
BRINGING CIVILIZATION SAVAGERY AND THE TAMING OF THE SAVAGE

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Abstract: “*See, the Conqu’ring Hero Comes*” goes the famous chorus from Handel’s *Judas Maccabeus*, but how does the hero conquer? Achilles defeats his enemies through his extraordinary prowess in battle, Odysseus by using his wit, but some heroes must abandon the trappings of civilization in order to conquer. This paper examines two examples of such heroes from Germanic and Greco-Roman myth: Beowulf and Herakles. In the texts analyzed, these heroes not only set aside their civilized veneer, but also must journey into the territory of the monster they wish to destroy and there use savagery to defeat the savage, in order to bring civilization.

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The dichotomy of city and wilderness has existed in the minds of humans since the first cities were built. Since that time humans have ventured out into the wilderness in search of wealth and of new places to call home, and they bring with them the civilization of their cities. This is seen already in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, in which the wild-man, Enkidu, who is raised in the wilderness by animals, is civilized through sexual interaction with Shamha,¹ who goes out into the wilderness to meet him in order to tame him. As a result of this interaction Enkidu is abandoned by his former animal companions, leaves the wilderness and enters the city of Uruk, where he wrestles with and is defeated by Gilgamesh before becoming his companion and foil.²

Bringing civilization to the wilderness was fraught with danger. In addition to the dangers of starvation and exposure to the elements, there were, more often than not, already inhabitants who were not pleased to share their land with newcomers. These “savages” need to be conquered and assimilated into the new society. The violence inherent in such colonization and the spread of civilization is reflected in myth. Heroes must often defeat savage giants or monsters that inhabit an area and commit atrocities, such as cannibalism, on passersby. An example of this is found in the *Odyssey*, in the defeat of Polyphemos.³

Odysseus lands on the island of Cyclopes and, with a small band of his men, makes his way inland. They come upon a large cave and make themselves at home, consuming much of the cheese and milk laid up there. When the owner of the cave returns, Odysseus is surprised to see a Cyclops, who does not obey the law of Zeus and offer them hospitality, rather, he helps himself

1 SANDARS 1984, 64-65.

2 SANDARS 1984, 68-69

3 Homer, *Odyssey*, IV.

to some of Odysseus' men and consumes them. Before too many of his soldiers can become a meal, however, Odysseus uses the strong wine that he had brought with him as a hospitality gift for his host and gets the Cyclops drunk and, while Polyphemos is sleeping, blinds him. That Polyphemos stands for the Paleolithic inhabitants of Greece who were displaced in the spread of Greek civilization is already discussed by Wilhelm Grimm,⁴ Polyphemos is portrayed as a savage in a number of ways: he does not recognize the law of Zeus; he is a cannibal; he uses only rudimentary forms of agriculture planting neither wheat nor grapes. In this case, Odysseus is able to use the advantages of civilization, the wine, along with his own cleverness to defeat the savage.

In a number of myths, however, the hero must himself become a savage, by divesting himself of the trappings of civilization, in order to defeat the savage and bring civilization. In this paper I hope to explore two heroes, Beowulf and Herakles, and examine how and why each of them embraces savagery in order to become a bringer of civilization. These examples, from Greco-Roman and Germanic mythology also show the antiquity of the theme and its universality in Indo-European mythology as a subset of the larger *topos* of the civilization bearing hero.

BEOWULF⁵

Thanks to the prowess of Hrothgar, a chieftain of the Ring-Danes, his clan grew large enough for him to build a great mead-hall, which he called Heort: Heort naman.⁶ In the lengthy description of the hall given in the poem,⁷ it is described as one of the most magnificent structures ever built. In this hall Hrothgar feasted, gave out rings and torques, listened to bards and poets and did all those things that were a necessary part of Germanic culture and civilization. Hrothgar, in other words, establishes a civilization in a new area. It is precisely this, the feasting and singing that occurs in this hall as part of the new civilization, which brings down Grendel on Heort.⁸ Grendel, like Polyphemos, is portrayed as a savage, killing dozens of men at once,⁹ and consuming those he slays.¹⁰ No warrior among Hrothgar's men is able to withstand Grendel, until a hero arrives from across the sea, Beowulf. The defeat of Grendel by Beowulf is one of the climactic scenes in the saga

