

## THEOCRITUS' IDYLL 11: LOVE, BLINDNESS AND GLORY

### IDÍLIO 11 DE TEÓCRITO: AMOR, CEGUEIRA E GLÓRIA

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#### Abstract

Perhaps the strangest feature of Theocritus' Idyll 11 is the fact that the Hellenistic poet selects a mythological creature notorious for its barbarism and inhumanity, in order to validate his thesis that poetry is the only medicine for love, the most distinctively ennobling and human of all emotions. The aim of this article is to demonstrate that Theocritus has chosen Polyphemus as an exemplum for his premise because he had been consistently associated in mythology with being blinded. His intention is to show through an elaborate network of interconnected verbal repetitions, as well as literary allusions, which essentially create a subtext to his work, that love, at least as it is experienced by the main character of the Idyll, is a form of self-inflicted blindness, but that, nevertheless, it entails a kind of personal glory. Although Galatea does not respond to Polyphemus' erotic call, his repeated singing incorporates her —irrespective of her will — into his life; in her absence she is always present, in his erotic failure the Cyclops artistically succeeds. This contiguity of opposites constitutes the core of Theocritus' proposed medicine: he wants to remain perpetually in love and through his art to make this feeling a part of his everyday life. This is the only way he can control it. In true Hellenistic fashion his principal aim is not erotic gratification, but poetic success. And love exacerbated, but ultimately controlled through song, love condemned to remain unfulfilled, is his chief helper in this task. It is the “blindness” that leads to his glory.

**Keywords:** Theocritus, Idyll 11, Blindness, Glory.

### Resumo

A maior singularidade do Idílio 11 de Teócrito encontra-se provavelmente no facto de o poeta helenístico ter escolhido uma criatura mitológica marcada pelo barbarismo e pela desumanidade para validar a tese segundo a qual a poesia se apresenta como o único bálsamo para o amor – a mais nobre e humana das emoções. O objetivo deste artigo é demonstrar que Teócrito escolheu Polifemo como *exemplum* da sua premissa por esta criatura ter sido constantemente associada na mitologia à cegueira. A intenção do poeta é a de revelar, através de uma elaborada rede de repetições verbais interrelacionáveis e de alusões literárias que funcionam como um subtexto do seu trabalho criativo, que o amor, pelo menos tal como é experienciado pelo protagonista do Idílio, é uma forma de cegueira autoinflingida, que, apesar de tudo, encerra uma espécie de glória pessoal.

Embora Galateia não responda ao apelo erótico de Polifemo, o canto incessante do amador incorpora-a involuntariamente na sua vida; mesmo ausente, Galateia está sempre presente. Apesar do seu falhanço erótico, o Ciclope triunfa artisticamente. Este jogo de opostos está no âmago da medicina proposta por Teócrito: ele deseja continuar apaixonado e, através da sua arte, este sentimento passa a fazer parte do seu quotidiano. Essa é a única maneira de controlar o amor. Fiel à tradição helenística, o seu propósito não é o de alcançar a gratificação erótica, mas sim o sucesso poético. E o amor exacerbado, mas controlado pelo canto, o amor condenado ao incumprimento é o principal móbil nesta tarefa. É a cegueira que o leva à glória.

**Palavras-chave:** Teócrito, Idílio 11, cegueira, glória.

Perhaps the strangest feature of Theocritus' Idyll 11 is the fact that the Hellenistic poet selects a mythological creature notorious for its barbarism and inhumanity, in order to validate his thesis that poetry is the only medicine for love, the most distinctively ennobling and human of all emotions. What is more, further from disconnecting the Cyclops Polyphemus from the previous mythological tradition, especially from his ghastly appearance in *Odyssey* 9, Theocritus constantly alludes to it, in a conscious effort to encourage the reader to perceive the significance of his work in the backdrop of his great predecessor's epic.<sup>1</sup> The apparent incongruity

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<sup>1</sup> It is not inconceivable that Theocritus might also have been influenced by Philoxenus of Cythera's now lost dithyramb or drama *Cyclops* or *Galateia*, where in all probability Odysseus had been depicted as imprisoned in Polyphemus' cave and trying to persuade the Cyclops to release him by promising to make Galateia fall in love for him by the use of magic, an offer that the Cyclops declined. See Hordern 1999: 450-451 and – on the genre of the poem – Sutton 1983. Relevant to the Idyll that we are examining is the likelihood

of the lovesick Cyclops reciting poetry with his previous depictions in mythology might lead to the conclusion that Theocritus' intention is ironic, that the situation itself undermines the seriousness of the basic contention and that the poet may even resort to playful self-deprecation.<sup>2</sup> The aim of this article is to demonstrate that Theocritus has chosen Polyphemus as an exemplum for his premise precisely because he had been consistently associated in mythology with being blinded. His intention is to show that love, at least as it is experienced by the main character of the Idyll, is a form of self-inflicted blindness, but that, nevertheless, it entails a kind of personal glory. Theocritus achieves his poetic purpose through an elaborate network of interconnected verbal repetitions, as well as literary allusions, which essentially create a subtext to his work. My task will be, therefore, to determine the precise significance of these repetitions<sup>3</sup> and to show how

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that in Philoxenus' poem Polyphemus asks the dolphins to tell Galatea that he was healing his love through the Muses (PMG 822). Theocritus also treats the story of Polyphemus and Galatea in Idyll 6 from a quite different angle, since it appears that it is the nymph who is now in love with the Cyclops. The theme of unrequited love is also present in Idylls 2 and 3.

