THE LYRICAL ESSAYS OF ALBERT CAMUS: UNE LONGUE FIDÉLITÉ

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ABSTRACT

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By

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The scope of Albert Camus' work is greater than might generally be recalled. In addition to the novels, the plays, and two philosophical essays, Le Mythe de Sisyphe and L'Homme révolté, he produced numerous prefaces, lectures, adaptations of foreign works, miscellaneous essays, and a large body of journalistic writings. A great many composite studies of his work have been written treating all or several of these genres. Other critical works have examined a major theme and traced it throughout his writings. Still others have concentrated on a specific genre. To date, however, although they have been treated summarily in conjunction with his other works, no detailed study has been devoted to the three major groups of essays which I have designated as "lyrical": L'Envers et l'endroit, Noces, and L'Eté. The main purpose of this dissertation, therefore, has been to provide one.

Such an examination is warranted for several reasons. For one, and with reference to the eventual evaluation of

Camus' literary merit, the essay collections in question demonstrate to a greater degree than his other works a lyricism which has not received attention in proportion to its significance. In my analysis, therefore, I have stressed poetic style as well as the affective and subjective content of the essays, these being the elements which justify their classification as "lyrical."

This study also demonstrates that the lyrical essays are of paramount importance to a full understanding of Camus' total work; in this respect they are unique in the tradition of the essay genre. They contain all the major themes treated by the writer and, in most instances, presented these themes prior to publication of his better-known writings. The last collection, L'Eté, completes the circle, demonstrating the author's continuing adherence to these basic themes, while at the same time pointing to a rearrangement of perspective.

The dissertation is divided into six parts: a brief introductory note, five chapters forming the main body of the work, and a conclusion. Chapter I discusses the components of lyricism, the essay genre in France, and Camus' qualities as lyrist and essayist. The second chapter examines the major themes appearing in his work. Chapters III, IV, and V analyze chronologically each of the three collections. In the examination of the individual essays

their lyrical aspects are pointed out where present, and attention is drawn to the aforementioned Camusian themes which appear in them. The conclusion returns in a general way to these themes and indicates their rapport with other works in the cases where this has not already been shown. It also comments on various aspects of Camus' style and summarizes its lyrical manifestation both in the collections studied and in other works of this author.

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To

Mom and Joe

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

The work of Albert Camus spans a quarter-century of political, ideological and moral upheaval in the western world and projects the growing concern of our time with the evolution of occidental values. The questions he raised and the concern he voiced are perhaps even more relevant today than during his lifetime, which ended in a fatal car accident in January, 1960. Relevance alone, however, cannot account for the proliferation of critical studies of his work, nor can we look to the charisma of the man himself, for in the 1970's other heroes and martyrs have replaced him and few in the new generation remain deeply touched by Camus' almost lifelong struggle with tuberculosis, his participation in the Resistance, his ideological quarrel with Sartre, or the countless acts that linked him as a man with other men and women.

There remains, beyond the relevance and the charisma, the writer's art. In the eventual evaluation of Camus' literary production critics will doubtless continue the debate concerning which of its elements are of most lasting value. An article in L'Express of April 18, 1971, for example, occasioned by the appearance of Camus'

previously unpublished novel La Mort heureuse, suggests that the best of his writing is to be found in the works where he gives freest rein to his emotion--"les oeuvres où Camus ne démontre rien, ne ménage rien dans le jaillissement de la jeunesse ou l'amertume lucide de la quarantaine"--a qualification that is clearly applicable to a major portion of the three essay collections I have designated as lyrical: L'Envers et l'endroit, Noces, and L'Eté. Camus himself, however, deprecates the artistic merit of at least the first of these collections, L'Envers et l'endroit, in his preface to the 1958 reedition of this work, (" ... à vingt-deux ans, sauf génie, on sait à peine écrire!"), and it is not precisely the spontaneity suggested by the Express commentator that I would stress as an enduring value in these essays, but rather their emotive and subjective content, as well as a developing poetic style, all as aspects of a much broader term: lyricism.

Consequently, while the chief purpose of this study is to examine in detail the essays mentioned, two secondary objectives will be pursued concurrently: to focus attention on lyricism when it appears in Camus' writing, and to demonstrate the significant relationship of these essays to his total work. As preparation for the examination of the essays themselves in order to place them in clearer perspective, I shall first discuss lyricism and the essay genre, and

the dominant themes which appear throughout Camus' work. The three collections will then be analyzed chronologically.

All citations from Camus' essays are taken from Albert Camus: Essais, edited by Roger Quilliot and Louis Faucon (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1965) hereinafter referred to as Essais, and page numbers are noted within the text immediately after quotations. I have used the following abbreviations in referring to the essays: EE (L'Envers et l'endroit), N (Noces), E (L'Eté), MS (Le Mythe de Sisyphe), and HR (L'Homme révolté).

CHAPTER I

LYRICISM AND THE ESSAY

> "Quel est celui de nous qui n'a pas, dans ses jours d'ambition, rêvé le miracle d'une prose poétique, musicale sans rythme et sans rime, assez souple et assez heurtée pour s'adapter aux mouvements lyriques de l'âme, aux ondulations de la rêverie, aux soubresauts de la conscience?"
>
> Baudelaire
> Dédicace, Le Spleen de Paris, 1869

In order to establish the significance of Albert Camus as a lyrist it is essential to explore first the meaning of this term. The term "lyrical" is usually applied to poetry that is a brief, unified expression of emotion in language as melodious as possible. The emotive quality of lyricism is emphasized by Robert de Souza in "Un Débat sur la poésie":

> Ceux qui ont un peu approfondi la genèse du lyrisme reconnaîtront l'excellence de cette formation poétique et de son développement. Elle doit son ardente origine à l'émotion de la vie totale, à la propulsion sentimentale entière qui ne sépare aucun des éléments physiques et spirituels de notre être.[1]

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[1]Henri Bremond, La Poésie pure avec un débat sur la poésie par Robert de Souza (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1926), p. 187.

In The Poetry of Experience Robert Langbaum cites Wordsworth in the latter's Preface to the Lyrical Ballads: ". . . the feeling therein developed gives importance to the action and situation, and not the action and situation to the feeling," and Professor Langbaum adds "he [Wordsworth] must have meant they were lyrical in the sense of subjective, stressing feeling over action"[2] in contrast to the traditional ballad.

Inevitably, with the stress on the affective quality of lyricism, the artist's subjectivity must be included as a primary factor. What is communicated is the result of an intensely personal experience. The idea of immediate experience as a dominant element of both nineteenth and twentieth-century poetry is what links both of them to romantic lyricism and to each other, according to Dr. Langbaum, and he adds that the poetry of experience is "in its meaning if not its events, autobiographical both for the writer and the reader."[3] In the case of Camus' lyrical essays we know that not only their meaning but their events are for the most part autobiographical. It is actual

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[2]Robert Langbaum, The Poetry of Experience (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1957), p. 56.

[3]Ibid., p. 52.

experience that is related, along with its effects on the writer's sensibility and intellect. It is Camus himself, returning to the milieu of his childhood and youth who communicates his reactions to it; Camus, the bored and lonely traveler in Prague--"J'aurais pleuré comme un enfant si quelqu'un m'avait ouvert ses bras" (EE, 36)--who becomes aware that it is the very isolation of the traveler in a strange place which brings him new lucidity. Again it is Camus "en chair et en os" living to the fullest the outdoor life of sun and sea in Algeria, experiencing with all his senses the beauties of Tipasa and the winds of Djémila; traveling again, now in Italy, assessing the art, the flowers, and the women; witnessing a boxing match in Oran; returning to Tipasa, to find barbed-wire around its ruins; wandering the streets of Manhattan in the rain.

The experiences related are not only intensely personal, but their emotional content evolves from physical phenomena--from flowers, from rain, from a death's head on the table of a Franciscan monk, from the marinated cucumbers sold by the street-vendors of Prague. One is reminded of the advice of Max Jacob in his "Conseils à un jeune poète": "Concrétisez, ça ne veut pas dire la poésie populiste, les paysans, les sabots, etc., ça veut dire: placer votre voix dans le ventre, la pensée dans le ventre, et parler du

sublime avec la voix dans le ventre."[4] A very special quality of Camus' lyricism lies in his ability not only to respond with great sensitivity to the external world, but also to communicate this response on both the level of the sublime and that of the "ventre." This is often accomplished by means of stark reporting, in blunt and concrete terms, which provokes the reader's sensitivity only after it has first aroused an almost physical reaction. Referring, for example, to the words on a grave-marker in a cemetery of Algiers, he describes them as a "feinte sinistre par quoi on prête un corps et des désirs à ce qui au mieux est un liquide noir" (N, 73). The horror and revulsion invoked by the words "liquide noir" is of an elemental and irrational nature, and it precedes the more refined association with the tragedy and absurdity of human mortality. At Djémila, on a less tragic note, he says, "Je me sentais claquer au vent comme une mâture" (N, 62). The appeal is first to the physical and instinctual, and the development of the reader's relationship to the experience being recounted begins not through a process of reason, but through an emotional charge which passes from writer to reader. It is an appeal having its origin in emotion and in turn producing it.

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[4]Jacques Charpier and Pierre Seghers, L'Art poétique (Paris: Editions Seghers, 1956), p. 469.

The external world, in addition to its function as catalyst to provoke instinctual reaction, interrelates in yet another way with the emotions of the lyrical writer. The latter, supersensitive, perceives the physical concrete world in a special way, in what Dr. Langbaum calls an "extraordinary perspective." The disruption of the ordinary appearance of things has a twofold effect. First, it permits the poet's imagination to transform them into significance. One of Wordsworth's declared objectives in his Lyrical Ballads was to choose "incidents and situations from common life" and "to throw over them a certain coloring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect. . . ."[5]

A second effect of the disruption is to permit entry of the poet's imagination into the physical world itself. The romantic lyrist not only perceives the exterior world with extraordinary sensitivity but himself enters into what he has perceived and becomes to a certain extent a part of it. It is the kind of union suggested by Baudelaire in his comments on the modern conception of pure art in his "Art philosophique": "C'est créer une magie suggestive contenant à la fois l'objet et le sujet, le monde extérieur à l'artiste

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[5]Ernest Bernbaum, ed., Anthology of Romanticism (3rd ed.; New York: Ronald Press, 1948), p. 301.

et l'artiste lui-même."[6] The lyrist's poetry is successful to the degree that he can transmit this fusion of object, emotion and thought to his reader as a shared experience.

But what actually happens, what is accomplished by such fusion of poet with the world? Dr. Langbaum suggests that it permits at least a glimpse of the ultimate reality of the object perceived, "in its organic connection, that is, with the observer and, through the observer's innate conception of universality, with the universe."[7] The process described by Dr. Langbaum could imply a platonic progression, with the intellect playing a substantial role, whereas the development of Camus' interaction with the physical world appears to come about as a kind of total abandonment of the self on a spontaneous, irrational level. His lyrical essays abound with expressions of fusion with the world of nature. In "Le Vent à Djémila," for example he declares: "Bientôt, répandu aux quatre coins du monde, oublieux, oublié de moi-même, je suis ce vent et dans le vent, ces colonnes et cet arc, ces dalles qui sentent chaud et ces montagnes pâles autour de la ville déserte" (N, 62). In "Le Minotaure": "Quelle tentation de s'identifier à ces pierres, de se confondre avec cet univers brûlant et

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[6]Charles Baudelaire, Oeuvres complètes, ed. by Claude Pichois (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1961), p. 1099.

[7]Langbaum, The Poetry of Experience, p. 42.

impassible qui défie l'histoire et ses agitations!" (E, 830). The urge to fuse with the physical world, to lose personal identity and become part of the universe, appears in many guises in Camus' works, and nowhere so directly as in his lyrical writings. The much-desired "loss-of-self," however, is counterpoised by an insistence on lucidity, on an awareness that is inextricably bound to individuality. Before the same landscape of Djémila, where he feels himself a "pierre parmi les pierres" he affirms: "Je veux porter ma lucidité jusqu'au bout et regarder ma fin avec toute la profusion de ma jalousie et de mon horreur" (N, 65).

The allusions to a merging with the world of nature have other implications. Philosophically Camus rejected absolutes, and the world of the concrete and the particular took precedence for him over the abstract principle and the Platonic ideal. Nevertheless in his lyrical works the yearning for submergence of his particularity into universal nature appears to be a form of "nostalgie d'un absolu." This yearning reaches its apogee at moments when he is deeply moved, when, seeing the world in an "extraordinary perspective" his emotions are most strongly aroused. One such moment is described in "Le Désert": "Des millions d'yeux, je le savais, ont contemplé ce paysage et pour moi, il était comme le premier sourire du ciel. Il me mettait

hors de moi au sens profond du terme ... " (N, 87). In a later chapter treating the Camusian themes I shall explore further this "nostalgie de l'Absolu," but at this point I wish only to call attention to it as it relates to emotion in lyricism in general, and in Camus' lyricism in particular.

Thus far in the endeavor to reach a clearer understanding of lyricism two major characteristics have emerged, emotion and subjectivity, both of which pervade the essays under study. One of the unique qualities of the lyrical writer as artist, aiding him to project these two characteristics, was found to be his ability to perceive the ordinary world in an unusual way.[8] Another type of vision is attributed to the romantic lyrist by Jacques Barzun, and it serves to emphasize the dramatic aspect of lyricism. He refers to it as a "playwright's vision," and states that "he (the romantic lyrist) is in effect a dramatist using his own self as a sensitive plate to catch whatever molecular or spiritual motion the outer world may supply."[9] While this is essentially repeating the earlier-mentioned idea of the writer as intermediary, the suggestion of a new perspective, that of the dramatist, calls to mind another dramatic trait present in Camus' lyrical essays, one which is related to

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[8]Supra, p. 8.

[9]Jacques Barzun, Romanticism and the Modern Ego (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1944), pp. 97-98.

lyricism by its personal and immediate character. I would describe it as a tone which at times approaches the conversational. Dr. Langbaum has noted this dramatic aspect of lyricism, and has remarked on its similarity to "one side of a dialogue, with the other side understood by its effect."[10] Often in Camus' lyrical essays there is the impression of a spoken phrase, with a listener present and ready to respond. In "L'Eté à Alger," for example, when describing a twilight in Algiers he says: "Quand je suis quelque temps loin de ce pays j'imagine ses crépuscules comme des promesses de bonheur" (N, 70). Further on in the same essay the impression is reinforced: "Presque aussitôt après, la première étoile apparaît ... Et puis, d'un coup, dévorante, la nuit" (N, 70). Of the open air dance floor on the beach of Padovani: "Souvent, j'attendais là une minute singulière. Pendant la journée, la salle est protégée par des auvents de bois inclinés. Quand le soleil a disparu, on les relève. Alors, la salle s'emplit d'une étrange lumière verte ... " (N, 71).

The sense of immediacy, of speech heard rather than read, derives from several elements that appear with far greater frequency in the lyrical essays than in those termed philosophical. The voice of the personal "je," also present in the latter, speaks now of physical phenomena, and by its

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[10]Langbaum, The Poetry of Experience, pp. 53-54.

very concentration on the physical, draws the reader into the framework of a concrete situation beside the speaker. Time as well as space is involved, and the feeling of being present is enhanced when the speaker begins many of his remarks conversationally with such words as "alors," "quand," "souvent," "et puis," presque aussitôt après," conveying to his auditor the movement of his experience. Increasingly involved in this movement the reader identifies with the invisible listener, and the personal emotional tone that is so much a part of lyricism is further heightened.

Emotional and subjective, lyricism is also characterized to a certain extent by spontaneity, and it will be recalled that the Express article cited in the introductory note to this study called attention to this quality in some of Camus' work. C. Day Lewis considers it essential to true lyricism, and states somewhat ambiguously that the poet's utterance will be lyrical "provided he has made contact with what, in nature and human nature, is spontaneous."[11] He also wonders if "the elaborate self-consciousness of modern man has not, by reaching an imbalance with his instinctual spontaneity, killed the lyric medium."[12] The gist of his remarks seems to be that the lyrical writer must above all

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[11]C. Day Lewis, The Lyric Impulse (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965), p. 152.

[12]Ibid., p. 4.

be sensitive to what is most spontaneous in nature, in man, and in himself. While I would insist that it is the writer's art which ultimately makes possible the communication of his emotion, it is nonetheless true that spontaneous and instinctual reaction is at the base of lyrical expression.

Still another attribute of lyricism remains to be discussed--the musical quality from which it derives its name. As Dr. Lewis points out, "Melody--a singing line--has always been essential to the lyric and the lyrical poem as we know them."[13] In lyrical writing more than in other kinds, the complete meaning is communicated by how the writer says what he is saying, and it is this aspect that is ultimately untranslatable. We know only that the effect is destroyed if the words or the order of the words is changed. The musical quality of lyricism is one of "ces grâces secrètes" mentioned by Père Rapin,[14] and to analyze definitively the mysterious order that produces it would be an impossible task. However, an approach can be made through a process of elimination. Lyricism is not a quality confined to the formalized structure of poetry, and its melody does not depend necessarily on meter and rhyme. Lyricism itself, moreover, including its singing quality,

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[13]Ibid., p. 19.

[14]René Rapin S. J., Les Réflexions sur la poétique de ce temps et sur les ouvrages des poètes anciens et modernes, ed. by E. T. Dubois (1675 ed.; Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1970), p. 60.

can be equated in many respects with poetry. Indeed it is interesting to note that the term "poetic" when it is applied to prose seems to be particularly directed toward traits which, when observed in versified poetry, are termed "lyrical." The musical quality of lyricism, leaving aside its emotional and subjective aspects, will depend then on its use of language, not necessarily restricted by meter and rhyme, but sharing other characteristics in common with the broader term of "poetry."

Since this study is not intended as an analysis of what constitutes poetic language or poetic techniques, I shall discuss them only briefly in order to show how they are employed by Camus in these essays to create the inner harmony of "singing lines" which move us as much by their beauty as by the feelings and thoughts they seek to express. In the detailed analysis of each essay which makes up the main body of this study, closer attention will be given to these as well as other poetic elements.

In La Prose poétique française Albert Cherel describes Racine as "maître de tous les moyens musicaux," and lists some of these latter as "alternance de longues et de brèves, retour des mêmes sons au cours d'un couplet, insistances accentuées par le rythme, variété indéfiniment souple des mouvements et des cadences. ... "[15] The variety

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[15]Albert Cherel, La Prose poétique française (Paris: L'Artisan du Livre, 1940), p. 29.

of movement and cadence, free of formal restriction and coupled with alternation of long and brief sounds, is one of the most admirable characteristics of Camus' lyrical essays, and thus one finds brief apostrophes juxtaposed with sensual images in which the vowel sounds are prolonged:

> O matins d'Oranie! Du haut des plateaux, les hirondelles plongent dans d'immense cuves où l'air bouillonne (E, 832).

A phrase of predominantly short sounds sometimes appears enclosed between two in which the vowels are prolonged:

> A chaque vague, une promesse, toujours la même (E, 886).

In some instances the rhythm encompasses a group of sentences whose varying lengths and cadences correspond to the total movement of the passage, as in the following description of approaching evening on a beach, as the sea grows more and more calm:

> Le soir venu, sous le ciel qui verdit et recule, la mer, si calme pourtant, s'apaise encore. De courtes vagues soufflent une buée d'écume sur la grève tiède. Les oiseaux de mer ont disparu. Il ne reste qu'un espace, offert au voyage immobile (E, 886).

As the sea calms and night falls, each succeeding sentence grows shorter, as a voice growing softer. The last sentence expresses the final stasis of the scene.

Enumeration as a means of insistence is another poetic characteristics of Camus' essays which contributes to their musical quality. Jacques-G. Krafft, discussing

enumeration, distinguishes between two types: juxtaposition, which he calls a "fait de prose," and superposition, "fait plus foncièrement émané de la poésie." In the former a series of terms, each adding a new factor to what preceded it, evokes a linear progression. In superposition, on the other hand, all the terms stress a single signification. In juxtaposed enumeration "L'esprit marche au pas réellement cadencé vers le total parfait," whereas in the use of superposition "on saute sur place."[16] Camus employs both kinds of enumeration, but his use of superposition is much more frequent. His tendency toward a "rythme ternaire," the grouping of three terms, was the subject of a study by Osten Södergard[17] and it is true that his superposition appears most often in this form. Whatever the number of elements, the build-up of insistence by means of such enumeration is one of the qualities contributing to the melodic movement of so many lines of these essays:

> ... si longuement frotté du vent, secoué depuis plus d'une heure, étourdi de résistance, je perdais conscience du dessin que traçait mon corps (N, 62).

> Les montagnes, le ciel, la mer sont comme des visages dont on découvre l'aridité ou la splendeur, à force de regarder au lieu de voir (N, 59).

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[16]Jacques-G. Krafft, Essai sur l'esthétique de la prose (Paris: Librairie philosophique J. Vrin, 1952), pp. 23-24.

[17]Osten Södegard, "Un Aspect de la prose de Camus: le rythme ternaire," Studio Neophilologica, XXXI (1959).

> Ensuite étaient venus les barbelés, je veux dire les tyrannies, la guerre, les polices, le temps de la révolte (E, 870).

> ... l'eau des confidences coule à petit bruit, interminablement, parmi les fontaines, les statues et les jardins (E, 848).

Even Camus' employ of juxtaposition, which Krafft calls a "fait de prose," takes on a poetic quality when metaphors are involved, and this juxtaposition has yet another rhythm, classical in its balance:

> Ces villes n'offrent rien à la réflexion et tout à la passion (E, 847).