*Līc-sār gebād atol æglæca; him on ea xle
wearð syn-dolh sweotol; seonowe on-
sprungon, burston bān-locan. Bēowulfe
wearð gūð-hrēð gyfeþe; scolde Grendel
þonan feorh-sēoc flēon under fen-hleoðu,
sēcean wyn-lēas wīc; wiste þē geornor,
þæt his aldres wæs ende gegongen, dōgera*

4 GRIMM 1857, 1–30.

5 Beowulf, perhaps the most well-known example of Anglo Saxon literature, has received a great deal of scholarly attention. This was already true in 1936 when J.R.R. Tolkien wrote about the poem (TOLKIEN 1936, 245–295). An overview of literature on Beowulf can be found in FULK 1991. Research on the poem is ongoing, especially dealing with the genre and a newer study can be found in BREIZMANN 1998.

6 HEANEY 2000, 78.

7 HEANEY 2000, 64–98.

8 It is not specified, but Grendel seems to have been unknown before this.

9 HEANEY 2000, 120–125.

10 HEANEY 2000, 730–736.

*dæg-rīm.*¹¹

[“The monster’s whole body was in pain, a tremendous wound appeared on his shoulder. Sinews split and the bone-lapping burst. Beowulf was granted the glory of winning; Grendel was driven under the fen-banks, fatally hurt, to his desolate lair. His days were numbered, the end of his life was coming over him, he knew it for certain...”]¹²

The human hero grapples with the monster and conquers him with an act of brute force, ripping off his arm. This defeat contradicts what we learn of Beowulf in earlier parts of the saga. Beowulf arrives at Heort as a legendary hero and is outfitted as such; in fact, it is their gear that is the first topic of conversation between Beowulf’s warriors and one of the warriors of Hrothgar: *Hwanon ferigeað gē fætte scyldas, græge syrçyan ond grīm-helmas, here-sceafta hēap?*¹³ [“Where do you come from, carrying these decorated shields and shirts of mail, these cheek hinged helmets and javelins?”].¹⁴ Beowulf does not use this impressive panoply to defeat the monster; instead he uses his hands and rips off his arm. This is an unusual thing for a warrior to do, even in situations in which the bearing of weapons seems illogical, even counterproductive; the warrior carries both arms and armor. This is best seen in the description of Beowulf’s swimming contest against Brecca.¹⁵ This contest takes place on the open sea, where chain mail would be more of a hindrance than a help, but because of his weaponry, Beowulf is able to dispatch the sea monsters that attack him and win great fame.

The contest against Grendel of a different sort than Beowulf has encountered before. Beowulf has had much experience in battle, and is already a proven warrior: *forþan hīe mægenes cræft mīne cūþon: selfe ofersāwon, ðā ic of searwum cwōm, fāh from fēondum, þær ic fife geband, yðde eotena cyn, ond on yðum slōg niceras nihtes, nearo-þearfe drēah, wræc Wedera nīð –wēan āhsodon—forgrand gramum...*¹⁶ [because all knew of my awesome strength. They had seen me bolstered in the blood of enemies when I battled and bound five beasts, raided a troll-nest and in the night-sea slaughtered sea-brutes. I have suffered extremes and avenged the Geats (their enemies brought it upon themselves, I devastated them).]¹⁷ His battles so far, however, have been either against mortal enemies, such as the enemies of the Geats, or against natural monsters, such as the “sea-brutes.” Grendel is a different sort of enemy.

*Swā ðā driht-guman drēamum lifdon,
ēadiglice, oððæt ān ongan fyrene fremman
fēond on helle. Wæs se grimma gæst Gren-
del hāten, mære mearc-stapa, sē þe mōras
hēold, fen ond fæsten; fifel-cynnes eard*

11 HEANEY 2000, 815–823.

12 HEANEY 2000, 55.

13 HEANEY 2000, 333–335.

14 HEANEY 2000, 23, 25.

15 HEANEY 2000, 37–39.

16 HEANEY 2000, 418–424.

17 HEANEY 2000, 29.

won-sǣlī wer weardode hwīle, sibðan him
Scyppend forscrifen hæfde in Caines cynne
– þone cwealm gewræc ēce Drihten, þæs þe
hē Abel slōg. Ne gefeah hē þære fæhðe, ac
hē hine feor forwræc, Metod for þy māne,
man-cynne fram. þanon untýdras ealle on-
wōcon, eontenas ond ylfe ond orcnēas, swy-
lce gīgantas, þā wið Gode wunnon lange
þrāge; hē him ðæs lçan forgeald.¹⁸