<sup>2</sup> There are, roughly speaking, three schools of scholarship on this poem: the sincere school, according to which Polyphemus does find the cure for love through poetry (see for example Erbse 1965, Holtmark 1966 and Brooke 1971), the ironic school, which essentially posits that Polyphemus is not cured (see for example Goldhill 1988 and 1991, Gutzwiller 1991 and Schmiel 1993), and scholars who think that the thesis is to be taken seriously somehow in spite of the ironic exemplum and that the proper reading of Polyphemus' song leads to an affirmation of the thesis (see for example Spofford 1969). I am primarily in the third category. Throughout the article I am using Gow's OCT edition.

<sup>3</sup> Many of these repetitions have been already pointed out by previous scholars, especially Brooke 1971, but the significance assigned to them is in most cases entirely different. I am operating through the premise that repetitions in ancient Greek literature are most of the times designed to create a subtext to a literary creation, as they join its various parts together into a harmonious whole. Through them the ancient Greek poets gradually build an implicit "argument", which we – the modern interpreters – are called to decipher. The poet first defines his thesis, that unifies his poem; then this thesis is usually dissected into key pairs of verbal repetitions, consciously selected by the poet to ensure the unity of his creation and to impart the intended meaning to it. Most of the remaining recurrences are usually subconscious, but, nevertheless, perfectly aligned with the thesis of the poem, as the artist later realizes. After all, the semantic range of a word is usually defined by the mental particularities of each speaker, so that the reappearance of a word used by that speaker inevitably intertwines the two (or more) contexts. Therefore, every single verbal repetition is significant, whether it is conscious or unconscious, as it is subservient to the thesis. A similar process is followed by a scholar writing an article: he first conceives of his main argument; then he outlines the course of his argumentation, usually leaving the

they contribute to the production of the meaning that Theocritus intends to impart to his poetic creation.

To begin with, the existence of an addressee confers to the poem a confessional tone, while the emphatic position of οὐδέν ('nothing', 1) at the very beginning of the first verse categorically excludes any other alternative, preparing us, thus, for the surprise which comes to the reader two lines later: the presentation of the arts as the only medicine to love patently contradicts the popular belief that this feeling can be cured exclusively by the person who has inspired it.<sup>4</sup> What is more, this 'unnatural' contention is counteracted by the poet's verification that the resort to the Muses as a means of curing this 'disease' is natural (πεφύκει, 1). Right from the start Theocritus implicitly warns us that the kind of medicine that he refers to is not directly associated with any kind of erotic gratification. This impression is reinforced by the first adjective he uses to describe the effects of this medicine (κοῦφον, 3); thus, poetry does not erase the disease, but provides instead a relief from it,<sup>5</sup> an implication which limits semantically the φάρμακον itself. Perhaps we may even maintain that part of the 'sweetness' (ἄδύ, 3) of the medicine is that the feeling of love is to an extent sustained. Nicias' two attributes, the fact that he is both a doctor and a poet (5-6),<sup>6</sup> presumably assist him in understanding that a kind of balance needs to be struck between the exigency to cure a disease and the artistic desiderata, especially in the case where love is a potent source of inspiration for poetry.

The repetition of the word 'easy' as an adverb in the superlative (cf. ῥάδιον, 4 to ῥάιστα, 7) implies that by finding the medicine to love Polyphemus has succeeded in reaching such a balance,<sup>7</sup> while the past

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details and the intervening fillers to the inspiration of the moment. However, these fillers are most of the times consonant with his main premise and help prove it. My aim here is to backward-engineer this process of poetic creation and to trace the meaning of the text, as it is gradually produced. And although this task is rather precarious, as repetitions can be polyvalent (depending as they are on their context), the scholar might be assured that he has achieved his purpose, if he manages to construct a coherent argument in which every single verbal repetition is accounted for.

<sup>4</sup> See for example Longus' *Daphnis and Chloe* 2.7.7. For the topos of different kind of φάρμακα Gow 1952: 209 and Hunter 1999: 225 cite Aesch. *PV* 479-480 and Eur. *Hipp.* 516.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Spofford 1969: 22, n. 1.

<sup>6</sup> Nicias is also mentioned in *Idylls* 13.2, 28.7 and in epigram 8.3.

