

## Polyphemos' Lament

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*This poem is inspired by and in response to Homer's *Odyssey*. It builds on Polyphemos' speech to his favourite ram (9.447-460), the sympathetic tone of which is an example of the ambivalence and ambiguity towards the Cyclops and the eponymous hero Odysseus that is evident throughout Homer's epic poem and which I analyse in my critical essay in this same issue.<sup>2</sup>*

No more shall I see the sea, nor the ships on the horizon,  
nor the sheep that were taken from me  
with my sight and my sweet shield-like single eye  
that shone from my brow like the sun  
looking down from the sky.

No more shall I tend my fat thick-fleeced sheep,  
nor taste their white milk from well-wrought vessels,  
nor curdle it and set it aside in wicker baskets,  
nor milk my ewes and bleating goats,  
nor place the young beneath each dam.

No more shall I stroke the purple-dark fleece of my  
beloved ram, the best of all the flock – always the first  
to reach the tender grass of the mountain meadow,  
to drink from the cool streams and with his long stride  
to head for home at eventide.

Monstrously slaughtered upon the beach, feasted upon,  
          thighs burned, sacrificed to the son of Kronos  
by Noman and his men. They thought me a monster  
for I am different to them for  
I eat no bread and my meat is men.

I am no monster, born of the sea,  
          the monster is Noman who came from the sea  
to my land, my home and ate my cheese,  
ate my well-fed thick fleeced flocks,  
got me drunk and blinded me!

They took my own staff, sharpened it, heated it  
          'till it glowed then thrust it in my single eye

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<sup>2</sup> Based on the following works: Homer, *Odyssey*, 9.105-566; Theocritus, *Idylls* 6 and 11; Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 13.738-897.

whirled it round and whirled it round,  
'till the root of my eyeball crackled  
and my lids and my brow singed!

I groaned! I wailed! Laboured in pain,  
tricked by Noman and tricked again  
when he made off with the sheep  
I tended so gently, the sheep  
I shall see and tend no more.

I smell the apples, grapes, strawberries, cherries and plums,  
But I cannot see their colours of yellow and gold  
and purple-black. I cannot see to pluck them,  
to know when they are ripe, so they fall and rot,  
and I trample them underfoot as I lumber and grope.

I know it is day from birdsong and seagulls' cry,  
from the heat of sand softly seeping through my toes  
as I stumble to wash the blood, still oozing  
from my eye, in the sea  
the sea I shall see no more.

I feel the warm breeze and taste the salt air  
that stings the mangled flesh that once was my eye,  
still tender with a pain so sharp,  
as sharp as the pain in my heart  
for another who took my eye.

No more shall I gaze on my skittish white nymph,  
whiter than curdled milk, softer than lambs,  
sweeter than ripened grapes, smoother than shells  
worn away by the waves in the sea where she resides,  
the sea I shall see no more.

My father, the earthshaker, the god of the wine-dark sea,  
may have dogged the trickster's journey home,  
maybe Noman returned to trouble in his house,  
but it was still to a son and a wife whose beauty  
he could see and with whom he could share a life.

I sit alone, without my nymph, without my sheep,  
without my sweet shield-like single eye  
and I gaze at that sea that brought me life  
that brought me love and brought me loss ...

I gaze at the sea I see no more.