> La beauté isolée finit par grimacer, la justice solitaire finit par opprimer (E, 871).

Repetition of words is also used to insist, and adds strong accent to the rhythm:

> Entre cet endroit et cet envers du monde, je ne veux pas choisir, je n'aime pas qu'on choisisse (EE, 49).

> Grande mer, toujours labourée, toujours vierge, ma religion avec la nuit (E, 886)!

Occasionally an alexandrine appears, rhythmically complete in itself:

> Ciel malade sur une mer décomposée (E, 882).

> Roi fainéant, mon chariot se traînait alors (E, 884);

or as part of another phrase:

> Voici les déserts où la pensée va se reprendre, la main fraîche du soir sur un coeur agité (E, 830).

All three of the essay collections, L'Envers et l'Endroit, Noces, and L'Eté, demonstrate every characteristic--emotion, subjectivity, music--implied by the term lyrical, and in fact to a large degree deserve the designation of "poésie en prose," as will be verified further in the more detailed analysis to follow.

In an examination of prose works described as "lyrical" one must at the outset take account of the fact that this term has been much more frequently associated with poetry than with prose, and there may still be objections to the title lyrist when applied to a writer of prose. However, the existence of poetic prose is a literary fact. Opposition of the two terms "poetry" and "prose" has often been called into question. The English poet Wordsworth wrote in 1800:

> . . . much confusion has been introduced into criticism by this contradistinction of poetry and prose, instead of the more philosophical one of poetry and matter of fact or science. The only strict antithesis to prose is meter; nor is this, in truth a strict antithesis, because lines and passages of meter so naturally occur in writing prose that it would be scarcely possible to avoid them, even were it desirable.[18]

Over a century later Robert de Souza pointed out that "la prose peut ressortir au poétique et le vers au prosaïque par le contenu et par le contenant," and he adds:

> Dans cet esprit, il convient de laisser complètement de côté la vieille distinction bilatérale de la prose et du vers, aussi fausse que

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[18]Bernbaum, Anthology of Romanticism, p. 303.

> toutes les autres, pour identifier la poésie partout où elle se présente dans l'alliance indivisible qui la constitue du sentiment et de son expression esthétique.[19]

Paul Claudel, exploring the subject of what constitutes poetry, cites lines which at first glance appear to be prose, and then remarks on their musical quality and other poetic elements. To his interlocutor who argues "Mais c'est de la prose, ce que vous dites là!" he replies:

> Non, ce n'est pas de la prose, cher Monsieur, ça n'a aucun rapport, ce sont des vers dont chacun est distinct, dont chacun a une figure sonore différente et contient en lui-même tout ce qu'il faut pour être parfait, en un mot c'est de la poésie latente, ...[20]

A good many illustrious French writers have even maintained the superiority of prose for the expression of feeling. In the article just quoted Claudel says of rhyme that it is "inutile et nuisible dans le drame et dans la grande poésie lyrique où le sentiment domine tout et où le moyen doit se faire oublier. ... "[21] Cherel reminds us of the "Lettre à l'Académie" of Fenelon in which the latter recognizes the power of poetic expression, but deplores the inadequacy of French versification to interpret it,

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[19]Bremond, La Poésie pure, pp. 258-259.

[20]Paul Claudel, "Réflexions et propositions sur le vers français," Nouvelle Revue française, XXV (juillet-déc., 1925), 556.

[21]Ibid., p. 569.

declaring that rhyme is the enemy of variety and true harmony, and further, that it tends to falsify meaning and stultify inspiration by its constraints.

The greater freedom allowed by prose seems to be the chief point in its favor according to its proponents, and once more I shall cite the very poetic prose of Claudel:

> Ah, il n'y a plus besoin de mesurer et de compter! Quel soulagement! Comme l'esprit jouit de cet affranchissement de l'oreille! Qu'est-ce qui va arriver? Quelle musique toujours changeante et toujours imprévue et quelle joie de se sentir ainsi gracieusement porté sans que l'on sache comment par-dessus tous les obstacles! Et comme le vers alexandrin à côté de ces roulades d'oiseaux paraît quelque chose de barbare, à la fois enfantin et vieillot, quelque chose de pionnesque et de mécanique, inventé pour dépouiller les vibrations de l'âme, les initiatives sonores de la simple Psyche, de leur accent le plus naïf et de leur fleur la plus délicate.[22]

For the subjective writer of lyrical tendency who rejects the constraints of formally structured poetry, the essay genre seems a particularly happy choice. There have been many definitions of the essay, but most agree on the three following characteristics: it should be brief, of a personal, reflective nature, and written in prose. Within these modest restrictions it has the virtue of allowing the writer greater freedom than any other genre.

The essay had its beginning in France, receiving its name from the work of its French originator, Michel Eyquem

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[22] Ibid., p. 556.

de Montaigne. This initial "essayist" left no doubt as to the total subjectivity of his work both topic and point of view: " ... c'est moy que je peins" (Avis au lecteur, Essais, 1580). Since the sixteenth-century Essais of Montaigne, the essay has continued to serve other writers in France as a vehicle for the expression of personal opinions and/or feelings, although some critics have wrongly tended to consider the form a predominantly English one. H. V. Routh, for example, in his article "The Origins of the Essay Compared in French and English Literatures" implies that the essay in France began and ended with Montaigne, and he adds the following rather shocking statement: "And yet the literature which created the essay and offers so many facilities for its continuance, has failed to produce a successor at all comparable to Montaigne, while another nation, apparently less adapted to the cultivation of this art, can claim all the great essayists of the world from Bacon to Lamb."[23] Mr. Routh gives as his explanation of this failure the particular conditions of French society in the seventeenth century: it was a period of reconstruction and desire for authority, within which the institution of the salon, with its stress on form, tended to eliminate what

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[23]H. V. Routh, "The Origins of the Essay Compared in French and English Literature," Modern Language Review, XV, No. 1 (1920), 33.

was personal and peculiar. "A writer was not expected to reveal his own soul but to play a part."[24]

This argument carries some weight insofar as it confines itself to the seventeenth century. While many of the carefully composed letters of the period, as well as the writings of the moralists, are close kin to the essay, they fail in significant ways to fulfill the criteria mentioned earlier. As Routh points out, La Rochefoucauld's Maximes are really an exposition of the society of his time, and La Bruyère, who perhaps had the "potentialities for the greatest of essayists," did not fulfill them, preferring in the succeeding editions of his Caractères to augment the more popular portraits rather than the meditations and comments which were more akin to the essay. It is nonetheless true that many seventeenth-century writers were in fact writing essays as we now recognize them, but under different names, such as "discours," "traité," and "réflexions." Guez de Balzac's letters, of contemplative style expressing his thoughts, would have been called essays in another era, and Saint-Evremond's literary and historical observations, though intended primarily to clarify certain subjects for his readers, contain many personal reflections.

While it is understandable that Mr. Routh, writing in 1920, would omit many twentieth-century writers in the

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[24] Ibid., p. 35.

genre such as Malraux, Duhamel, Sartre, and Camus, it is inconceivable that he would overlook completely the great French writers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries who employed it. It was during the eighteenth century that the "essay" so named returned to France under the influence of Bacon and Locke, and the use of the genre soon expanded and gained momentum in the form of well-knit studies of a variety of subjects, always from a personal point of view. Many major figures of the Enlightenment, such as Voltaire, Diderot, Holbach, and Montesquieu made use of it. Marivaux, generally thought of as a novelist and dramatist, produced one-quarter of his total work in this form. Le Spectateur français (1722), L'Indigent Philosophe (1728), and Le Cabinet du philosophe (1734) are all essay collections. The eighteenth century also witnessed the increasing use of the genre in art criticism. Diderot employed it extensively for this purpose.

Nineteenth-century writers in France continued the previous century's usage of the essay. Baudelaire, following in the footsteps of Diderot, used it in art criticism, for example. However, other writers, such as Chateaubriand (Essai historique, politique et moral sur les révolutions anciennes et modernes, 1797), Stendhal (Essai sur l'amour, 1822), Mérimée (Essai sur la guerre sociale, 1841), Taine (Essai sur les fables de La Fontaine, 1853),

Renan and Cousin gave the name of "essay" to works which were in fact lengthy treatises. It was not until the latter part of the century that shorter pieces more closely resembling those of Montaigne began to appear, although these were not always entitled essays. Dr. Sidney Braun cites as examples of some of these nineteenth-century shorter works the Du Dandysme (1845) of Barbey d'Aurevilly, some of the Actes et paroles (1872) of Victor Hugo, and short pieces of Léon Bloy and Rémy de Gourmont.[25]

In the twentieth century the essay has become increasingly popular, and many critics attribute this phenomenon to the growing independence of writers which permits them greater freedom of thought. A possible related cause suggested by Dr. Braun is the decline of the fixed form in our century. The novel, for example, which had come to encompass other genres formerly distinct in themselves, such as satire and tragedy, eventually tended to become a fixed form itself. The essay was a convenient outlet for writers such as Gide who revolted against fixed form.

Emile Bouvier calls the essayist's manner a "réaction de défense de la sensibilité littéraire." The essay's dominant characteristics of eclecticism

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[25]Sidney D. Braun, ed., Dictionary of French Literature (New York: Philosophical Library, 1958), p. 113.

and personality, according to Bouvier, are directly opposed to the requirements of scientific didacticism, specialization, and objectivity. The writer, situated in a collective environment, and forced to seek his personal justifications within the limits of his historical milieu, at least tries to do it in his own way, "suivant des procédés qui relèvent pour autant de l'art d'agréer que de celui de démontrer." As a means of viewing the twentieth-century essay in perspective with usage in other periods, Bouvier's definition of it is worth citing in its entirety:

> L'essai est d'abord un totalitarisme. Le sens de la solution du problème est dicté par une conviction intérieure, souvent préconçue; l'argumentation fait appel tour à tour à la raison, au coeur, à l'imagination; la composition est souple, parfois irregulière, avec raccourcis et digressions; le 'tempo' varié; le style calque un mouvement intérieur et est frappé à l'empreinte personnelle de l'auteur. En bref, quelle que soit sa significantion didactique, même et surtout lorsque l'essayiste y attache une importance capitale, l'essai reste oeuvre d'art et objet de plaisir, détachable de la démonstration proprement dite.[26]

Most of the above is applicable not only to Camus' lyrical essays, but to the four Lettres à un ami allemand of 1943-1944 and to the philosophical essays as well. It would be well to state here that the term "philosophical" applied to Le Mythe de Sisyphe and L'Homme révolté is not strictly

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[26]Emile Bouvier, Les Lettres françaises au XXe siècle (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1962), pp. 76-77.

accurate, since Camus made no pretensions to being a philosopher or of formulating a philosophical system. The two above-mentioned essays are frequently referred to by this term because of their objective concern with certain principles as they apply to human life. Even in these so-called "philosophical" essays, however, Camus' strong tendency toward subjective and lyrical expression is apparent. The concluding pages of L'Homme révolté and a large part of Le Mythe de Sisyphe approach very closely the designation of prose poetry.

The field of subjects for essays has expanded to include personal speculation and reflection on every conceivable matter. Twentieth-century novelists have found the genre an effective means of expressing philosophical ideas and principles that underly their subsequent novels. Malraux's La Tentation de l'Occident explores basic differences between the East and the West in their orientation toward human life and the world. The separation of Western man from the world, his insistence on particularity, and his need for action are among the themes which appear and are developed later in his novels. For Camus Le Mythe de Sisyphe stands in the same relationship with L'Etranger: the theme of the Absurd conveyed in the former by means of personal reflection, is revealed in the latter through the experience of the protagonist, Meursault. The expansion of

Camus' thought, as expressed in L'Homme révolté, is revealed novelistically in La Peste, both works demonstrating a shift toward enlarged responsibility.

Other twentieth-century writers have found their sources of inspiration in nature, travel, politics, art religion, literature, and philosophy. So great was the impact of one collection of essays on the young Camus, that by his own admission it was the deciding factor in his becoming a writer. In his preface to the 1959 edition of Les Iles, essays of his mentor and friend, Jean Grenier, Camus writes: "A l'époque où je découvris Les Iles, je voulais écrire, je crois. Mais je n'ai vraiment décidé de la faire qu'après cette lecture." It was this slender book, he says, which guided him toward "une réflexion plus profonde" and in addition, "Un jardin s'ouvrait, en effet, d'une richesse incomparable; je venais de découvrir l'art."[27] The influence of Les Iles on Camus was therefore twofold, since he also chose its form for his first published work.

Many of the above-mentioned speculations on the situation of the essay genre in France in the twentieth century point up its peculiar appropriateness for Camus. Certainly he stressed the freedom and independence of the writer, and as an artist he was deeply concerned with form.

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[27]Jean Grenier, Les Iles (1930; rpt. Paris: Gallimard, 1959), preface by Albert Camus, p. 13.

It has been suggested by various critics that as a craftsman Camus was not an unqualified success in certain of his dramatic and novelistic works, tending in some cases to allow his themes to overflow the limits of the genre employed, to the detriment of the finished work. It is possible to view this alleged defect as a manifestation of the artist's impatience with fixed form, whether conscious or unconscious. It is also, however, a support to the thesis that Camus, with his pronounced lyrical tendency, writes best in the essay, where he is entirely free to reflect and to speculate, to express his emotions with the greatest degree of spontaneity, to speak in his own voice finally without the constraints imposed by other forms.

Although Camus' Le Mythe de Sisyphe and L'Homme révolté are perhaps more widely known than the three collections of lyrical essays, the latter have a special relationship to his total work in that they contain all of the major themes whose development makes up their author's literary production. This was suggested by Camus himself in his preface to the 1958 reedition of L'Envers et l'endroit, the earliest collection, when he speaks of "ce long cheminement pour retrouver par les détours de l'art les deux ou trois images simples et grandes sur lesquelles le coeur, une première fois, s'est ouvert."[28]

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[28]Henry Bonnier, Albert Camus ou la force d'être (Lyon: Editions Emmanuel Vitte, 1959), p. 58.

Others have perceived the importance of the lyrical essays to an understanding of Camus' other works. Henry Bonnier, for example, refers to Noces as "la première et déterminante impulsion à une oeuvre riche de franchise et d'honnêteté"[29] and stresses the decisive influence of Camus' experience at Djémila as transcribed in the second essay of Noces. Albert Maquet[30] sees "Les Amandiers" (written in 1950 and later published in the collection L'Eté in 1954) reflected in the final lyrical chapter of L'Homme révolté (1951). Before beginning the examination of the lyrical essays themselves, a brief survey will be made of the recurring themes in Camus' writing in order to demonstrate more clearly the unique rapport between the lyrical essays and Camus' total literary production.

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[29]Ibid., p. 97.

[30]Albert Maquet, Albert Camus ou l'invincible été: essai (Paris: Nouvelles Editions Debresse, 1955), p. 105.

CHAPTER II

THE THEMES

> " ... une oeuvre d'homme n'est rien d'autre que ce long cheminement pour retrouver par les détours de l'art les deux ou trois images simples et grandes sur lesquelles le coeur, une première fois, s'est ouvert."
>
> Camus
> Préface, L'Envers et l'Endroit

Even a cursory perusal of Camus' total writing discloses the predominance of certain themes. A closer look will reveal that all of them are present in the lyrical essays under study, and further, that they remain his preoccupation from the beginning to the end of his career as a writer.

In the examination of these subjects some overlapping is unavoidable and this is particularly true of the first theme I propose to discuss--tension--which I consider to be at the base of all of Camus' work. Aspects of it are apparent in all of the other major themes to be treated and as a result each of these subsequent themes, with few exceptions, will be examined either from a double perspective or paired with another subject. Since this chapter will be concerned primarily with "fond" rather than "forme"

discussion of details of style will be postponed until analysis of the essays themselves. It should at least be noted here, however, that tension, first theme to be treated, manifests itself also in Camus' "forme," as Henri Hell has remarked in the special edition of La Table Ronde of February, 1960 dedicated to Camus:

> ... le style de Camus est celui d'un grand écrivain. Le dépouillement et l'élan lyrique, tels sont ses caractéristiques essentielles. Dans ses livres les plus accomplis ... ces deux tendances qui peuvent sembler contradictoires donnent naissance à une oeuvre classique, où s'équilibrent la volonté d'ordre, d'unité, et la tension intérieure contre laquelle l'écrivain ne cesse de lutter. C'est cette lutte qui donne à ses plus belles pages leur ton particulier: celui d'une voix harmonieuse et crispée, ardente et sobre, douce et révoltée. Voix à laquelle l'oeuvre de Camus devra sa vertu la plus durable.[1]

Tension in Camus' work takes several aspects. One of these appears in the idea of limit, of "la mesure." Indeed this aspect has been so closely associated with Camus that he himself commented humorously on the subject in an interview with Frank Jotterand of the Gazette de Lausanne in March of 1954: "D'autres termes encore que l'on répète à tout propos à mon égard; limite, mesure ... Il faudra que je renouvelle mes adjectifs ... "[2]

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[1]Henri Hell, "Gide et Camus," La Table ronde, No. 146 (1960), 25.

[2]Camus, Essais, p. 1836.

Camusian "mesure" is the kind of tension or equilibrium achieved by recognition of limits and the acceptance of restraint within those limits. As a student and admirer of the Greeks, who sensed deeply his own affinity with Greek ideals and Greek rapport with the natural world, Camus makes frequent allusion to them as observers of "la mesure" whose example our western civilization has failed to follow. For the Greeks, will was restrained by reason; we have instead placed "l'élan de la volonté au coeur de la raison, qui en est devenue meurtrière" (E, 855); for the Greeks' action was based on preëxistent values, and it was restricted to precise limits, but:

> ... la philosophie moderne place ses valeurs à la fin de l'action. Elles ne sont pas, mais elles deviennent, et nous ne les connaîtrons dans leur entier qu'à l'achèvement de l'histoire. Avec elles, la limite disparaît, et comme les conceptions diffèrent sur ce qu'elles seront, comme il n'est pas de lutte qui, sans le frein de ces mêmes valeurs, ne s'étende indéfiniment, les messianismes aujourd'hui s'affrontent et leurs clameurs se fondent dans le choc des empires (E, 855).

In modern philosophy's enshrinement of History and the concept of the progression of human society toward a better future, the field of our action becomes open-ended, and the action itself, without pre-set values to act as guide and restraint, proceeds without limits to unimaginable excesses.

The idea of limitation governed all areas of Greek thought because it embraced all things, yet permitted none

to excess: "Elle n'a rien poussé à bout, ni le sacré ni la raison, parce qu'elle n'a rien nié, ni le sacré, ni la raison. Elle a fait la part de tout, équilibrant l'ombre par la lumière" (E, 853). Western society, dedicated to absolutist ideologies, "est fille de la démesure." The Greeks recognized that justice itself had limitations, while today the continent of Europe "se convulse à la recherche d'une justice qu'il veut totale" (E, 853).

Camus' preoccupation with the concept of limits, so respected by the Greeks, dates back to his study of philosophy and is already apparent in his "diplôme d'études supérieures" written after completion of the "licence" and preparatory to candidacy for the "agrégation." This dissertation, Entre Plotin et Saint Augustin,[3] traces the relationship of Greek philosophy to Christianity, and particularly the role played by neoplatonism in the evolution of Christian thought. Briefly, it is structured as follows: An introduction discusses Greek thought insofar as it both differed from and prefigured Christianity. One important difference lay in the Greek acceptance of and harmony with the world: "Leur évangile disait: notre Royaume est de ce monde."[4] In L'Envers et l'endroit Camus will repeat

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[3]Roger Quilliot in the Pléiade edition of Camus' Essais states that the exact title is Métaphysique chrétienne et Néoplatonisme.

[4]Camus, Essais, p. 1225.

these words speaking this time for himself (EE, 49). A second area of difference was the Greeks' rational conception of life and the world, with man sufficient in himself to explain the universe. In this view virtue can be learned, and moral evil is equated with ignorance or error.

In the wake of Alexander, however, in the melange of races and beliefs, of oriental and occidental thought, in a period of social and political upheaval, a longing for a God and a preoccupation with the destiny of the human soul began to surface and grow stronger, and "à l'orgueil de la vie qui animait le monde antique se substitue l'humilité d'esprits en quête d'inspirations."[5] Thus more and more after 200 B.C. the principal religions began preparing the way for Christianity. Camus' first chapter, concerning earliest Christianity, describes its chief characteristics as: scorn for all speculation or inquiry; concern for religious practice; the primacy of faith; pessimism concerning man; and great hope because of the Incarnation. Above all, with the concept of universal sin ("nemo bonus") a great distance separates man from God. Plato's scale of ideas, constructed to join Man to the Good, is replaced in Christianity by a single factor outside the orbit of man's reason or control: the coming of Jesus as man's only hope.

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[5]Ibid., p. 1227.

The second chapter, dealing with the further evolution of Christianity, describes the growing efforts to show that Christianity conforms with Reason, and the various manifestations of Gnosticism. Christian in their pessimism with regard to the world, the Gnostics were Greek in their acceptance of reason as an aid to salvation.

Center of the "diplôme," the third chapter discusses the rapport of neoplatonism with Christianity, and particularly the thought of Plotinus, a third-century neoplatonist torn between a rational view of the world and anguish before man's destiny. "En une certaine mesure la Raison plotinienne est déjà le 'coeur' de Pascal."[6] However, seeing the cosmos as a cyclic "procession" or "emanation" from God, Plotinus is not tortured by 'disproportion' nor the abyss separating man from God. Although he views the world from the perspective of Greek idealism, i.e., inferior to "le monde supérieur," nevertheless for him the things of this world are the valued indicators and reminders of that superior realm. "Chaque chose ici-bas s'en fait le vivant rappel."[7] Camus cites passages from the Enneads of Plotinus which abound in sensual imagery, and remarks "C'est donc avec sa sensibilité que Plotin se saisit de l'intelligible,"[8]

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[6]Ibid., p. 1271.