[So times were pleasant for the people there until finally one, a fiend out of hell, began to work his evil in the world. Grendel was the name of this grim demon haunting the marches, marauding round the heath and the desolate fens; he had dwelt for a time in misery among the banished monsters, Cain's clan, whom the Creator had outlawed and condemned as outcasts. For the killing of Abel the Eternal Lord had exacted a price: Cain got no good from committing that murder because the Almighty made him anathema and out of the curse of his exile there sprang ogres and elves and evil phantoms and the giants too who strove with God time and again until He gave them their reward.]¹⁹

Grendel belongs in the same category with those mythical and magical, but evil, creatures that are the descendants of Cain. The unnatural origin of Grendel gives him a distinct advantage over the warriors who combat him; he uses magic to make his skin impervious to weapons.²⁰ Grendel is not alone in being immune to weapons in Germanic legend; in the *Nibelungenlied*, we learn that Siegfried, too, has this advantage: *Noch weiz ich an im mere daz mir ist bekant: einen lintrachen den sluoc des heldes hant. er bādete sich in dem bluote; sîn hût wart hûrnin. des snidet in kein wâfen. daz ist dicke worden schîn.*²¹ [About him too there is more that I know: a dragon was slain by the hero's hand. He bathed himself in its blood; his skin became horn. No weapon could cut him. This has been shown already]. Siegfried, unlike Grendel, is not able to do this with his own power, but through the magic of the dragon's blood and this story parallels that of Achilles, who was made immortal by his mother Thetis, except for his heel, which she was holding.²² These heroes are ultimately defeated, not by being overmatched by a more powerful foe, but by a flaw in their impervious skin. Grendel, on the other hand, has no such flaw, and it is the power of Beowulf that defeats him.

18 HEANEY 2000, 99-114.

19 HEANEY 2000, 9.

20 HEANEY 2000, 53.

21 *Das Nibelungenlied*, section 100.

22 Apollonius Rhodius, *Argonautica*, 4.869-872. The use of magic in this context is of great interest, and the immunity to weapons provides a good example. Grendel and, as we will discuss later, Antaios are immune to weapons through the magic they possess themselves. Opposed are heroes, such as Siegfried, Achilles and Herakles, who receive this advantage through the magic of others. While magic is not unknown to the "civilized," it is not the average mortal hero who can use it, and they must be assisted by gods or magic creatures. That the "uncivilized" can use magic underscores their otherness and their place outside of normal, "civilized" society.

Grendel's physical features are never described in the saga, but he is no mere monster: *Gewāt ðā nēosian, syþðan niht becōm, hēan hūses, hū hit Hring-Dene æfter bēor-þege gebūn hæfdon; fand þā ðær inne æþelinga gedriht swefan æfter symble—sorge ne cūðon, wonsceaft wera.*²³ [So, after nightfall, Grendel set out for the lofty house, to see how the Ring-Danes were settling into it after their drink, and there he came upon them, a company of the best asleep from their feasting, insensible to pain and human sorrow.]²⁴ He is imbued with a wicked intelligence. Despite his overwhelming strength and immunity to weapons, he still attacks Heort at its most defenseless, while the warriors are sleeping off their mead, and is therefore able to carry off thirty warriors with little resistance. This faceless, intelligent and murderous creature is the very embodiment of savagery, of the uncivilized. Grendel's presence is able to disrupt the civilizing influence that Heort was supposed to establish, and the inhabitants even turn to paganism in order to free themselves of the creature, themselves reverting to "savagery"²⁵ in order to get rid of the savage.

In order to defeat this savage, who is immune to the weapons of civilization, Beowulf must himself become as savage as Grendel, laying aside that which defines him as a Geat warrior, his arms and armor.²⁶ It is only by doing this, by becoming like Grendel, that the warrior is able to defeat the savage and to make the return to and the spread of civilization possible in Heort.

HERAKLES AND CACUS²⁷

*ecce, boves illuc Erytheidas adplicat heros
emensus longi claviger orbis iter.*

*dumque huic hospitium domus est Tegeaea, vagantur
incustoditae lata per arva boves.*²⁸

[Behold, there the club bearing hero drives the Erytheidan cattle

on his immense journey over the wide world.

