

# ApHOARisms: A Dialogue

Wherein Prof. Hoar, on teaching Camus's essay "The Myth of Sisyphus," recollects (in tranquillity) a *conversazione* he overheard at Bread Loaf, Vermont, in the "Barn" on an evening in July 1959 between the philosophers Camus and Frost.

Robert. I believe we are all indebted to Sisyphus. I have long applauded him in my heart.

Albert. Oui. Sisyphus possesses poetic integrity, for he was a born rebel with a *cause célèbre*. He is worthy of your ultimate luxury, your ultimate poem—to die in the bed you were born in.

Robert. The world loves an underdog, cynical though it be to say so.

Albert. Underdogs make our best heroes; most heroes, however, all too often become insufferable bores at last. One could do worse than be a raiser of rocks.

Robert. Earth's the right place for underdogs and for rocks. Frankly, I dunno where they're likely to go better.

Albert. Early on, you allowed how we're the right place for love?

Robert. Yes, but try'n find it!

Albert. Earthlings, such as we, are already underlings. Under a curse. Call it *felix culpa*. Call it *weltschmerz*. Call it divine justice.

Robert. It was a low pedestrian assignment . . . consignment to H— . . . that our friend Sisyphus was awarded. It wasn't on the level. I never felt he deserved it.

Albert. But, if just desserts were best for us, why do apple pie à la mode, brandied Danish pastry, and cheesecake make us ever fatter?

Robert. Well, at least Sisyphus'll never be fat. He was into isometrics ages before our Health Ed. folks.

Albert. Most think the gravity of his situation unbearable, a decided put-down, for the gods thought him worthy of their displeasure. After all, he did *manage* to steal their fire.

Robert. Yes'n, b'gawd, he's *been* stealing it ever since!

Albert. They thought humiliating him would be a great victory—all gold.

Robert. Ayuh—a sardonic joke they could always titter about as he teeters about . . . somewhere ages hence . . . or so they thought.

Albert. But Sisyphus did the unexpected—he found meaning. Found it anew. Did what each of us

should do . . . find meaning where the gods assume there is none. This exemplary act tends to confirm Homer's estimate: that Sisyphus has perhaps proven the most sapient of mortals.

Robert. I'm like the gods who wanted Sisy to feel downhearted, downcast, downright sorry for himself. And he wouldn't give 'em the satisfaction or sadist-faction!

Albert. They thought to make him the ultimate absurdity. But one who's never known the night can't appreciate daylight nearly so much as Sisyphus. He's a paradox. But, then, who isn't?

Robert. Sisy is all of dynamic. His nobility of soul has him saying "Yes" to his rock. He's a Yeasayer.

Albert. He whom the gods look down upon in scorn, this mortal proletarian among 'em, actually turns more than his stone. He turns the tables on 'em by teaching 'em the higher fidelity, thus nixing all of 'em from Pluto, Moanarch of the dead, on up.

Robert. Ayuh, he's said even to have conquered death, so sacredly ordained of the gods. Before that, Sisy wasn't even average, tasting as he did of lowly human mortalities and contentments.

Albert. Oui, the dirtiest word on Earth is *average*.

Robert. But, if, like Sisy, you can more often say "Yes" to the world out there, you have a higher *AVERAge*.

Albert. Just so.

Robert. Your Sisy, despite his ordeal (raw deal) by darkness, eclipses the absurd in that the rock's his thing. He's "doing his thing," as Emerson would have said.

Albert. The gods wane whiles he waxes, for grubby, dirty though his hands are—many a mortal would gladly shake them!—Sisyphus is the daring darling of serendipity.

Robert. He renders sere their pity. Why, he's a rock star! Pressed for a summation, Sisy must often have "Oh"-pined, "I'm between a rock and a hard place."

Robert. Are we earthlings not all little Sisy, reluctant ergophobes, tasking out our ephemeral

days for figsome praise in the work place?

*Albert.* Oui! For life's an uphill battle, taxing upon the soul as upon the body.

*Robert.* Our rocks (taxes) ever rise before us . . . are ever with us. While Sisy's rock constantly erodes by wear at every turn, each mortal of us must shoulder a growing tax burden, though we can barely budge it.

*Albert.* Such arbitrations *are* a bit much. We each must rise, like Sisyphus, to the occasion, burdened (apparently) in the knowledge that nothing is equal . . . nor should be.

*Robert.* The higherarchy among the gods—those Nay-saying doomsters, who failed abjectly in Sisy's case—have brainwashed us of the lowerarchy into mournful lamentations over our myriad inequalities abounding here. Humans heed not that a uniform equality in all things would be our tragic undoing . . . a veritable hell on earth. God knows, we're nearly there now.

*Albert.* To equate equality with paradise on earth is not only a myth but a mythstake.

*Robert.* Dear bungling (forgive the redundancy) human error—on our lips we croon equality; in our hearts we crave equity.

*Albert.* Absurdity and ecstasy *are* scions/signs of the same sod.

*Robert.* Even the gods have their quarrels, their petty jealousies, jockeying/jokeing for most favored status.

*Albert.* Humans are mixed bags, adulterated baggage.

*Robert.* There are good farts; there are natural farts; and then, of course, there are the *real* farts.

*Albert.* Sisyphus is a real good fart.

*Robert.* Sisy prefers pure water to being popular with the gods. Gawdjess, he'd rather slake than sleaze any day.

*Albert.* But Sisyphus is a peace craver and does humanity proud . . . enough so, to be their patron saint, if they'd but have 'im. To be acknowledged by one's fellows is often too much to ask.

*Robert.* Sisy is our logo! He symbolizes our futile inability to get out from under our largest,

## Emerson Said

Emerson said everything  
in nature is cracked,  
now this is an idea  
that calls me in,  
and if I can get into this idea  
bone deep I will be a bit closer  
to naming my own redemption,  
that stance in nature I need,  
a step into that infinity  
outside human control.  
My entry into this wild universe  
is as dependent upon  
ideas from others  
as it is upon my singular  
walking the paths and fields  
of nature's body.

—ROD FARMER

heaviest, and most astonishing stone—WAR,  
our nemesis.

*Albert.* Sisy has monumental patience to empathize with humans at all, for he is inept at hatred(s). He is way out of sync with our sick compulsion for the gold, for victory, for Number-Oneness.

*Robert.* Perhaps our worst indictment is our not accepting Sisyphus for his saintly qualities. He teaches us that the *upward struggle* toward the Heights of our highest endeavors *is itself enough*.

*Albert.* Oui. Enoughness is his redeeming virtue. As Sisyphus to summitry, so ought we to be to the pinnacle of our dreams.

*Robert.* I admire Sisy, finally, for one other homely forte—his stamina, courage, originality, and direction all rolled into one: what oldtime Mainers used to call *bo-ink-um*.

*Albert.* *If we could have but these two qualities—ENOUGHNESS and BO-INK-LIM—we would be, like Sisyphus\*, calmer within and achieve karma without.* Why, Robert, I believe we have breathed life into my favorite myth!

—JAY S. HOAR

*\*Translatable in Aramaic as "Jesus"*