[7]Ibid.

[8]Ibid.

a comment which might well be applied to Camus himself. For Plotinus there is a harmony, an accord, even a sense of mutual participation between physical phenomena and Reason, between the beauty of the world and Truth. He is critical of the Christian Gnostics for their scorn of the beauties of this world, and rejects the "salut gratuit" of Christianity, running counter as it does to Greek concept of virtue based upon reason. For this neoplatonist "la mesure" was essential to virtue and Camus translates from the first Ennead: "Car un être devient meilleur parce qu'il se limite et parce que, soumis à la mesure, il sort du domaine des êtres privés de mesure et de limite."[9]

Hellenism, one of the sub-themes recurring often in Camus' work, remains closely linked to his preoccupation with "la mesure" as a guard against excess in any form. The essay, "L'Exil d'Hélène," first published in Cahiers du Sud in 1948 (republished in L'Eté in 1954) expresses many of Camus' thoughts on limit that will appear in the long philosophical and political essay of 1951, L'Homme révolté:[10] from "L'Exil d'Hélène":

> Némésis veille, déesse de la mesure, non de la vengeance. Tous ceux qui dépassent la limite sont, par elle, impitoyablement chatiés (E, 853).

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[9]Camus' translation appears in a footnote on p. 1270 of the Pléiade edition of the Essais.

[10]An entire section from the last chapter of L'Homme révolté is entitled "Mesure et démesure."

> Dans nos plus extrêmes démences, nous rêvons d'un équilibre que nous avons laissé derrière nous et dont nous croyons ingénument que nous allons le retrouver au bout de nos erreurs (E, 854).
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> ... les Grecs n'ont jamais dit que la limite ne pouvait être franchie. Ils ont dit qu'elle existait et que celui-là était frappé sans merci qui osait la dépasser. Rien dans l'histoire d'aujourd'hui ne peut les contredire (E, 855-56).

From L'Homme révolté:

> Ou cette valeur de limite sera servie, en tout cas, ou la démesure contemporaine ne trouvera sa règle et sa paix que dans la destruction universelle (HR, 698).
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> Dans leur [the Greeks] univers, il y a plus de fautes que de crimes, le seul crime définitif étant la démesure (HR, 440).

As an individual, man must recognize and accept the limitations of his own condition. The consequences of disregard for such "limite" are frighteningly portrayed in Camus' play Caligula. The protagonist's transgression of "la limite" has a double aspect: refusing to accept human mortality and the limitations of human destiny, Caligula attempts to thwart them by usurping destiny's role. In assuming the capricious and arbitrary power of destiny, he abandons every restraint in his treatment of those under his rule. The failure to accept his own human condition leads him to the perpetration of inhuman excesses against others, and in the end to his own destruction.

"Limite" with reference to human mortality has strong ties to other themes of Camus' writing, and is

reflected particularly in his emphasis on life and beauty in the here-and-now, and on lucidity as one of the necessary ingredients of the Absurd, which will be explored subsequently. Already in "Le Désert" he opts for the acceptance of such limits:

> ... c'est que l'Italie comme d'autres lieux privilégiés m'offre le spectacle d'une beauté où meurent quand même les hommes. Ici encore la vérité doit pourrir et quoi de plus exaltant? Même si je la souhaite, qu'ai-je à faire d'une vérité qui ne doive pas pourrir? Elle n'est pas à ma mesure (N, 87).

Later in La Peste Dr. Rieux will affirm the same acceptance of human limitation: "Le salut de l'homme est un trop grand mot pour moi. Je ne vais pas si loin. C'est sa santé qui m'intéresse ... "[11] and "Je n'ai pas de goût, je crois, pour l'héroïsme et la saintété. Ce qui m'intéresse, c'est d'être un homme."[12]

Tension appears in Camus' work in a second guise, one more closely related to the definition of "équilibre" itself. The latter is defined as "état de repos d'un corps sollicité par plusieurs forces qui s'annulent." If a single concept--that of limit--predominates in "la mesure," in "l'équilibre" the focus is on two elements maintained in balance. These two elements may or may not be opposed to

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[11]Albert Camus, Théâtre, Récits, Nouvelles, ed. by Roger Quilliot (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1962), p. 1397.

[12]Ibid., p. 1427.

each other, but either way, as Hazel Barnes correctly points out in a 1960 article, they should be viewed in terms of certain absolutes to be maintained rather than by seeking a golden mean between opposing systems.[13] Dozens of examples can be found in Camus' work of equilibrium between non-contradictory factors. In "La Mort dans l'âme" five years before his essay on the Absurd, Le Mythe de Sisyphe, he is already suggesting the necessity of both courage and lucidity. Confronted with the beauty of the Italian plain near Vicenza, shaken by it to a point of "extrême conscience," he perceives in it a certain grandeur: "Je la trouvais dans la confrontation de mon désespoir profond et de l'indifférence secrète d'un des plus beaux paysages du monde. J'y puisais la force d'être courageux et conscient à la fois" (EE, 39).

Occasionally two elements which appear to be opposites are revealed as simply two aspects of the same thing. In "L'Eté à Alger" after describing the beauties of nature enjoyed by Algerians he refers to "ses autres richesses: je veux dire ses silences et son ennui" (N, 70). The gay and noisy mid-day on the beaches enjoyed by the young contrasts with and is balanced by the silence of

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[13]Hazel Barnes, "Balance and Tension in the Philosophy of Camus," The Personalist, XLI, No. 4 (1960), 434.

mid-day in the public square where lemonade is sipped under the trees that border it. Later, on the first pages of Le Mythe de Sisyphe he will tell us that exploration of the question of life's meaning requires "l'équilibre de l'évidence et du lyrisme qui peut seul nous permettre d'accéder en même temps à l'émotion et à la clarté" (MS, 99-100). Evidence and lyricism, emotion and reason, must coexist: each is equally necessary to the other.

More frequently, however, the two factors held in balance are opposed. Ms. Barnes acknowledges in the above-mentioned article that opposites coexist for Camus, and that often his desirable mean is not a compromise between two extremes but rather the simultaneous maintenance of both. However, she forestalls those who would see traces of Hegelian dialectic in Camus, balanced oppositions:

> . . . contrary to what we find in Hegel, the thesis and antithesis--if we could even call them that--cannot be considered as evanescent moments of the synthesis, nor is there anything which might be called a true reconciliation in which the opposites are cancelled out by being lifted to a higher level or all-embracing whole. Rather the opposing principles are preserved, never blended though one might say that they color each other.[14]

The theme of equilibrium maintained between opposing principles pervades Camus' writing. In his earliest essay collection, appropriately titled L'Envers et l'endroit, he

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[14] Ibid., p. 435.

is already expressing his awareness of the positive and negative aspects of life's reality with the recollection of his childhood of poverty and joy:

> Il y a une solitude dans la pauvreté, mais une solitude qui rend son prix à chaque chose. A un certain degré de richesse, le ciel lui-même et la nuit pleine d'étoiles semblent des biens naturels (EE, 24).

In one of the travel essays he recollects the contrasting impressions left on him by the gloom of Prague and the radiant beauty of the Italian plains, and concludes that " ... les deux me sont chères et je sépare mal mon amour de la lumière et de la vie d'avec mon secret attachment pour l'expérience désespérée que j'ai voulu décrire" (EE, 39). The world will always present two faces to man, and for Camus both must be embraced:

> Je tiens au monde par tous mes gestes, aux hommes par toute ma pitié et ma reconnaissance. Entre cet endroit et cet envers du monde, je ne veux pas choisir, je n'aime pas qu'on choisisse (EE, 49).

The conclusion of "Le Désert," written after his travels in Italy, prefigures the Absurd described in Le Mythe de Sisyphe, an equilibrium between opposing forces:

> C'est sur ce balancement qu'il faudrait s'arrêter: singulier instant où la spiritualité répudie la morale, où le bonheur naît de l'absence d'espoir, où l'esprit trouve sa raison dans le corps. S'il est vrai que toute vérité porte en elle son amertume, il est aussi vrai que toute négation contient une floraison de 'oui' (N, 87).

In 1954 the collection L'Eté shows no lessening in Camus' affinity for such opposition, which often manifests itself

in paradox or humour. Discussing the mediocre monuments of Oran and the city itself, he states that they force one to grant importance to the unimportant, thus having a salutary effect on "l'esprit," which needs on occasion to be humbled (E, 826). Near the beginning of "L'Enigme" appears the somewhat paradoxical statement, "De nouveau, une énigme heureuse m'aide à tout comprendre" (E, 861), and he goes on to affirm his faithfulness to the lessons of his youth in Algeria where beauty and misery are constantly juxtaposed:

> Au plus noir de notre nihilisme, j'ai cherché seulement des raisons de dépasser ce nihilisme. Et non point d'ailleurs par vertu, ni par une rare élévation de l'âme, mais par fidélité instinctive à une lumière où je suis né et où, depuis des millénaires, les hommes ont appris à saluer la vie jusque dans la souffrance (E, 865).

Likewise, in "Retour à Tipasa," revisiting the scenes of Noces, he reiterates his commitment to both aspects of human life.

> Puisque peu d'époques demandent autant que la nôtre qu'on se fasse égal au meilleur comme au pire, j'aimerais, justement, ne rien éluder et garder exacte une double mémoire. Oui, il y a la beauté et il y a les humiliés. Quelles que soient les difficultés de l'entreprise, je voudrais n'être jamais infidèle ni à l'une ni aux autres (E, 875).

"L'équilibre," though one aspect of tension, suggests a state of repose. The term tension on the other hand implies not a static but a dynamic state, ready at any moment to snap should the balance shift. "La mesure" says

Camus, "est une pure tension," and "Elle sourit sans doute et nos convulsionnaires, voués a de laborieuses apocalypses, l'en méprisent. Mais ce sourire resplendit au sommet d'un interminable effort: il est une force supplémentaire" (HR, 704). It means the necessary maintenance of opposing principles in precise balance, with the determination not to permit the equilibrium to be destroyed at any cost. With whatever aspect of tension he was dealing, Camus seems always to have been keenly aware of the precariousness implied in the term tension itself. It can be likened to stretching a cord to its limits but never permitting it to snap, or to walking a tight-rope in the knowledge that a momentary lapse means destruction. It represents the "interminable effort" which constitutes for Camus the indispensable ingredient of any attempt to improve the human condition, individually or collectively. It means constant awareness of death while living life to the fullest; implicit in it is refusal of fanaticism, the rejection of ideologies based on absolutes; it means accepting principles in defense of man, but never allowing them to outweigh in importance the concrete living man they are designed to defend; it requires embracing both happiness for oneself and responsibility for the well-being of others; for the artist particularly it necessitates a perpetual balance between his responsibility to his art, his duty to use his

art for the good of others, and his own attachment to the world.

Tension is at the heart of the Absurd, a major theme of Camus which is treated in detail in Le Mythe de Sisyphe. Man, seeking answers to the human condition and reasons to give his life a meaning, is faced with an irrational cosmos. Life itself as a value can be his only justification, and to maintain this value he must maintain all factors of the Absurd, evading neither life nor the consciousness of his eventual death. Awareness of death, far from destroying the value of life, makes it all the more precious. At the same time, by the defiance of his fate, by finding joy in the world in spite of his inevitable end, man himself gives his life a nobility and a meaning that is refused by an indifferent universe. Only through unceasing effort is this achieved:

> L'absurde est sa tension la plus extrême, celle qu'il maintient constamment d'un effort solitaire, car il sait que, dans cette conscience et dans cette révolte au jour le jour, il témoigne de sa seule vérité qui est le défi (M, 139).

This extreme tension manifests itself in pure awareness in one of Camus' earliest essays, "Amour de Vivre," written in 1936. It receives here what is surely one of its most poetic expressions, and foreshadows the lucidity so essential to the absurd man of Le Mythe de Sisyphe. In Majorca, visiting a cloister, contemplating its colonnades, its

peaceful garden, the roses, the well, the silence broken only by the beating of pigeons' wings, he becomes suddenly and acutely aware that for him none of this beauty can last:

> J'étais lucide et souriant devant ce jeu unique des apparences. Ce cristal où souriait le visage du monde, il me semblait qu'un geste l'eût fêlé. Quelque chose allait se défaire, le vol des pigeons mourir et chacun d'eux tomber lentement sur ses ailes déployées. ... Dans une heure, une minute, une seconde, maintenant peut-être, tout pouvait crouler (EE, 43-44).

The tension so apparent in his work was an experienced reality in Camus' life. During the collaborationists' trials following World War II he declared himself opposed, in the name of all those who had suffered and died for France, to an attitude of clemency. François Mauriac, writing in Le Figaro, took the contrary view and recommended mercy instead of the death penalty. In October 1944 Camus replied in a Combat article that " ... le problème de la justice consiste essentiellement à faire taire la miséricorde dont parle M. Mauriac lorsque la vérité de tous est en jeu."[15] The temptation to pursue an elusive absolute justice to its logical end in the death sentence was a serious one for Camus at this time. He felt a profound sense of responsibility toward those who had died in the struggle to the point that momentarily at least he felt

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[15]Camus, Essais, p. 1535.

justified, in Emmett Parker's words, "in taking up the weapons of the executioner and in using them against him."[16] The tension inherent in guarding against such a lapse will appear later in La Peste as Tarrou remarks that each one of us carries within himself the germ of the plague, of murder, and must be constantly alert against causing the death of others:

> ... il faut se surveiller sans arrêt pour ne pas être amené, dans une minute de distraction, à respirer dans la figure d'un autre et à lui coller l'infection. Ce qui est naturel, c'est le microbe. Le reste, la santé, l'intégrité, la pureté, si vous voulez, c'est un effet de la volonté et d'une volonté qui ne doit jamais s'arrêter. L'honnête homme, celui qui n'infecte personne, c'est celui qui a le moins de distraction possible. Et il en faut de la volonté et de la tension pour ne jamais être distrait.[17]

For Camus this tension had slackened temporarily. On the brink of falling, however, he resisted. He had discovered in the course of the trials that the rapid and firm justice he had wanted was "inégalement rapide et inégalement ferme,"[18] favoring those who were in higher positions. On December 6, 1946, in an address before the Garde des Sceaux defending two journalists condemned to death for collaboration, he said:

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[16]Emmett Parker, Albert Camus: The Artist in the Arena (Madison; Milwaukee; London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1966), p. 68.

[17]Camus, Théâtre, Récits, Nouvelles, p. 1426.

[18]Roger Quilliot in Essais, p. 1886.

> J'ai longtemps cru que ce pays ne pouvait pas se passer de justice. Mais je ne vous offenserai pas, ni personne autour de vous en disant que la justice depuis la Libération s'est révélée assez difficile pour que nous ne sentions pas maintenant que toute justice humaine a ses limites et que ce pays, finalement, peut aussi avoir besoin de pitié.[19]

Emmett Parker writes that by November of 1946 "Camus had decided that there was no truth in the name of which he would ever again demand the life of another human being."[20] Finally in 1948 in another article Camus acknowledged that Mauriac had been right and he himself wrong.

In the years that followed Camus was repeatedly criticized for failure to take strong political stands and for so-called inaction. The publication of L'Homme révolté in 1951, in which he had warned against the consequences of ideologies based on history and proposed moderation as a moral value, was the catalyst for many such attacks and led to the eventual break between Camus and Sartre. Recognizing the dilemma of the writer who does not wish to commit himself wholly to any party, Wyndham Lewis wrote of the author of L'Homme révolté:

> In Camus we have a writer of great distinction who declares himself as not of any party: or at least desirous of being that. Yet there is nothing in the world so difficult today as not belonging to a party . . . . Remain outside of

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[19]Camus, Essais, p. 1887.

[20]Parker, Artist in the Arena, p. 95.

> party, and you flout and affront all the beautiful (and extremely touchy) groups who would like you to succumb to their attractions.[21]

Serge Doubrovsky in his article "La Morale d'Albert Camus" asks the question, "La morale de la mesure n'aboutira-t-elle donc qu'à la politique de la modération?" and he appears at first to side with Camus' detractors with the reminder that the path of moderation as well as the one of extremes can have fatal consequences. But he goes on to say "La première offre, cependant, plus de chances de survie à notre civilisation que la seconde, dont on sait trop où elle conduit." Further, he sees in Camus' insistence on maintaining a middle ground no lack of courage or strength but rather an extreme tension necessitating both:

> Il y a là une tension existentielle qu'aucune formulation théorique, aucun procès dialectique ne saurait résoudre, rien que les deux bouts de la chaîne qu'il nous faut tenir à toute force. La "mesure" camusienne, dans ce qu'elle a d'authentique, est à l'opposé de la modération confortable et médiocre. Elle est perpétuel et douloureux effort.[22]

Camus himself, in an unpublished, undated defense of L'Homme révolté, emphasizes the tension inherent in the solutions proposed in his political essay:

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[21]Wyndham Lewis, The Writer and the Absolute (London: Methuen, 1952), p. 67.

[22]Serge Doubrovsky, "La Morale d'Albert Camus," Preuves, No. 116 (October, 1960), 48.

> L'analyse de ces contradictions culmine en tout cas dans la tension beaucoup plus générale que j'ai essayé de définir et qui oppose l'individu à l'histoire. Là encore, je n'ai pas procédé à une condamnation de l'histoire au nom de l'individu, ni soumis celui-ci à celle-là. J'ai suivi, une fois de plus, le trace approximatif d'une limite où les deux s'affrontent dans leur tension la plus grande, si grande au demeurant qu'elle finira par projeter en avant à la fois l'individu et l'histoire.[23]

It would appear that the path Camus advocated in L'Homme révolté, and to which he remained faithful, both in his other works and in his life, was anything but an easy one of evasion and inaction. He chose, I believe, the most difficult of all--resistance to any form of action which excluded alternatives. Such action, he realized, if carried to a logical conclusion, would necessitate the destruction of those opposed to it. The individual human life constituted a supreme value for him, and he believed that in the recognition of human limitations lay the solutions best calculated to avoid the taking of human lives. Holding a relativistic philosophy he was, of course, continually opposed by those who envisaged a perfection achieved through absolute means. However, the constant vigilance and effort required to withstand the attraction of extremes is, I believe, a far more rigorous form of action than succumbing to any of them, but one which is necessary for the survival of human society in a nuclear age. It is repeatedly

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[23]Camus, Essais, p. 1711.

portrayed by Camus as a precarious balance and he likens his situation to that of a man on a tight-rope, "un fil d'équilibre où j'avance péniblement sans être sûr d'atteindre le but."[24]

The writer faces another dilemma which is more closely related to his art. He is forever torn between his urge to create beauty and his responsibility to men, and the two are interdependent. Jonas, in one of the short-stories of L'Exil et le royaume, lives in precisely this predicament. Camus describes it as tension in the Discours de Suède, his acceptance speech on the occasion of being awarded the Nobel Prize in 1957:

> Pour finir, peut-être touchons-nous ici la grandeur de l'art, dans cette perpétuelle tension entre la beauté et la douleur, l'amour des hommes et la folie de la création, la solitude insupportable et la foule harassante, le refus et le consentement.[25]

Limit, balance, tension, whatever form Camus' dialectic takes, it cannot be termed pessimistic or nihilistic. As Ms. Barnes emphasizes, it is "life-giving, an impetus to motion forward."[26] Such tension, embracing contradictions yet never yielding to extremes "finira par projeter en avant à la fois l'individu et l'histoire."[27]

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[24]Camus, Essais, p. 6.

[25]Ibid., p. 1092.

[26]Barnes, "Balance and Tension," p. 435.

[27]Camus, Essais, p. 1711.

Nature and the life of the body is the rather broad name I have given to the second major theme to be examined. It encompasses various related subjects: the natural world and man as a part of this world; beauty and poverty, youth and old age, life and death, the concrete versus the abstract.

Any discussion of Camus' relationship to nature cannot fail to take into account the influence of his birthplace, Algeria. "J'ai ainsi avec l'Algérie une longue liaison qui sans doute n'en finira jamais, ... " (E, 848). His youth was spent in its sunlight and sea, and he enjoyed to the fullest the beauty and the opportunities for physical pleasure they afforded. As Georges Joyaux points out in his article on Camus and North Africa, it led him "to an immediate enjoyment of life, to a kind of voluptuous, never-satiated epicureanism. . . ."[28] The outdoor life it encouraged placed Camus in constant direct contact with the natural world outside of man, and at the same time made him appreciate his own body as a means of rapport with this natural world. The intellectual connotations of this rapport, which for Camus were always posterior to the emotional experience, are, as we shall see, of both a positive and a negative nature.

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[28]Georges Joyaux, "Albert Camus and North Africa," Yale French Studies, No, 25 (Spring, 1960), 11.

In accord with the Greeks and the Mediterranean philosophy he promulgated, Camus believed profoundly that the wedge driven between man and nature when Christianity renounced its Mediterranean heritage could have only destructive effects. Unlike the Greeks, who accepted the natural world and felt themselves a part of it, "Nous tournons le dos à la nature, nous avons honte de la beauté" (E, 854). The results of this separation have been far-reaching and disastrous:

> ... lorsque l'Eglise a dissipé son héritage méditerranéen, elle a mis l'accent sur l'histoire au détriment de la nature, fait triompher le gothique sur le roman, et, détruisant une limite en elle-même, elle a revendiqué de plus la puissance temporelle et le dynamisme historique (HR, 702).

