

# THE CYCLOPS

*Translated by* WILLIAM ARROWSMITH

# THE CYCLOPS: INTRODUCTION

## *The Play: Date and Composition*

*The Cyclops* is not a tragedy but a satyr-play. It is the only complete specimen of this genre to have survived. The satyr-play was a type of drama similar to tragedy in being based on heroic myth and employing many of the same stylistic features, but distinguished by having a chorus of half-human, half-horse followers of Dionysus—sileni or satyrs, played by the same Athenian citizens as had played the tragic choruses in the three preceding plays, but costumed now in baldheaded masks, horse tails, and erect phalluses. Furthermore, satyr-plays always end happily and tend to be shorter and simpler than tragedies, to be far more ribald in matters sexual and alcoholic, and to be somewhat looser formally and musically. Usually they are set in the countryside or some exotic land, and their plotlines often involve the defeat of an ogre or monster. Each playwright's dramatic tetralogy at the Great Dionysian Festival in Athens usually consisted of three tragedies followed by one satyr-play (but we are told, for example, that Euripides' tragedy *Alcestis* took the place of the satyr-play in his tetralogy of 438 BCE). A vivid and informative picture of a satyr chorus preparing to perform, along with Silenus, heroic actors, and a pipe player, can be found on the famous Pronomos Vase, painted in Athens around the end of the fifth century BCE. (Images of this vase are widely available in books and on the web.)

Although we can be certain that Euripides wrote *The Cyclops* for the annual competition at that festival, there is no way to determine its exact or even approximate date: no external evidence indicates when it was produced, and the metrical features that provide an approximate sequence for Euripides' tragedies do not apply to the satyr-plays. Scholars have suggested dates ranging from the beginning to the end of Euripides' career; some have tried looking for allusions in the play to particular political

events or to other plays of known date, but such attempts have not been convincing. So too, what the other three plays were in Euripides' tetralogy of that year, and how they fared in the dramatic competition, are entirely unknown.

### *The Myth*

*The Cyclops* is a comic dramatization of a celebrated episode from book 9 of the *Odyssey*: on his voyage home from Troy, Odysseus lands on an island inhabited by the fearsome, man-eating, primitive, one-eyed Cyclops Polyphemus. Odysseus and some of his crew are trapped in the monster's cave and start to be devoured two at a time. But Odysseus saves himself and his remaining men by an ingenious stratagem: he gets Polyphemus drunk and blinds the sleeping Cyclops with a smoldering stake. Odysseus has told him that his name is "Nobody," so that when Polyphemus calls for help from his fellow Cyclopes they laugh at him when he can only tell them that "Nobody" has blinded him. In the end, Odysseus and his men escape from the cave by hiding under the fleecy bellies of the Cyclops' sheep.

In spite of the evident differences in dramatic medium and comic tone, Euripides' play follows his Homeric model fairly closely, though he has eliminated the huge rock blocking the doorway and Odysseus' use of the sheep to escape, substituting for these a macabre game of blindman's buff as the enraged Cyclops tries to catch the escaping Greeks. The most obvious difference, of course, is the insertion, into the very center of this serious epic story, of the lascivious, childish, musical, and cowardly satyrs and their comically dipsomaniacal and duplicitous leader Silenus.

The result is a sophisticated hybrid genre, a kind of romancedrama that mixes epic, comic, and pastoral elements so as to provoke laughter and amusement at both the lowest and the highest literary levels.

### *Transmission and Reception*

*The Cyclops* has never been one of Euripides' most popular dramas. It survived antiquity only by the accident of being among the so-called

“alphabetic plays,” (see “Introduction to Euripides,” p. 3); it is transmitted only by a single manuscript (and its copies) and it is not accompanied by ancient commentaries (scholia) explaining interpretive difficulties. Nor have any papyri bearing parts of its text ever been discovered. Its impact on the visual arts seems to have been very limited, though one striking late fifth-century BCE vase painting does survive from Lucania (south Italy), depicting Odysseus and his crew in the act of blinding Polyphemus while satyrs scurry about them—a scene presumably inspired by this play.

So too, in its influence on modern literature and art, *The Cyclops* has been greatly overshadowed by Homer’s epic version. But Euripides’ play was translated by Percy Bysshe Shelley (1819), and it is occasionally staged, with considerable success. As the sole surviving example of a complete satyr-play, it also receives its share of critical attention in accounts of the origins and history of Greek drama, although scholars are unsure just how typical it really is.

# THE CYCLOPS

## *Characters*

SILENUS, father of the satyrs

CHORUS of satyrs

ODYSSEUS

CYCLOPS, named Polyphemus

*Scene: In front of a cave at the foot of Mount Etna.*

*(Enter Silenus from the cave.)*

SILENUS

O Bromius,

thanks to you, my troubles are as many now  
as in my youth when my body still was strong!

First I remember when Hera drove you mad  
and you left your nurses, the mountain nymphs.

5 And then there was that war with the Giants:  
there I stood, on your right, covering your flank  
with my shield. And I hit Enceladus with my spear  
square on the center of his shield and killed him.

Or wait: was that in a dream? No, by Zeus,  
for I displayed the actual spoils to Bacchus.

