

APOLLODORUS

3 Σίσυφος δὲ ὁ Αἰόλου κτίσας Ἐφύρα τὴν τὴν
 λεγόμενῃ Κόρυμβου γαμέλ Μερופן τὴν Ἄρταν-
 τος. ἐξ αὐτῶν παῖς γίγνεται Ἰλαΐκος, ὃ παῖς
 Βελήροδοτῆς ἐξ Εὐρυμέδους ἐγεννήθη, ὃς ἔκτεινε
 τὴν πυρίππου Χίμαιραν. κολλάσται δὲ Σίσυφος
 ἐν Ἄϊδου πέτρῳ ταῖς χεράι καὶ τῇ κεφαλῇ
 κνήαν, καὶ τοῦτον ὑπερβάλλειν θέλων οὗτος
 δὲ ὠδόμενος ὑπ' αὐτοῦ ὠθέεται πάλιν εἰς τοῦτόν α.
 τίθει δὲ ταύτην τὴν δίκην διὰ τὴν Ἀσωποῦ
 θυγάτηρα Ἀΐγυιαν ἀπατάσασθαι γὰρ αὐτὴν κρύφα
 Δία Ἀσωπῶ μνηστῆραι ζητοῦντι λέγεται.

4 Ἀγλαὸν δὲ βασιλεύον τῆς Φωκίδος Διομήδην
 τὴν Εὐρύου γαμέλ, καὶ αὐτῶ γίγνεται θυγάτηρ μετ'
 Ἀστεροδία,¹ παῖδες δὲ Αἰνέος Ἀκτωρ Φύλακος
 Κέφαλος, ὃς γαμέλ Πτόλεμον² τὴν Ἐρεχθέως.
 αἰθὺς δὲ ἡ Ἥος αὐτὸν ἀπατάει ἐρασθεῖσα.

5 Περὶ τῆς δὲ Μεσσηνίας κατασχόντος Ἰορροφόνῃ
 τὴν Περσέως ἐγγυμένη, ἐξ ἧς Ἀφάρειος αὐτῶ καὶ
 Λεύκιπρος καὶ Τυνδαίρεος ἐν τε Ἰκάριος παῖδες

¹ Ἀστεροδία Preller (comparing Scholiast on Homer, *Il.*
 ii. 520. Scholiast on Euripides, *Ionides*, 9), Hercher,
 Wagner: Ἀστεροδία Α.
² Πτόλεμον Aegius: πτόλεμον Α.

¹ Compare Homer, *Iliad*, vi. 152 sq.; Pausanias, ii. 1. 1.
² As to Bellerophon and the Chimera, see Apollodorus, ii.
 3. 1, with the note.
³ As to Sisyphus and his stone, see Homer, *Od.* xi. 593-600.
 Homer does not say why Sisyphus was thus punished, but
 Pausanias (ii. 5. 1) and the Scholiast on Homer (*Iliad*, i. 180)
 agree with Apollodorus as to the crime which incurred this
 punishment. Hyginus assigns impudently as the cause of his
 sufferings (*Fab.* 60). The picturesque story of this cunning
 knave, who is said to have laid Death himself by the heels,
 so that nobody died till Ares released Death and delivered

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And Sisyphus, son of Aeolus, founded Epheira, which
 is now called Corinth,¹ and married Merope, daughter
 of Atlas. They had a son Glaucus, who had by
 Eurymede a son Bellerophon, who slew the fire-
 breathing Chimera.² But Sisyphus is punished in
 Hades by rolling a stone with his hands and head in
 the effort to heave it over the top; but push it as he
 will, it rebounds backward.³ This punishment he
 endures for the sake of Aegina, daughter of Asopus;
 for when Zeus had secretly carried her off, Sisyphus
 is said to have betrayed the secret to Asopus, who
 was looking for her.

Deion reigned over Phocis and married Diomedes,
 daughter of Xuthus; and there were born to him a
 daughter, Asterodia, and sons, Aeneas, Actor,
 Phylacus, and Cephalus, who married Procris,
 daughter of Erechtheus.⁴ But afterwards Dawn fell
 in love with him and carried him off.