While he enjoys the hospitality of the Tegeaeian home, the cattle

roam the wide fields untended.]

Herakles' journey to Italy, as described by Ovidius in the *Fasti*, seems to be going just as it should. As a traveler in a foreign land, Herakles is owed hospitality – *xenia* – under the law of Zeus. He receives this hospitality in the house of Tegeaeus, and it seems to be such a civilized and secure place, that Herakles allows his cattle to roam the fields free, without his own, or any other, supervision.

The civilized veneer of Italy is soon shown to be just that and we learn that a great savage, Cacus...*ferox* [vicious

23 HEANEY 2000, 115-120.

24 HEANEY 2000, 9, 11.

25 HEANEY 2000, 170-178.

26 See above pg. 40-41.

27 There are several versions of this story in Latin literature. The version I will focus on is that found in the *Fasti* of Ovidius. Other versions are included in the *Aeneid* of Vergilius and in *Ab Urbe Condita* by Titus Livius. In the *Aeneid*, like in the *Fasti*, Cacus is presented as a vicious monster, justly slain by Herakles. In the Titus Livius version, however, Cacus is presented as a shepherd, rather than a monster, and Herakles is nearly put on trial for his murder. For more on the other versions of this story c.f. POGORZELSKI 2008, 45-47.

28 Ovidius, *Fasti*, I, 543-546.

Cacus], lives nearby: *Cacus Aventinae timor atque infamia silvae* [Cacus, the terror of the Aventine and the shame of the forest].²⁹ Cacus does not respect the hospitality laws of Zeus, nor the ownership rights of Herakles and makes off with two of the bulls from his herd. Cattle rustling is an established *topos* in Indo-European mythology and appears in such works as the *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, the *Cattle Raid of Cooley*, in Irish literature. In the *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, just as in the Herakles/Cacus story, it is the uncivilized, the antagonist, who steals the cattle. Queen Medb attempts, by force of arms and sorcery, to steal Donn Cuailnge,³⁰ a bull that belongs to the kingdom of Ulster. She is resisted by Cú Chulainn, the legendary hero of Ulster.³¹ In Greek myth, the cattle raider is the “heroic activity *par excellence*,”³² Achilles, for example, kills the brothers of Andromache during a cattle raid and assault on their city.³³

By evoking the imagery of the cattle raid, this myth does two things, it casts Cacus in the role of the epic hero, and sets up the expectation of the reader for an encounter between epic champions. This expectation remains unfulfilled and Cacus is revealed as a savage. Herakles is removed from the realm of the civilization, from his stay at the *domus Tegeaea* house, and transferred to the realm of the *Aventinae timor*.³⁴ This transference is immediately followed up by two descriptions of Cacus, which serve to reinforce his savagery. The first description is of Cacus himself: *dira viro facies, vires pro corpore, corpus grande – pater monstri Mulciber huius erat* –³⁵ [the face of this man was wild, his strength was like his body, which was large – the father of this monster was Mulciber (a name of Vulcan)—]. Like Grendel, Cacus, as the son of Mulciber, is not of human origin, and his savagery is reflected not only in the way he looks, but also in the horror he visits *finitimis hospitiibusque* [for neighbors and foreigners]. The second is the description of his cave: *proque domo longis spelunca recessibus ingens, abdita, vix ipsis invenienda feris. ora super postes adfixaque brachia pendent, squalidaque humanis ossibus albet humus*.³⁶ [for his house he used a deep cave, hidden away, difficult even for the wild animals to find. There were heads affixed on posts, and hanging arms, and the dirty ground was white with human bones]. In this description, the savagery of Cacus is escalated from a cattle raider, which, though the act of a barbarian is a human activity, to something much more sinister. Like Grendel, Cacus drags his human victims, as well as his bovine victims, to his cave where he mutilates their bodies, and, although there is no overt mention of cannibalism, the scattered bones, which make the very ground white, seem to suggest it.