10 And now I must bail against a wilder wave  
of trouble. For when I heard that Hera  
had urged Tyrrhenian pirates to sell you

as a slave abroad, I hoisted sail with my sons  
to search for you. Right on the stern I stood,  
15 the tiller in my hands, steering the ship.  
And my boys strained at the oars, churning white  
the green sea in our search for you, my king!  
And then we had almost rounded Cape Malea  
when an east wind cracked down and drove us here,  
20 to rocky Etna, where the one-eyed sons  
of the sea god, the murderous Cyclopes,  
live in their desolate caves. One of them—  
they call him Polyphemus—captured us  
and made us slaves in his house. So now,  
25 instead of dancing in the feasts of Bacchus,  
we herd the flocks of this godless Cyclops.

So now, far off on the mountain slopes, my sons,  
young as they are, watch the youngling herd.  
I am assigned to stay and fill the troughs  
30 and clean these quarters and play the chef  
for the godless dinners of this impious Cyclops.  
And now I must sweep the cave with this iron rake—  
these are my orders—to welcome back home  
35 my absent master and his flock of sheep.  
But I see my sons shepherding their sheep  
this way.

*(Enter the Chorus of satyrs from the side, with their flock of sheep and attendant slaves.)*

What? How can you dance like that?  
Do you think you're mustered at Bacchus' feast  
and swaggering your sexy way with lyre music

to the halls of Althaea?

*(To a ram.)*

CHORUS [*singing*]

STROPHE

*You there, with the fine pedigree  
on both sides, dam and sire,  
why run for the rocks?  
Haven't you here a quiet breeze,  
45 green grass for the grazing?  
Look: the water from the brook  
swirls through your troughs  
beside the cave  
where your small lambs bleat.*

MESODE

*Hey, come here! Now!  
50 Won't you feed on the dewy hill?  
Move, or I'll pelt you with stones!  
In with you, horny-head, move along  
into the fold of Shepherd Cyclops!*

*(To a ewe.)*

ANTISTROPHE

*55 Relieve your swollen teats!  
Come, suckle your young whom you left  
all alone in the lamb pens!  
Asleep all day, your newborn lambs  
bleat that they want you.*

60     *Leave your cropping at Etna's rocks,  
          and come into the fold!*

EPODE

*No Bacchus here! Not here the dance,  
or the women whirling the thyrsus,  
65     or the timbrels shaken,  
       where the springs of water rill up!°  
       Not here the bright drop of wine,  
       and no more at Nysa with nymphs  
       do I sing the song "Iacchus! Iacchus!"  
70     to Aphrodite,  
       she that I used to fly after  
       along with the barefooted Bacchae!  
       Dear lord Bacchius, where do you run,°  
75     unattended now, tossing your auburn hair?  
       For I, your servant, am a wretched slave,  
80     tricked out in dirty goatskin  
       serving a one-eyed Cyclops,  
       and out of the way of your love.*

SILENUS

Be quiet, my sons. Quick, order the attendants  
to corral the flocks into the rock fold.

CHORUS LEADER

Move along there.

*(The slaves do as instructed.)*

But why this hurry, father?



SILENUS

85 I see a Greek ship drawn up on the shore  
and oarsmen led by a captain coming  
toward our cave. They carry water pitchers  
and empty containers about their necks:  
they'll want supplies. Poor strangers, who are they?  
90 They can't know what this Polyphemus is like,  
coming to this inhospitable land  
and—bad luck!—to the Cyclops' man-eating jaws.  
But hush, so we can learn from where they've come  
95 to Sicily and to Mount Etna.

*(Enter Odysseus from the side with his men.)*

ODYSSEUS

Strangers, could you tell us where we might find  
running water? We have nothing to drink.  
Would some one of you like to sell some food  
to hungry sailors? What? Do I see right?  
We must have come to the city of Dionysus.  
100 These are satyrs I see around the cave.  
Let me greet the oldest among you first.

SILENUS

Greeting, stranger. Who are you, and from where?

ODYSSEUS

I am Odysseus of Ithaca, king of the Cephallenians.

SILENUS

I've heard of you: a glib sharper, Sisyphus' bastard.

ODYSSEUS

105 I am he. Keep your abuse to yourself.

SILENUS

From what port did you set sail for Sicily?

ODYSSEUS

We come from Troy and from the war there.

SILENUS

What? Couldn't you chart your passage home?

ODYSSEUS

I was driven here by wind and storm.

SILENUS

110 Too bad. I had the same misfortune.

ODYSSEUS

You too were driven here from your course unwilling?

SILENUS

We were chasing the pirates who captured Bacchus.

ODYSSEUS

What is this place? And who inhabits it?

SILENUS

This is Etna, the highest peak in Sicily.

ODYSSEUS

115 Where are the walls and the city towers?

SILENUS

This is no city. No man inhabits here.

ODYSSEUS

Who does inhabit it? Wild animals?

SILENUS

The Cyclopes. They live in caves, not houses.

ODYSSEUS

Who governs them? Or do the people rule?

SILENUS

120 They are savages. There is no government.

ODYSSEUS

How do they live? Do they till the fields?

SILENUS

Their whole diet is milk, and cheese, and the meat of sheep.

ODYSSEUS

Do they grow grapes and make the vine give wine?

SILENUS

No. And the land is sullen. There is no dance.