One effect, as Malraux has indicated in his essay, La Tentation de l'Occident, is that Western civilization has tied its values and its goals to action. In contrast with the Greeks, we perceive nature as something apart from us which we are constantly impelled to change. "La nature qui cesse d'être objet de contemplation et d'admiration ne peut plus être ensuite que la matière d'une action qui vise à la transformer" (HR, 702).

Nature was very early an object of such contemplation and admiration for Camus, and evidence of his awareness and sensitivity toward it appears in one of his first published essays, "La Mort dans l'âme":

> ... la flûte aigre et tendre des cigales, le parfum d'eaux et d'étoiles qu'on rencontre dans les nuits de septembre, les chemins odorants parmi les lentisques et les roseaux, autant de signes d'amour pour qui est forcé d'être seul. Ainsi, les journees passent. Après l'éblouissement des heures pleines de soleil, le soir vient, dans le décor splendide qui lui font l'or du couchant et le noir des cyprès (EE, 38).

However, it is in Noces that Camus' attitude toward nature in all its aspects appears in its most concentrated and lyrical form. In the first sentence of "Noces à Tipasa" are gathered many of the major elements of Camus' natural world as he found it in the land of his birth: the sun and the sea, the sky, the stones, the earth and its growing things. Finally, the author himself is present, natural man attuned to this natural world:

> Au printemps, Tipasa est habitée par les dieux et les dieux parlent dans le soleil et l'odeur des absinthes, la mer cuirassée d'argent, le ciel bleu écru, les ruines couvertes de fleurs et la lumière à gros bouillons dans les amas de pierres (N, 55).

The central theme of Noces is the harmony of nature and the union of man with the natural world, and the imprint of this theme, in one or another of its aspects, appears in most of Camus' works. For the moment, however, let us examine briefly the separate elements of this natural world.

The sun and its light and warmth are predominantly beneficient elements, symbols of life and happiness for Camus. This is especially true in the two earlier essay collections which contain so many references to his own

youthful exuberance on the beaches of Algeria. "Sous le soleil du matin, un grand bonheur se balance dans l'espace" (N, 57). Michel Benamou has noted that Camus distinguishes between the midday sun and other forms of light, and seems to infer that the midday sun's intervention in human affairs is both malefic and representative of the Absurd.[29] However, in "L'Eté à Alger" the young people who "tous les jours à midi, se mettent nus au soleil" do so simply because "ils sont 'bien au soleil'" (N, 68). The same Algerian sun and light are in sharp contrast with the cold and gloom of the northern climates that provide the settings for Le Malentendu and La Chute. In "Noces à Tipasa" the sun is viewed positively even when it is overpowering--it is a vital force of nature and as such promotes fecundity. Images of nature's superabundance are numerous in this essay. The sun's light and warmth are themselves superabundant: " ... j'ouvre les yeux et mon coeur à la grandeur insoutenable de ce ciel gorgé de chaleur" (N, 56). Flowers are everywhere: "Partout, des bougainvillées rosats dépassent les murs des villas; dans les jardins, des hibiscus au rouge, encore pâle, une profusion de roses thé épaisses comme de la crème, et de délicates bordures de longs iris blues" (N, 55).

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[29]Michel Benamou, "Romantic Counterpoint: Nature and Style," Yale French Studies, No. 25 (Spring, 1960), 47.

The perfume of growing things is almost suffocating: "L'odeur volumineuse des plantes aromatiques racle la gorge et suffoque dans la chaleur énorme" (N, 55). Contrasting the sun's aspect in Camus' work and Sartre's, Serge Doubrovsky stresses its life-giving and unifying qualities in Camus' perception of it:

> ... on ne saurait s'étonner de ne trouver chez Sartre aucune analyse théorique du solaire, puisque aussi bien, le soleil semble absent de son univers personnel. Ou plus exactement, il y joue un rôle négatif: ... [Chez Camus] C'est la lumière ... comme bain fécondant. C'est la force unificatrice du cosmos.[30]

However, the sun is not invariably beneficent. It is in the blazing sun that Meursault fires on the Arab in L'Etranger, and the renegade of L'Exil et le Royaume will die under a "soleil inexorable." Both Kay Killingsworth and Michel Benamou have accurately noted that in Camus' imagery the physical qualities of thickness and density in the world are those which are indifferent or hostile to man, whereas "tout ce qui est transparent et fluide représente l'union de l'homme avec les éléments."[31] For the most part when the sun's role is a destructive, malevolent one, it is portrayed as metallic or dense, giving off heat and light that crushes or pierces. For Meursault

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[30]Doubrovsky, "La Morale d'Albert Camus," p. 41.

[31]Kay Killingsworth, "Au-delà du Déchirement: l'héritage méridional dans l'oeuvre de William Faulkner et de Camus," Esprit XXXI, No. 320 (1963), 228.

approaching the Arab on the beach "le soleil était maintenant écrasant. Il se brisait en morceaux sur le sable et sur la mer."[32] Its light is described as an "épée" or "une longue lame étincelante," and moments before he fires on the Arab, Meursault is conscious of nothing but "les cymbales du soleil" on his forehead. In contrast to the life-giving sun of Tipasa which shines down beneficently on men and promotes "un grand bonheur" (N, 57), at Taghâsa where the renegade is tortured it is the ally of Evil that destroys men:

> Maintenant, le soleil a un peu dépassé le milieu du ciel. Entre les fentes du rocher, je vois le trou qu'il fait dans le métal surchauffé du ciel, bouche comme la mienne volubile, et qui vomit sans trêve des fleuves de flammes au-dessus du désert sans couleur.[33]

The mineral world itself, whose physical characteristics of weight and density are sometimes attributed to the sun or the sea, is a significant part of Camus' natural universe, and, as Benamou observes, in the latter's hierarchy of elements it "varies from neutrality to hostility."[34] In its neutral state it evokes the Absurd--the indifference and unhumanness of the world--and so plays a part in the development of the lucidity so essential for

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[32]Camus, Théâtre, Récits, Nouvelles, p. 1165.

[33]Ibid., p. 1587.

[34]Benamou, "Romantic Counterpoint," p. 47.

an authentic existence. It is at Djémila among the ruins and the natural stones of the hills that Camus becomes most poignantly aware of the finality of death, but side by side with lucidity and its accompanying sadness, there is also beauty:

> Ce grand cri de pierre que Djémila jette entre les montagnes, le ciel et le silence, j'en sais bien la poésie: lucidité, indifférence, les vrais signes du désespoir ou de la beauté (N, 65-66).

The hostility of the mineral world toward man takes several aspects. Sometimes it is the stone and metal of cities, isolating man from what is natural and good. Whether Prague, Amsterdam, Oran or New York, the artificial world that man has constructed is not a happy one: it is the scene of loneliness, of guilt, of "ennui" and of plague. In addition, it is an ugly world in contrast with the world of nature. In "Le Minotaure" Camus' description of Oran, city where "le caillou est roi," is heavy with irony:

> Forcés de vivre devant un admirable paysage, les Oranais ont triomphé de cette redoubtable épreuve en se couvrant de constructions bien laides (E, 818).

Much more explicit is the hostility of the mineral kingdom where the renegade is held prisoner, " ... [une] ville stérile sculptée dans une montagne de sel, séparée de la nature."[35] This city, where he is subjected to every

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[35]Camus, Théâtre, Récits, Nouvelles, p. 1589.

kind of cruelty and degradation, is also "la ville de l'ordre enfin, angles droits, chambres carrées, hommes roides," and its truth too is "carrée, lourde, dense, elle ne supporte pas la nuance."[36] The mineral world of the unnatural, the inhuman, is also rigid and categorical. It suggests the absolutism that goes hand-in-hand with excess, the opposite of the relativism and moderation Camus advocated so strongly in La Peste and L'Homme révolté. In the city of salt only Evil can be absolute.

Both Kay Killingsworth and Michel Benamou, cited earlier, have remarked that transparence and fluidity in Camus' natural world are qualities which promote man's union with the world. Camus, in his advocacy of pagan harmony with nature, would, of course, find such union highly desirable. One can also see in the unifying and beneficent aspects of water as portrayed by Camus, a relationship with the mother-image, an extension of the prenatal unity and security of the womb which continues later on an instinctual or intuitive level, and becomes associated with what is natural, comforting, and loving. Thus so often "la mer" takes on the characteristics for Camus of "la mère," whereas the sun, also an indispensable element of the writer's poetic universe, tends at times to be related to the father-image--to reason, law, abstraction,

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[36] Ibid., p. 1589.

and power. As such it sometimes oversteps the "limite" of nature and reaches extremes, and so becomes destructive.[37]

Water, however, is a "symbole du bonheur" and almost invariably the sea appears as a favorable and supporting force in its rapport with man. Meursault, swimming with Marie experiences a sense of pleasure that recalls scenes described in Noces: "Toute la matinée s'est passée en plongeons, en floraisons de rires parmi des gerbes d'eau, en longs coups de pagaie autour des cargos rouges et noires ... " (N, 69). In La Peste when Rieux and Tarrou swim together the sea again brings a sense of well-being, but of a different nature: primitive innocence will have given way to spiritual awareness, and in the sea these two men, each concerned with the plight of their fellow-men, find not only physical respite and renewal, but a sense of fraternity, of harmony with nature and with each other: " ... ils avancèrent avec la même cadence et la même vigueur, solitaires, loin du monde, libérés enfin de la ville et de la peste."[38]

Water is also protection and refuge from the sun's force when the latter is destructive. Meursault, just before firing the fatal shots on the beach, thinks longingly

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[37]See infra, pp. 101-102 on mother-love; also p. 239 on maternal versus paternal values.

[38]Camus, Théâtre, Récits, Nouvelles, p. 1429.

of the cool spring behind the rock: "J'avais envie de retrouver le murmure de son eau, envie de fuir le soleil. ... "[39] On the rare occasions when water is not associated with happiness and well-being it is interesting to note that its fluidity is retarded and it takes on density. For Meursault the sun on the day of the murder has imposed itself on the sea, slowed the water's movement and given it a metallic quality:

> Le bruit des vagues était encore plus paresseux, plus étale qu'à midi. C'était le même soleil, la même lumière sur le même sable qui se prolongeait ici. Il y avait déjà deux heures que la journée n'avançait plus, deux heures qu'elle avait jeté l'ancre dans un océan de métal bouillant.[40]

References to all of these elements of the non-human natural world permeate Camus' writing, but as already suggested, man too is a part of this world, though differing from it in his capacity to think and feel. The Algerian, as a purely physical creature of nature experiences pleasure and pain--the pleasure afforded healthy young animals in a favorable climate, and the pain of hunger, illness, old age and death. The praise of the world's beauty that is sung in Noces is also the expression of man's pleasure in it, and it is purely a physical pleasure: "Il n'y a rien ici

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[39] Ibid., p. 1167.

[40] Ibid.

pour qui voudrait apprendre, s'éduquer ou devenir meilleur" (N, 67). Repeatedly, especially in Noces, the primacy of the body over the spirit is reiterated: in "L'Eté à Alger," "Cette race est indifférente à l'esprit. Elle a le culte et l'admiration du corps" (N, 74); in the same essay, "Il faut une rare vocation pour être jouisseur. La vie d'un homme s'accomplit sans le secours de son esprit, ... " (N, 76); in "Le Désert," " ... l'esprit trouve sa raison dans le corps" (N, 87).

Man too is both the recipient and the expression of nature's vital force and the vehicle of his participation in it is his body. Throughout Camus' work there appears to be a close relationship between bodily health and human happiness, and the rapport is clear if we recall Camus' predilection for the Greeks. Pierre Nguyen-Van-Huy in fact defines Camus' concept of happiness as "l'unité," and divides it into three kinds, the first of which is union with the physical world.[41] It is the young, healthy, active body which is best able to achieve such unity. Serge Doubrovsky also maintains both the importance of the body for Camus and the idea of union: "Si le corps est le lieu privilégié de la joie, c'est qu'il est celui de l'harmonie, c'est que

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[41]Pierre Nguyen-Van-Huy, La Métaphysique du bonheur chez Albert Camus (Neuchâtel: Editions de la Baconnière, 1962), pp. 8-10.

l'union est aussi bien un unisson."[42] The Camusian attitude toward life inclines strongly toward the Dionysian described by Norman Brown--an attitude which upholds instinct and the life-force over reason and its "god of sublimation, Apollo":

> . . . Apollo is the god of form--of plastic form in art, of rational form in thought, of civilized form in life. But the Apollonian form is form as the negation of instinct. [It] is form negating matter, immortal form; that is to say, by the irony that overtakes all flight from death, deathly form.
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> But the Greeks, who gave us Apollo, also gave us the alternative, Nietzsche's Dionysus. Dionysus is not dream but drunkenness; not life kept at a distance and seen through a veil but life complete and immediate.[43]

Even in the later evolution of Camus' thought and work the instincts as expressions of the life-force are primarily positive in their effects on human life. If Meursault's life before the killing of the Arab is lived purely at an instinctual level, these bodily values lose none of their preciousness in the development of his awareness--to the contrary they become all the more valuable. In Camus' own life physical health, precarious ever since his first encounter with tuberculosis, will remain always an important factor, and in fact a support to his writing. In 1959,

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[42]Doubrovsky, "La Morale d'Albert Camus," p. 41.

[43]Norman O. Brown, Life Against Death: The Psychoanalytical meaning of History (New York: Random House, reprinted by arrangement with Wesleyan University Press, 1959), pp. 174-175.

questioned by Jean-Claude Brisville on the rapport between the life of the body and the artist's creation he replied:

> La vie du corps en plein air et au soleil, le sport, l'équilibre physique sont pour moi les conditions du meilleur travail intellectuel. Avec (ce qui va ensemble) un bon emploi du temps. Je me trouve rarement, à vrai dire, dans ces conditions. Mais je sais en tout cas que la création est une discipline intellectuelle et corporelle, une école d'énergie. Je n'ai jamais rien fait dans l'anarchie ou l'avachissement physique.[44]

Moreover the body's well-being becomes more and more associated with spiritual values. In "Le Vent à Djémila" physical illness is attacked as an obstacle to lucidity:

> Rien de plus méprisable à cet égard que la maladie. C'est un remède contre la mort. Elle y prépare. Elle crée un apprentissage dont le premier stade est l'attendrissement sur soi-même. Elle appuie l'homme dans son grand effort qui est de se dérober à la certitude de mourir tout entier (N, 64).

In La Peste evil takes the form of plague against which good men must struggle. In "Le Rénegat" evil attacks by physical torture--the protagonist's tongue is torn out and at the end he is crucified.

The beauty of the world and the joys of a healthy body are all to be enjoyed, but with awareness of their brevity, for in poverty men grow old quickly. Youth is spent in a "précipitation à vivre qui touche au gaspillage" (N, 72) and at thirty the laborer has exhausted himself.

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[44]Camus, Essais, p. 1921.

In this environment of contrasts where the focus is on physical existence Camus became aware early in his life of the double aspect of this existence. "Entre oui et non" from his first essay collection describes his family life of poverty in the years of his childhood and youth, and the portrait of his mother that emerges from it is one of a creature imprisoned within the physical limitations of her human condition. She is deaf and poor, widowed by the death of her young husband in World War I, and must work hard as a charwoman. Her silence and "manque d'esprit" typify an existence which must be lived almost at animal level, but there is nevertheless unspoken love between mother and son, and with it a longing to break out of the prison--the prison which in the evolution of Camus' thought becomes the Absurd.

The prison, like happiness, is rooted in the physical elements of man's life. It is in his body that man is first vulnerable, as Camus had discovered in 1930 with the advent of tuberculosis. The body must die. Death is always the ultimate victor. But if illness or accident do not occur, old age intervenes, and it is a condition toward which Camus was particularly sensitive. The first two essays and the last in L'Envers et l'endroit are primarily sketches of old people. In "Entre oui et non," recalling his childhood, he considers how he perceived the future then, that to be a man was the important thing. The youth

changes, however, confronted daily with the evidence of bodily deterioration: "Il est maintenant un homme. N'est-ce pas cela qui compte? Il faut bien croire que non, puisque faire ses devoirs et accepter d'être un homme conduit seulement à être vieux" (EE, 26). The seeds of the awareness of mortality which will be the subject of "Le Vent à Djémila" are already present.

Throughout Camus' work young, sun-bronzed characters alternate with the old, for whom loneliness is but a prelude to the ultimate isolation that is death. But death too has its place in nature's pattern. Jérôme Carcopino has remarked on a formula that appears over and over, both in Greek and in Latin, on third-century tombstones in Algeria--a formula which is also typical of Camus' attitude toward death as a natural and accepted part of the cycle of life: "Non fui, fui, non sum, non desidero. Je n'étais pas; je suis devenu; je ne suis plus; cela m'est égal." Carcopino also characterizes this attitude as "une affirmation d'indifférence à la mort et d'une sorte de désintéressement total, qui est au fond de l'Epicurisme."[45]

Nietzsche, whose influence on Camus the latter acknowledged, affirmed all of life, and therefore also death, proclaiming that what has become perfect wants to

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[45]Jérôme Carcopino, Aspects mystiques de la Rome paiënne (Paris: L'Artisan du Livre, 1942), p. 226.

die. Dying is part of the natural cycle, and in Norman Brown's comments on Nietzsche's "perfection" one can see analogies with Camus' thought.

> Nietzsche's perfection, which is unrepressed life (joy) wants eternity, but it also wants to die. Eternity is therefore a way of envisaging mankind's liberation from the neurotic obsession with the past and the future; it is a way of living in the present, but also a way of dying. Hence the ultimate defect of all heavens with immortality beyond the grave is that in them there is no death; by this token such visions betray their connection with repression of life.[46]

The "unité" which Nguyen-Van-Huy associates with Camus' "bonheur" seems also to be sought for in death as a kind of blending into the Cosmos. Camus perceived the impossibility of this longed-for union with the Cosmos for man, who desires at the same time to retain his unique personality:

> ... si, franchissant le gouffre qui sépare le désir de la conquête, nous affirmons avec Parmenide la réalité de l'Un (quel qu'il soit), nous tombons dans la ridicule contradiction d'un esprit qui affirme l'unité totale et prouve par son affirmation même sa propre différence et la diversité qu'il prétendait résoudre (M, 110).

Nonetheless a "nostalgie" for such union, even in the annihilation of the personality, is frequently apparent in the lyrical essays, bearing witness at the same time to Camus' strong attraction to the natural world. In "La Mort

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[46]Brown, Life Against Death, p. 108.

dans l'âme" it is a "goût du néant" (EE, 38); in "Le Désert" it appears as the abandonment of "la petite monnaie de sa personnalité (N, 86); in "Le Vent à Djémila," "mon détachement de moi-même et ma présence au monde" (N, 62). In L'Eté he still recognizes the attraction of such loss of identity in the universe: " ... il y a dans chaque homme un instinct profond qui n'est ni celui de la destruction ni celui de la création. Il s'agit seulement de ne ressembler à rien" (E, 830).

As death is accepted as a necessary part of the life cycle, the awakening to the spiritual implications of human mortality that takes place at Djémila will increasingly change Camus' attitude toward death: it is the ultimate enemy, with whom all complicity is forbidden. In Le Mythe de Sisyphe and L'Homme révolté he will examine in detail the question of such complicity and many of his narrative and dramatic works will treat the same issue.

As for the attempt to evade this "aventure horrible et sale" with hope of an after-life, it is in fact a sin against life: " ... s'il y a un péché contre la vie, ce n'est peut-être pas tant d'en désespérer que d'espérer une autre vie, et se dérober à l'implacable grandeur de celle-ci" (N, 76). When the individual faces his own inevitable end, however, despair need not follow. Awareness of death fulfills and enriches life:

> Mais qu'est-ce que le bonheur sinon le simple accord entre en être et l'existence qu'il mène? Et quel accord plus légitime peut unir l'homme à la vie sinon la double conscience de son désir de durée et son destin de mort (N, 85)?

Life and death are inextricably bound together. André Rousseaux, referring to death, says that Camus "fait face au problème dans toutes les pages de son oeuvre,[47] and claims that his (Camus') whole philosophy of happiness is based on the affirmation that death is the only ineluctable evil, and once this fact is faced and accepted, all else can be seen as happiness. Outside of "cette unique fatalité de la mort, tout, joie ou bonheur, est liberté" (M, 192). Reinforcement of this idea comes from Dr. Norman Brown: "Only if Eros--the life instinct--can affirm the life of the body can the death instinct affirm death, and in affirming death magnify life."[48] Likewise Louis Rossi, outlining the spiritual progress of Meursault in L'Etranger, sees the necessity of lucidity before death for the enrichment of life:

> The dread of annihilation is preliminary to the final Freedom-toward-Death, which is won when all illusions are abandoned before the "nothingness of the possible impossibility of existence." As such, death is disclosed as the extreme potentiality. Facing it, completely denuded of conventional attitudes, man becomes his authentic self.[49]

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[47]André Rousseaux, "Albert Camus et la philosophie du bonheur," Symposium, II, No. 1 (1948), 1.

[48]Brown, Life Against Death, p. 109.

[49]Louis Rossi, "Albert Camus: The Plague of Absurdity," The Kenyon Review, No. 3 (Summer, 1958), 410.

