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# The Mirror

Sisyphus, The Tragedy of

Comrade Candle

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1/6/24

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106–8 | Circular? Perhaps one day Sisyphus will escape his perpetual boulder rolling. Prometheus?

### **RECOMMENDED READING**

Sophocles' *Antigone*, as it features a woman hero.

Camus' *The Myth of Sisyphus*, for obvious reasons.

Friedrich Nietzsche's *The Dionysian Vision of the World*, to grasp my love for Apollo and to a degree, tragedy.

34–5 | Certainly by now. Also, I use “craft” to stay true to the Greek *techne*.

38–41 | Total paradigm shift; also foreshadowing.

42 | Virgil’s epitaph read: *Mantua me genuit; Calabri rapuere; tenet nunc Parthenope. Cecini pascua, rura, duces* (Mantua gave birth to me, the Calabrians took me, now Naples holds me; I sang of pastures [the *Eclogues*], country [the *Georgics*], and leaders [the *Aeneid*]).

45 | Am I too Nietzschean? I am reminded that Sisyphus is about to surpass man during his downfall.

49 | Would we expect less?

54 | Another ode to Virgil.

56 | “Better” at what?

60 | As most do.

63 | Fish?

64 | Respect Sisyphus!

65 | Equal to the god?

67 | Back in the day, Apollo was “the shit,” having a hand in plenty of mythos.

70 | Not the first such wager Apollo can see the future after all. A warning should Apollo wish to gamble with you...

74 | Hubris rarely does.

75 | “Know thyself.”

81 | In ancient Greek, nobility, aristocrat, and wealth implied beauty, hence, “pretty.”

82 | Double-edged sword — notice a pacing change? Sometimes life comes at you fast.

84 | Hecate?

86 | “Offering.”

91–6 | Greek gods are known for being all-too-human.

97 | More of said humans.

98 | As if he knows already.

100–3 | For the fellow math nerds, that’s rate of change for you.

## INTRODUCTION TO SISYPHUS, THE MYTH OF

A Greek tragic (anti-)hero, Sisyphus provided the French philosopher Albert Camus a classic illustration of the absurd in his essay, *The Myth of Sisyphus*. Speaking as a prisoner, a nihilist, and a lover of tragedy, I love Sisyphus. He was a professional highwayman, a trickster whose exploits inspired my writing of this epic — I too am a (former) robber. Among his feats, Sisyphus outsmarted Death by slipping him into chains. Imprisoned, Death was unable to claim any life and civilization collapsed. Sisyphus was eventually contained and sent to Hades, where he convinced Persephone to let him return to his wife — once again escaping the Underworld. When Hades finally collects the rogue man, Sisyphus is punished for a mortal life of thievery, of mocking the rules of the gods. He is sentenced to an eternal task: roll a boulder up a hill, only to have it fall *ad infinitum*. In his essay, Camus considers that “one must imagine Sisyphus happy.” He argues that one must find happiness in the accomplishment of the task, rather than in extracting the meaning from it.

## THE EPIC & THE TRAGEDY, A CRASH COURSE

To the uninitiated, the epic may appear daunting. Long-form poetry is not as ever-present now as in the days when tragic comedies were written, memorized, acted, and recited to worship Apollo. Homeric epics, namely the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad* were written in strict dactylic hexameter, as was Virgil’s *Aeneid*. In poetics, meter denotes how many steps (a collection of syllables) are present per line, while “-ic” denotes the number of syllables per step and which syllables receive hard/soft emphasis. As I write in English (not ancient Greek nor Latin), I

chose to compromise with iambic hexameter — one more step than Shakespearean iambic pentameter. In short, each line has twelve syllables (six steps), and every other syllable receives “emphasis.” I have strictly followed this structure.

I have aimed to construct an enjoyable tragic hero. Time and victory are fleeting for Sisyphus, unless we adhere to Camus’s conclusion. For the ancient Greeks (prior to the Academy), the memorization of Homer constituted a mark of intelligence. Schooling involved learning to appropriately act or recite the epics. Hubris is integral to tragedy; through it the hero’s undoing becomes the poetic, impactful, and (at times) unjust resolution.

## SISYPHUS, THE TRAGEDY OF

Free spirit, death defied, has freshened dawn become

Lightened of torment forthcome as life’s due payment

Fresh air’s breath expels cold sorrow frosting heart numb

“Where shall I go prior death’s upset arraignment?

Shall I just flee to see once more Apollo’s rise —

Doubt that I have of ever knowing peaceful sight

While defiance brings civilization’s demise”

Joyous notes of hearty laughter provide respite

“I would rather live as I so choose to exist

Be damned what great risk I continue to garner!

To fool Hades merely to cowardly subsist

Would be wasteful of what great wit I have harbored”

He is seized by Apollo, dragged to Hades’s ask  
Given naught more to do than roll his big boulder  
Only to find as he ever completes his task  
The temperature in his heart grows colder.| CC

## LINE NOTES

1 | As the absurd subject, it naturally follows to label Sisyphus a free spirit (a term denoting its literal meaning, yet also “being a follower of Nietzsche’s teaching”).

3 | Punishment chills one’s heart, I notice as I look upon the prison. Fresh air is what we most live for, in here and out there.