Perieres took possession of Messene and married
 Gorgophone, daughter of Perseus, by whom he had
 sons, to wit, Aphareus and Leucippus,⁵ and Tyndareus,

Sisyphus himself into his clutches (Scholiast on Homer, *Iliad*,
 vi. 153), was the theme of plays by Aeschylus, Sophocles,
 and Euripides. See *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta*, ed.
 A. Nauck, pp. 74 sqq., 251, 572; *The Fragments of Sophocles*,
 ed. A. C. Pearson, vol. ii. pp. 184 sq. Critias, one of the Thirty
 Tyrants at Athens, is credited with a play on the same
 theme, of which a very striking fragment, giving a wholly
 sceptical view of the origin of the belief in gods, has come
 down to us. See Sextus Empiricus, ed. Im. Bekker, pp. 402
 sqq.; *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta*, ed. A. Nauck,
 pp. 771 sqq.

¹ Compare ii. 4. 7, iii. 15. 1. As to the love of Dawn or
 Day for Cephalus, see Hesiod, *Theog.* 988 sqq.; Pausanias, i.
 3. 1; Antoninus Liberalis, *Transform.* 41; Ovid, *Metamorph.*
 vii. 700-713; Hyginus, *Fab.* 189, 270.
² Compare Pausanias, iv. 2. 2 and 4.

than that of human suffering and, like it, inexhaustible. Not the divine fable that amuses and blinds, but the terrestrial face, gesture, and drama in which are summed up a difficult wisdom and an ephemeral passion.

THE MYTH OF SISYPHUS

THE gods had condemned Sisyphus to ceaselessly rolling a rock to the top of a mountain, whence the stone would fall back of its own weight. [They had thought with some reason that there is no more dreadful punishment than futile and hopeless labor.]

If one believes Homer, Sisyphus was the wisest and most prudent of mortals. According to another tradition, however, he was disposed to practice the profession of highwayman. I see no contradiction in this. Opinions differ as to the reasons why he became the futile laborer of the underworld. To begin with, he is accused of a certain levity in regard to the gods. He stole their secrets. Ægina, the daughter of Æsopus, was carried off by Jupiter. The father was shocked by that disappearance and complained to Sisyphus. He, who knew of the abduction, offered to tell about it on condition that Æsopus would give water to the citadel of Corinth. To the celestial thunderbolts he preferred the benediction of water. He was punished for this in the underworld. Homer tells us also that Sisyphus had put Death in chains. Pluto could not endure the sight of his deserted, silent empire. He dispatched the god of war, who liberated Death from the hands of her conqueror.

It is said also that Sisyphus, being near to death, rashly wanted to test his wife's love. He ordered her to

see under
slide

cast his unburied body into the middle of the public square. Sisyphus woke up in the underworld. And there, annoyed by an obedience so contrary to human love, he obtained from Pluto permission to return to earth in order to chastise his wife. But when he had seen again the face of this world, enjoyed water and sun, warm stones and the sea, he no longer wanted to go back to the infernal darkness. Recalls, signs of anger, warnings were of no avail. Many years more he lived facing the curve of the gulf, the sparkling sea, and the smiles of earth. A decree of the gods was necessary. Mercury came and seized the impudent man by the collar and, snatching him from his joys, led him forcibly back to the underworld, where his rock was ready for him.

You have already grasped that Sisyphus is the absurd hero. He is, as much through his passions as through his torture, His scorn of the gods, his hatred of death, and his passion for life won him that unspeakable penalty in which the whole being is exerted toward accomplishing nothing. This is the price that must be paid for the passions of this earth. Nothing is told us about Sisyphus in the underworld. Myths are made for the imagination to breathe life into them. As for this myth, one sees merely the whole effort of a body straining to raise the huge stone, to roll it and push it up a slope a hundred times over; one sees the face screwed up, the cheek tight against the stone, the shoulder bracing the clay-covered mass, the foot wedging it, the fresh start with arms outstretched, the wholly human security of two earth-clotted hands. At the very end of his long effort

measured by skyless space and time without depth, the purpose is achieved. Then Sisyphus watches the stone rush down in a few moments toward that lower world whence he will have to push it up again toward the summit. He goes back down to the plain.