<sup>7</sup> See also Farr 1991: 484: "The Cyclops will guide and nourish his love in order to inspire his song".

continuous of the verb of the main sentence (διᾶγ', 7) emphasizes that the Cyclops goes through a prolonged experience, whereas healing has an instantaneous effect. Furthermore, Theocritus appropriates the mythological figure of the Cyclops (ὁ παρ' ἑμῖν, 7)<sup>8</sup> not only because he too experiences the feeling of love, but also because he resorts to the arts, while the adjective 'the ancient' (ὠρχαῖος, 8) denotes the timelessness of this phenomenon. Moreover, Polyphemus' young age (9) situates the action of the poem to a period prior to his well-known encounter with Odysseus and his comrades, encouraging thus the sympathy and – perhaps – the identification of the reader with him, and possibly urges us to view his situation through the lens of a rite of passage. Theocritus then proceeds to explain the nature of his love; his downright frenzy (ὀρθαῖς μανίας, 11) conceivably consists of the fact that he does not take active measures in pursuing his beloved (10), while he considers everything else – not only his daily activities, as the narrator subsequently explains, but also even the task of wooing her – as trifles. A correlation between Polyphemus' negligence of his herd and his own behaviour is established by the repetition of the personal pronoun (cf. αὐταί, 12 to αὐτός, 14);<sup>9</sup> it appears that love has reduced the Cyclops to the status of an animal; similarly to his untended sheep, he is out of control, an impression reinforced by the fact that instead of his familiar pastures he now finds himself singing at the shore. At the same time, the recurrence of his beloved's name (cf. 8 to 13) reveals to the reader the way that his erotic feelings are manifested; Polyphemus confines himself at singing. And it is precisely this act that creates an apparent ambivalence, since his song is both presented as a symptom of his disease and as the medicine for it (cf. αἰδῶν, 13 to ἄειδε, 18).<sup>10</sup> This ambivalence can be resolved if we take into consideration the change of setting between these two similar acts: while in the first instance the Cyclops sings at the shore, in the second case he sings on a high rock, gazing towards the sea.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, while the act of singing initially exacerbates his disease, it eventually relieves it; after reaching a climax, it naturally fades away (without, however, being erased

<sup>8</sup> Foster 2016: 93 is right in pointing out that the Doric word alludes to the mythological view that the Cyclopes dwell in Sicily.

<sup>9</sup> The verbal repetition is also noted by Du Quesnay 1979: 50.

<sup>10</sup> See also Gow 1952: 211, Hunter 1999: 220-221 and Foster 2016: 77.

<sup>11</sup> This change of setting has been noted by Farr 1991: 480-481, who maintains that in the second occasion Polyphemus sings another song which permits him to find the medicine to love. Gow 1952: 212 associates this scene with *Od.* 5.156.

altogether).<sup>12</sup> Polyphemus, thus, gains a measure of control over his disease by distancing himself from it, as the change of setting indicates. And in so doing not only does he follow a natural procedure, as the repetition of the noun φάρμακον (cf. 1 to 17) suggests, but also he accomplishes something difficult, as we are implicitly reminded by the recurrence of the verb ‘to find’ (cf. εὔρεϊν, 4 to εὔρε, 17).<sup>13</sup>

When Theocritus cites the Cyclops’ song, Polyphemus begins by complaining that Galateia repulses the person who loves her;<sup>14</sup> the participle used by the singer to refer to himself derives from the same verb as the participle previously applied to Nicias, who was loved by the Muses (cf. περιλημμένον, 6 to τὸν φιλέοντ’, 19), reinforcing, thus, our impression that Polyphemus’ erotic failure is ultimately due to his exclusive preoccupation with singing, a process which has, nevertheless, led him to discovering the medicine to love. On the other hand, the repetition of the adjective used to describe Galateia in the comparative degree (cf. λευκά, 19 to λευκοτέρα, 20),<sup>15</sup> as well as all the ensuing adjectives in the comparative degree (20-21), stress that Polyphemus is consumed with the singing of his beloved, because in his mind her features far surpass the reality of his mundane existence. This attitude retrospectively justifies the neglect of his daily tasks and suggests that through his song the Cyclops has idealized his beloved. Indeed, Polyphemus reaches the point of characterizing twice his sleep as ‘sweet’ (22-23), because he can see Galateia in his dreams,<sup>16</sup> while the repetition of the adverb οὔτως (cf. 7 to 22) implicitly emphasizes the pleasure that Polyphemus derives from this experience. However, when he proceeds by comparing his beloved to a sheep that flees at the sight of a wolf, an image which brings to our mind the Cyclops’ own untended sheep (cf. 12 to 24), we are left with the feeling that he cannot control her; not

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<sup>12</sup> As Faraone 2006: 89 maintains, the imperfect tense of the verb ἄειδε suggests that the song’s efficacy lay in its constant repetition. Moreover, Faraone formulates the interesting contention that Theocritus composed the opening lines of the Idyll as an allusion to both the poetic tradition of protective incantations and to the medical tradition of treating lovesickness as an actual disease.

