

³⁵ List, p. 283.

³⁶ Ellison, essays, p. 101.

³⁷ Foley, p. 311.

³⁸ Foley, p. 14.

the “unconscious politics” of the universal human urge to dominance that crisscrosses all races.’³⁹

Alternate Cyclopean figures are present throughout both texts. For example, in the chapter in which Jack’s blinding takes place, the text itself gives multiple indications and forebodings of what is to come. In the section preceding the blinding, there are thirty-nine references to “eyes”, ‘looking’ or ‘seeing’ (462-474). As Patrice Rankine points out, ‘American society at large is depicted throughout the novel as a type of Cyclops’⁴⁰.

Likewise, in *Ulysses* there is a focus on eyes too. But Joyce makes the Cyclops parallel more explicit. Throughout the chapter there are references such as ‘Nelson policy putting your blind eye to the telescope’ (421), ‘old Mrs Verschoyle with the turned in eye’ (433) and a ‘a loafer with a patch over his eye’ (444). One of the final examples of this is ‘where Alf Bergan and Joe Hynes discuss the recent Koegh-Bennett bout’⁴¹. Towards the end of the fight the Englishman Bennett’s ‘right eye was nearly closed’ (413) by Irishman Koegh. Colonialism as a theme is clearly present here, but the Cyclopean figure as English is an interesting reversal, complicating the traditional reading. But like Ellison, Joyce was not only signifying towards Homer, but towards contemporary culture through the fight. Kasia Boddy points out that:

according to Stanislaus Joyce, ‘a rough draft’ of the scene had originated in his brother’s ‘ironical comments’ on nationalism in ‘that epoch-marking event’, Johnson versus Jeffries. American racist ideology is reconfigured in British and Irish nationalist terms. The debts of the Harlem Renaissance to the Irish Renaissance are well documented; this incident reveals that Irish literature also owes something to black America.⁴²

Boddy further suggests that Johnson versus Jeffries is referenced in *Invisible Man* too. It takes place in ‘an imitation of the pub scene in Joyce’s “Cyclops”’⁴³. Through this, another strange triangle of influence and signifying emerges, with the Cyclops imagery tied to boxing within both texts.

Furthermore, there is indeed a Cyclopean boxer figure later in *Invisible Man* which, to my mind, is influenced in part by Joyce’s Bennett. As Invisible Man waits to give his arena speech, he discovers a photograph of ‘a popular fighter who had lost his sight in the ring’ (334). While Foley suggests that Black boxers ‘symbolized victory over white supremacy’⁴⁴, this boxer is characterised primarily through his race and lack of agency. He is ‘dark and battered’ (334). He was blinded in a ‘crooked fight’ (334), the scandal ‘suppressed’ (334) and he ‘died in a home for the blind’ (334). This blinding anecdote acts as a microcosm for black experience in America. The focus on the Cyclops ‘as an oppressive and brutish figure’⁴⁵ is completely subverted. It casts the Cyclops as a victim, not only circumstance, but of society’s racial

³⁹ List, p. 9.

⁴⁰ Rankine, p. 123.

⁴¹ Kasia Boddy, ‘Cultivating Peripheral Vision: Ralph Ellison, James Joyce and the Fight of the Century’ in *Literature Compass* 1 (2004), p. 2.

⁴² Boddy, p. 2-3.

⁴³ Boddy, p. 2.

⁴⁴ Foley, p. 81.

⁴⁵ McConnell, p. 87.

hierarchy. His opponent's reputation is deemed more important than the Cyclops figure's sight. Furthermore, this develops on the themes introduced by the Battle Royal. Invisible Man recalls that, like the boxer, a blow 'sent my right eye popping like a jack-in-the box' (25). Indeed, while in the changing room, coded as cave-like, he 'felt a welling up of memories.' (333) The reference back to the Battle Royal just before the protagonist goes on stage 'implies- for the reader... that the novel's governing ritual is about to be replayed.'⁴⁶ It is this resurgence of memories from the Battle Royal that subconsciously informs the content of the arena speech. Just like in the Battle Royal, this complicates the reading of blindness as a metaphor for Communism. The narrator is a victim here: he 'is both caged and blinded in the circle of artificial light'.⁴⁷

This marks the beginning of a chapter that creates a subversive understanding of the Cyclops as a sympathetic, specifically African American figure, unable to see beyond the strict racial hegemony of America's underlying ideology.

The narrator of the Cyclops chapter in *Ulysses* is also coded as Cyclopean. In the beginning of the chapter the narrator describes his near blinding with an olive-branch-like object: 'a bloody sweep came along and he near drove his gear into my eye' (376). Interestingly, the narrator is also left nameless. In a strange twist, just as critics have adopted 'Invisible Man' to refer to Ellison's protagonist, some Joyce critics have taken to naming the narrator 'Nameless'⁴⁸.

The narrator is used to introduce the theme of lawlessness. In the *Odyssey*, Odysseus narrates that the Cyclops' are 'lawless brutes'⁴⁹ and Polyphemus in particular is 'a savage deaf to justice, blind to law'⁵⁰. Joyce does the same thing by applying lawlessness, and particularly laws surrounding debts,⁵¹ to the Citizen, the narrator and Ireland as a whole.

