

Acis and Galatea (XIII.750-897)



Polyphemus and Galatea - Odilon Redon, 1840-1916)

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During Ovid's telling of the story of Aeneas and specifically his wanderings, the poet interjects several stories that are at best digressions. In the passage here, as Aeneas passes Scylla and Charybdis, Ovid presents Galatea telling Scylla her sad story. In the love triangle between the nymph Galatea, Acis, and the Cyclops Polyphemus, the Cyclops was the odd man out; the love between Acis and Galatea was deep and mutual. One day as she sat in her boy friend's lap, she heard his proclamation of his love as he talked to himself about his great love for her and explained why he was deserving of her love in return. When he finished, he saw the two lovers who had been listening; enraged he hurled a giant rock at them and crushed Acis as Galatea dove into the sea. He is transformed in death into the river Acis and has the same level of strength of his father Symaethus.

Ovid lampoons the lover who sings a song that is filled in the first section with comparatives from nature that praise her beauty but lament her rejection. He next boasts of his possessions that will all be hers to enjoy. Then he moves to a description of his physical attractions, attempting to gloss over the negatives by pointing out, for example, that he has only one eye but it is as big as a huge shield. His last effort at persuasion is to point out that his father is Neptune and that he, the Cyclops, is unafraid of Jupiter himself. He concludes with a lament for being rejected and a threat for Acis because the monster carries an Etna of passion in his heart. Just as Apollo is mocked because of his unrequited love for Daphne, so the Cyclops suffers the ignominy of loving someone who chooses another.

Outline:

750-769 Galatea is loved by Acis, whom she loves back, and by Polyphemus, the Cyclops, who repulses her despite the changes love has effected in him.

770-777 Telemus warns Polyphemus that Ulysses (Odysseus) will take away his eye, but the Cyclops says that another has already taken it.

778-788 Polyphemus sits on a cliff to brood and sing, as Acis and Galatea sit nearby, unseen.

789-869 Song of the Cyclops

789- 797 Galatea, you are more beautiful in so many ways.

798-807 But you are more hurtful in so many ways because you reject me.

808-839 My possessions are many and are all yours to enjoy.

840-853 My looks are not attractive but they are impressive: my eye is the size of
a big shield.

854-858. Neptune is my father and I do not fear Jupiter, but I do fear you.

859-869 Why Acis? If I catch him, I will kill him. I love with passion as hot as
Mt. Etna.

870-886 The Cyclops sees the lovers; he hurls a rock, killing Acis as Galatea dives into the sea.

887-897 Acis' blood is transformed into the spring of a river, of which he becomes the river-god.