Yet another basic theme in Camus' work can be related to nature and the life of the body: his concern for the concrete living man as opposed to abstract principles. This opposition, constantly stressed in L'Homme révolté, is rooted in Camus' sensuality--in his perception of the world and man in their physical dimensions. This is nowhere more apparent than in his lyrical essays. Of his fellow Algerians, for example, he writes:

> Entre ce ciel et ces visages tournés vers lui, rien où accrocher une mythologie, une littérature, une éthique ou une religion, mais des pierres, la chair, des étoiles et ces vérités que la main peut toucher (N, 74-75).

Death itself is described in terms of a decomposed human body--"un liquide noir" (N, 73). In "Les Amandiers," brief essay written in 1940 and included in L'Eté, he is careful to point out that the blossoms are not mere symbols of renewal: "Nous ne gagnerons pas notre bonheur avec des symboles" (E, 836). Rather they too are part of the physical life of the world that we must ever keep in mind if we are to improve the human condition. In Ni Victimes ni bourreaux (1946) under the sub-heading "Sauver les corps" he criticizes those who maintain that the death penalty can never be eliminated, and lays the blame to the increasing abstraction of our era:

> Cet argument était présenté avec force. Mais je crois d'abord qu'on n'y mettait tant de force que parce que les gens qui le présentaient n'avaient pas d'imagination pour la mort des

> autres. C'est un travers de notre siècle. De même qu'on s'y aime par téléphone et qu'on travaille non plus sur la matière, mais sur la machine, on y tue et on y est tué aujourd'hui par procuration.[50]

Over and over Camus calls attention to the danger of abstraction in concealing the ugly reality of taking human life. Tarrou in La Peste tells of witnessing an execution and its effect on him--an actual experience of Camus' father which the writer recounts at the beginning of Réflexions sur la guillotine.[51] Also in La Peste the journalist Rambert, separated from his mistress because of the plague, accuses Tarrou and Dr. Rieux of fighting for an abstraction:

> Et vous êtes capable de mourir pour une idée, c'est visible à l'oeil nu. Eh bien, moi, j'en ai assez des gens qui meurent pour une idée. Je ne crois pas à l'héroïsme, je sais que c'est facile et j'ai appris que c'était meurtrier. Ce qui m'intéresse, c'est qu'on vive et qu'on meure de ce qu'on aime.[52]

Dr. Rieux himself had told Tarrou earlier he had begun his work as a physician "abstraitement" but then "il a fallu voir mourir." He adds that he has never been able to accustom himself to seeing people die.[53]

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[50]Camus, Essais, p. 334.

[51]Ibid., p. 1021.

[52]Camus, Théâtre, Récits, Nouvelles, p. 1351.

[53]Ibid., p. 1323.

In the political essay, L'Homme révolté, where he attacks history-based ideologies, Camus warns again against the dangers of abstraction:

> La révolution sans honneur, la révolution du calcul qui, préferant un homme abstrait à l'homme de chair, nie l'être autant de fois qu'il est nécessaire, ... (HR, 707).
>
> Ils oublient le présent pour l'avenir, la proie des êtres pour la fumée de la puissance, la misère des banlieues pour une cité radieuse, la justice quotidienne pour une vaine terre promise (HR, 708).

It is the reality of the physical world and the flesh that must be constantly kept in sight, and Camus will never cease to believe that evil in the world is commensurate with the degree of man's separation from the natural, physical world:

> Nous vivons dans la terreur parce que la persuasion n'est plus possible, parce que l'homme a été livré tout entier à l'histoire et qu'il ne peut plus se tourner vers cette part de lui-même, aussi vraie que la part historique, et qu'il retrouve devant la beauté du monde et des visages; parce que nous vivons dans le monde de l'abstraction, celui des bureaux et des machines, des idées absolues et du messianisme sans nuances.[54]

With fuller awareness of human mortality Camus' thought will move to a broader concept of human solidarity. Human attachments, responsibility to others and to himself, were constantly at war in Camus--yet another tension in his life and work. Even as a youth in Algeria his joy in the natural beauty of his milieu was counterbalanced by his

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[54]Camus, Essais, p. 332.

feelings of compassion and love for others. Germaine Brée writes:

> What differentiates Camus is that his need for happiness was associated with another need as strong, as urgent, that is, a feeling of responsibility for the suffering of humanity, a suffering all the more intolerable because, in his eyes it had no compensation, no meaning.[55]

He was well aware, however, of his natural penchant for pleasure which could lead to selfishness: " ... j'aime trop la vie pour ne pas être égoïste" (N, 65). As a man he will constantly feel this pull in two directions. He will also experience it as an artist, and the controversy with Sartre on the subject of "engagement" must have derived not only from Camus' reluctance to be bound by too-rigid stands and his devotion to relativism, but also to a basic difference of opinion as to the ratio of responsibility owed by an artist to his art and to others. In the Discours de Suède, in acceptance of the Nobel Prize in 1957 he speaks of this dilemma:

> ... devant son siècle, l'artiste ne peut ni s'en détourner ni s'y perdre. S'il s'en détourne, il parle dans le vide. Mais, inversement, dans la mesure où il le prend comme objet, il affirme sa propre existence en tant que sujet et ne peut s'y soumettre tout entier. Autrement dit, c'est au moment même où l'artiste choisit de partager le sort de tous qu'il affirme l'individu qu'il est. Et il ne pourra sortir de cette ambiguïté.[56]

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[55]Germaine Brée, Camus (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., Harbinger Books edition, 1964), pp. 86-87.

[56]Camus, Essais, p. 1091.

Jonas, the artist in L'Exil et le royaume, reaches a point of artistic sterility as a result of the same dilemma. Just before his fall he writes a single word, but it is impossible to distinguish whether this word is "solitaire" or "solidaire." In his book on Camus' dramatic works Raymond Gay-Crosier has noted the writer's "mutisme" between 1952 and 1960.[57] No doubt Camus' silence in the face of the Algerian crisis was the outcome of the "ambiguïté" he described in the Discours de Suède, and like Jonas he found himself unable to create.

Love of nature and life here on earth, capacity for pleasure, compassion for the poor, the old and all men, who must undergo the ultimate "injustice" of death, lucidity, dedication to art, and through all of these constant tension, necessitating a perpetual vigilance--all of these basic themes developed in Camus' lyrical essays will reappear in his other works.

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[57]Raymond Gay-Crosier, Les Envers d'un échec (Paris: Lettres modernes, 1967).

CHAPTER III

L'ENVERS ET L'ENDROIT: THE WELLSPRING

> "Chaque artiste garde ainsi, au fond de lui, une source unique qui alimente pendant sa vie ce qu'il est et ce qu'il dit ... pour moi je sais que ma source est dans L'Envers et l'endroit.
>
> Camus
> Préface, L'Envers et l'endroit (1958)

Camus' first collection, published in Algeria in 1937 when he was twenty-four, consists of five brief essays written in 1935 and 1936: "L'Ironie," "Entre oui et non," "La Mort dans l'âme," "Amour de vivre," and "L'Envers et l'endroit." The author did not permit its republication until 1958, and in his preface to the new edition he gives two related bases for this reluctance: artistic reservations concerning the form of the work, written as it was at the debut of his career (" ... à vingt-deux ans, sauf génie, on sait à peine écrire")[1] and the fundamental importance to him of its content as a testimonial to certain profound influences on his life as a man and as a writer. The frequently-quoted lines under the chapter heading above

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[1]Camus, Essais, p. 5.

make it clear that this slender book of essays held enormous personal significance for Camus, and this very significance made him all the more sensitive to its formal shortcomings. Near the end of his preface these combined feelings are summed up:

> Les secrets qui nous sont les plus chers, nous les livrons trop dans la maladresse et le désordre; nous les trahissons, aussi bien, sous un déguisement trop apprêté. Mieux vaut attendre d'être expert à leur donner une forme, sans cesser de faire entendre leur voix, de savoir unir à doses à peu près égales le naturel et l'art; d'être enfin.[2]

He explains his eventual decision to permit republication first, as a result of arguments from readers, that the book had already been published once but in such limited numbers that only the rich could afford them. His second reason refers to the element of art: he has reached that point which occurs in the life of each artist when he must pause and take stock, draw nearer the true center of his inspiration and henceforth try to maintain himself there. L'Envers et l'endroit is for him this center, the source from which emanate all the basic elements that nourish his subsequent work. His deepest wish is to once more express "les deux ou trois images simples et grandes sur lesquelles le coeur, une première fois, s'est ouvert,"[3] but with the craft of the mature artist:

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[2]Ibid., p. 12.

[3]Ibid., p. 13.

> Si, malgré tant d'efforts pour édifier un langage et faire vivre des mythes, je ne parviens pas un jour à récrire L'Envers et l'endroit, je ne serai jamais parvenu à rien, voilà ma conviction obscure. Rien ne m'empêche en tout cas de rêver que j'y réussirai, d'imaginer que je mettrai encore au centre de cette oeuvre l'admirable silence d'une mère et l'effort d'un homme pour retrouver une justice ou un amour qui équilibre ce silence.[4]

Already in 1937 on the occasion of the first publication of these essays the youthful Camus seems to have been aware of the permanent significance of their content to his future work. In a letter dated July 8, 1937 to Jean de Maisonseul, a friend who had written to him about the book, he writes:

> Plus tard j'écrirai un livre qui sera une oeuvre d'art. Je veux dire bien sûr une création, mais ce seront les mêmes choses que je dirai et tout mon progrès, je le crains, sera dans la forme--que je voudrai plus extérieure. Le reste, ce sera une course de moi-même à moi-même.[5]

In the same letter there is further evidence that Camus was conscious of the spontaneous affective quality of the essays, that they were first and foremost an outpouring of feeling. Maisonseul, while praising the book had criticized Camus' lack of objectivity. The author, admitting that it was his youth and love of life which prevented him from being objective, added:

> ... l'oeuvre d'art ne compte pas aujourd'hui pour moi. Même si certaines pages sont bien

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[4] Ibid., p. 13.

[5] Ibid., p. 1219.

> écrites, c'est mon coeur et ma chair qui ont bien écrit et pas mon intelligence.[6]

With maturity and the practice of his craft the intelligence will indeed play a larger role in Camus' work, but "le coeur" and "la chair" will continue as dominant forces, reinforcing, at least on the grounds of emotional content, the projection of Camus as a lyrical writer. Adele King writes that already in "L'Envers et l'endroit," the final essay in this collection of the same title, Camus had chosen his kingdom, and "it is a kingdom of the individual and the immediate, a kingdom of persons rather than of ideologies, a kingdom of sensations rather than of abstract knowledge."[7] Camus makes the choice explicit in "L'Envers et l'endroit," " ... mon royaume est de ce monde" (EE, 49), but it is also implicit in the four preceding essays, and it is a choice to which he will remain faithful in all of his subsequent works.

The content of L'Envers et l'endroit also proposes a rule for living that will persist through all of Camus' work and which he suggests for the first time in the titles of this, his first book: there is inherent contradiction in the "hic et nunc" human condition, with its dual quality as source of both joy and despair, and we must learn to live with the contradiction. Camus' emphasis on the balance

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[6]Ibid., p. 1219.

[7]Adele King, Camus (Edinburgh and London: Oliver and Boyd, 1964), p. 17.

between the contradictory aspects of human life appears not only in the title of this work, but is reiterated in his preface to the 1958 edition. The world of L'Envers et l'endroit is a world "de pauvreté et de lumière" (EE, 6); "Je vivais dans la gêne mais aussi dans une sorte de jouissance" (EE, 6). He perceives in retrospect that even his illness had its positive side since it favored a certain "liberté du coeur" which delivered him from the corrosive effects of envy, bitterness and resentment.

However, throughout L'Envers et l'endroit there is a thirst for life which goes beyond mere acceptance of its contradictory facets. It is rather an "ardeur affamée," an "appétit désordonné de vivre"[8] which, as the author points out in his preface, finds its way to the surface even in the most somber passages. One cannot stress too much this aspect of Camus' thought. The "ardeur" is not inextricably bound to joy or happiness in living, but is in fact life itself, "la vie dans ce qu'elle a de pire et de meilleur."[9] The thirst for life assumes its true role as a manifestation of life itself, and the seeker and the sought are inseparably blended. This life-force is reflected in Camus' essays in a variety of ways, but in L'Envers et l'endroit, the most explicitly autobiographical of the three collections with

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[8]Camus, Essais, p. 11.

[9]Ibid.

which this study is concerned, the tone is predominantly somber. The "appétit désordonné de vivre" appears chiefly as a stubborn refusal of death, in spite of all the limitations and misery of human existence. "Là était tout mon amour de vivre: une passion silencieuse pour ce qui allait peut-être m'échapper, une amertume sous une flamme" (EE, 44). It is in L'Envers et l'endroit that the Absurd makes its first tentative appearance in Camus' work, though not yet with complete lucidity, and not as yet so named.

Three of the essays in this collection ("L'Ironie," "Entre oui et non," and "L'Envers et l'endroit") deal with characters drawn from the milieu of Camus' youth in Belcourt, Algeria, a world of poverty. Two of them ("L'Ironie" and "Entre oui et non") are prefigured in an incomplete manuscript entitled "Voix du quartier pauvre" on which Camus was working in 1934. His sensitivity to poverty and misery, heightened by his childhood environment, appears indirectly even earlier in an article published in May, 1932 in the review Sud, and Roger Quilliot selected it for inclusion in the Pléiade edition of the Essais as a forecast of a concern that will grow and develop in this writer. The Sud article is a brief commentary on the Soliloques du pauvre of Jehan Rictus, pseudonym of Gabriel Random de Saint-Amand (1867-1933), a municipal employee in Paris known for his poems in the tradition of Villon, which he

read aloud in Parisian bars. Camus' article is entitled "Le poète de la misère" and he sees Jehan Rictus as the spokesman for the silent poor: "Pauvre dont tout le monde parle, Pauvre que tout le monde plaint, Pauvre répugnant dont les âmes 'charitables' s'écartent, il n'a encore rien dit."[10] In his own way Camus too will become a "poète de la misère," and nowhere is this more apparent than in the three essays from L'Envers et l'endroit.

The two remaining essays from this collection, "La Mort dans l'âme" and "L'Amour de vivre," concern Camus' travels in 1937 and 1936, respectively, to Prague, Italy, and the Balearic Islands, and portray the greater awareness and anguish that result from alien surroundings. Away from the familiar the writer cannot evade the truth of human destiny and his own impermanence.

If a common theme can be said to unite all five essays in L'Envers et l'endroit, it is the essential absurdity of human existence. But another common bond which creates a kind of unity is, as Germaine Brée points out, the voice of the author, "which speaks throughout the work and gives it its tone, a highly distinctive, clearly recognizable tone."[11] In his Carnets, in a planned preface for the collection dated May, 1936, Camus suggests rather

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[10]Camus, Essais, p. 1194.

[11]Brée, Camus, p. 76.

vaguely a certain progression: "De la première à la dernière, peut-être y sentira-t-on une démarche sourde qui en fait l'unité."[12] It is true that there is a gradual progression from objective reporting to more subjective expression which culminates in the final essay, "L'Envers et l'endroit," in a summary and statement of the writer's personal philosophy of life: "Je tiens au monde par tous mes gestes, aux hommes par toute ma pitié et ma reconnaissance. Entre cet endroit et cet envers du monde, je ne veux pas choisir, je n'aime pas qu'on choisisse" (EE, 49). Although these lines were first written in January of 1936,[13] before Prague, the author placed them in his published collection near the end of the final essay, signifying its importance. Moreover, Camus, whose kingdom and exile are both rooted in the physical world, does not perceive his attitude as despairing or pessimistic. Like Sisyphus, of whom he will write later, he must be imagined as happy, and there is evidence that he wished this first collection to conform structurally to this viewpoint. "Amour de vivre" written in 1936 after his trip to Palma, actually preceded "La Mort dans l'âme," permeated with the gloom of Prague which he visited in 1937. But in the published collection

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[12]Camus, Carnets I (Paris: Gallimard, 1962), pp. 48-49.

[13]Ibid., p. 30.

the order is reversed, so that "Amour de vivre" follows the other essay. If, in spite of the author's youthful efforts the structural unity of the collection remains weak, one feels no real lack. The essential bond--the absurdity of the human condition, its combined joy and despair--rests intact and speaks clearly through the voice of the narrator in each of the individual essays.

"L'Ironie"

Three encounters with loneliness and old age are the subject-matter of the first essay, and its characters are drawn from the circle of Camus' own experience in Belcourt. The first depicts one evening in the life of an old woman cut off from the mainstream of life by age and infirmity. She finds briefly a sympathetic ear in a young man who is visiting the family, until once more she is left alone when the others leave to attend a movie.

Human misery appears in this brief episode as poverty, but although it takes place in the economically deprived milieu of Camus' boyhood, its preoccupation is not overtly with material poverty, but with the physical poverty of old age and illness, the social poverty of loneliness and isolation, the spiritual and intellectual poverty of insensitivity and ignorance, and finally the universal poverty of human existence, powerless to extend itself and overcome death. The theme is developed through three characters:

the old woman, the sympathetic young visitor, and the collective "others," family and guests. The old woman's existence has become nothing more than anticipation of death. The causes of her gradual and involuntary separation from life are interrelated, but the primary factor is the purely physical one of old age and ill health. No longer able to function as an active member of the family her communication with the others diminishes, and the poignancy of her dilemma is further emphasized by the contrast between her past and her present: "Petite vieille remuante et bavarde, on l'avait réduite au silence et à l'immobilité" (EE, 15). In her increasing isolation and loneliness there is nothing to distract her from the contemplation of approaching death: " ... livrée tout entière à la pensée de sa mort, elle ne savait pas exactement ce qui l'effrayait, mais sentait qu'elle ne voulait pas être seule" (EE, 17). She does not intellectualize about her fate, but "illettrée, peu sensible" she reacts viscerally with fear and horror. Even her religious faith is a poor and limited one, and the author's irony is heavy when he refers to it. She believed in God, he says, "Et la preuve est qu'elle avait un chapelet, un christ de plomb et, en stuc, un saint Joseph portant l'Enfant" (EE, 15). She has simply reached the time of life when one by one the other shields against death--health, love, work--have been withdrawn. This kind of spiritual

poverty is well summed-up by Roger Quilliot in La Mer et les prisons:

> C'est une pauvre religion que Camus a connue dans son entourage, tout entière liée à la peur de la mort. Les jeunes, les adultes ne croient guère: ils vivent, ils ont le présent, l'avenir. Sans doute, la vieille infirme avait-elle pensé de même: la foi, c'est l'affaire des malades, des vieillards, des veuves; on verra plus tard. Le temps de croire est venu. ... Dieu n'est ici que la conscience angoissée de la mort prochaine, ... [14]

Limited on all sides, physically, socially, spiritually, and intellectually, the stubborn desire to live is all that remains to combat, even though vainly, the ultimate limitation of death. Her poor faith in God and an afterlife are not sufficient to make her resigned to it: "Mais que l'espoir de vie renaisse et Dieu n'est pas de force contre les intérêts de l'homme" (EE, 16). Left alone without human society her communication with God will be "décevant" (EE, 17). When she is finally abandoned as the others leave, her tight grasp of her rosary is a gesture of desperation rather than fervor, and she sees with horror the disappearance of "la seule certitude en laquelle elle eût pu reposer" (EE, 17). Like the author, her kingdom is of this world and if she cannot reason about it, "le coeur et la chair" tell her it is so.

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[14]Roger Quilliot, La Mer et les prisons: essai sur Albert Camus (Paris: Gallimard, 1956), pp. 31-32.

The "others" differ little from the old woman except in their age and state of health. Still active, they are engrossed in their own lives and the old woman is tolerated, sometimes with annoyance, but for the most part with indifference, as if she had already departed from the world of the living. They are insensitive to her need for human warmth and communication, just as she herself can only feel it vaguely, without giving it formulation or definition. "On ne lui parlait pas," and as for the movies, "Il n'était pas question, évidemment, que la vieille femme vînt aussi" (EE, 16). They embrace her when they leave, but it is a surface gesture, without awareness of her feelings.

The young man, through whom Camus speaks, enters as a visitor, an objective observer who differs from the others in that he is genuinely interested in the old woman. He listens to her complaints and though her voice becomes quarrelsome, "Ce jeune homme comprenait" (EE, 15). Unlike the others, or the old lady herself, he is possessed of a sensitivity which causes him to participate in her suffering. As she describes her daughter's impatience with her frequent prayers he listens "avec une immense peine inconnue qui le gênait dans la poitrine" (EE, 16). The old woman, who does join the others for dinner, sits alone in a corner behind the young visitor and "de se sentir observé, celui-ci mangeait mal" (EE, 16). However, he too is one of those

"others" who have not yet crossed the invisible line between active life and the general descent toward death, and when they leave he prepares to accompany them. The old woman's reluctance to let him go annoys him--it is both a reminder of old age and death which he like the others would prefer to ignore, and a vague reason to feel guilty. He finally experiences a feeling of such hatred that he thinks of striking her. Later, on the street, seeing the light extinguished in the lonely apartment, he senses yet another emotion, one of remorse.

The mixed feelings experienced by the young visitor will be aroused by other subjects in the author's life as he matures as a man and a writer, but the basic conflict will remain the same--how to maintain the precarious equilibrium between one's own freedom and the discharging of responsibility toward others. More and more as he became an established writer Camus was preoccupied with this problem, and his concern, which he expressed in many of his writings, particularly those concerning art, is a testimony to his basic integrity and compassion.