This theme is first introduced as the narrator characterizes himself as a 'collector of bad and doubtful debts' (377), and has just come from meeting 'old Troy of the D.M.P' (376). The reference to Troy further intertwines Homeric myth and the law (Dublin Metropolitan Police) together into a single image.

This theme is used most overtly to introduce the Citizen's cannibalism. Despite the fact that the narrator is tracking someone for 'Trading without a license' (377), he willingly associates with the Citizen, whose dog, Garyowen, 'ate a good part of the breeches off a constabulary man in Santry that came round one time with a blue paper about a license' (381). Here, violence in Dublin takes precedence over law. Garyowen embodies the cannibalism element of the Cyclops, twinned with the Citizen through their shared 'paw' (381, 394) imagery. His name is also a reference to an Irish folk song about debtors avoiding jail.

In fact, there are multiple references throughout the chapter to Irish folk songs featuring debts. The song 'the man for Galway' (383) features the line 'with debts galore but fun far more'. The Citizen greets the narrator by saying 'Stand and deliver' (381), not only a reference to the song 'Whiskey in the jar' but also to a highway robbery. Paddy Dignam's death is referred to as paying 'the debt of nature' (388). Through this, Joyce could be suggesting that Irish culture

⁴⁶ Foley, p. 261.

⁴⁷ Foley, p. 261.

⁴⁸ Marilyn Reizbaum, 'When the Saints Come Marching In: Re-Deeming "Cyclops"', in *Ulysses: En-Gendered Perspectives, Eighteen New Essays on the Episodes*, Eds. Kimberly J. Devlin and Marilyn Reizbaum (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1999), p. 169.

⁴⁹ Homer, p. 215.

⁵⁰ Homer, p. 218.

⁵¹ This focus on debts is also referencing guest rite and the buying of rounds in pub culture. But because many critics have delved into this aspect it seems unnecessary to discuss in detail.

is infused with this Cyclopean lawlessness. This resists the traditional reading of the Cyclops parallel as condemning militant Irish nationalism in particular, as this theme clearly encompasses Ireland's culture itself.

This use of folklore to convey theme is an inherently similar, if subtler, use to Ellison's intertwining of Homeric and African American folklore. Joyce signifies on and builds parallels to Homer using Irish art in the same mode: the oral.⁵² He therefore not only draws a textual parallel but also a cultural and productive one. Ellison also uses this oral mode in reference to the Cyclops theme. The aforementioned boxer is narrated through 'my father's story' (334) and is therefore reminiscent of a folk tale passed down through generations, as if to warn against rebellion.

Furthermore, Foley argues the oral is central to the arena scene as 'Brother Jack hires the protagonist not for his intelligence and initiative but for his voice'⁵³. In his first speech for the Brotherhood, Invisible Man implies a similar mass application of the Cyclops' blindness for his audience as Joyce implies for the Irish. The speech Invisible Man gives to the arena rally in Harlem is rife with Cyclopean imagery. He characterises himself and the crowd as 'blind- uncommonly blind.' (343) He further states that 'they've dispossessed us each of one eye from the day we're born.' (343) This characterisation is clearly directed towards African Americans in particular. More than the fact that the rally takes place in Harlem, Ellison removed from an earlier draft a description of the audience as 'black and white'⁵⁴, removing any explicitly multiracial element. Furthermore, they are coded as African American through the call and response to Invisible Man's speech, reminiscent of black episcopal church sermons.

The introduction of an antagonist into Invisible Man's speech fundamentally casts the Cyclopean crowd as victims of oppression:

Up to now we've been like a couple of one-eyed men walking down opposite side of the street. Someone starts throwing bricks and we start blaming each other and fighting among ourselves. But we're mistaken! Because there's a third party present. There's a smooth, oily scoundrel running down the *middle* of the wide gray street throwing stones (344).

This mythopoeic reimagining of the Battle Royal is a strange combination of the Cyclops myth and Plato's Cave. This 'oily scoundrel' (344) is connected with 'our fine friends' (344) with 'blue steel pistols and blue serge suits' (344), representing state violence and foreboding Tod Clifton's death at the hands of the police. Here, blindness is transformed into a weapon of the white hegemony. The brutishness of the Cyclops is still present, as the violence of 'fighting among ourselves' (344) may be interpreted as a form of inter-communal cannibalism. But the blindness is used as a metaphor for weaponized ignorance, removing the agency from this violence. This could be a hangover from Ellison's original metaphor for Marxism as a 'magnifying lens'⁵⁵. Regardless, it definitively recasts the Cyclops figure here as a victim of racialized violence, forced to walk 'straight white lines' (344), complicating the simplified reading that a focus on Brother Jack produces.

⁵² Meaning oral in origin.

⁵³ Foley, p. 259.

⁵⁴ Foley, p. 262.

⁵⁵ Foley, p. 14.