<sup>13</sup> The repetition is noted by Dover 1971: 174.

<sup>14</sup> Hunter 1999: 229 compares this passage to Anacreon *PMG* 417.

<sup>15</sup> Bowie 2021: 758-759 compares ll. 19-20 to Longus 1.17.3.

<sup>16</sup> See Cairns 1972: 146, Hunter 1999: 231 and Payne 2007: 76-77. On the other hand, Gow 1952: 213 and Dover 1971: 177 believe that the lines mean that Galateia visits the shore while Polyphemus is asleep.

only does it appear that she shuns him, but also his constant singing for her and his consequent neglect of his usual activities has rendered Galatea into an obsession.

Then the frustrated lover recalls his first meeting with his object of desire, beginning his next sentence with the telling verb ἠράσθην (25),<sup>17</sup> which recurs twice in the frame of the poem (ἦρατο, 8 and 10); the repetition might underline again Polyphemus' young age, which, in its turn, might explain his inability to take active measures in pursuing her. And it is this inability, we may presume, which renders him incapable of controlling either her or his feelings for her, as it is made manifest by the application to Galatea of a verb that the narrator has used before to refer to the Cyclops' untended sheep (cf. ἀπῆνθον, 12 to ἦνθεσ, 26). Strangely enough, the Cyclops in his utter desperation following his beloved's apparent indifference reaches the point of invoking Zeus (29), something which comes in stark contrast with his attitude towards the supreme god in the *Odyssey*<sup>18</sup> and rather increases the reader's sympathy for his plight. On the other hand, the repetition of οὐδέν (cf. 1 to 29) reveals that Polyphemus has resorted to the arts because of Galatea's presumed indifference. However, we cannot be absolutely certain about the validity of this indifference, since there is a possibility that it is just an impression from the part of Polyphemus, an impression stemming from his low self-esteem.<sup>19</sup> This possibility is strengthened not only from the ensuing detailed list of Polyphemus' own repelling features (31-33),<sup>20</sup> but also from two sets of repetitions in the introductory remark of this list (cf. κόρα, 25 to 30 and φεύγεις, 24 to 30); these repetitions –taken into account together with their immediate context– suggest that the Cyclops does not actively woo Galatea. It is difficult (one might even say impossible) for us to know whether Polyphemus has expressed his feelings to his beloved and has been rejected by her or not.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>A verb which incites Hunter 1999: 232 to consider this passage as a potential echo of Sappho fr. 49.1 Voigt.

<sup>18</sup> See Hunter 1999: 233.

<sup>19</sup>See also Konstan 2021: 519; “Polyphemus' self-image is as negative as his perception of Galatea is idealized... It is only by imagining how Galatea sees him that he envisions himself as ugly”.

<sup>20</sup>The theme of unattractive features that repel the beloved reoccurs in Idyll 3.8-9, as Fowler 2016: 99 notes.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Foster 2016: 98, n. 61, who asserts that “Polyphemus' song may be directed to Galatea, but there is no indication that Galatea hears his song let alone refuses his overtures”.

Subsequently it seems that the Cyclops recognizes that his attitude is self-defeating and tries to compensate for his perceived flaws by enumerating the advantages of his lifestyle (34-37); the irony of the situation is, of course, that Polyphemus has for the time being abandoned this lifestyle in order to sing the praises of his beloved. However, it is this precise neglect that has helped the Cyclops find the medicine to love through his song, as the following lines (38-40) imply. When Polyphemus boasts that he can play the pipe like none other Cyclops (ὡς οὔτις...Κυκλώπων, 38), the reader, on the one hand, recalls Odysseus, who tricked him into believing that his name was ‘nobody’ and so managed to escape after blinding him;<sup>22</sup> it is probable, therefore, that we are encouraged by the poet to think that Polyphemus’ very preoccupation with his art is ‘blinding’ him in some way. On the other hand, the repetition of the word ‘Cyclops’ (cf. Κύκλωψ, 7 to Κυκλώπων, 38) reminds us that it is the act of singing itself that has led Polyphemus to the discovery of the medicine for love. The recurrence of the participle αἰδῶν (cf. 13 to 18 and 39) suggests the way that this development has been brought about: his song firstly exacerbates his disease and then relieves it by helping him gain a measure of control over it. But how exactly is his song ‘blinding’ the Cyclops? In persisting to sing in a regular basis Polyphemus seems to be forgetful of the fact that Galateia shuns him – whether this repulsion is real or only perceived. He continually sings of her (τίν, 39), although he had shortly before realized that she (τίν, 29) did not care at all and had invoked Zeus in his desperation; he characterizes her as someone that he loves (τὸ φίλον, 39), despite the fact that he began his song by complaining that she repulses the one who loves her (τὸν φιλέοντ’, 19). Therefore, it appears that Polyphemus’ sentimental, as well as artistic obsession is ultimately fomented by Galateia’s real or perceived indifference towards his feelings. Nevertheless, his song, resulting from this obsessive love, contains the medicine to it, as the participle that Theocritus had used in the idyll’s frame to refer to his addressee (πεφιλημένον, 6) implies. The metaphor that the Cyclops uses to praise his beloved (γλυκύμαλον, 39) is highly significant not only because its first part of the word was previously used to refer to his sleep (γλυκύς, 22 and 23), which was made sweet by Galateia’s presence in his dreams, but also because it recalls one of Sappho’s well-known fragments (105a);<sup>23</sup>

