

Styx

STYX

F O U R R E F L E C T I O N S

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Senior Project: Multiple Currents

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Peer into the blackness of the river Styx long enough and you see things.

R E F L E C T I O N

Ideas and words, poetry and exposition—
They reflect back at you and you see
The ancient and the contemporary.
You realize that what you see is of the river,
Not of yourself,
And your reflection is at once familiar and unknown.

Reflect on this—
You are not the first to ponder its depth,
Nor the first to contemplate its currents!
The river Styx is not an old relic re-examined,
But a river that will always reflect and offer more
To those seeking explanation or inspiration.

Peer into the blackness of the river Styx and see what others reflect upon it.

The stream that falls from the crag by Nonakris drops first of all on to a high rock and down through the rock into the river Krathis, and its water is death to men and to all animals. They say once upon a time it brought death to the goats which first tasted its water, and as time went by its other extraordinary qualities became known. The water of the Styx dissolves glass and crystal and agate and all the stone objects known to man, even pottery vessels. The water corrupts horn and bone, iron and bronze, and even lead and tin and silver and the alloy of silver and gold ... The only thing able to resist the river Styx is a horse's hoof, which will hold the water you pour in and not be destroyed by it.

POISON

"And every dove had lost its will to fly."

—Castle Walls, Styx

From the icy black waterfall in Arcadia, which shares the name Styx, to the toxic Mavronéri, which flows from Mount Olympus, to the Italian Lake Avernus, which kills all birds attempting to fly over it, it is conceivable that the poisonous reputation of the river Styx originates in rivers of this world.

I have no actual knowledge that this water was the poison that killed Alexander, son of Philip, but I have certainly heard it said.

—Pausanias

And whoever of the gods, who keep the summits of snowy
Olympos, pours of this water, and swears on it, and is
forsworn, is laid flat, and does not breathe, until a year is
completed; nor is this god let come near ambrosia and
nectar to eat, but with no voice in him, and no breath, he is
laid out flat, on a made bed, and the evil coma covers him.



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“By that dark stream I swear, that glides below
the world through the glades of Hell.”

—**Metamorphoses**, Ovidius

Because the goddess of the river Styx,
the eldest daughter of Oceanus,
was the first to align with Zeus,
he honored her above others.
He proclaimed that the river
would be the oath of the gods.
The sacred oath is known as Horkos.

But when, in the course of a great year, he is over his
sickness, there follows on in succession another trial, yet
harsher: for nine years he is cut off from all part of the
everlasting gods, nor has anything to do with their
counsels, their festivals for nine years entire, but in the
tenth he once more mingles in the assemblies of the gods
who have their homes on Olympos. Such an oath did the
gods make of the imperishable, primevil water of Styx; and
it jets down through jagged country.

—**Theogony**, Hesiod

We crossed the circle to the bank beyond,
And found a hot spring boiling, and a way,
Dark, narrow, and steep, that down beside it goes,
By which we clambered. Purple-black the pond
Beneath it, widening to a marsh that spreads
Far out, and struggling in that slime malign
Were muddied shades, that not with hands, heads,
And teeth and feet besides, contending tore,
And maimed each other in beast-like rage.

PURGATION

"Not easy is the path from out the tomb;
for this cause above all—
that the gods beneath the earth
are readier to sieze than to release."

—*The Persians*, Aeschylus

The river Styx is a restraint, preventing the souls of the dead from returning to the surface. In the accounts of both Dante and Virgil, the river Styx encircles the underworld nine times, making escape near-impossible.

My guide expounded, "Those whom anger overbore
On earth, behold ye. Mark the further sign
Of bubbles countless on the slime that show.
These from the sobs of those immersed arise;
For buried in the choking filth they cry,
We once were sullen in the rain-sweet air,
When waked the light, and all the earth was fair,
How sullen in the murky swamp we lie
Forbidden from the blessed light on high.
This song they gurgle in their throats, that so
The bubbles rising from the depths below
Break all the surface of the slime."

—*Inferno*, Dante

There Charon stands, who rules the dreary coast—
A sordid god: down from his hoary chin
A length of beard descends, uncomb'd, unclean;
His eyes, like hollow furnaces on fire;
A girdle, foul with grease, binds his obscene attire.
He spreads his canvas; with his pole he steers;
The freights of flitting ghosts in his thin bottom bears.
He look'd in years; yet in his years were seen
A youthful vigor and autumnal green.
An airy crowd came rushing where he stood,
Which fill'd the margin of the fatal flood ...
Now these, now those, the surly boatman bore:
The rest he drove to distance from the shore ...

The river Styx is a passage from this world to the next. Only souls with the proper fare of two obols are given passage across the river by the ferryman, Charon.

Without this, they must wander in limbo, searching for the pauper's entrance to their final resting place.

"I see him there at the oars of his little boat in the lake
the ferryman of the dead,
Charon, with his hand upon the oar,
and he calls me now:
'What keeps you?
Hurry, you hold us back.' He is urging me on
in angry impatience."

—**Alcestis**, Euripides

"The ghosts rejected are th' unhappy crew
Depriv'd of sepulchers and fun'ral due:
The boatman, Charon; those, the buried host,
He ferries over to the farther coast;
Nor dares his transport vessel cross the waves
With such whose bones are not compos'd in graves.
A hundred years they wander on the shore;
At length, their penance done, are wafted o'er."

—**Aeneid**, Virgil

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