4 | Couldn’t resist a playful use of “arraignment,” to this story as allegory.

5 | I could imagine Sisyphus, a patron deity of *agéneios* (beardless) man, begin Apollonian, also foreshadowing.

7 | Given naught can die, Sisyphus shattered society’s “truth” of death and taxes. Hades’s confinement birthed a new state.

9–12 | Sisyphus presents as the “subject in revolt,” a term I borrow from insurrectionist theory — also, hubris.

17–22 | Hard not to image Disney’s Hades, try as I may. Still, Hades seems less of a “hothead” as I image him, more cold, more vindictive.

24–5 | Back in the day, peasant farmers were called on to become soldiers! So the demos (common people) were more “hard” and tough. Compare what Sisyphus does to a home invasion at some rural modern-day farm, he’d probably get shot.

30 | Fate was a staple of the Greek culture and thereby mythos. Sisyphus is certain of his fate — more hubris? Does he think himself capable of Apollonian feats?

Truly a shame that your path and mine have now  
crossed  
For now all you own you can count to have been  
lost  
As an offering at my feet lest you be flayed”  
Rather than fold to a mortal’s dismal demand  
Apollo unsheathes a golden, glistening sword  
Now having revealed a good portion of his hand,  
He addresses Sisyphus of his own accord  
“I have an inkling of how the gods have been  
wronged  
Though I’m not here to discuss Hades’s present  
plight  
The weapon you wield would have been better if  
pronged  
And you’ll certainly regret that you forsook height  
I offer you my crown and my Olympus seat  
Should it prove possible that you can best my feat”  
Beckoning Sisyphus, Apollo heads to creek  
Pausing briefly at the edge yet not looking meek  
With only one thrust, he raises his sword, gleam-  
ing,  
Seven fish harpooned upon a blade, some steaming  
Yet Sisyphus pauses then with dagger, he jabs  
Only to find that with any subsequent stabs  
The results would be the same: only spearing  
three.  
So as Sisyphus turns in an attempt to flee

Sisyphus, our hero, has set his path onward  
Toward his old profession as an outlaw robber  
While below Hades’s chained calls have yet to be  
heard  
Regardless of intense frothing and much slobber  
“Challenge my rule today for all of your renown  
Surely you must expect my wrath will be unseen  
I will personally see to bring you back down  
So that you can understand what punishment  
means!  
Gods do not take kindly to being outsmarted  
Nor the shattering of the order we uphold”  
Soundless to Sisyphus who has just now started  
Ventures so fiery to demand one be bold  
Stepping over fencing surrounding lowly farm  
“Where can the brave find a dagger to make their  
own?  
Lying around servicing no potential harm  
Or even grasped by those who have yet to have  
shown  
Any propensity for culling expertise  
I will find my new blade wherever it may lie”  
Darting and weaving amongst sparsely present  
hay  
Concealed, but barely, leaving ample room to vie  
For farm’s existence as more than but dreary tease  
“The gods cannot hope to keep my weapon away  
I will certainly collect what my craft demands”

Much rifling through that which is present outside  
Shows only the devotion of Sisyphus stands.

“I see that, like every thief, you too have no pride  
Pilfering what little my farm and I possess  
I’d ask that you return what, of mine, you’ve taken  
Though it seems likely you’d need be under  
duress”

Farmer with pitchfork, intended use forsaken  
Having grown weary of such useless dialogue  
A raising of the pitchfork serving as prologue  
Hardened muscles tightly grip a worn wooden  
shaft

Stern and angry jobs accompanied by much bay  
That Sisyphus will leave the farmer’s possessions  
Protecting the homestead for yet another day  
Sisyphus in acting may appear at first daft  
In holding fast to his ground despite aggressions  
Yet farmer charges forward and Sisyphus dives  
Tumbling as struggle descends to grassy floor  
Spiteful of the cause for which Sisyphus still  
strives

Farmer fervently fights as if he were at war  
Still, Sisyphus triumphs now — holding new  
weapon

“You’d do well to deliver me a better blade  
I’ll be brief in telling you that which would hap-  
pen:

Without deliverance, your life is what you trade

For this slight against my newfound time, here, on  
earth”

Frightened mortally, measuring life beyond worth  
Much scuttling about gifts Sisyphus his wish  
Throwing pitchfork aside, a warning is issued:  
Sisyphus, magnanimous, is no lowly fish  
To be treated in ways that are petty and rude  
One should think of Poseidon to grasp what one  
meets

When it is the hero Sisyphus who one greets!  
Apollo, having heard many cries, travels down  
Assuming the appearance of a rich merchant  
In the aim of halting one man’s insurrection  
He will wager to Sisyphus his laurel crown  
Through a carefully chosen skilled competition  
Sisyphus will truthfully learn if his penchant  
Lies among the gods rather than mere mortal men  
Ambitious ascent to godhood will not slacken  
Having placed himself between hero and Delphi  
Apollo awaits for the tides to finally crash  
Wanting for Sisyphus to at least have a try  
He refrains from trying to do anything brash  
As farm’s departure continues ongoing joy  
Sisyphus marauds on toward the nearest city  
Surprised yet thankful at spotting someone pretty  
He dashes out from bush to enact his swift ploy  
“I can see your riches are flagrantly displayed