<sup>22</sup> See Kutzko 2007: 76-77.

<sup>23</sup> The literary allusion has been noticed by Dover 1971: 177, Hunter 1999: 235 and Kampakoglou 2021: 258.

the purpose of this literary allusion – which must be taken into consideration in combination with the verbal repetition - is to show that Polyphemus has idealized his beloved, since she has dominated his imagination; and the reason for this idealization is probably the fact that he has not pursued her in a more active way, as the recurrence of the word ‘apple’ suggests (cf. οὐ μάλοις, 10 to γλυκύμαλον, 39). And this idealization, that can also be attributed to Galateia’s indifference, justifies the Cyclops’ neglect of his daily tasks, a neglect of which we are subtly reminded by the recurrence of the adverb πολλάκι (cf. 12 to 40). Moreover, I believe that the rare – and one might say rather unusual – animals that Polyphemus rears for the sake of Galateia (40-41) probably serve to underscore this precise idealization of his beloved.<sup>24</sup>

Polyphemus then proceeds by inciting Galateia to leave the sea and to pass the night in the cave with him; however, the way that his invitation is phrased and, in particular, its verbal repetitions suggest that the last thing that the Cyclops has in his mind is the consummation of their relationship. He maintains that a night with him will be more pleasant (ἄδιον, 44) for Galateia, a contention which reminds us of the pleasantness of the medicine for love (ἄδύ, 3) brought about by the Muses. On the other hand, the mere reference of the night calls attention to the fact that Polyphemus habitually spends that part of the day singing for him and his beloved (cf. νυκτός, 40 to τὰν νύκτα, 44). Finally, the verb that the Cyclops uses brings once again to our mind art as a medicine for love (cf. διαῖγ’, 7 to διαξειῖς, 44). All this evidence implies that Polyphemus’ primary concern is the preoccupation with his singing and not his beloved *per se*; we are encouraged to think that what he will do in his cave is confine himself at singing for Galateia and not make love to her.

In his eagerness to persuade his beloved to prefer his abode, the Cyclops lists all the plants and the elements that feature it; all these characteristics of his dwelling are interconnected through the constant repetition of the verb εἶμι (45-48). In addition, all these attributes might have a symbolic significance: laurels are traditionally connected to glory, cypresses are associated with death, ivy and the vine are emblems of Dionysus and are, thus, linked with otherness, while water represents life. Furthermore, the adjective applied to the vine connects otherness to Galateia (cf. γλυκός,

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<sup>24</sup> On the other hand, Du Quesnay 1979: 68 maintains that these creatures’ ferocity and quantity render them more suitable to the donor than to the recipient, while Payne 2007: 79 asserts that they are offered to Galateia as playthings.

22-23 to γλυκύμαλον, 39 and to γλυκύκαρπος, 46), while the epithet used to describe the snow from which the water originates also links Polyphemos' beloved to life (cf. λευκά, 19 to λευκᾶς, 48). Moreover, the association of water to life is strengthened by the adjective 'immortal', as well as by its description as something to be drunk, which reminds us of the Cyclops' previous boast that he drinks the finest milk (cf. πίνω, 35 to ποτόν, 48); the repetition underscores the nourishing function and, therefore, the life-giving property of water. If we were to combine the interconnected symbolic significance of the various elements present in Polyphemos' cave, we might form the opinion that what Theocritus intends us to infer from these lines is that the Cyclops will gain glory through some kind of death, which will involve his contact with otherness, a process that will ultimately lead him to life. The recurrence of the word 'sea' (cf. θάλασσαν, 43 to 49) in his closing remark reiterates Polyphemos' contention and emphasizes the fact that he considers his dwelling as superior to Galatea's abode.