The second encounter describes an old man's efforts to evade the reality of impending death through the incessant recounting of his past experiences. Like the old woman, he clings desperately to human society, and his listeners represent his only link to life. When he can

no longer hold their attention he wanders the streets in a hopeless flight from the dreaded solitude of his room, where he must face his illness and the nearness of death.

In this vignette Camus does not speak through a character and the old man's anguish, like the old woman's, is seen chiefly in his relationship with the collective "others," those still young enough to be wholly occupied in the daily affairs of family, work, and "divertissement."

There is a feverish tension in the old man's efforts to keep his audience. He allows himself no pause, no break in the continuous stream of talk that might permit their attention to wander; he deliberately omits mention of his misfortunes, believing "Ça fait mieux de paraître heureux" (EE, 18); he refuses to see their ironic looks. But for all his striving, the world of the living recedes from him, and he senses his growing exclusion. Life itself is like the gayety of the younger "others," "une gaité à laquelle il n'avait pas le droit de participer" (EE, 18).

Among the "others" there is no pity for the old man, only a "brusquerie moqueuse" or, when they finally tire of his endless anecdotes, "des visages indifférents" (EE, 18). Consciously or not, the living reject this concrete embodiment of their own future fate: " ... un vieil homme qui va mourir est inutile, même gênant et insidieux" (EE, 18). But there is a brief flash of sympathy from the author for

these "others" who will all too soon grow old in their turn, and be forced to relinquish the few poor pleasures that a hard life affords them. Why should they not turn away from the old man and enjoy while they can "le billard et les cartes qui ne ressemblent pas au travail imbécile de chaque jour" (EE, 18).

When the old man leaves the café he is feeling ill, and doesn't want to go home, preferring rather to roam the sidewalks "chargés d'hommes." Ordinarily he is comfortable returning to join his elderly wife in the accustomed routine of supper, but there, when the signs of physical deterioration cannot be ignored "la fièvre lui masque la vieille et l'isole dans sa chambre" (EE, 19) and he feels himself defenseless against death. He can only lie helpless, "horrifié, avec, dans le ventre sa peur acide et douloureuse" (EE, 19). Much better to walk the streets, however ill he may feel.

In the last episode it is a domineering old grandmother through whom the misery of sickness and old age is portrayed. The household she rules consists of her son, her daughter, and the two sons of the latter. It is the household in which Camus grew up, and for the first time the figure of his mother appears in his work. His relationship with her will be more fully explored in the subsequent essay, "Entre oui et non," and it will continue to influence

his later writings. The grandmother, like the old people in the two previous vignettes, seeks to maintain her grip on life through the attention of the younger "others," but her methods are more aggressive. She refuses to relinquish the dominant role she had been forced to play in the past, when as a widow she had full responsibility for her family of nine children. To maintain this role now, in the face of failing physical powers, she must pretend to herself as well as to the others that she is indispensable. Her attacks of illness are exploited to the fullest to emphasize this idea, for when the others show concern and would have her rest she can respond, "Qu'est-ce que vous deviendriez si je disparaissais" (EE, 21). The children become accustomed to these attacks and pay little attention to them. When finally she takes to her bed and calls the doctor the younger grandson, Camus, perceives it only as "une nouvelle comédie, une simulation plus raffinée" (EE, 21), and he finds it difficult to believe in her subsequent death.

Intellectual and spiritual poverty are again apparent in this brief anecdote: the old woman's son, Camus' uncle, "était presque muet"; her daughter thinks with difficulty. However, physical deterioration plays a more obvious role than in the two previous accounts, and it is all the more poignant as the old woman uses it to build up the myth of her indispensability, and by implication, the

necessity of her immortality. Sometimes there is pretense about her physical symptoms, as when she faints with "beaucoup de facilité" after family arguments, and even when she suffers genuine attacks she does it as conspicuously as possible, "avec fracas" (EE, 21). But for all the fact that she uses her illness as a tool to maintain her foothold in life, death is a reality she must eventually accept.

"L'Ironie" concludes with a brief paragraph in which Camus addresses his readers directly, posing tentative questions concerning the relationship and the significance of the three vignettes. He is not yet ready to formulate an answer, but two phrases are present which already contain the seeds of his definitive response near the end of the final essay in the collection: the double aspect of the human condition, with on the one hand old age, misery, and death, and on the other, "toute la lumière du monde"; and the acceptance of both, "Qu'est-ce qua ça fait, si on accepte tout?" (EE, 22).

In Camus' Carnets II there is a note dated March, 1950 in which he states, "Toute mon oeuvre est ironique,"[15] and it is true that this trait appears again and again in his works, perhaps most notably in L'Eté and La Chute.

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[15]Camus, Carnets II (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), p. 317.

The major theme of this early essay, so appropriately named, is profoundly ironic, dwelling as it does on the wide gap between human hopes and their inevitable destruction. But an ironic tone is also apparent in the author's treatment of particular situations. His comments on the old woman's religious faith have already been noted. When the others leave her alone to face the thought of her coming death, it is to see "un film gai" (EE, 16). In the meditative remarks at the close of the episode of the old man we are reminded of the stupidity of human plans: "Les hommes bâtissent sur la vieillesse à venir. A cette vieillesse assaillie d'irrémédiables, ils veulent donner l'oisiveté qui les laisse sans défense" (EE, 20). In the third vignette when the grandmother dies her death is perceived by her grandson as only "une nouvelle comédie, une simulation plus raffinée" (EE, 21). At the beginning of his career, as well as in his maturity, Camus will often express his most profound feelings in terms of wry humor.

All three episodes of "L'Ironie" contain characteristics Camusian themes. The sadness, futility and incomprehensibility of human life, as facets of the Absurd, are associated here primarily with old age. The life of the body is fundamental. The "quartier pauvre" which forms the background does not encourage a spiritual or intellectual life, and when physical strength wanes it is a gradual

relinquishment of life itself, since this is the only level on which it has been lived. As Roger Quilliot has observed:

> Les intellectuels peuvent affronter l'âge, pour autant qu'ils gardent l'esprit valide; les politiciens, si usés soient-ils, ont des réserves d'influence; les industriels, de l'argent: ils vieillissent dans le respect et la puissance. Mais tous ceux qui n'avaient pour richesse que leurs bras et leurs jambes, quand le corps s'est une fois engourdi, il ne leur reste que la silencieuse rumination des humbles.[16]

However, for Camus there is no disparagement of human limitation, only an immense sadness and compassion for the shared fate of all human beings which is death. Some of his most notable characters in later works will be old people, and Roger Quilliot has stated that Camus' interest in old age is basically an attention to death, as the ultimate human limitation. In this light he perceives this writer as an essentialist: "La notion de nature humaine prendra pour Camus une certaine consistance, dans la découverte des limites que le temps et la chair nous imposent."[17] However, at the same time his sensitivity to the dilemma of old age makes him aware of the solitude of each individual death: "La mort pour tous, mais a chacun sa mort" (EE, 22).

Camus' preoccupation with the reality of physical life manifests itself in other ways. Physical senses are

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[16]Quilliot, La Mer, p. 31.

[17]Ibid., p. 39.

the means by which psychological effects are shown. The old woman does not eat with the family at night because "les aliments sont lourds le soir" (EE, 16). Her physical infirmity thus contributes further to her isolation. For the old man, "Tout aboutit à ne plus être écouté" (EE, 19). As he lies alone and feverish in his bed, his fear is described in physical terms: it is "dans le ventre, ... acide et douloureuse" (EE, 19). When death comes to the grandmother it is accompanied by all its concrete and revolting physical effects: an hour before her death "elle se délivrait de ses fermentations d'intestin." She tells her grandson, "Tu vois, je pète comme un petit cochon" (EE, 22).

If the tone of "L'Ironie" is somber, the forces of life persist there against all odds. The three aging protagonists fight death to the end, each in his own way. In spite of her unhappiness the old woman "ne voulait pas quitter les hommes" (EE, 17). The old man, almost too ill to walk ("Il marche, ... bute et, presque, tombe") (EE, 19), nevertheless postpones as long as possible going home to bed, where, in the darkness, he cannot escape the thought of death. The old grandmother even uses her physical deterioration to keep the attention of the living. In all of these struggles there is inherent tension between the forces of life and death, but "L'Ironie" devotes little space to

the positive aspects of human life, to "l'endroit." They appear only indirectly as the effort to postpone death.

Like the other essays in L'Envers et l'endroit, "L'Ironie" is to a large degree autobiographical, and undoubtedly the fact that Camus was an observer or participant in these scenes adds a great deal to their emotional force. As author, however, his personal viewpoint is not presented consistently in the text. In the first episode it is plainly Camus who is the sympathetic visitor to the old woman, but the character's reactions are sometimes presented objectively and merely reported, and at other times related in so personal a tone that the author all but appears openly in the first person. The transition between varied attitudes is not always a smooth one. The narration is begun by an undefined "je" who does not reappear but who is also obviously the author. A little further along the young man's interest in the old woman is enlarged upon in an "aside" placed in parentheses: ("Il croyait qu'il y avait une vérité et savait par ailleurs que cette femme allait mourir, sans s'inquiéter de résoudre cette contradiction") (EE, 15). When the old lady remarks that she would rather die than be a burden, two short sentences express the attitude of the young visitor who is also the author: "Il était d'avis cependant qu'il valait mieux être à la charge des autres que mourir. Mais cela ne

prouvait qu'une chose: que, sans doute, il n'avait jamais été à la charge de personne" (EE, 15). Indirect discourse adds uncomfortably to the feeling of confusion over which viewpoint the writer means to pursue, and distracts momentarily from the content.

In the second episode there is a clearer separation between the action of the text and the author's personal comments on it. Near the conclusion there is a long paragraph in which Camus generalizes about the dilemma of old age, and then relates it smoothly to the old man as he returns to the particular situation of the latter. In the same account, however, after having employed objective reporting through more than half of it, he suddenly speaks out in the first person. When the old man staggers and almost falls, the author remarks, "Je l'ai vu" (EE, 19). Further along he injects himself only a little less obviously after referring to the old man's growing consciousness that nothing is going to change his situation: "Ce sont de pareilles idées qui vous font mourir. Pour ne pouvoir les supporter, on se tue--ou si l'on est jeune, on en fait des phrases" (EE, 19). In the third episode, of the domineering grandmother, the problem of the writer's presence is more controlled. Camus, the younger grandson, thinks and speaks consistently as a character within the anecdote.

Whatever the minor formal deficiencies of this first essay, they are outweighed by the depth of feeling

it conveys. Indeed they can almost be said to add to it by their impression of spontaneity. One can only be grateful that the youthful author did not dissipate its emotional power in too-strenuous efforts to perfect his style.

"Entre oui et non"

In the second essay, "Entre oui et non," Camus develops more fully the portrait of his mother and his relationship with her, touched on only briefly in "L'Ironie." Near the end of his preface to the reedition of L'Envers et l'endroit he had affirmed his continuing desire to recreate one day this early work, and to once more place at its center "l'admirable silence d'une mère et l'effort d'un homme pour retrouver un justice ou un amour qui équilibre ce silence."[18] At the outset, in the title of the essay, one can discern again the author's preoccupation with the equilibrium of opposing forces, and the tension and anguish of maintaining this equilibrium. Its full implications will emerge after a closer examination of this brief autobiographical work which recounts Camus' thoughts and feelings

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[18]Camus, Essais, p. 13. In his Carnets I under the date of May, 1935, Camus had written "Une certaine somme d'années vécues misérablement suffisent à construire une sensibilité. Dans ce cas particulier, le sentiment bizarre que le fils porte à sa mère constitue toute sa sensibilité. Les manifestations de cette sensibilité dans les domaines les plus divers s'expliquent suffisamment par le souvenir latent, matériel de son enfance (une glu qui s'accroche à l'âme)," p. 15.

during a return visit to the neighborhood of his boyhood. The mother-figure which will play such an important role in his subsequent works--L'Etranger, Le Malentendu, and La Peste--dominates "Entre oui et non" in the person of Camus' own mother, and through it can be perceived relationships with other themes: the natural world, in both its positive and negative aspects, the Absurd and the importance of lucidity, and finally "une certaine forme d'amour" (EE, 12) to which he had referred in his preface. The events of the essay occur at three different levels of time: Camus' childhood, the occasion of one of his visits to his mother as a grown man, and finally the present-time of the narrator during a later visit, as he pauses in a Moorish café and begins the recollections and meditations which will make up the essay.

In the opening paragraph the author refers to the atmosphere of his childhood as a lost paradise, but it is a paradise of double aspect, of nature's beauty and of human poverty and misery, of "les étoiles" and "un couloir puant" (EE, 24). Awareness of the double aspect of life, product of his childhood, will have lasting influence on Camus' work. His preface is replete with references to it: " ... je sais que ma source est ... dans ce monde de pauvreté et de lumière"; "La pauvreté, d'abord, n'a jamais été un malheur pour moi: la lumière y répandait ses richesses"; " ... je

fus placé à mi-distance de la misère et du soleil"; "Je vivais dans la gêne, mais aussi dans une sorte de jouissance" (EE, 6).

To perceive fully the beauty of the world, poverty is necessary, for "a un certain degré de richesse, le ciel lui-même et la nuit pleine d'étoiles semblent des biens naturels," whereas "au bas de l'échelle, le ciel reprend tout son sens: une grâce sans prix" (EE, 24). He draws from the past a "leçon d'amour et de pauvreté" (EE, 28) and all that he has found most authentic in life and in himself. Later during a contemplative pause in his recollections, he feels himself momentarily suspended in time, separated from the ordinary current of life with its choices and decisions: "Puisque cette heure est comme un intervalle entre oui et non, je laisse pour d'autres heures l'espoir ou le dégoût de vivre. Oui, recueillir seulement la transparence et la simplicité des paradis dans une image" (EE, 28). The image is that of his mother.

For the moment, however, seated in the bar and hearing in the distance the sound of the sea, it is not "un bonheur passé" that he recalls, but a strange awareness of the natural world and its indifference toward perishable man. "Le monde soupire vers moi dans un rythme long et m'apporte l'indifférence et la tranquillité de ce qui ne meurt pas" (EE, 24). Sensing "ce grand soupir du monde" he feels

himself repatriated, and beings to remember his boyhood. Typically, it is the physical world to which Camus reacts first. The catalyst of this recollection had been the sound of the sea. Other physical elements play a similar Proustian role: "une odeur de chambre trop longtemps fermée, le son singulier d'un pas sur la route" (EE, 22). Recalling the house of his childhood, it is certain physical reactions that come to mind first, and he is sure, were he to return there now after so many years, that even in total darkness he would be able to make his way up the stairs without stumbling because,

> Son corps même est imprégné de cette maison. Ses jambes conservent en elles la mesure exacte de la hauteur des marches. Sa main, l'horreur instinctive, jamais vaincue, de la rampe d'escalier. Et c'était à cause des cafards (EE, 24).

From boyhood to manhood his relationship with his mother remains basically unchanged, except that as a grown man he reflects on it as well as experiences it. For the most part it is a relationship without words: "La mère de l'enfant restait ... silencieuse" (EE, 25). Entering the room where she sits in the semi-darkness after a day of hard work as a charwoman, the child experiences vague feelings which he is not yet ready to define. Pity? Love? He watches the silent figure, and "ce silence marque un temps d'arrêt, un instant démesuré" (EE, 26). As he grows up, "sa mère toujours aura ces silences" (EE, 26).

The grown man, looking back, recalls "ce mutisme ... d'une irrémédiable désolation" (EE, 25). When he returns to visit his mother, once more "Ils sont assis face à face, en silence" (EE, 28), but love has no need for words and the son, like the mother, has never been talkative:

> --Alors, maman.
> --Alors, Voilà.
> --Tu t'ennuies? Je ne parle pas beaucoup?
> --Oh, tu n'as jamais beaucoup parlé.
> Et un beau sourire sans lèvres se fond sur son visage. C'est vrai, il ne lui a jamais parlé. Mais quel besoin, en vérité? A se taire, la situation s'éclaircit. Il est son fils, elle est sa mère. Elle peut lui dire: 'Tu sais' (EE, 28-29).

In silence their rapport becomes clearer, more evident, as if words are not only unnecessary, but in fact disturb the natural harmony between them.

The content of this "natural harmony" is complex, and explains to a large degree the lasting importance and influence of "l'amour maternel" on Camus' life and work. Nguyen-Van-Huy defines Camusian happiness as unity with the natural world, with other men, and with transcendent values, and states that Camus' solution for the problem of disunity or separation is "la révolte unitaire."[19] Some of the characters in his works attempt a different kind of revolt, "la révolte pour faire régner la quantité, la diversité et

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[19]Nguyen-Van-Huy, La Métaphysique du bonheur, p. 84.

donc la séparation"[20]--Sisyphus, Martha, Caligula, and Clamence--and they are doomed by it. "La révolte unitaire" on the other hand, is based on love, exemplified in Rieux, the physician in La Peste, and in L'Homme révolté. But Camusian man requires "une certaine forme d'amour," one which fulfills all three conditions of unity mentioned above: unity with "le monde physique, le monde social, et le monde métaphysique."[21] Mother-love alone meets these requirements.

The child, and the man, in "Entre oui et non" feel an attachment to the mother that is first of all instinctive and biological, as is her love for him. Even in the strange silences when the boy suffers vaguely from their inability to communicate, he does not feel unloved. This woman, who thinks and speaks with difficulty, speaks up firmly enough when the grandmother strikes the children: "'Ne frappe pas sur la tête.' Parce que ce sont ses enfants, elle les aime bien" (EE, 25). If she never caresses the child, it is because "elle ne saurait pas" (EE, 25).

The Pléiade edition of Camus' Essais includes a manuscript note originally intended for "Entre oui et non" in which the author speaks of his mother's strange indifference upon learning that he had tuberculosis, although he never seems to have doubted her love for him. Aware of

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[20] Ibid., p. 58.

[21] Ibid., p. 86.

the gravity of his illness nevertheless "elle promenait ... sa surprenante indifférence,"[22] and he remarks that surprisingly it never occurred to him to reproach her for it. Later in the same piece he explains both her indifference and his own by the very depth of the attachment between them. He has never been able really to believe in his own physical death nor in hers, and he senses the same conviction in his mother:

> Elle portait inconsciemment en elle l'idée d'une commune pérennité. Elle doutait que rien les séparât jamais. Elle ne doutait même pas. Elle n'y pensait pas.[23]

This mutual conviction does not stem from a thought process but rather from a common primordial and intuitive source of knowledge.

In the published version of "Entre oui et non" a particular episode illustrates dramatically this close attachment. The mother is beaten by a street thug, and when the boy arrives home she is in bed, on the doctor's orders. The boy sleeps with her this night and they experience together the aftermath of the frightening encounter:

> La peur du drame récent traînait dans la chambre surchauffée. Des pas bruissaient et des portes grinçaient. Dans l'air lourd, flottait l'odeur du vinaigre dont on avait rafraîchi la malade. Elle, de son côté, s'agitait, geignait, sursautait

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[22]Camus, Essais, p. 1214.

[23]Ibid., p. 1215.

> brusquement parfois. Elle le tirait alors de courtes somnolences d'où il surgissait trempé de sueur, déjà alerté--et où il retombait, pesamment, après un regard à la montre où dansait, trois fois répétée, la flamme de la veilleuse. Ce n'est que plus tard qu'il éprouva combien ils avaient été seuls en cette nuit. Seuls contre tous (EE, 26-27).

When at last he falls asleep, it is with "l'image désespérante et tendre d'une solitude à deux" (EE, 27).

If natural ties bind the author to his mother, there is also a common sharing of human misery, poverty, and mortality. It is through her that he learns the "leçon d'amour et de pauvreté." The compassion so apparent in Camus' work has its beginnings in his relationship with his mother. As a very young child, awareness of her "maigre silhouette aux épaules osseuses" and "ce silence animal" (EE, 25) moves him to pity before he is even able to define that emotion. When he recalls many years later the night spent in her room, it is "Comme si elle était l'immense pitié de son coeur, répandue autour de lui, devenue corporelle et jouant avec application, sans souci de l'imposture, le rôle d'une vieille femme pauvre à l'émouvante destinée" (EE, 27). This immense pity will eventually encompass all of the world's "humiliés," and finally all men, who must share the ultimate fate of death. At the time of the publication of L'Envers et l'endroit Camus was already involved with political groups in Algeria concerned with social and economic inequities, and as a youthful reporter for the leftist Alger-Républicain, many of his early articles were written on

behalf of the poor and the oppressed. Emmett Parker, whose excellent book, Albert Camus: The Artist in the Arena, gives a detailed account of Camus' journalistic work, has this to say of the writer during the period closely following publication of L'Envers et l'endroit:

> His views on the political events of those years reveal a young man of great courage and integrity who felt that political action was not an end in itself but a means to attaining and safeguarding freedom and justice for those who suffer from flagrant inequities in the social system. His youthful enthusiasm may have sometimes resulted in overconfidence on his part, but his genuine compassion for afflicted human beings more than compensated for this failing.[24]

It is probable that much of Camus' acceptance of "la pauvreté" as well as "la lumière" is due to unconscious imitation of his mother's attitudes. Much has been written of Camus' Epicurianism, particularly regarding his enjoyment of physical life. Robert Champigny, however, in his study of Meursault in L'Etranger reminds us that Epicurian happiness is not only "le plaisir" but also, negatively, "ne pas souffrir physiquement et de n'être pas troublé phychiquement: aponie et ataraxie."[25] Meursault's attitude, he states, is not so much one of indifference as of ataraxie, "une absence de trouble," because he has rid himself of "les désirs non

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[24]Parker, Artist in the Arena, p. 24.