ODYSSEUS

125 Are they hospitable to strangers here?

SILENUS

Strangers, they say, make the tastiest meal.

ODYSSEUS

What? You say they feast on human flesh?

SILENUS

Here every visitor always gets devoured.

ODYSSEUS

Where is this Cyclops now? In the ... house?

SILENUS

130     Gone hunting on Mount Etna with his hounds.

ODYSSEUS

You know what you can do so we can escape?

SILENUS

I don't know, Odysseus. But I'll do what I can.

ODYSSEUS

Then sell us some bread. We have none left.

SILENUS

There is nothing to eat, I said, except meat.

ODYSSEUS

135     Meat is good too, and it will stop our hunger.

SILENUS

We have some curdled cheese. And there's cow's milk.

ODYSSEUS

Bring them out. The buyer should see what he buys.

SILENUS

Tell me, how much gold will you pay down?

ODYSSEUS

In money, nothing. But I have some wine.

SILENUS

140     Delicious word! How long since I've heard it.

ODYSSEUS

Maron, son of the god, gave me this wine.

SILENUS

Not the same lad I once reared in these arms?

ODYSSEUS

The son of Bacchius himself, to be brief.

SILENUS

Where is the wine? On board ship? You have it?

ODYSSEUS

145     In this flask, old man. Look for yourself.

SILENUS

That? That wouldn't make one swallow for me. °

ODYSSEUS

No? For each swallow you take, the flask gives two.

SILENUS

A fountain among fountains, that! I like it.

ODYSSEUS

Will you have it unwatered to start with?

SILENUS

150 That's fair. The buyer should have a sample.

ODYSSEUS

I have a cup here to go with the flask.

SILENUS

Pour away. A drink will jog my memory.

ODYSSEUS

There you are.

SILENUS

Mmmmmm. Gods, what a bouquet!

ODYSSEUS

Can you see it?

SILENUS

No, by Zeus, but I can whiff it.

ODYSSEUS

155 Taste it now. Then you'll sing its praises.

SILENUS

Mmmmmmaa. A dance for Bacchus! La de da.

ODYSSEUS

Didn't that purl down your gullet sweetly?

SILENUS

Right down to the tips of my toenails.

ODYSSEUS

160 Besides the wine, we'll give you money.

SILENUS

Money be damned! Just pour out the wine.

ODYSSEUS

Then bring out your cheese, or a lamb.

SILENUS

Right away.

I don't give a hoot for any master.

I would go mad for one cup of that wine!

165 I'd give away the herds of all the Cyclopes.

Once I get drunk and happy, I'd go jump  
in the sea off the Leucadian rock!

The man who doesn't like to drink is mad.

Why, when you're drunk, you stand up stiff down here

*(Gestures.)*

170 and then get yourself a fistful of breast  
and browse on the soft field ready to your hands.  
You dance, and good-bye to troubles. Well then,  
why shouldn't I adore a drink like that  
and tell that stupid Cyclops to get lost  
with his eye in the middle of his ugly head?

*(Exit into the cave.)*

CHORUS LEADER

175 Listen, Odysseus, we'd like a word with you.

ODYSSEUS

By all means. We are all friends here.

CHORUS LEADER

Did you take Helen when you took Troy?

ODYSSEUS

We rooted out the whole race of Priam.

CHORUS LEADER

When you took that woman, did you all take turns  
180 and bang her? She liked variety in guys,  
the fickle slut! Why, the sight of a man  
with embroidered pants and a golden chain  
so fluttered her, she left Menelaus,  
185 a fine little man. If only there were  
no women in the world—except with me!

*(Enter Silenus from the cave, carrying baskets of cheese and leading some lambs.)*

SILENUS

King Odysseus, here are some lambs for you,  
the fat of the flock, and here, a good stock  
190 of creamed cheeses. Take them and leave the cave  
as fast as you can. But first give me a drink  
of that blessed wine to seal our bargain.  
Oh, help us! Here comes the Cyclops! What shall we do?



ODYSSEUS

We're finished now, old man. Where can we run?

SILENUS

195 Into the cave. You can hide in there.

ODYSSEUS

Are you mad? Run right into the trap?

SILENUS

No danger. The rocks are full of hiding places.

ODYSSEUS

Never. Why, Troy itself would groan aloud  
if we ran from one man. Many's the time  
200 I stood off ten thousand Phrygians with my shield.  
If die we must, then we must die with honor.  
But if we live, we live with our old glory!

*(Enter the Cyclops from the side, with attendants.)*

CYCLOPS

Here. Here. What's going on? What is this idleness?  
Why this Bacchic hubbub? There's no Dionysus here,  
205 no bronze clackers or rattlings of drums!  
How are my newborn lambs in the cave?  
Are they at the teat, nuzzling their mothers?  
Are the wicker presses filled with fresh cheese?  
210 Well? What do you say? Answer, or my club  
will drub the tears out of you! Look up, not down.

*(To the Cyclops.)*

CHORUS LEADER

There. We're looking right up at Zeus himself.  
I can see Orion and all the stars.

CYCLOPS

Is my dinner cooked and ready to eat?

CHORUS LEADER

215 Ready and waiting. You only need to swallow.

CYCLOPS

And are the vats filled up, brimming with milk?

CHORUS LEADER

You can swill a whole hogshead, if you like.

