

**Cyclops (Theocritus *Idyll 11*)** A brief introduction to Theocritus can be found in **Norton** p. 547

There's no drug, Nicias, to cure desire: no  
Hot compress, powder, ointment, or suspension  
Except for song: a sweet alleviation,  
But not so easy sometimes. You should know.  
You're a doctor; and, what's more, the nine  
Muses love you, better than they love most.

So it was that back in Sicily long ago  
The Cyclops Polyphemus made the best of it  
When he began to desire Galatea,  
When the first soft-sprouting hair began to grow  
Along his jaw and above his upper lip.

His desire eclipsed convention; there was no  
Sending apples, or roses, or exchanging locks  
Of hair, none of the usual things. He was  
Truly insane, could think of nothing else.

He often sat alone, awake at dawn  
Among the piles of seaweed by the shore;  
Melting with desire he sang to her,  
Leaving his sheep to find their own way home.  
Wounded deep, the barb beneath his heart  
Of Aphrodite's arrow, he found this balm;  
From the high cliffs staring out to sea  
He sang this song:

"White Galatea, whiter than cottage cheese,  
Why cast away the one who loves you?  
Softer than lamb's wool, springier than the knees  
Of a newborn calf, bright as an unripe grape,  
Why come near when sweet sleep holds me still  
Then disappear when sweet sleep lets me go?  
I wake to see you bolting up the hill  
Like the sheep who saw the gray wolf.

I loved you instantly, the day you came  
With my mother to gather hyacinths on the  
mountain.

I led you along the path. It's been the same  
Ever since: I saw you, I can't stop.  
But you don't care. I don't mean a thing to you.

Delightful girl, I know why you run away.  
My looks are frightening. I know it's true,  
One long shaggy eyebrow runs from ear to ear  
With one huge eye below. My nose is flat  
And wide. Yet, as I am, I keep a thousand head  
Of cattle, and from them I fill a vat  
Of the best milk to drink. All year round  
I never run out of cheese, not even in  
The coldest winter. My baskets are always full.  
I play the pipe as no other Cyclops can,  
And sing, sweet apple, of you and of myself,  
Often late at night. For you I raise  
Eleven gentle fawns, and four bear-cubs.

Come to me, and you will spend your days  
No worse off than before. Leave the sea,  
The gray-green sea, to pound against the sand.  
Come spend the pleasant nights curled up beside me  
In my cave, where there is laurel and  
Slender cypress, sweet ripe grapes, and ivy  
Dark black-green, and from the cold bright snow  
Of Aetna's forests, fresh cold water, a drink  
Good enough for any goddess. Who  
Would trade these things for seaweed and salt surf?

But if I am too shaggy, look: I have  
Oak logs, and, unquenched by covering ash,  
The spark of never-wearying fire within my cave.  
I could endure being singed to the quick by you—  
My only eye, the sweetest thing to me,  
I'd let you burn it.

Mother! Why was I born  
Without gills? I would dive into the sea,  
Galatea, and kiss your hand—since you

Would never let me kiss your mouth—and bring  
Small white crocuses to you, or tender red  
Poppies with broad petals, blossoming  
In summertime. I could not bring you both  
(Since crocus blooms when snow is on the  
pasture)  
Together at the same time. Galatea, sweet girl,  
I'll learn to swim right now, if only a stranger  
Will come here in a ship and show me how.  
I'll know then why you love to live in the brine.

Come out, Galatea, come out, and you'll forget,  
As I do now, to go back home again.  
Come be my shepherdess, and help me milk  
The sheep and cows, come help me set the  
cheese.

I blame my mother. She never says a word  
To you on my behalf; she lets you tease  
Me constantly, she lets me waste away.  
I'll tell her that my head hurts, so she'll worry.  
I'll tell her both my feet are swollen up.  
I want her to feel sorry, since I'm sorry.

Cyclops, Cyclops, have you lost your mind?  
Go weave your baskets, go and milk the ewe  
That's here, don't chase the one that runs away.  
Figure out the sensible thing to do,  
And do it. That's always the best way.  
You'll find another Galatea, maybe,  
A prettier one. Many girls seek me out,  
Calling in the night, "come play with me"—  
Giggling when I answer. Here on dry land  
It's clear that I am someone of importance."

And so the Cyclops shepherded the hills  
Of his desire with song, the Muses' salve,  
More surely than he could with doctor's bills.