

The Vision of the Cyclops in Theocritus' *Idylls* 6 and 11

This paper explores Theocritus' representation of the Cyclops' vision (what he sees, and how he appears) in *Idylls* 6 and 11. Scholars have noted that the portraits of Polyphemus in these two poems are naturally related, though not necessarily consistent with each other (Hunter 1996; Payne 2007). In *Idyll* 6 Polyphemus and the flirtatious Galatea (as they are imagined by the herdsmen Daphnis and Damoetus) seem more evenly matched than they are in *Idyll* 11, in which the narrator uses Polyphemus' (metrically clumsy) song to demonstrate the poetic "cure" for lovesickness. Still, the portrayal of Polyphemus in both poems is less than flattering; he becomes, as Fantuzzi puts it, a "grotesque parodic monster," bearing little relation, for example, to Bion's Cyclops (Fantuzzi and Hunter 2004, 184). Theocritus evidently draws on the sexual ambiguity that has been attributed to the Homeric Cyclops: aspects of the Polyphemus episode (e.g., cave/womb; blinding/rape) emasculate the *aner pelorios* (*Od.* 9.187), "symbolically feminizing" him (Schein 1996; cf. Hernandez 2000). My claim is that Theocritus' (blindly) narcissistic Cyclops is informed in part by tragic models of male desire in the idylls as well as the comic characterization of female agency (in the idylls as well as Herodas' *Mimiambes*) as unstable, vengeful, uneducated, sexually frustrated, and lacking self-awareness despite obsessive self-absorption. Central to the argument are the liminal, indeterminate (seaside) settings of these two poems and their inconclusive, aporetic endings, the visual identification of Polyphemus with his dog (*Id.* 6.10-14, 28-38), and Polyphemus' self-descriptions, which are longer and more detailed than those of other male singers in the idylls (cf. Morrison 2007, 247).

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