Against this semi-divine, cattle stealing, homicidal, possibly cannibalistic savage is set Herakles. Herakles is a problematic Greek hero, as he has a savage streak himself. Herakles is, like most Greek heroes, semi-divine. He is,

already as an infant, targeted by the goddess Hera, but is able to evade her assassination attempt using poisonous snakes thanks to his extraordinary strength. Hera’s enmity ultimately brings out the savage in Herakles, as she drives him to madness and he slaughters his wife and children.³⁷ Modern readers would react with sympathy, but madness is not an excuse to the ancients, as is seen in the example of Ajax son of Telamon. Ajax, too, is driven to madness, by Athena, and he slaughters a herd of cattle, Ajax commits suicide because of the shame.³⁸

Herakles is also not equipped as a Greek hero should be. Like Beowulf, the riches and origin of the arms and armor a hero carries reflect his *kleos*, his glory.³⁹ This is seen in numerous examples in the Iliad. Nestor, the wisest of the kings at Troy, carries a golden shield.⁴⁰ Hector, the foremost warrior of Troy, strips Achilles’ armor from the dead body of Patroclus and wears it himself, despite having a perfectly good set of armor himself.⁴¹ The new, divinely created, weapons Achilles receives from his mother are described in a lengthy *ekphrasis*, describing every detail of the new shield.⁴² Instead of brazen armor, sword, shield, helmet and spear, the usual panoply of a Greek warrior, Herakles wields a club, which emphasizes both his strength and his barbarity, he also uses a bow, a weapon looked down on in Greek society.⁴³ His armor too, links him with barbarity; he wears the skin of the Nemean lion, impenetrable to weapons, like the skin of Grendel. Herakles, unlike Beowulf, has already divested himself of the usual aspects of the Greek hero; this makes him the most suitable for the task of conquering the savage. It is not only in the setting aside of arms, however, that Herakles is drawn into the world of the savage, but through the movement in the narrative.

servata male parte boum Iove natus abibat:

mugitum rauco furta dedere sono.

‘accipio revocamen’ ait vocemque secutus

*impia per silvas ultor ad antra venit.*⁴⁴

[the son of Jupiter departed with the rest of the ill protected herd:

(then) the stolen ones lowed with a hoarse sound.

‘I hear you calling me back’ he said following the voices,

and the avenger came through the forest to the impious cave]

Herakles is about to continue his journey with his remaining cattle, putting his brush with the uncivilized behind him. He is called back by a reminder of the cattle raid, the lowing of the stolen bulls. This pulls him back to the realm of the uncivilized, and he goes deeper and deeper into it *per silvas*, through the forests, until he reaches the very center of the savagery, the cave of Cacus. The physical

37 c.f. Euripides *Herakles* for the most well known version of these events.

38 Ajax’ shame is explored in the drama *Ajax* by Sophocles.

39 Sometimes the arms and armor mentioned seem even more ceremonial than functional.

40 Homer, *Odyssey*, VIII, 157-211.

41 Homer, *Odyssey*, XVII, 140-197.

42 Homer, *Odyssey*, XVIII, 468-607.

43 The bow was the weapon of choice of the Persians, very few Greek heroes use a bow: Herakles, Ajax the lesser and Philoctetes being the best examples.

Herakles was much more closely associated with the club than with the bow.

44 Ovidius, *Fasti*, VI, 559-562.

29 Ovidius, *Fasti*, I, 551.

30 DUNN 1914, sections 1-2.

31 DUNN 1914, section 4.

32 JOHNSTON 2008, 117.

33 Ovidius, *Fasti*, VI, 490-500.

34 Like Grendel, Cacus enters into a place of civilization and brings savagery with him.

35 Ovidius, *Fasti*, VI, 553-554.

36 Ovidius, *Fasti*, VI, 555-558.

movement of the hero from the civilized into the uncivilized is paralleled in the Polyphemos narrative in the *Odyssey*,⁴⁵ in which Odysseus journeys with his men from the ships to the cave of the Cyclops. In *Beowulf*, too, *Beowulf* must travel across the sea to combat the savage.

When Herakles reaches the cave of Cacus there must be a battle, in which the uncivilized can be extinguished. In this battle, the two match weapons and their divinely inherited talents: *prima movet Cacus conlata proelia dextra remque ferox saxis stipitibusque gerit. quis ubi nil agitur, patrias male fortis ad artes confugit et flammis ore sonante vomit.*⁴⁶ [first, Cacus began the battle, laying about with his right hand. The wild one wielded weapons as well, stones and branches. When these brought nothing, he took, because of his cowardice, recourse in the arts of his father⁴⁷ and, yelling, spewed flames from his mouth]. All the savage power of Cacus was of no avail against Herakles, who, using the divine strength he possessed, flushed Cacus out of his lair by knocking over his cave⁴⁸ and then is able to kill him by striking him in the face with his club.⁴⁹ Just as we saw in the *Beowulf* narrative, in the very center of Cacus' power, the savage is defeated by the hero who becomes a greater savage still.