The Cyclops' attempt to compensate for his perceived disadvantages reaches its climax when he subsequently expresses his willingness even to blind himself, in order to become accepted by Galateia (50-53).<sup>25</sup> He had already included his shagginess among the features that repelled his beloved (cf. λασία, 31 to λασιώτερος, 50).<sup>26</sup> Now he is eager to sacrifice his only eye (cf. 33 to 53), which is most sweet to him, presumably because, as the various verbal repetitions make clear (cf. γλυκύς, 22-23 to γλυκύμαλον, 39 to γλυκύκαρπος, 46 and to γλυκερώτερον, 53), he can behold Galateia through it. The expression of this paradoxical willingness is introduced by the same verb that Polyphemos had previously used to advertise the features of his abode (cf. ἐντί, 45 to 51), urging us thus to assume that the kind of death that will bring him glory is connected to this self-inflicted blindness. Of course, this extravagant eagerness is the result of the influence of his erotic passion, that has caused him to lose control, as the recurrence of the personal pronoun suggests (cf. αὐτός, 14 to 50). However, this eagerness to blind himself can be considered as an integral part of the process of his

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<sup>25</sup> As Brooke 1971: 77 remarks, Galateia is here momentarily united with Odysseus. The allusion to *Odyssey* 9 and the dramatic irony is also noted by Gow 1952: 217, Spofford 1969: 33-34, Du Quesnay 1979: 46, Hutchinson 1988: 181, Fantuzzi 1995: 17, Payne 2007: 78 and Cusset 2021: 280. On the other hand, Foster 2016: 110 maintains that all the ominous allusions to Polyphemos' future blinding prefigure the similarly unhappy end of his courtship.

<sup>26</sup> This and the following repetition have been pointed out by Schmiel 1993: 230.

finding the medicine to this passion, an implication accentuated by the repetition of the verb 'to think' (cf. δοκεῖ, 2 to δοκέω, 50).

The next lines reinforce the latent idea that Polyphemus' wish to change is his weakness, but also constitutes part of the process of him discovering the medicine to love. When the Cyclops deplores the fact that his mother did not bear him with gills so that he might have dived towards Galateia and kissed her hand, the repetition of the word 'mother' (cf. μητρί, 26 to μάτηρ, 54) reminds us of the first meeting of Polyphemus with his beloved and, consequently, suggests that this wish can be perceived as a symptom of his love for her. On the other hand, the recurrence of the personal pronoun τίν (cf. 29 to 39 and to 55) and of the verb φιλέω (cf. πεφιλημένον, 6 to φιλέοντ', 19 to φίλον, 39 and to ἐφίλησα, 55) implies that the cause of this wish is the fact that Galateia repelled the Cyclops, something that has led to her idealization. At the same time, this idealization, which is due to his repeated song, helps him to find the medicine for love. The offerings that Polyphemus promises to his beloved, the white lilies and the soft poppy with red petals,<sup>27</sup> match her features (cf. λευκά, 19 to λευκοτέρα, 20 and to λευκά, 56; cf. ἀπαλωτέρα, 20 to ἀπαλάν, 57), something which justifies his neglect of his daily tasks, since Galateia is perceived as more valuable. This implication, in its turn, rationalizes her indirect comparison with the white snow (cf. 48 to 56), the provenance of the cool water in Polyphemus' cave, which, as we previously maintained, can be associated with life itself. However, the Cyclops' ensuing complaint that he will not be able to bring both together, because one grows in summer and the other in winter (τὰ μὲν θέρος, τὰ δὲ... ἐν χειμῶνι, 58) contrasts with his previous boastful claim that he does not lack cheese neither in summer, neither in autumn, not even in the depth of winter (οὔτ' ἐν θέρει... / οὐ χειμῶνος ἄκρω, 36-37), accentuating thus the weakness that his love causes him. This weakness is further underlined through the repetition of the verb 'can' (cf. δύναμαι, 29 to ἐδυνάθην, 59), which additionally emphasizes the obsessive nature of Polyphemus' love.

Scholars have already recognized that the Cyclops' subsequent willingness to learn how to swim, unless a stranger sails to his dwelling with a ship, so that he may know what pleasure it is to Galateia to live in the depths of the sea (60-62), contains an allusion to the coming of Odysseus and,

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<sup>27</sup> Segal 1981: 225 notes the incongruity of the flowers of the mountain offered to a sea-nymph and asserts that it "reflects the hopelessness of love itself".

consequently, to Polyphemus' blinding.<sup>28</sup> What has not been so far pointed out is that Odysseus is implicitly identified here with Galateia through the recurrence of the verb 'to arrive' (cf. ἀφίκευσο, 42 to ἀφίκηται, 61). On the other hand, the repetition of the word 'maiden' (cf. κόρα, 25 and 30 to κόριον, 60) suggests that Polyphemus' eagerness to change is a result of his love for Galateia and of his impression that she repels him. Nevertheless, his desire to alter himself for the sake of his beloved does not only bring about his 'blindness', but also proves to be an integral part of the discovery of the medicine for love through his singing, as the reappearance of the adjective 'pleasant' implies (cf. ἀδύ, 3 to ἄδιον, 44 and to ἄδύ, 62).