Joyce also employs mythopoeic techniques. The folkloric mode as a method of conceptualising the nation is a major theme throughout the Cyclops chapter. This is achieved through the multiple temporal breaks throughout the chapter that signal what Joyce called ‘narrative excess’⁵⁶. An example of this is a parody of the Irish Celtic revival, ‘Inisfail the fair’ (378), mythopoeically creating a pre-colonial Ireland of ‘warriors and princes of high renown.’ (378)

Joyce contrasts this folkloric parody with the lawless Cyclops motif. The description of mythic Ireland is interrupted by talk of debts: ‘Come out here, Geraghty, you notorious bloody hill and dale robber!’ (380) This directly juxtaposes Joyce’s excessive mythmaking with the Cyclopean, lawless reality. Joyce therefore destabilises this Irish folkloric construction through signifying via an Ancient Greek one.

Furthermore, it is clear that this description is not only parodying the Irish Celtic revival movement but also figures into the Citizen and his companions’ view of the history of Ireland. They view history through a singular gaze. For them, it is a homogeneous, single narrative. The pre-colonial, utopian Ireland is one which the Citizen gestures to throughout, describing ‘our wool that was sold in Rome in the time of Juvenal’ (423). As a consequence, he views Ireland as having suffered ‘800 years of continuous colonial oppression’⁵⁷ which, according to Clare Carroll, is a ‘vast simplification’⁵⁸ and fundamentally ignores the complicated history of Irish complicity and servitude in the British colonial enterprise.

This attitude is reminiscent of Cyclopean thinking in the Kantian sense. That is, ‘Physically, one eye would prevent full peripheral vision; metaphorically it suggests narrow-mindedness, a lack of intellectual vision.’⁵⁹ This is exemplified by the Citizen, as he sees the flaws in English national myth, ‘That’s the great empire they boast about of drudges and whipped serfs’ (427), but not in his own. It is Bloom who here fulfils the ‘*sensus communis*’⁶⁰ element of Kant’s argument, able to view issues from multiple angles: ‘-But, says Bloom, isn’t discipline the same everywhere?’ (427) Indeed, Bloom undermines this national myth with his now famous definition ‘A nation is the same people living in the same place.’ (430)

But this somewhat traditional reading is once again complicated by Joyce’s narrative excess. Bloom is described multiple times as ‘Cod’s eye’ (384), and therefore does not escape the Cyclopean implication. Indeed, even Ireland itself is made Cyclopean in a reference to “Ireland’s eye” (431). This complicates the straightforward reading of the Citizen’s brutish nationalism. Joyce seems to be suggesting that Bloom, passers-by, the narrator, folkloric culture and even the very land itself are somehow caught up in this Kantian thinking. This appears to me a way for Joyce to conceptualise the colonial subconscious, List calls this ‘Joyce’s pioneering enquiries into the psychology of oppression’⁶¹.

The arena scene seems tied to this psychological, colonial oppression too. McConnell claims there is a long history of black writers disavowing Ellison’s use of the Cyclops: ‘Aimé Césaire, Derek Walcott, and Sylvia Wynter, would say that Ellison had internalised the white man’s reading of Polyphemus.’⁶² The ‘white man’s reading’⁶³ is presumably in reference to

⁵⁶ Reizbaum, p. 168.

⁵⁷ Clare Carroll, ‘Introduction: The nation and Postcolonial Theory’, in *Ireland and Postcolonial Theory*, ed. by Clare Carroll and Patricia King (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), p. 3.

⁵⁸ Carroll, p. 3.

⁵⁹ McConnell, p. 98.

⁶⁰ McConnell, p. 98.

⁶¹ List, p. 6.

⁶² McConnell, p. 88.

Polyphemus' typical casting as 'an oppressive and brutish figure'⁶⁴, a figure much closer to the Citizen than anything found in *Invisible Man*. While there are Cyclopean antagonists throughout the text, the casting of the Cyclops as a figure of racialized oppression in the arena scene and through Ellison's boxer seems to contradict this idea. While Ellison's reading of the Cyclops is less straightforwardly postcolonial than Césaire's or Walcott's, it cannot be ignored that some of these figures are not oppressors, they are the oppressed.

Gates stated that 'Repetition, with a signal difference'⁶⁵ is an essential element of signifying. This difference is key to understanding the Cyclops figures in *Ulysses* and *Invisible Man*. It manifests as warped and prejudiced expressions of ideology, at once going beyond and signifying back on Homer. Ellison believed that myth could be used to 'retell and to reshape [stories] so that they reflect our ideals—and guide our actions.'⁶⁶ Joyce and Ellison clearly reflected their ideals in these characters, but also hinted towards something more complex. Indeed, in both texts, Cyclopean narrow-mindedness is presented as a consequence of oppression, not simply a cause of it. While Brother Jack and the Citizen are oppressing with their counter-hegemonic ideology, there are also many victims of the psychological oppression of the dominant ideologies of white supremacy and the British Empire. The Cyclops is used in these instances as a metaphor for hegemony controlling the boundaries of thought. In the Citizen's own words: 'they believe it. The unfortunate yahoos believe it.' (427)

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⁶³ McConnell, p. 88.

⁶⁴ McConnell, p. 87.

⁶⁵ Gates, p. 70.

⁶⁶ Rankine, p. 122.

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