[25]Robert Champigny, Sur un Héros païen (Paris: Gallimard, 1959), p. 58.

nécessaires."[26] Camus' lack of concern for worldly goods and artificial values can perhaps be traced to his memory of childhood poverty, in the midst of which his mother's image remains in silent dignity untouched by her sordid surroundings. His preface plainly expresses his discomfort with possessions:

> Bien que je vive maintenant sans le souci du lendemain, donc en privilégié, je ne sais pas posséder. Ce que j'ai, et qui m'est toujours offert sans que je l'aie recherché, je ne puis rien en garder. Moins par prodigalité, il me semble, que par une autre sorte de parcimonie: je suis avare de cette liberté qui disparaît dès que commence l'excès des biens. Le plus grand des luxes n'a jamais cessé de coïncider pour moi avec un certain dénuement. J'aime la maison nue des Arabes ou des Espagnols. Le lieu où je préfère vivre et travailler (et, chose plus rare, où il me serait égal de mourir) est la chambre d'hôtel.[27]

His mother is also associated with nature in a more impersonal sense. Nguyen-Van-Huy relates Camus' own naturalistic attitude to the unconscious influence of his mother: "C'est en regardant vivre et mourir sa mère qu'il s'initie à une sorte de mysticisme naturaliste dont la contemplation est la seule méthode d'initiation."[28] But it is not only the surrounding natural world of which Camus becomes aware through observing her long periods of contemplative silence, but of his mother as an integral part

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[26] Ibid., p. 59.

[27] Camus, Essais, p. 7.

[28] Nguyen-Van-Huy, La Métaphysique du bonheur, p. 96.

of it. In her "contemplation sans but" (EE, 26), her silence and her indifference, she is like nature itself: "L'indifférence de cette mère étrange! Il n'y a que cette immense solitude du monde qui m'en donne la mesure" (EE, 26). The natural world's silence and indifference is a source of anguish that Camus will later associate with the Absurd. Sometimes when the child observes his mother's silent silhouette "il a peur" (EE, 25). A brief passage in the essay concerns the author's recollection of another mother, a cat who cannot nurse her kittens. One by one the latter die and he returns one evening to find one of the dead kittens half eaten by the mother:

> Je m'assis alors au milieu de toute cette misère et, les mains dans l'ordure, respirant cette odeur de pourriture, je regardai longtemps la flamme démente qui brillait dans les yeux verts de la chatte, immobile dans un coin (EE, 28).

Meditating on that past episode, he perceives that the natural world outside man is simple: "Ainsi, chaque fois qu'il m'a semblé éprouver le sens profond du monde, c'est sa simplicité qui m'a toujours bouleversé" (EE, 28). There is something of this simple natural world in his mother, in her strange indifference, her impassiveness, and the author perceives its presence in himself as well. But there is danger in this simplicity, in the temptation to blend totally with the non-human natural world and become like it, indifferent to everything:

> Il y a une vertu dangereuse dans le mot simplicité. Et cette nuit, je comprends qu'on puisse vouloir mourir parce que, au regard d'une certaine transparence de la vie, plus rien n'a d'importance. ...
>
> ... A un certain degré de dénuement, plus rien ne conduit à plus rien, ni l'espoir ni le désespoir ne paraissent fondés ... (EE, 27-28).

At the conclusion of the essay the narrator reiterates the danger of this temptation to join with the non-human world. As the Arab proprietor informs him the bar is closing and he rises to leave, he feels its tug:

> Il est vrai que je regarde une dernière fois la baie et ses lumières, que ce qui monte alors vers moi n'est pas l'espoir de jours meilleurs, mais une indifférence sereine et primitive à tout et a moi-même (EE, 30).

But he resists, and maintains his precarious balance between the pull of non-human nature and the world of men: "Je ne veux plus descendre cette pente si dangereuse," and "il faut briser cette courbe trop molle et trop facile. Et j'ai besoin de ma lucidité" (EE, 30). The world is simple, it is men who complicate it, but he is a man and must not forsake men, even as he retains his ties with nature.

"Entre oui et non" marks further progression in the author's awakening to the Absurd, and this important theme too is linked with his childhood and his mother. During the silence of the night alone with his mother, the boy senses himself "dépaysé," separated from other men and from "toute l'espérance qui nous vient des hommes, toutes les certitudes que nous donne le bruit des villes" (EE, 27), a theme that

will be expanded in "La Mort dans l'âme." Day-to-day concerns fade into the background as if they no longer exist, and nothing remains, "Rien que la maladie et la mort où il se sentait plongé" (EE, 27). Yet, in the face of the absurdity of human destiny, life retains its force and its value: "Et pourtant, à l'heure même où le monde croulait, lui vivait. Et même il avait fini par s'endormir. Non cependant sans emporter l'image désespérante et tendre d'une solitude à deux" (EE, 27). Inseparably bound to life is the image of his mother in their "solitude à deux."

Near the end of the essay the author, wondering what brings the young man back to this place, what keeps him in his mother's room making idle conversation, answers: " . . . la certitude que ça vaut toujours mieux, le sentiment que toute l'absurde simplicité du monde s'est réfugiée dans cette pièce" (EE, 30). Everything is here, "l'envers et l'endroit," all that will make up the center of his work. His closing words stress the necessity for lucidity--quality so necessary for "l'Homme absurde"[29]--more explicitly than in "L'Ironie." At the same time they demonstrate again the primacy of the concrete individual man over abstractions, so fundamental in Camus' thought:

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[29]"Sisyphe, prolétaire des dieux, impuissant et révolté, connaît toute l'étendue de sa misérable condition: c'est à elle qu'il pense pendant sa descente. La clairvoyance qui devait faire son tourment consomme du même coup sa victoire" (MS, 196).

> Qu'on ne nous raconte pas d'histoires. Qu'on ne nous dise pas du condamné à mort: 'Il va payer sa dette à la société, mais: 'On va lui couper le cou.' Ça n'a l'air de rien. Mais ça fait une petite différence. Et puis, il y a des gens qui préfèrent regarder leur destin dans les yeux (EE, 30).

"Entre oui et non" makes only a brief reference to Camus' father, who was killed in World War I when the writer was only a year old. It occurs in a brief exchange with his mother concerning the physical resemblance between father and son, and the narrator adds: "C'est sans conviction qu'il a parlé de son père. Aucun souvenir, aucune émotion" (EE, 29). The father-character is almost completely absent in his work. Nonetheless the final lines of the essay cited above have a connection with an experience his father had that was later told to Camus by his mother. It made a lasting impression on the writer, and he recounts it in Réflexions sur la guillotine, which gives his views on capital punishment. The incident also appears in La Peste as an experience of Tarrou's father. The elder Camus, like his neighbors, had been shocked and angered by the cold-blooded murder of an entire family, including the children, and decided to go to the murderer's execution. His wife recalled that he never spoke of what happened there but came bursting into the house, flung himself on the bed, and shortly afterwards was violently sick. The first paragraph of Réflexions sur la guillotine (1957) recalls the final lines of "Entre oui et non":

> Il venait de découvrir la réalité qui se cachait sous les grandes formules dont on la masquait. Au lieu de penser aux enfants massacrés, il ne pouvait plus penser qu'à ce corps pantelant qu'on venait de jeter sur une planche pour lui couper le cou.[30]

In "Entre oui et non" as in "L'Ironie," emotions are triggered and an atmosphere is revealed through physical senses. In "Entre oui et non" it is primarily the sense of smell. The instant-recall produced by "une odeur de chambre trop longtemps fermée" has already been mentioned. In the café the writer's recollection is sharpened by "une odeur de café grillé" (EE, 26); later the memory of the night spent in his mother's room will be associated with "cette odeur mêlée de sueur et de vinaigre." In the episode of the cat who devours her dead kitten, "l'odeur de mort se mélangeait à l'odeur d'urine" (EE, 28) and in the latest visit to his mother, the familiar everyday life of his old neighborhood reaches him through the window, in both sound and smell:

> Toute l'odeur du quartier remonte par la fenêtre. L'accordéon du café voisin, la circulation qui se presse au soir, l'odeur des brochettes de viande grillée qu'on mange entre des petits pains élastiques, un enfant qui pleure dans la rue (EE, 29).

The lyricism of Noces is prefigured in "Entre oui et non" as the author recalls, or experiences with emotion, the natural beauty of his country:

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[30]Camus, Essais, p. 1021.

> Nuits d'été, mystères où crépitaient des étoiles! (EE, 24).
>
> Le triangle de ciel que je vois de ma place est dépouillé des nuages du jour. Gorgé d'étoiles, il frémit sous un souffle pur et les ailes feutrées de la nuit battent lentement autour de moi (EE, 27).

For the most part, however, the emotions expressed in "Entre oui et non" are closely allied to the somber side of this world of "pauvreté et lumière."

Written during the same period as "L'Ironie," 1935-36, "Entre oui et non" shows none of the former's somewhat awkward handling of viewpoint in the narration. It is a first-person account in the present, with flashbacks to two different times in the past, developed smoothly through intervals of meditation. The writer states his situation almost at once: "Un émigrant revient dans sa patrie" (EE, 23). At the moment he is "Dans ce café maure, tout au bout de la ville arabe" (EE, 23). The first flashback occurs as he sits listening to the familiar sounds of the sea and senses again nature's indifference: "Et me voici rapatrié" (EE, 24). He recalls his childhood, his mother and his family life, and then briefly, through an occurrence in this past, we are brought back to the present: the child inadvertently startles his mother and is told "Qu'il aille faire ses devoirs" (EE, 26), and the author goes on "L'enfant a fait ses devoirs. Il est aujourd'hui dans un café sordide. Il est maintenant un homme" (EE, 26). He remains

in the bar as the evening advances, and the world now seems to hold a promise of peace while his recollections turn again toward the past and his childhood. The next return-to-the-present is signalled by the passage of time as marked in the sky, which is now "gorgé d'étoiles," and the narrator wonders "jusqu'à où ira cette nuit où je ne m'appartiens plus" (EE, 27)? In the brief meditation that follows he refers again to the "paradis perdu" of his boyhood, experienced through the image of his mother, and leads us easily to the time of another visit with her: "Et c'est ainsi qu'il n'y a pas longtemps, dans une maison d'un vieux quartier, un fils est allé voir sa mère" (EE, 28). The mother's words to him as he prepares to leave trail off: "Tu reviendras? dit-elle. Je sais bien que tu as du travail. Seulement, de temps en temps ... " (EE, 30). Once more we are back in the present, in the café, and perhaps, like the writer, experiencing emotions that go beyond particular times or events:

> Mais à cette heure, où suis je? Et comment séparer ce café désert de cette chambre du passé. Je ne sais plus si je vis ou si je me souviens. Les lumières des phares sont là. Et l'Arabe qui se dresse devant moi me dit qu'il va fermer. Il faut sortir (EE, 30).

"La Mort dans l'âme"

The "dépaysement" of the child in "Entre oui et non" during the long, restless night with his injured mother, is

experienced more directly and with deeper spiritual awareness by the author as a man in "La Mort dans l'âme." In 1936 Camus made a trip to Czechoslovakia, Austria, and Italy, and its psychological and emotional effects on him are related in this essay. He had gone, with very little money, to Prague where he was to be joined by friends. During the week he spends there alone he feels completely alienated from his surroundings and is left vulnerable to thoughts of his own ultimate destiny. In Italy, although he rejoices in the warmth and natural beauty of the countryside, he is more poignantly aware than ever of human mortality. Here, however, the grandeur of nature produces not only awareness but along with it " ... la force d'être courageux et conscient à la fois" (EE, 39).

"La Mort dans l'âme" begins, in a tone of straight reporting, with Camus' arrival in Prague at six o'clock in the evening. Almost at once a sense of alienation makes itself felt. There are a million people living in this city whose lives have never touched his; they speak a strange language; everyone is walking rapidly, "Et me dépassant, tous se détachaient de moi. Je perdis pied" (EE, 31). His depression is aggravated by concern about money, and he starts out at once to find an inexpensive hotel with already a vague sense of fleeing something indefinable: "Quelque chose dans ma course précipitée ressemblait déjà à une

fuite" (EE, 31). The room he finally takes in a modest-appearing hotel turns out to be double the rate he had expected, and he is aware now that he will have to watch his expenditures even more closely. It is a depressing thought, and his general despondency increases.

A cheap restaurant is his next objective, but when he finds one he is reluctant to enter and passes back and forth in front of it until this strange behavior attracts attention and he feels he must enter. Inside, his discomfort continues as he is unable to read the menu or communicate with the waiter. He finally orders, with the help of a prostitute called over from another table by the waiter, and is served an unpalatable dish excessively seasoned with cumin. He pretends interest in the girl's conversation, which in fact he is unable to follow, and the feeling of estrangement persists: " ... je ne suis pas ici. Tout m'exaspère, je vacille, je n'ai pas faim" (EE, 32). Afterwards he has no desire to accompany the prostitute, who, he reflects later, had she been pretty, might have distracted him. But there is no escape--the world outside him is a foreign, unfamiliar one with which he is unable to establish any meaningful rapport: his thoughts have nowhere to turn except inward, upon himself, and he finds this most frightening of all: " ... d'être seul dans ma chambre d'hôtel ... réduit à moi-même et à mes misérables pensées" (EE, 32).

Walking gives him no relief: "Je marchai dans la vieille ville, mais incapable de rester plus longtemps en face de moi-même, je courus jusqu'à mon hôtel ... " (EE, 32). He tries desperately to fill his remaining days with sight-seeing to make the time pass as quickly as possible until his friends arrive: "Je me perdais dans les somptueuses églises baroques, essayant d'y retrouver une patrie, mais sortant plus vide et plus désespéré de ce tête-à-tête décevant avec moi-même (EE, 33).

As previously noted, Nguyen-Van-Huy has suggested that Camusian happiness is synonymous with unity--unity with the natural world, with man, and with transcendent values. At the opposite pole is separation, isolation, and solitude, and their by-product, anguish, all of which are experienced with excruciating intensity by the narrator of "La Mort dans l'âme." Growing awareness of his solitude brings all the accoutrements of anguish: depression and discomfort--he is "mal à l'aise ... creux et vide" (EE, 31); physical illness--"J'avais peur d'être malade, là au milieu de ces gens prêts à rire" (EE, 32); fear--" ... à l'heure où le soleil déclinait, mon pas solitaire faisait résonner les rues. Et m'en apercevant, la panique me reprenait" (EE, 33).

Near the end of his stay in Prague the narrator is brought face to face with the ultimate separation, death. He learns upon returning to his hotel one afternoon that a

man in the adjacent room has died, and the solitude of human beings is brought sharply home to him: "la vie avait continué dans l'hôtel, jusqu'à ce que le garçon ait eu l'idée de l'appeler ... il était mort seul ... Moi, pendant ce temps, je lisais la réclame de ma pâte à raser" (EE, 35). Death is always a solitary experience, but its loneliness is underlined in this case by the impersonality of the setting--a hotel, where human contact reaches only a superficial level. Men live and die separated in space only by inches, yet isolated from each other. Death is also thrown into relief in the contrast with life going on unconcernedly around it, and the writer, glancing through the open door of the dead man's room, becomes more poignantly aware of both life and death as the light from the window casts the dead man's shadow on the wall: "Cette lumière me bouleversa. Elle était authentique, une vraie lumière de vie, d'après-midi de vie, une lumière qui fait qu'on s'aperçoit qu'on vit. Lui était mort. Seul dans sa chambre" (EE, 35). All of the absurdity of human destiny is summed up in one brief sentence: "Il était arrivé là sans se douter de rien et il était mort seul" (EE, 35).

The experience is very nearly the last straw for the writer. His anguish reaches a point where it can no longer be borne: " ... je ne pouvais aller plus loin" (EE, 36). Fortunately at that moment his friends arrive and he manages

to greet them in the normal way. He is aware of the trauma he has undergone, but in their eyes he is still "l'homme qu'ils avaient quitté" (EE, 36).

There are specific echoes in Camus' other works of the signs of alienation and anguish that appear in "La Mort dans l'âme." Jan, in Le Malentendu, is uncomfortable in the home of his mother: "Je ne suis pas à mon aise ici," and " ... j'ai l'impression pénible que cette maison n'est pas la mienne."[31] He likens it to "toutes les chambres d'hôtel de ces villes étrangères où des hommes seuls arrivent chaque nuit."[32] He is finally able to define the anguish he feels there: "je connais son nom. Elle est peur de la solitude éternelle, crainte qu'il n'y ait pas de réponse. Et qui répondrait dans une chambre d'hôtel?"[33] In Le Mythe de Sisyphe "l'Homme absurde" seeks in vain a feeling of belonging, of being part of a unified and harmonious universe. The narrator's alienation in "La Mort dans l'âme," expressed in the words, "J'étais un étranger," will be reflected in his 1942 novel, L'Etranger. Physical sickness, joined to isolation, becomes a dominant theme in

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[31]Camus, Théâtre, Récits, Nouvelles, p. 156.

[32]Ibid., p. 152.

[33]Ibid.

La Peste, and Clamence in La Chute, associates "l'angoisse" with "le malconfort."[34]

In the comfort of familiar surroundings and the routine of daily life it is possible to evade awareness of one's solitude. The traveler, in "La Mort dans l'âme" is even willing to suffer the sickening food of the restaurant where he had eaten his first meal in order not to sacrifice its precious, if slight, familiarity: "Là du moins, j'étais 'reconnu.' On me souriait si on ne m'y parlait pas" (EE, 33). However, once away from the known milieu no evasion is possible. Sightseeing one day in a cloister the narrator begins to perceive the rapport between his presence in a strange environment and his suffering. He returns to the hotel to write in one stroke the thoughts that elucidate this anguish and affirm the importance of lucidity--travel has brought him both:

> Et quel autre profit vouloir tirer du voyage? Me voici sans parure. Ville dont je ne sais pas lire les enseignes, caractères étranges où rien de familier ne s'accroche, sans amis à qui parler, sans divertissement enfin. De cette chambre où arrivent les bruits d'une ville étrangère, je sais bien que rien ne peut me tirer pour m'amener vers la lumière plus délicate d'un foyer ou d'un lieu aimé ... Vais-je appeler, crier? Ce sont des visages étrangers qui paraîtront. Eglises, or et encens, tout me rejette dans une vie quotidienne où mon angoisse donne son prix à chaque chose. Et voici que le rideau des habitudes, le tissage confortable des paroles où le coeur s'assoupit, se relève lentement

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[34] Ibid., p. 1531.

> et dévoile enfin la face blême de l'inquiétude. L'homme est face a face avec lui-meme: je le défie d'être heureux ... (EE, 33-34).

"Le rideau des habitudes" serves as a veil which when broken exposes the Absurd. In Le Mythe de Sisyphe a similar image appears:

> Il arrive que les décors s'écroulent. Lever, tramway, quatre heures de bureau ou d'usine, repas, tramway, quatre heures de travail, repas, sommeil et lundi mardi mercredi jeudi vendredi et samedi sur le même rythme, cette route se suit aisément la plupart du temps. Un jour seulement, le 'pourquoi' s'élève et tout commence ... (MS, 106-07).

The characteristic Camusian duality and tension is still apparent, however, in the necessary "équilibre" between positive and negative qualities. If the lucidity awakened by travel brings anguish, it also enhances the precious quality of things hitherto taken for granted. The traveler in Prague, even in his anguish, feels a new kinship with the world:

> Et c'est pourtant par là que le voyage l'illumine. Un grand désaccord se fait entre lui et les choses. Dans ce coeur moins solide, la musique du monde entre plus aisément. Dans ce grand dénuement enfin, le moindre arbre isolé devient la plus tendre et la plus fragile des images (EE, 34).

During the journey south through Austria the traveler is unable to shake off the effects of his experience in Prague: " ... je gardais au fond de moi l'étourdissement de ceux qui ont trop regardé dans une crevasse sans fond" (EE, 36). However as he approaches the warmer climate of Italy there is a gradual change. The sickness of Prague is now

behind him, and he feels like a convalescent "qu'on a nourri de bouillons et qui pense à ce que sera la première croûte de pain qu'il mangera" (EE, 36). Italy does not disappoint him, and it is with quiet happiness that he finds himself under a warm and sunny sky where he can resume the close contact with nature that was so much a part of his life in Algeria. There is still loneliness, but now there are "appuis pour qui ne sait plus être seul" (EE, 37), and "signes d'amour pour qui est forcé d'être seul" (EE, 38).

Here too, far from home, he begins to perceive the other half of the lesson of his native land, "ce monde de pauvreté et de lumière." The sun, while it illuminates the beauty of the natural world, also brings lucidity to the human who is not a part of it, and makes him sharply conscious of his own impermanence:

> Certes, devant cette plaine italienne, peuplée d'arbres, de soleil et de sourires, j'ai saisi mieux qu'ailleurs l'odeur de mort et d'inhumanité qui me poursuivait depuis un mois (EE, 39).

Here where there is such riches to be enjoyed by the senses there is all the more poignancy in the knowledge that the body must die:

> Pour moi, aucune promesse d'immortalité dans ce pays. Que me faisait de revivre en mon âme, et sans yeux pour voir Vicence, sans mains pour toucher les raisins de Vincence, sans peau pour sentir la caresse de la nuit sur la route du Monte Berico à la villa Valmarana? (EE, 39).