CYCLOPS

Cow's milk, or sheep's milk, or mixed?

CHORUS LEADER

Whatever you like. Just don't swallow me.

CYCLOPS

220 You least. I'd soon be dead if I had you  
dancing your fancy moves inside my belly.

*(He sees the Greeks standing near the cave.)*

Hey! what's that crowd I see over by my cave?

Have pirates or thieves taken the country?

225 Look: lambs from my fold tied up with willow twigs!  
And cheese-presses all around! And the Old Man  
with his bald head swollen red with bruises!

SILENUS

Ohhh. I'm all on fire. They've beaten me up.

CYCLOPS

Who did? Who's been beating your head, old man?

SILENUS

*(Indicating the Greeks.)*

230 They did, Cyclops. I wouldn't let them rob you.

CYCLOPS

Didn't they know that I am a god?

Didn't they know my ancestors were gods?

SILENUS

I tried to tell them. But they went on robbing.

I tried to stop them from stealing your lambs  
and eating your cheeses. What's more, they said

235 they would yoke you to a three-foot collar  
and squeeze out your bowels through your one eye,  
and scourge your backsides with a whip,  
and then they were going to tie you up  
and throw you on their ship and auction you  
240 for hauling rocks or slaving at a mill.

CYCLOPS

Is that so?

*(To a servant.)*

Run and sharpen my cleavers.  
Take a big bunch of firewood and light it.

*(Exit a servant into the cave.)*

I'll slaughter them right now and stuff my maw.  
245 I'll give the carver their meat red-hot from the coals,  
the other pieces boiled in the cauldron  
and tender. I'm fed up with mountain food:  
too many lions and stags and far too long  
since I've had a good meal of man meat.

SILENUS

250 And quite right, master. A change in diet  
is always pleasant. It's been a long time  
since we've had visitors here at the cave.

ODYSSEUS

Cyclops, let your visitors have their say.  
We came here to your cave from our ship  
255 wanting to buy some food. This fellow here  
sold us some lambs in exchange for wine—  
all quite voluntary, no coercion.  
There's not a healthy word in what he says;  
260 the fact is he was caught peddling your goods.

SILENUS

I? Why, damn your soul.

ODYSSEUS

Yes—if I'm lying.

SILENUS

I swear, Cyclops, by your father Poseidon,  
by Triton the great, I swear by Nereus,  
by Calypso and by Nereus' daughters,  
265 by the holy waves and every species of fish,  
I swear, dear master, lovely little Cyclops,  
I did not try to sell your goods to strangers!  
If I did, then let my dear children die for it.

CHORUS LEADER

And the same to you. With these very eyes  
270 I saw you selling goods to the strangers.  
And if I'm lying, then let my father  
die for it. But don't do wrong to strangers.

CYCLOPS

You're lying. I would rather believe him

*(Indicating Silenus.)*

than Rhadamanthus himself. And I say  
that he's right. But I want to question you.  
275 Where have you sailed from, strangers? What's your country?  
Tell me in what city you grew up.

ODYSSEUS

We are from Ithaca. After we sacked  
the city of Troy, sea winds drove us here,  
safe and sound, to your country, Cyclops.

CYCLOPS

280 Was it you who sacked Troy-on-Scamander

because that foul Helen was carried off?

ODYSSEUS

We did. Our terrible task is done.

CYCLOPS

You ought to die for shame: to go to war  
with the Phrygians for a single woman!

ODYSSEUS

285     A god was responsible; don't blame  
         mortals.

But we ask as free men, we implore  
         you,

do not, O noble son of the sea god,  
murder men who come to your cave as  
         friends.

Do not profane your mouth by eating  
         us.

For it is we, my lord, who  
         everywhere

290     in Hellas preserved your father  
         Poseidon

in the tenure of his temples. Thanks to  
         us,

Taenarus' sacred harbor is inviolate,  
Cape Malea too with all its mountain  
         hollows;

the peak of Sunium with its silver  
         lodes

sacred to Athena, is still untouched;

295     and safe, the sanctuaries of Geraestus!

We did not betray Greece—perish the  
thought!°—

to Phrygians. And you have a share in  
this:

for this whole land, under volcanic  
Etna

in whose depths you live, is part of  
Hellas.

In any case—and even if you  
disagree—

300 all men honor the rule that  
shipwrecked sailors  
must be received and given clothes  
and presents.

Above all, they should not gorge your  
mouth and belly,

nor be spitted as men  
might spit an ox.

The land of Priam has exhausted  
Greece,

305 soaked up the blood of thousands  
killed in war:

wives made widows, old women and  
gray-haired men

without their sons. If you roast the rest  
for your ungodly meal, where will  
people turn?

310 Change your mind, Cyclops! Forget  
your hunger!

Forget this sacrilege and do what is  
right.

Many have paid the price for base  
profits.

SILENUS

A word of advice, Cyclops. Eat every bit  
of him. And if you chew on his tongue,  
315 you'll become eloquent and very glib.