The following lines provide a further clue about the exact nature of this medicine. The Cyclops pleads with Galateia to come forth, to forget to go home again and to become a part of his pastoral reality (63-66), an invitation which – we might argue – constitutes the core purpose of his entire song. It goes without saying that this invitation is a result of his love for her (cf. ἦνθεσ, 26 to ἐξένθεισ, 63). Through his song this love is evolved into a disease, because Galateia repels the Cyclops, but, at the same time, she makes his life more beautiful (cf. Γαλάτεια, 8 to 13 to 19 and to 63). And through his song he is able to find the medicine for love (cf. καθεζόμενος, 17 to καθήμενος, 64)<sup>29</sup> due to the fact that he has neglected his daily tasks (cf. ἀπῆνθον, 12 to ἀπενθεῖν, 64). Part of this medicine is to urge Galateia to share his everyday life; the first time he saw her might have encouraged him to think that she would be willing to change her dwelling (cf. θέλοισ', 26 to ἐθέλοισ, 65). Should she choose to do so, she will not only enrich his life, but also – and this is far more important – she will validate his self-esteem, since she will occupy herself with the same activities which fomented the Cyclops' pride (cf. ἀμελγόμενος γάλα, 35 to γάλ' ἀμέλγειν, 65 and τυρός, 36 to τυρόν, 66); and this pride compensates his perceived shortcomings.

However, Theocritus does not allow us to forget the weakness that this love causes to the Cyclops, when he has him complain like a child<sup>30</sup> that his mother alone wrongs him, since she has never spoken a kindly

<sup>28</sup> See Gow 1952: 218, Dover 1971: 178, Du Quesnay 1979: 46, Goldhill 1988: 85-86, Hunter 1999: 239, Payne 2007: 78, Kutzko 2007: 78 and Ambühl 2021: 498.

<sup>29</sup> The repetition is noted by Farr 1991: 481.

<sup>30</sup> Ambühl 2021: 447-449 is right in characterizing Polyphemus as "a mother's child" and in maintaining that he is psychologically not still ready for an adult love relationship.

word to Galatea, despite the fact that she sees him growing thinner day by day; this resentment incites him to tell her that his head and both his feet ache, so that she may suffer as he does (67-71). The mention of his mother (cf. *ματρί*, 26 to *ἄ μάτηρ*, 54 and 67) encourages us to think that his attitude here is consonant to his previous unfulfilled wish that he had been borne with gills and that both reactions originate from his love for Galatea. On the other hand, the recurrence of the definite pronoun (cf. *αὐταί*, 12 to *αὐτός*, 14 and 50 and to *αὐτῶ*, 67) subtly reminds us that this love is exacerbated by his song and renders the Cyclops out of control. But, of course, therein lies the medicine to love, which is in its turn linked with Galatea's real or presumed repulsion of the Cyclops, a suggestion reinforced by the repetition of the word *οὐδέν* (cf. 1 to 29 and to 68) and of a participle derived from the verb 'to see' (cf. *ὄρων*, 18 to *ὀρεῦσα*, 69). And part of this medicine is, paradoxically enough, Polyphemus' idealization of Galatea which is created by his putative repulsion by her in the past, a repulsion that has led him to his constant singing of her praises. Not only does the Cyclops clearly abstain from assigning any responsibility for his predicament to his beloved, but also the reappearance of the personal pronoun (cf. *τίν*, 29 to 39 to 55 and to 68) and of a word derived from the verb 'to love' (cf. *πεφιλημένον*, 6 to *φιλέοντ'*, 19 to *φίλον*, 39 to *ἐφίλησα*, 55 and to *φίλον*, 68) rather serve to strengthen the above stated argument.

Nevertheless, in the course of his singing Polyphemus seems to realize that this love robs him of his personal power and tries unsuccessfully to regain some of it. This reversal comes naturally after the climax of his infirmity, when he had reverted to childish behaviour, and is supported by numerous verbal repetitions. First of all, the reappearance of his name (cf. *ὁ Κύκλωψ*, 7 to *Κυκλώπων*, 38 and to *ὦ Κύκλωψ*, 72) is a reminder that through his art he blinds himself, but ultimately manages to find the medicine to love. Secondly, whereas he had previously remembered the first time he saw Galatea, now he urges himself to go back to his usual pastoral activities (cf. *ἦνθεξ*, 26 to *ἐνθών*, 73). Despite the fact that he had previously promised to his beloved some offerings and had stated naively his incapacity to bring all at once, he is now satisfied to gather greenery for his lambs (cf. *ἔφερον*, 56 to *φέρειν*, 59 and to *φείροις*, 74). He comes to

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On the other hand, Konstan 2021: 520 suggests that "the ultimate cause of the Cyclops' frustrated passion is somehow connected with the distant mother".