Despite his conquest, Herakles does not replace Cacus as the *timor Aventinae*. Instead, he immediately institutes civilization by sacrificing to Jupiter: *immolat ex illis taurum tibi, Iuppiter, unum victor*⁵⁰ [the victor sacrificed one of these bulls to you, Jupiter]. In this way he makes up for the impious theft of the cattle and the breach in the hospitality laws by instituting the worship of Jupiter. After the sacrifice Herakles calls the local people: *Euandrum ruricolae vocat*⁵¹ [he called Euander and the farmers], and together they build a great altar on the spot, which later becomes the *Forum Boarium*. The end of the narrative has Herakles, like *Beowulf*, bringing the normal order of civilization to the area that was plagued by the savage. The sacrifice and altar built by Herakles, the bringing of proper religion, mirrors the return of Christianity to the people of Heort, who had turned to the pagan gods to help them. The feast held in Heort, the proper use for the mead hall, to celebrate the death of Grendel mirrors the arrival of the *ruricolae*, the tillers of the soil, who bring agriculture to the area, and put the land to its proper use.

HERAKLES AND ANTAIOS

ταύτης ἐβασίλευε παῖς Ποσειδῶνος Ἀνταῖος, ὃς τοὺς ξένους ἀναγκάζων

παλαίειν ἀνήρει. τούτω παλαίειν ἀναγκαζόμενος Ἥρα κλῆς ἀράμενος ἄμμασι μετέωρον κλάσας ἀπέκτεινε: ψάουοντα γὰρ γῆς ἰσχυρότερον συνέβαινε γίνεσθαι, διὸ καὶ Γῆς τινες ἔφασαν τοῦτον εἶναι παῖδα.⁵²

[The son of Poseidon, Antaios, ruled this land (Libya), he compelled

passersby to wrestle and kill them. Herakles,

⁴⁵ See above pp. 38-39.

⁴⁶ Ovidius, *Fasti*, VI, 569-572.

⁴⁷ Again, as we saw above, it is the savage who uses magic, while the hero does not have this capability. Once again, the ability to use magic underscores the otherness of the savage and his place outside society.

⁴⁸ Ovidius, *Fasti*, VI, 564-568.

⁴⁹ Ovidius, *Fasti*, VI, 575-578.

⁵⁰ Ovidius, *Fasti*, VI, 579-580.

⁵¹ Ovidius, *Fasti*, VI, 580.

⁵² Pseudo-Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca*, 2, 5, 11.

compelled to wrestle this man,

killed him by breaking him in half after picking him up from the ground:

he became stronger standing touching the ground, because of this some have said

that he was a child of Gaia.]

This narrative, found in the *Bibliotheca* of Pseudo-Apollodorus, is of the second of the Herakles stories we will discuss in this paper. Once again, Herakles is pitted against a foe that seems unbeatable thanks to magical power of divine origin. Antaios is the son of Poseidon and of (though there seems to be some disbelief about this Appollonius' part) Gaia and, as long as he is in contact with the ground he is invincible. Like many of the children of the Sea gods, as opposed to the numerous children of Zeus, Antaios is not a hero, but a savage.⁵³

The narrative begins by saying that Antaios ἐβασίλευε, ruled, the land of Libya. By using this term, the author implies a nation with a system of governance, a civilization. He is not, as Cacus was, termed a terror or a monster; he is a *basileus*, a king. The expectation of the reader is not met, however, and the savage nature of Antaios is soon made clear. Like Cacus and Polyphemos, Antaios savagery is first revealed in his disdain for the *xenia* laws of Zeus. Instead of inviting a foreigner into his home, as is proper, Antaios forces him to wrestle and kills him. If the king himself does not follow one of the fundamental laws of the Greek world, then this is no civilization, but a place of chaos.⁵⁴ Further savagery is described by Pindar in Isthmian Ode 4:

Θηβᾶν ἀπὸ Καδμεϊᾶν μορφᾶν βραχύς, ψυχᾶν δ' ἄκαμptos, προσπαλαίσων ἦλθ' ἀνήρ

τὰν πυροφόρον Λιβύαν, κρανίοις ὄφρα ξένων ναὸν Πoσειδάωνος ἐρέφοντασχέςθαι,

υἱὸς Ἀλκμήνας

[to wheat-bearing Libya from Thebes came a man, of the Kadmeian race, the son of Alkmene (i.e. Herakles), short of stature, in order to wrestle with him who wreathed the temple of Poseidon with the skulls of strangers as with wreaths].

