

Cyclopes vs big dan teague essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Lucas Chaney 2/19/2013 When analyzing the movie "O Brother Where Art Thou", it becomes obvious that there are many similarities between the characters in the movie and those in Homer's *Odyssey*. One scene where this is exceptionally apparent is when Everett and company sit down to eat with Big Dan Teague outside of a restaurant. Describing himself as "a man with a large appetite", Big Dan consumes copious amounts of food in the same manner that Polyphemus the Cyclopes devours Odysseus's men. Both characters are single-eyed, gluttonous beasts that seem to have little concern for anyone but themselves.

An example of this can be seen in some of Polyphemus's first words to Odysseus. "You are dumb, stranger, or from far away, if you ask me to fear the gods. Cyclopes don't care about Zeus or his aegis or the blessed gods, since we are much stronger" (9. 265). While Polyphemus has power over humans due to his superior size and strength, Big Dan uses his persuasive abilities and "gift of gab" to take advantage of Everett and his companions. Although different methods are used, both characters end up receiving a meal from their victims.

Another important similarity is the theme of expected *xenia* that both characters share. Just as Polyphemus demands wine from Odysseus, Big Dan asks Everett to pick up the bill, and proceeds to eat their leftover food afterwards. While there are countless possible comparisons between these two characters, the most important trait that they both share is the shepherd's role that they play. Unlike a traditional shepherd who values his sheep as if they were companions, these characters seek only to gain personal benefits from their sheep.

Polyphemus is a shepherd in a more literal sense, as he guides and cares for his livestock with the intention of using them for food in the future. Big Dan however, provides his “sheep” with “answers from the book that’s got em”, the Holy Bible. This modern Cyclopes steals money from his subjects in order to further feed his growing power, just as Polyphemus grows stronger with each human that he eats. These characters’ shared desire for power is eventually diminished when they meet an eerily similar fate. His lids and brow were all singed by the heat from the burning eyeball and its roots crackled in the fire and hissed like an axe-head or adze a smith dips into water” (9. 388). The single eye that gives each villain his power is pierced with a burning stake in both accounts. Ironically, it is a burning cross that falls and crushes Big Dan, a symbol of retribution from God for taking advantage of his people. While the characters of Polyphemus and Big Dan serve as a great tool to compare two completely different eras of history, the shepherd’s role that they play can also link their shared story to other points in time.

In Homer’s *Odyssey*, Polyphemus milks his goats only so that he may have milk with his supper. “Then, he sat down and milked the ewes and bleating goats, all in good order, and put the sucklings beneath their mothers” (9. 247). Similarly during World War Two, Hitler stole the milk from the great mother figure of Germany. In his 1941 speech to the Reichstag, Hitler used propaganda to persuade his followers that declaring war on the British was inevitable and necessary. Just as Big Dan persuaded Everett and company to walk into a trap, so to did Hitler when he convinced his people to go to war.

In this way, Hitler represents a corrupt shepherd with the same agenda as both characters from the *Odyssey* and “O Brother”. Although the plot progression from this “O Brother” scene and Homer’s *Odyssey* might not translate directly to 1940s Germany, the role of the villain in each remains the same. All three stories tell of a “shepherd” of sorts, who leads his sheep down the wrong path. Hitler might not have only one eye, but his cunning demeanor and sly words are adaptations of the same trickery used by the Cyclops Big Dan Teague.

Furthermore, the presence of “sheep” in each context strengthens the argument that each of these characters was a shepherd figure. Like sheep, many people in Germany during WWII were unable to think for themselves, and required a guiding hand. While there are some who take on the role of shepherd out of love and compassion for the poor sheep, others aspire to the role of shepherd out of the delusion they know what’s best for others, when really it is their own personal interests that drive them to do so.