CYCLOPS

Money's the wise man's religion, little man.  
The rest is mere bluff and purple patches.  
I don't give a damn for my father's shrines  
along the coast! Why did you think I would?  
320 And I'm not afraid of Zeus's thunder;  
in fact, I don't think Zeus is a stronger god  
than I am. And anyway I don't care,  
and I'll tell you why I don't care. When Zeus  
pours down rain, I take shelter in this cave  
325 and feast myself on roast veal or venison.  
Then I stretch myself and wash down the meal,  
flooding my belly with a vat of milk.  
Then I strike it with my hand, louder than ever  
Zeus can thunder. When the wind sweeps down  
330 with snow from Thrace, I wrap myself in furs  
and light up the fire. Then let it snow  
for all I care! Whether it wants or not,  
the earth must grow the grass that feeds my flocks.  
And as for sacrifices, I make mine,  
335 not to some other gods, but to the greatest  
of all: me and my belly! To eat, to drink  
from day to day, to have no worries—  
that's the real Zeus for your man of sense!  
As for those who embroider human life  
340 with their little laws—damn the lot of them!



I shall go right on indulging myself—  
by eating you. But, to be in the clear,  
I'll be hospitable and give you fire  
and my father's water<sup>o</sup>—plus a cauldron.  
Once it starts to boil, it will clothe your flesh  
345 better than these rags. So go inside  
and gather round the altar to the god  
of the cave, and wish me hearty eating.

ODYSSEUS

Gods! Have I escaped our hardships at Troy  
and on the seas only to be cast up  
and wrecked on the reef of this savage heart?  
350 O Pallas, lady, daughter of Zeus, now  
if ever, help me! Worse than war at Troy,  
I have come to my danger's deepest place.  
O Zeus, god of strangers, look down on me  
from where you sit, throned among the bright stars!  
If you do not look down upon me now,  
355 you are no Zeus, but a nothing at all!

*(Exit the Cyclops and attendants into the cave, dragging Odysseus and his  
men and followed by Silenus.)*

CHORUS [*singing*]

STROPHE

*Open the vast O of your jaws, Cyclops!  
Dinner is served: the limbs of your guests,  
boiled, roasted, or broiled, ready for you  
to gnaw, rend, and chew  
360 while you loll on your shaggy goatskin.*

MESODE

*Don't ask me to dinner. Stow that cargo  
on your own. Let me keep clear of this cave,  
well clear of the Cyclops of Etna,  
365       this loathsome glutton,  
who gorges himself on the guts of his guests!*

ANTISTROPHE

*Savage! Stranger to mercy! A monster  
who butchers his guests on his hearth,  
370       who boils up their flesh and eats it,  
          whose foul mouth munches  
on human meat plucked from the sizzling coals!°*

*(Enter Odysseus from the cave.)*

ODYSSEUS

375       Zeus, how can I say what I saw in that cave?  
Unbelievable horrors, the kind of things  
men hear about in myths, not in real life!

CHORUS LEADER

Has that godforsaken Cyclops butchered  
your crew? Tell us what happened, Odysseus.

ODYSSEUS

He snatched up two of my men, the soundest  
380       and plumpest. He weighed them in his hands.

CHORUS LEADER

How horrible! How could you stand to watch?

ODYSSEUS

First, after we had entered the cave,  
he lit a fire and tossed down on the huge hearth  
logs from a vast oak—you would have needed  
385 three wagons merely to carry the load.  
Then he pulled his pallet of pine needles  
close to the fire. After he milked the cows,  
he filled a hundred-gallon vat with milk.  
By his side, he put an ivy-wood box,  
390 about four feet in width and six feet deep.  
Next he put a cauldron of brass to boil  
on the fire, and beside it thorn-wood spits  
whose points had been sharpened in the coals  
and the rest trimmed down with an axe. There were<sup>o</sup>  
bowls for catching blood, big as Etna,  
395 and set flush against the blade of the axe.  
Well, when this damned cook of Hades was ready,  
he snatched up two of my men. With one blow  
he slit the throat of one over the lip  
of the brass cauldron.<sup>o</sup> Holding the other  
400 by the heels, he slammed him against a rock  
and bashed out his brains. Then he hacked away  
the flesh with his terrible cleaver  
and put the pieces to roast on the coals.  
The leftovers he tossed in the pot to boil.  
405 With the tears streaming down, I went up close  
and waited on the Cyclops. The others,  
their faces ashen, huddled up like birds  
in the crannies of the rocks. Then he leaned back,  
bloated with his awful meal on my men,

and let out a staggering belch.

410

Just then

some god sent me a marvelous idea!

I filled a cup and gave him Maron's wine  
to drink. "Cyclops," I said, "son of the sea god,  
see what a heavenly drink yield the grapes

415

of Greece, the gladness of Dionysus!"

Glutted with his dreadful meal, he took it  
and drained it off at one gulp, then lifted  
his hands in thanks: "You are the best of guests!

420

You have given me a noble drink to crown  
a noble meal." When I saw how pleased he was,  
I poured him another, knowing the wine  
would quickly fuddle him and pay him back.

Then he started to sing. I poured one drink  
after another and warmed his belly.

425

So there he is, inside, singing away  
while my crew wails; you can hear the uproar.

I slipped out quietly. Now, if you agree,  
I'd like to save myself and you as well.

430

So tell me, yes or no, whether you want  
to escape this monster and live with the nymphs  
in the halls of Bacchius. Your father in there  
agrees, but he's weak and loves his liquor.