Not only does Antaios kill the strangers that come to his country, but, like Cacus, he mutilates their bodies and uses their heads as decoration. What savage acts Antaios commits with the rest of the body is not stated, however, it is probably safe to assume that he does not give his victims a proper funeral.

As was the case in the Cacus myth, Herakles journeys into the realm of the uncivilized, into the land of Libya. Here he again faces a monster that attempts to match their semi-divine power against his, and loses. In this myth, however, Herakles divests himself of even his club, fighting hand to hand, like *Beowulf* fighting Grendel. Again the word choice of the author seems to mask the true savagery of the contest. Herakles goes to Libya προσπαλαίσων, in order to wrestle. Wrestling is a civilized contest and one that is well known throughout the Greek world, being one of the sports in

⁵³ This seems to reflect the fear the Greeks felt for the sea, which despite the best efforts of shipwrights could easily destroy a vessel that sails out of sight of land.

⁵⁴ Not to mention that murdering any travelers must have been detrimental to trade, diplomacy, etc.

which a young man is educated in school, and a sport that is played at every major festival game. Herakles, though, lifts Antaios off the ground, cutting him off from the power of his mother, and crushes him to death, this is not the normal outcome of a wrestling match, and reflects rather the power of Herakles overmatching the power of Antaios.

CONCLUSION

Grendel, Antaios and Cacus, all monsters who are defeated in myth, and whose defeat allows for the land where they lurked to be settled and brought into civilization. Do these monsters, however, merely represent the danger inherent in colonization, or is this a more primal myth? The disparate nature of the myth, being found in Germanic, Roman and Greek mythology, among others, suggests that it is of a very ancient mythological type. The similarities between these monsters and Polyphemos suggest that they, too, represent *palaeolithic* man, dispossessed by the arrival of the Indo Europeans. All three of these creatures live in a remote lair, usually a cave, they do not have any agriculture, but subsist on what they can hunt, which includes humans. In Greco-Roman myth, however, a few details have been added, the adornment of Cacus' cave and the Temple of Poseidon with human heads. This seems to be an attempt to update the myth to bring it into line with what the Greeks saw as they colonized new territory in Europe. The Celts and Germans were avid headhunters, and adorned their homes with the severed heads of important enemies. The *palaeolithic* man is replaced with the newer savage, those barbarians who live around the newly established Greek colonies.

Why, though, must the hero become a savage in order to bring civilization? This may just be a reflection of reality, before the newly established city, or village could be safe enough to allow individuals to specialize, the very definition of civilization, it was necessary for everyone to concern themselves with the business of survival: finding food, building shelter, fighting off enemies. Another possibility is found in the religious festivals of the Ancient Athenians. In the *Thesmophoria*,⁵⁵ for example, women would leave their homes and celebrate away from their families.⁵⁶ Beyond the "agrarian magic" and fertility rituals of this festival, the absence of the women, as well as the hostility toward men inherent in the ritual, represent a breakdown of civilization, a "verkehrte Welt" [reversed world]. The end of the festival returned the world to its normal state,⁵⁷ and the simulated breakdown of order forestalled an actual breakdown of society. In the same way, the heroes simulate a breakdown of civilization, discarding that which marks them out as heroes and moving into an unknown area, and by doing so forestall an actual breakdown of society, in fact make it possible for civilization to expand.

Whether as an expression of racial memory, or a type of sympathetic magic meant to forestall the breakdown of society, or even a mix of the two, these stories represent a primal side of humanity, savagery and chaos, that can only be overcome when it is understood and embraced, as the heroes

55 A festival of the goddess Demeter.

56 BURKERT 1985, 104-105, 242-246, 258-259.

57 This re-establishment of order in society is paralleled in these myths by the restoration of "proper" religious worship, Christianity in Beowulf and the worship of Jupiter in the Herakles/Cacus myth.

have to embrace savage forces in order to destroy them.

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