It is during that return, that pause, that Sisyphus interests me. A face that toils so close to stones is already stone itself! I see that man going back down with a heavy yet measured step toward the torment of which he will never know the end. That hour like a breathing space which returns as surely as his suffering, that is the hour of consciousness. At each of those moments when he leaves the heights and gradually sinks toward the lairs of the gods, he is superior to his fate. He is stronger than his rock.

If this myth is tragic, that is because its hero is conscious. Where would his torture be, indeed, if at every step the hope of succeeding upheld him? The workman of today works every day in his life at the same tasks, and this fate is no less absurd. But it is tragic only at the rare moments when it becomes conscious. Sisyphus, proletarian of the gods, powerless and rebellious, knows the whole extent of his wretched condition: it is what he thinks of during his descent. The lucidity that was to constitute his torture at the same time crowns his victory. There is no fate that cannot be surmounted by scorn.

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If the descent is thus sometimes performed in sorrow, it can also take place in joy. This word is not too much. Again I fancy Sisyphus returning toward his rock, and

the sorrow was in the beginning. When the images of earth cling too tightly to memory, when the call of happiness becomes too insistent, it happens that melancholy rises in man's heart: this is the rock's victory, this is the rock itself. The boundless grief is too heavy to bear. These are our nights of Gethsemane. But crushing truths perish from being acknowledged. Thus, Oedipus at the outset obeys fate without knowing it. But from the moment he knows, his tragedy begins. Yet at the same moment, blind and desperate, he realizes that the only bond linking him to the world is the cool hand of a girl. Then a tremendous remark rings out: "Despite so many ordeals, my advanced age and the nobility of my soul make me conclude that all is well." Sophocles' Oedipus, like Dostoevsky's Kirilov, thus gives the recipe for the absurd victory. Ancient wisdom confirms modern heroism.

[One does not discover the absurd without being tempted to write a manual of happiness.] "What! by such narrow ways—?" There is but one world, however. Happiness and the absurd are two sons of the same earth. They are inseparable. It would be a mistake to say that happiness necessarily springs from the absurd discovery. It happens as well that the feeling of the absurd springs from happiness.] "I conclude that all is well," says Oedipus, and that remark is sacred. It echoes in the wild and limited universe of man. It teaches that all is not, has not been, exhausted. It drives out of this world a god who had come into it with dissatisfaction and a preference for futile sufferings. It makes of fate a human matter, which must be settled among men.

All Sisyphus' silent joy is contained therein. His fate belongs to him. His rock is his thing. Likewise, the absurd man, when he contemplates his torment, silences all the idols. In the universe suddenly restored to its silence, the myriad wondering little voices of the earth rise up. Unconscious, secret calls, invitations from all the faces, they are the necessary reverse and price of victory. There is no sun without shadow, and it is essential to know the night. The absurd man says yes and his effort will henceforth be unceasing. If there is a personal fate, there is no higher destiny, or at least there is but one which he concludes is inevitable and despicable. For the rest, he knows himself to be the master of his days. At that subtle moment when man glances backward over his life, Sisyphus returning toward his rock, in that slight pivoting he contemplates that series of unrelated actions which becomes his fate, created by him, combined under his memory's eye and soon sealed by his death. Thus, convinced of the wholly human origin of all that is human, a blind man eager to see who knows that the night has no end, he is still on the go. The rock is still rolling.

{ I leave Sisyphus at the foot of the mountain! One always finds one's burden again. But Sisyphus teaches the higher fidelity that negates the gods and raises rocks. He too concludes that all is well. This universe henceforth without a master seems to him neither sterile nor futile. Each atom of that stone, each mineral flake of that night-filled mountain, in itself forms a world. The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy. }