believe that if he confines himself to these tasks, he will have more sense than before, when he was promising gifts to Galateia, in order to lure her out of her habitat (cf. ἐξεῖς, 42 to ἔχειν, 49 and to ἔχοις, 74). The exhortation to himself to milk the ewe that is present (cf. ἀμελόμενος, 35 to ἀμέλγειν, 65 and to ἄμελγε, 75) can be essentially construed as an incitement not to base his self-esteem on external validation, while the admonition not to pursue him that flees (cf. φεύγεις, 24 and 30 to τὸν φεύγοντα, 75) can be perceived as an encouragement to himself to be content with his external appearance and to not try to change. However, his tactic backfires when he tries to reassure himself that maybe he will find another, more beautiful, Galateia;<sup>31</sup> the mere mention of his beloved's name (cf. Γαλάτειαν, 8 to 13, 19, 63 and 76) seems to suggest that Polyphemos' new object of desire will also repel him – or at least he will think that she does – and, thus, his love for her will become obsessive through his (repeated) song;<sup>32</sup> the Cyclops will fail to conquer her, despite the fact that this new beloved might also enrich his life through his song.

This ominous implication is reinforced by the various verbal repetitions of the following three lines. When he tries to console himself with the thought that many maidens invite him to play with them at night, the reference to those maids (cf. κόρα, 25 and 30 to κόριον, 60 and to κόραι, 77) seems to suggest that a kind of vicious circle will be created: the enamoured Polyphemos, who suffers from low self-esteem, will create again the impression that his beloved repels him and will want in vain to change, because, as the recurrence of the word 'night' implies (cf. νυκτός, 40 to τὰν νύκτα, 44 and 77), he will idealize her through his song. Furthermore, the reappearance of the quantifier πᾶς (cf. παντί, 31 to πᾶσαι, 78) might signify that there is a possibility that all the maidens laugh because Polyphemos' external appearance (or even his concomitant lack of self-esteem as well) repulses them.<sup>33</sup> Under the influence of love and song the Cyclops will be once again out of control and his willingness to change will be a kind of self-inflicted blindness, as the repetition of the personal pronoun indicates (cf. αὐταῖς, 12 to 14, 50, 67 and 78). Consequently, Polyphemos fails to break out of the vicious circle of his

<sup>31</sup> Gow 1952: 220 compares this passage to *Od.* 21.250.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Gutzwiller 1991: 114, who suggests that "Polyphemos will react with the same lack of understanding to any new love".

<sup>33</sup> See also Goldhill 1988: 89 and Hunter 1999: 242. Cf. Hutchinson 1988: 180, Foster 2016: 108, Kampakoglou 2021: 263 and Palmieri 2021: 489.

love; the same psychological situation will perpetuate itself endlessly no matter who his beloved is. In his case, there are no real alternatives. So when he states proudly that he too seems to be somebody on the earth, in reality he is ‘nobody’ (cf. οὔτις, 38 to τις, 61 and 79),<sup>34</sup> without even realizing it, he is ‘blind’ and, what is more important, it is he who inflicts this condition upon himself.

The final two verses of the idyll resume the initial frame and verify that despite this self-inflicted ‘blindness’ Polyphemus has found the medicine to love. Apart from the repetition of his name (cf. 8 to 80), we are reminded that he fared easily when he was in love (cf. οὔτω...ῥάιστα δι᾿αγ’, 7 to Οὔτω...ῥᾶον δὲ δι᾿αγ’, 80-81; cf. also ἔρωτα, 1 to τὸν ἔρωτα, 80) and that he has accomplished something difficult (cf. οὐ ῥᾶδιον, 4 to ῥᾶον, 81). The means of this accomplishment is, of course, his preoccupation with the arts, which identifies the Cyclops to Theocritus’ addressee, Nicias (cf. Μοῖσαις, 6 to μουσίσδων, 81).<sup>35</sup> As a result of this concern his beloved becomes an integral part of his everyday life, although she never consents, as far as we know, to share the pastoral activities that characterize it (cf. ποιμαίνειν, 65 to ἐποίμαινεν, 80). And therein lies the key to the interpretation of the idyll: although Galateia does not respond to Polyphemus’ erotic call, his repeated singing incorporates her – irrespective of her will – into his life; in her absence she is always present, in his erotic failure the Cyclops artistically succeeds. This contiguity of opposites constitutes the core of Theocritus’ proposed medicine: he wants to remain perpetually in love and through his art to make this feeling a part of his everyday life. This is the only way he can control it. In Hellenistic fashion his principal aim is not erotic gratification, but poetic success. And love exacerbated, but ultimately controlled through song, love condemned to remain unfulfilled, is his chief helper in this task. It is the “blindness” that leads to his glory. And Polyphemus, a mythological figure traditionally associated with being blinded, is the most proper vehicle for this idea.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>34</sup> The verbal parallel between lines 79 and 61 has been noted by Payne 2007: 78. See also Kutzko 2007: 79.

<sup>35</sup> The above repetitions have been pointed out by Goldhill 1988: 90. See also Farr 1991: 483 and Schmiel 1993: 229.

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