435

He's stuck to the cup as though it were glue,  
and can't fly. But you are young, so follow me  
and save yourselves; find again your old friend,  
Dionysus, so different from this Cyclops!

CHORUS LEADER

My good friend, if only we might see that day

when we escape at last this godless Cyclops!

*(Showing his phallus.)*

This poor hose has been a bachelor<sup>o</sup>  
440 a long time now. But we can't eat the Cyclops back!

ODYSSEUS

Listen to my plan for setting you free  
and getting revenge upon this loathsome beast.

CHORUS LEADER

Tell on. I would rather hear tell of his death  
than hear all the harps in Asia play.

ODYSSEUS

445 He is so delighted with Bacchus' drink  
he wants to carouse with his relatives.

CHORUS LEADER

I see. You'll set an ambush in the woods  
and kill him—or push him over a cliff.

ODYSSEUS

No, I had something more subtle in mind.

CHORUS LEADER

450 I've always heard that you are sly. What then?

ODYSSEUS

I hope to stop him from going on this spree  
by saying he shouldn't give his wine away,  
but keep it for himself and live in bliss.

Then, as soon as the wine puts him to sleep,  
455 I'll take my sword and sharpen up the branch  
of an olive tree I saw inside the cave.  
I'll put it in the coals and when it's burnt,  
I'll shove it home, dead in the Cyclops' eye,  
and blind him. Just like a timber-fitter  
460 whirling his auger around with a belt,  
I'll screw the brand in his eye, round and round,  
scorch out his eyeball and blind him for good.

CHORUS LEADER

465 Bravo! I'm for your plan with all my heart.

ODYSSEUS

And finally, my friends, I'll embark you  
and your old father aboard my black ship  
and sail full speed away from this place.

CHORUS LEADER

May I lend a hand at this ritual?  
470 Help hold the pole when you put out his eye?  
This is one sacrifice I want to share.

ODYSSEUS

You must. The brand is huge. You all must lift.

CHORUS LEADER

I could shoulder a hundred wagonloads  
so long as Cyclops gets what he deserves!  
475 We'll smoke out his eye like a hornets' nest.

ODYSSEUS

Be quiet now. You know my stratagem.  
When I give the word, obey your leaders.  
I refuse to save myself and leave my men  
trapped inside. I could, of course, escape:<sup>o</sup>  
480 here I am, outside. But I have no right  
to abandon my crew and save myself alone.

CHORUS [*chanting*]

*Who'll be first along the brand? Who next?  
We'll shove it square in the Cyclops' eye!  
485 We'll pulverize his sight.*

*(Singing is heard from within the cave.)*

*Quiet.*

*Shhhh.*

*Here he comes, flat, off-key drunkard,  
490 reeling out of his home in the rock,  
braying some wretched tune. Ha!  
We'll give him lessons in carousing!  
A little while: then, perfect blindness!*

*(Enter Polyphemus from the cave, accompanied by Silenus.)*

*[The Chorus continues to sing in this lyric interchange with the  
Cyclops, who sings in reply]*

STROPHE A

495 *Happy the man who cries "Euhoi!"  
just itching to make merry,  
for whom the wine keeps flowing,  
whose arms are open to his friend!*

*Lucky man, upon whose bed there waits*  
500 *the soft bloom of a lovely girl!*  
*With gleaming hair, sweet with oil,*  
*he cries: "Who'll open the door for me?"*

CYCLOPS

STROPHE B

*Mamama. Am I crammed with wine!*  
*How I love the fun of a feast!*  
505 *The hold of my little ship*  
*is stuffed right up to the top deck!*  
*This marvelous meal reminds me:*  
*I should go carouse with my brothers*  
*the Cyclopes, in the springtime.*  
510 *Here, here, my friend, hand me the flask.*

CHORUS

STROPHE C

*O the flash of a handsome eye!*  
*Handsome himself comes from his house,*  
*Handsome the groom, Handsome the lover!*  
515 *A soft bride burns for this groom;*  
*she burns in the cool of the cave!*  
*And soon we shall wreath his head*  
*with a wreath of reddest flowers!*

ODYSSEUS [*speaking*]

Listen, Cyclops. I've spent a lot of time  
520 with this drink of Bacchus I gave you.



CYCLOPS [*speaking*]

Who is this Bacchus? Worshipped as a god?

ODYSSEUS

Best of all in blessing the lives of men.

CYCLOPS

At least he makes very tasty belching.

ODYSSEUS

That's the kind of god he is: hurts no one.

CYCLOPS

525     How can a god bear to live in a flask?

ODYSSEUS

Wherever you put him, he's quite content.

CYCLOPS

Gods shouldn't clothe themselves in animal skins.

ODYSSEUS

What matter, if you like him? Does the flask irk you?

CYCLOPS

I loathe the flask. The wine is what I like.

ODYSSEUS

530     Then you should stay here and enjoy yourself.

CYCLOPS

Shouldn't I share the wine with my brothers?

ODYSSEUS

Keep it to yourself; you'll be more esteemed.

CYCLOPS

But I'd be more useful if I shared it.

ODYSSEUS

Yes, but carousing often ends in fights.

CYCLOPS

535 I'm so drunk nothing could hurt me now.

ODYSSEUS

My dear man, drunkards ought to stay at home.

CYCLOPS

But the man's a fool who drinks by himself.

ODYSSEUS

It's the wise man who stays home when he's drunk.

CYCLOPS

What should we do, Silenus? Should I stay home?

SILENUS

540 I would. Why do we want more drinkers, Cyclops?

CYCLOPS

Anyway, the ground is soft with flowers.

SILENUS

There's nothing like a drink when the sun is hot.

Lie down there; stretch yourself out on the ground.

*(The Cyclops does as instructed, and Silenus puts the wine bowl behind his back.)*

CYCLOPS

545     There. Why did you put the bowl behind my back?

SILENUS

Someone might tip it over.

CYCLOPS

  You wanted  
to steal a drink. Put it in the middle.  
You there, stranger, tell me what your name is.

ODYSSEUS

Nobody is my name. But how will you reward me?

CYCLOPS

550     I will eat you the last of all your crew.

SILENUS

That's a fine gift to give your guest, Cyclops.

*(He furtively drinks some wine.)*

CYCLOPS

What are you doing? Drinking on the sly?

SILENUS

The wine kissed me—for my beautiful eyes.

CYCLOPS

Watch out. You love the wine; it doesn't love you.

SILENUS

555      Yes, by Zeus, it has a passion for my good looks.

CYCLOPS

Here, pour me a cupful, give it to me.

SILENUS

How is the mixture? Let me taste and see.

*(He takes a quick drink.)*

CYCLOPS

Damnation! give it here.

SILENUS

By Zeus, not before

I see you crowned—

*(He gives the Cyclops a wreath of flowers.)*

and have another drink.

*(He empties the cup.)*

CYCLOPS

560      This wine-pourer is a cheat!

SILENUS

Not at all.

The wine's so good it slides down by itself.

Now wipe yourself off before you drink again.

CYCLOPS

There. My mouth is clean and so is my beard.

SILENUS

Then crook your arm—gracefully now—and drink,  
just as you see me drink—and now you don't.

*(He empties the cup.)*

CYCLOPS

565     Here! What are you doing?

SILENUS

Guzzling sweetly.

*(Snatching away the cup and handing it to Odysseus.)*

CYCLOPS

Here, stranger. Take the flask and pour for me.

ODYSSEUS

At least the wine feels at home in my hand.

CYCLOPS

Come on, pour!

ODYSSEUS

I am pouring. Relax, friend.

CYCLOPS

Relax? That's not so easy when you're drunk.

ODYSSEUS

570     There, take it up and drink down every drop,  
          and don't say die until the wine is gone.

CYCLOPS

Mama. What a wizard the vine must be!

ODYSSEUS

          If you drench yourself on a full stomach  
          and swill your belly, you'll sleep like a log.  
575     Leave a drop, and Bacchus will shrivel you up.

*(He takes a long drink.)*

CYCLOPS

          Whoosh! I can scarcely swim out of this flood.  
          Pure pleasure! Ohhh. Earth and sky whirling around,  
          all jumbled up together! Look: I can see  
580     the throne of Zeus and the holy glory  
          of the gods.

                    Couldn't I make love to them?  
          Those Graces tempt me! But my Ganymede here

*(He grabs Silenus.)*

          is good enough for me. With him I'll sleep  
          better than with the Graces. ◦ Yes, I will!  
          And anyway, I prefer boys to girls.

SILENUS

585     Am I Zeus' little Ganymede, Cyclops?

CYCLOPS

          You are, by Zeus! The boy I'm grabbing from Dardanus!

SILENUS

I'm done for, children. Ghastly things await me.

CYCLOPS

Sneer at your lover, do you, because he's drunk?

SILENUS

It's a bitter wine I'll have to drink now.

*(Exit the Cyclops into the cave, dragging Silenus.)*

ODYSSEUS

590 To work, you noble sons of Dionysus!  
Our man's inside the cave. In a short while  
his belly will heave its foul meal of flesh.  
The firebrand has begun to smoke inside.  
We prepared it for just this: to burn out  
595 the Cyclops' eye. Now you must act like men.

CHORUS LEADER

Our will is made of unbreakable rock.  
But hurry inside before it happens  
to my father. All is ready out here.

ODYSSEUS

O Hephaestus, ruler over Etna,  
free yourself from this vile neighbor of yours!  
600 Sear out his bright eye at one blow! O Sleep,  
child of black Night, leap with all your might  
on this god-detested beast! And do not,  
after our glorious trials at Troy,  
betray Odysseus and his crew to death

605 from a man who cares for neither man nor god.  
If you do, we will make a goddess of Chance,  
and count her higher than all the other gods!

*(Exit Odysseus into the cave.)*

CHORUS [*singing*]

*Grim tongs shall clutch by the throat  
this beast who bolts down his guests.  
610 Fire shall quench the fire of his eye.  
The brand, big as a tree, already waits,  
615 waits in the coals.*

*On, wine, to your work!  
Rip out the eye of this raving Cyclops!  
Make him regret the day he drank you!  
I want with all my soul to see  
620 Bacchus, the god who loves the ivy,  
and to leave the Cyclops' savage cage!  
Shall I ever see that day?*

*(Enter Odysseus from the cave.)*

ODYSSEUS [*speaking*]

Quiet, you animals! By the gods, be quiet!  
Hold your tongues. I don't want a man of you  
625 to blink or clear his throat or even breathe.  
If we wake up that scourge of evil,  
we won't be able to sear out his eye.

CHORUS LEADER

We *are* quiet. Our mouths are locked up tight.



ODYSSEUS

630 To work then. And grab the brand with both hands  
when you enter the cave. The point is red-hot.

CHORUS LEADER

You should tell us our stations. Who'll be first  
on the blazing pole? And then we can all  
take our fair part in what fortune assigns.

ONE CHORUS MEMBER

635 Where we stand, over here by the entrance,  
we're too far away to reach his eye.

ANOTHER CHORUS MEMBER

And just this minute we've gone lame.

FIRST CHORUS MEMBER

And we have too. While we were standing here  
we sprained our ankles, I don't know how.

ODYSSEUS

640 Sprained your ankles, standing still?

SECOND CHORUS MEMBER

And my eyes  
are full of dust and ashes from somewhere.

ODYSSEUS

What worthless cowards! There's no help from you.

CHORUS LEADER

And just because I pity my back and spine

and don't want to have my teeth knocked out,  
645 I'm a coward, am I? But I can sing  
a fine Orphic spell that will make the brand  
fly of its own accord into the skull  
of this one-eyed whelp of Earth and scorch him up.

ODYSSEUS

I knew from the first what sort you were,  
but now I know it better. So I guess  
650 I'll have to use my own men. If you're too weak  
to lend a hand, at least cheer them along  
and put some heart in them with cries and chants.

*(Exit Odysseus into the cave.)*

CHORUS LEADER

We'll do that—and leave it to others to run the risks.  
655 We'll scorch the Cyclops—but only with our singing.

CHORUS [*singing*]

*Go! Go! As hard as you can!*  
*Push! Thrust! Faster! Burn off*  
*the eyebrow of the guest-eater!*  
*Smoke him out, burn him out,*  
660 *the shepherd of Etna!*  
*Twist it! Turn! Careful:*  
*he is hurt and desperate.*

*(From within.)*

CYCLOPS

665 Owwooooo! My eye is scorched to ashes!

CHORUS LEADER [*speaking*]

Oh song of songs! Sing it for me, Cyclops!

*(From within.)*

CYCLOPS

Owwoo! They've murdered me! I'm finished!

But you won't escape this cave to enjoy  
your triumph, you contemptible nothings.

I'll stand at the entrance and block it—so.

*(The Cyclops appears at the entrance of the cave, his face streaming with  
blood.)*

CHORUS LEADER

What's the matter, Cyclops?

CYCLOPS

I'm done for.

CHORUS LEADER

You look terrible.

CYCLOPS

670 I feel terrible.

CHORUS LEADER

Did you get so drunk you fell in the fire?

CYCLOPS

Nobody wounded me.

CHORUS LEADER

Then you're not hurt.

CYCLOPS

Nobody blinded me.

CHORUS LEADER

Then you're not blind.

CYCLOPS

Blind as you.°

CHORUS LEADER

How could nobody make you blind?

CYCLOPS

675     You mock me. Where is Nobody?

CHORUS LEADER

Nowhere.

CYCLOPS

It's the stranger I mean, you fool, the one  
who pumped me full of wine and did me in.

CHORUS LEADER

Wine is tricky; very hard to wrestle with.

CYCLOPS

By the gods, have they escaped or are they inside?

CHORUS LEADER

680     There they are, standing quiet over there,  
under cover of the rock.

CYCLOPS

On which side?

CHORUS LEADER

On your right.

*(The Cyclops leaves the entrance, and the Greeks steal out of the cave.)*

CYCLOPS

Where?

CHORUS LEADER

Over against the rock.

Do you have them?

*(Running into a rock.)*

CYCLOPS

Ouf! Trouble on trouble.

I've split my head.

CHORUS LEADER

And now they've escaped you.

CYCLOPS

This way, did you say?

CHORUS LEADER

No, the other way.

CYCLOPS

Which way?

CHORUS LEADER

685                      Turn around. There. On your left.

CYCLOPS

    You're laughing at me in my misery.

CHORUS LEADER

    Not now. There he is in front of you.

CYCLOPS

    Where are you, demon?

ODYSSEUS

                        Out of your reach,  
690      Looking after the safety of Odysseus.

CYCLOPS

    What? A new name? Have you changed your name?

ODYSSEUS

    Odysseus: the name my father gave me.  
    You have had to pay for your unholy meal.  
    I would have done wrong to have fired Troy  
695      but not revenge the murder of my men.

CYCLOPS

    Ah! The old oracle has been fulfilled.  
    It said that after you had come from Troy,  
    you would blind me. But you would pay for this,  
700      it said, and wander the seas for many years.

ODYSSEUS

Much I care! What's done is done. As for me,  
I'm off to the shore where I'll launch my ship  
on the Sicilian sea and sail for home.

*(Exit Odysseus and his men to the side.)*

CYCLOPS

Not yet. I'll rip a boulder from this cliff  
705 and crush you and all your crew beneath it.  
Blind I may be, but I'll reach the mountaintop  
soon enough through the tunnel in the cave.

*(Exit into the cave.)*

CHORUS

And we'll enlist in the crew of Odysseus.  
From now on our orders come from Bacchius.