Camus' preface to the 1959 reedition of Jean Grenier's <u>Les Iles</u> contains lines which recall these feelings of despair

before the beauty of the Italian landscape on the 1936 journey:

> Celui qui, entre une terre ingrate et un ciel sombre besogne durement, peut rêver d'une autre terre où le ciel et le pain seraient légers. Il espère. Mais ceux que la lumière et les collines comblent à tout heure du jour, ils n'espèrent plus.[35]

Nevertheless the lucidity that comes from nature differs from that of Prague. Its extreme beauty brings not only despair but exaltation and the courage to bear human mortality:

> J'avais besoin d'une grandeur. Je la trouvais dans la confrontation de mon désespoir profond et de l'indifférence secrète d'un des plus beaux paysages du monde. J'y puisais la force d'être courageux et conscient à la fois (EE, 39).

This is a courage that had been lacking in Prague ("Je ne pouvais aller plus loin") and one is reminded again of George Joyaux' words concerning the degree to which Camus was influenced by his physical environment: "His emotional reactions to the physical milieu and the kind of life it suggests, from the start gave direction to his intellectual development. . . ."[36]

Camusian "équilibre," noted earlier, permeates "La Mort dans l'âme." There is life and death, a sky from which falls both "l'indifférence et la beauté" (EE, 38). The

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[35]Camus, preface to Les Isles, p. 11.

[36]Joyaux, "Albert Camus and North Africa," p. 11.

traveler will sometimes recall Prague, and with the odor of cucumbers and vinegar uneasiness will return; then he turns his thoughts to the plains of Vicenza:

> Mais les deux me sont chères et je sépare mal mon amour de la lumière et de la vie d'avec mon secret attachement pour l'expérience désespérée que j'ai voulu décrire. On l'a compris déjà, et moi, je ne veux pas me résoudre à choisir (EE, 39).

It is apparent here, as well as elsewhere in Camus' works, that the writer has at times felt the attraction of death as well as of life, as another kind of union. The above-quoted "secret attachement" is one such reference. Earlier in this essay, describing his feelings before the Italian landscape, he remarks that "ce que je touchais du doigt, c'était une forme dépouillée et sans attraits de ce goût du néant que je portais en moi" (EE, 38). At times this attraction is expressed as a desire to blend into nature, to lose identity in it, a desire that will become explicit in Noces. It is already suggested in "La Mort dans l'âme" as he recalls the days spent near Vicence: "J'ai tout le ciel sur la face et ce tournoiement des journées, il me semble que je pourrais le suivre sans cesse, immobile, tournoyant avec elles" (EE, 37).

The influence of nature on Camus' thought and work has already been noted. Its role as poetic Muse is presaged in "La Mort dans l'âme." Except for the short, intensely lyrical passage dashed off by the traveler upon his return

from the cloister, the early part of the trip in Prague is related in straightforward prose. However, after his arrival in Italy, an abundance of "singing lines"[37] transcribe the experience of nature through the senses:

> ... la flûte aigre et tendre des cigales, le parfum d'eaux et d'étoiles qu'on rencontre dans les nuits de septembre, les chemins odorants parmi les lentisques et les roseaux, autant de signes d'amour pour qui est forcé d'être seul (EE, 37-38).
>
> Une à une, derrière moi, les cigales enflent leur voix puis chantent: un mystère dans ce ciel d'où tombent l'indifférence et la beauté (EE, 38).
>
> Ainsi, les journées passent. Après l'éblouissement des heures pleines de soleil, le soir vient, dans le décor splendide que lui font l'or du couchant et le noir des cyprès (EE, 38).
>
> Le soleil était presque au zénith, le ciel d'un bleu intense et aéré. Toute la lumière qui en tombait dévalait la pente des collines, habillait les cyprès et les oliviers, les maisons blanches et les toits rouges, de la plus chaleureuse des robes, puis allait se perdre dans la plaine qui fumait au soleil (EE, 38).

W. M. Frohock, in an article concerning Camus' use of metaphors, has remarked that in passages of great emotional intensity the writer found himself forced "to go beyond the ordinary resources of his language, to abandon the ordinary strategies of prose in favor of a strategy more closely associated with poetry."[38] In Noces nature will inspire some of Camus' most poetic lines, traces of which appear

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[37]Lewis, The Lyric Impulse, p. 19.

[38]W. M. Frohock, "Camus: Image, Influence and Sensibility," Yale French Studies, II, No. 2 (1949), 99.

already in "La Mort dans l'âme." The plenitude of Noces is also forecast in lines which merit equally the description "lyrical":

> Chaque être rencontré, chaque odeur de cette rue, tout m'est prétexte pour aimer sans mesure (EE, 37).
>
> ... la trompette des marchands de glaces, les étalages de fruits, pastèques rouges aux graines noires, raisins translucides et gluants--autant d'appuis pour qui ne sait plus être seul (EE, 37).

The lesson on "La Mort dans l'âme" is human mortality and the necessity of awareness in the face of it. The writer cherishes his bitter prize, lucidity. At the end of the essay he recalls crossing a little cemetery in Algeria and finding at the end of it a view of the valley with the sea beyond--it is the kind of grandeur that lends courage to face the truth, that nothing lasts except the world of nature outside of man. But, retracing his steps and perceiving a gravestone carved with the words "regrets éternels," he concludes on a note of ironic humour: "Heureusement, il y a les idéalistes pour arranger les choses" (EE, 39).

"Amour de vivre"

In the summer of 1935 Camus travelled to the Spanish Balearic Islands, and "Amour de vivre," written the following year, treats the same theme as "La Mort dans l'âme"--the psychological and emotional effects of travel, which deprive us of familiar routine, sharpen our awareness, and

so force us to confront our ultimate destiny which is death. There is the same fear and loneliness: "Car ce qui fait le prix du voyage, c'est la peur. Il brise en nous une sorte de décor intérieur"; the same resulting lucidity:

> Il n'est plus possible de tricher--de se masquer derrière des heures de bureau et de chantier (ces heures contre lesquelles nous protestons si fort et qui nous défendent si sûrement contre la souffrance d'être seul) (EE, 42).

However, the equilibrium between life and death that is depicted in both "La Mort dans l'âme" and "Amour de vivre" has a different emphasis in the two essays. Death, or "l'envers" had dominated the atmosphere of "La Mort dans l'âme," whereas in "Amour de vivre," inspired by the Mediterranean sun of the Balearics, it is life, "l'endroit," which plays the major role.

In Camus' Carnets I, notes made in the winter of 1936 prior to the writing of "Amour de vivre" give a list of sites visited during the trip. The finished essay concentrates on two of these: a "café chantant" and "le petit cloître gothique de San Francisco." A sharp contrast, these two, the first hot, noisy, and pulsating with humanity, the second quiet, almost deserted; yet each in its own way increasing the writer's hunger for a life which he knows must inevitably end. In both places he perceives through a sharpened sensitivity, brought about by "le dépaysement," the precious quality of the things of this world:

> Loin des nôtres, de notre langue, arrachés à tous nos appuis, privés de nos masques (on ne connaît pas le tarif des tramways et tout est comme ça), nous sommes tout entiers à la surface de nous-mêmes. Mais aussi, à nous sentir l'âme malade, nous rendons à chaque être, à chaque objet, sa valeur de miracle (EE, 42-43).

Life as it is depicted in the café in Palma is human and earthy. Its physical quality is at once apparent in the description which begins the essay: The crowd of customers is "serré à mourir, épaules contre épaules"; "tous hurlaient"; "une sorte d'officier de marine m'éructait dans la figure des politesses chargées d'alcool"; the orchestra plays tunes of which only the rhythm can be heard "parce que tous les pieds en donnaient la mesure" (EE, 41). A clash of cymbals announces the entrance of the entertainer, "un visage de jeune fille, mais sculpté dans une montagne de chair" (EE, 41). She wears a garment of net through which swells "un damier de chair blanche"; when she smiles the corners of her mouth set in motion "une série de petites ondulations de chair"; she dances and "Dans ce mouvement monotone et passionné, de vraies vagues de chair naissaient sur ses hanches et venaient mourir sur ses épaules; she sings and "tenant ses seins à pleines mains, ouvrant sa bouche rouge et mouillée, reprit la mélodie en choeur avec la salle, jusqu'à ce que tout le monde soit levé dans le tumulte" (EE, 42). Life manifests itself in the flesh, as a primitive, vital force, incarnated in the girl, who is "Comme

une déesse immonde sortant de l'eau," and "comme l'image ignoble et exaltante de la vie, avec le désespoir de ses yeux vides et la sueur épaisse de son ventre ... " (EE, 42). For a moment she too has a "valeur de miracle," and in the noisy scene the writer sees the reflection of all of life: "La vie nous semble s'y refléter tout entière" (EE, 43). The mind has no part to play amidst this "joie trépignante": the woman's eyes are "vides," she dances "sans penser" (EE, 43), and "pas un être ici n'était conscient" (EE, 41).

Yet, if "immonde" and "ignoble" describe the life-force, it is also "exaltante," and Camus maintained this attitude toward it throughout his life. It is significant that Nietzsche had a profound influence on the youthful Camus[39] and though he had already rejected the superman and the power principle, as evidenced in his early play, Caligula, Nietzsche's vitalism struck a chord which found ready response in Camus' Mediterranean temperament. Serge Doubrovsky, in tracing the revolution of Camus' ethics, has effectively noted the early and lasting significance of the vital for the writer, and its connection with his childhood and youth:

> Enfant et enfant d'illettrés, Camus, à l'heure des expériences fondamentales, était en deça de la culture. Il s'agit bien plutôt d'un effort

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[39] "Nietzsche était alors pour lui la loi et les prophètes." Paul Mathieu, cited in Essais, p. 1172.

> conscient et parfois maladroit pour retrouver les sources vives, pré-culturelles de l'existence.[40]

He notes later in the same article that for Camus "La participation vitale est à la fois un fait et une valeur."[41] In "Amour de vivre" the vital and the intuitive predominate. With maturity moral and intellectual values will become increasingly important in Camus' work, but the role of the vital will not diminish.

At the cloister of San Francisco the writer again experiences an extreme lucidity, but the catalysts are different. The cloister is in the rather deserted quarter of the cathedral, and here, in contrast to the crowd and noise of the café, the traveler moves in silence and solitude. He feels himself blending with the world, losing his identity: "Je me fondais dans cette odeur de silence, je perdais mes limites, n'étais plus que le son de mes pas, ou ce vol d'oiseaux ... " (EE, 43). It is not a gentle peace that these surroundings impart, but sharp awareness and tension. The beauty of the scene seems a precariously-poised reflection in a glass, ready to shatter at any moment: "Dans une heure, une minute, une seconde, maintenant peut-être, tout pouvait crouler" (EE, 44). The visitor permits himself to enter into the illusion, but with full consciousness: "J'entrais

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[40]Doubrovsky, "La Morale d'Albert Camus," p. 40.

[41]Ibid, p. 42.

dans le jeu. Sans être dupe, je me prêtais aux apparences" (EE, 44). In this moment of lucidity he perceives the reflection of his own final dissolution and at the same time his love of life: "Là était tout mon amour de vivre: une passion silencieuse pour ce qui allait peut-être m'échapper, une amertume sous une flamme" (EE, 44). The time of revolt has not yet come for the writer. For the moment there is simply love of life, and a simultaneous urge to become part of the beauty and permanence of the non-human world, to lose separate identity and become part of the whole. Each day at the cloister the experience is repeated: "Chaque jour, je quittais ce cloître comme enlevé à moi-même, inscrit pour un court instant dans la durée du monde" (EE, 44).

As in the café, the spirit is irrelevant here. The primitive and the vital, which there manifested itself in human bodies, shows itself here in the world of nature. The writer also makes another discovery--comprehension of his affinity for the Mediterranean countries and those which resemble them: while he may admire their gifts to civilization of reason and philosophy, they have a stronger attraction for him in their reduction of man to only another manifestation of nature: in their environment his spirit, his intellect, all that make him an individual, become non-entities. Significantly Camus makes a distinction between primitive Greek and Hellenic Greek art, and between Gothic

and Renaissance in Italy: " ... je sais bien pourquoi je pensais alors aux yeux sans regard des Apollons doriques ou aux personnages brûlants et figés de Giotto" (EE, 44). A footnote on the same page adds: "C'est avec l'apparition du sourire et du regard que commencent la décadence de la sculpture grecque et la dispersion de l'art italien. Comme si la beauté cessait où commençait l'esprit." The gift to him of these lands is rooted further back in time, when the world was not made to man's measure but he was simply a part of it: " ... ce n'était pas un monde fait à la mesure de l'homme--mais qui se refermait sur l'homme" (EE, 44). If they attract him, it is an attraction toward loss-of-self and fusion with the non-human world, the same "goût du néant" he had felt in Italy (EE, 38).

> ... si le langage de ces pays s'accordait à ce qui résonnait profondément en moi, ce n'est pas parce qu'il répondait à mes questions, mais parce qu'il les rendait inutiles. Ce n'était pas des actions de grâces qui pouvaient me monter aux lèvres, mais ce Nada qui n'a pu naître que devant des paysages écrasés de soleil (EE, 44).

The unity which Nguyen-Van-Huy posits as essential to Camusian happiness may also be consummated in loss of self.

Appropriately enough, considering the setting of this essay, the author uses the Spanish word for nothingness. It is also a reminder that Camus' mother was of Spanish descent. Brief references to his inclination toward the Spanish appear in the preface to <u>L'Envers et l'endroit</u>:

his pride, "J'avais là toutes les occasions de développer une 'castillanerie' qui m'a fait bien du tort"; his taste for the lack of clutter in Spanish and Arab dwellings, "J'aime la maison nue des Arabes ou des Espagnols."[42] A similar reference to Spanish décor appears in La Peste. There have been many comments by Camus and others concerning his ability to wholeheartedly enjoy himself, a trait he also finds typical of the Spanish and which he praises as the mark of the truly civilized in a brief footnote to the scene in the "café chantant" of Palma: "Il y a une certaine aisance dans la joie qui définit la vraie civilisation. Et le peuple espagnol est un des rares en Europe qui soit civilisé" (EE, 41).

There is yet another trait of the Spanish people described by Ernest Hemingway which Camus shared:

> They know death is the unescapable reality, the one thing any man may be sure of; the only security. . . . They think a great deal about death and when they have a religion they have one which believes that life is much shorter than death. Having this feeling they take an intelligent interest in death. . . .[43]

Camus too seems to have taken an interest in death and much of his thought centers around it. André Rousseaux sees death as the foundation of Camus' "philosophie du bonheur."[44]

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[42]Camus, Essais, pp. 6-7.

[43]Ernest Hemingway, Death in the Afternoon (New York, London: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1954), p. 266.

[44]Supra, p. 67.

Roger Quilliot states that Camus' numerous portrayals of old people, beginning with L'Envers et l'endroit, indicate an interest in death as a common human experience: "L'intérêt que porte Camus à la vieillesse est aussi attention à la mort, et pour finir, il l'est essentiellement."[45] For Robert de Luppé it is at the heart of his work: "Toute expérience véritable débouche dans la mort, voilà la pensée fondamentale de Camus."[46]

Repeatedly in Camus' novels and plays death brings about an awakening: when Meursault pulls the trigger and kills the Arab, "c'est là, dans le bruit à la fois sec et assourdissant, que tout a commencé";[47] for Caligula the death of Drusilla brings the realization that "les hommes meurent et ils ne sont pas heureux,"[48] and starts him on the vain attempt to usurp the role of destiny; in La Peste the slow and painful death of Othon's child marks the beginning of doubts concerning his faith for Father Paneloux--"à partir de ce jour où il avait longtemps regardé un enfant mourir, il parut changé."[49] When the priest dies his card

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[45]Quilliot, La Mer, p. 39.

[46]Robert de Luppé, Albert Camus (Paris: Editions Universitaires, 1963), p. 117.

[47]Camus, Théâtre, Récits, Nouvelles, p. 1168.

[48]Ibid., p. 16.

[49]Ibid., p. 1399.

is inscribed "cas douteux,"[50] and the author implies that this doubtful aspect is applicable to more than his physical disease. In La Chute too, death is a catalyst. The disruption of Clamence's complacency originates in his awareness of guilt for the death of the woman in the Seine, and that of his fellow internee in the prison camp:

> Il faut que quelque chose arrive, voilà l'explication de la plupart des engagements humains. Il faut que quelque chose arrive, même la servitude sans amour, même la guerre, ou la mort. Vivent donc les enterrements![51]

Camus' preoccupation with death also demonstrates a close rapport with other facets of his thought: his love of life coupled with the "goût du neant," his attitude toward nature, his affinity for the Greeks, and finally the desire for unity pointed out by Nguyen-Van-Huy. All of these factors can be viewed in clearer perspective when they are juxtaposed with the statements of Dr. Norman Brown in Life Against Death. Dr. Brown argues for the acceptance of death as a step toward its reunification-in-consciousness-with-life which would eliminate man's horror of death. He, as Camus has done at various points in his work, points out the elaborate means Western man has developed to evade awareness of death, in contrast to pagan man and to Eastern philosophy. He quotes the poet Rilke as stating that the

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[50] Ibid., p. 1410.

[51] Ibid., p. 1494.

horror of death is really the horror of dying with unlived lives in our bodies. The crippled Zagreus in Camus' first novel, La Mort heureuse, indeed remarks that " ... ce qui m'effraie dans la mort c'est la certitude qu'elle m'apportera que ma vie a été consommée sans moi. En marge, vous comprenez?"[52]

In a statement with which the writer of "Amour de vivre" would most certainly have agreed Dr. Brown defends the life force, says that we must affirm the life of the body along with the necessity of death, and that only in this way can life be lived fully: "Only if Eros--the life instinct--can affirm the life of the body can the death instinct affirm death, and in affirming death magnify life."[53]

"Amour de vivre" concludes with a passionate cry of hunger for life. The author feels an "immense élan qui voulait mettre le monde entre mes mains" (EE, 45) and he begrudges even the moments he must sleep as time lost from living: "Il me semblait que chaque heure de mon sommeil serait désormais volée à la vie ... " (EE, 45). Here too is prefigured the ethic of quantity of the Absurd Man in Le Mythe de Sisyphe for whom "ce qui compte n'est pas de vivre le mieux mais de vivre le plus" (MS, 143): " ...

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[52]Camus, La Mort heureuse (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), p. 79.

[53]Brown, Life Against Death, p. 109.

que m'importe de mal étreindre si je peux tout embrasser" (EE, 45). As for "la mesure" and "les limites," the narrator acknowledges that they are necessary for one who would create, but there are no limits for the pure love of life which he experiences as a surge of intense emotion.

"L'Envers et l'endroit"

The final essay in L'Envers et l'endroit, which bears the same title, is scarcely three pages long. It begins with the description of an eccentric old woman who uses her small inheritance to purchase a tomb for herself, and concludes with personal meditations of the author which serve both as commentary on this particular situation and as a summary of thoughts which relate this final essay to those which preceded it.

Death predominates once more in this concluding essay, but touches of ironic humour relieve the heavy atmosphere of gloom that was so prevalent in "La Mort dans l'âme." The old woman, more concerned with the world of the dead than that of the living, communes with the spirits, and "refusait de voir certaines personnes de sa famille mal considérées dans le monde où elle se réfugiait" (EE, 48). She receives a small legacy, uses it to purchase at a bargain price an elaborate unclaimed tomb, and spends her Sunday afternoons visiting it. On one of these visits she finds on the steps of the tomb a bunch of violets: "des inconnus

compatissants, devant cette tombe laissée sans fleurs, avaient partagé les leurs et honoré la mémoire de ce mort abandonné à lui-même (EE, 48). Near the end of the essay her daughter dresses her for the tomb while she is still living because it is easier to do before rigor mortis sets in. Commenting on this, the author, who in his meditations had spoken seriously and passionately of life and death, concludes with wry humour: " ... c'est curieux tout de même comme nous vivons parmi des gens pressés" (EE, 50).

In the Sunday visits to her tomb the old woman on her prie-Dieu, like the traveler in Prague or at the cloister of San Francisco, is face to face with herself and her destiny, "confrontant ce qu'elle était et ce qu'elle devait être" (EE, 47). Here the author's preoccupation with life and death as a totality--a desired reunification--appears in the image of a broken chain. Alive, kneeling on the prie-Dieu, the old woman perceives her coming death in the symbol of the tomb, and thus finds the link which will join the divergent ends of her destiny, "l'anneau d'une chaîne toujours rompue" (EE, 47).

The author senses himself part of a larger totality. He speaks of the natural world and there is present the idea of fusion with it:

> Qui suis-je et que puis-je faire, sinon entrer dans le jeu des feuillages et da la lumière? Etre ce rayon où ma cigarette se consume, cette

> douceur et cette passion discrète qui respire dans l'air. Si j'essaie de m'atteindre, c'est tout au fond de cette lumière. Et si je tente de comprendre et de savourer cette délicate saveur qui livre le secret du monde, c'est moi-même que je trouve au fond de l'univers (EE, 48).

In a while, he tells us, he will speak of men and their suffering, but now it is this moment of harmony with the non-human world that he wishes to preserve. Others may guard the memory of moments shared with a lover, his communion is with the world of nature: "D'autres laissent une fleur entre des pages, y enferment une promenade où l'amour les a effleurés. Moi aussi, je me promène, mais c'est un dieu qui me caresse" (EE, 48). In "Entre oui et non" he had spoken of the dangerous "simplicité" of the world. In "L'Envers et l'endroit" the apprehension has disappeared. In the authenticity of the confrontation all is reconciled: " ... ce qui compte, c'est d'être vrai et alors tout s'y inscrit, l'humanité et la simplicité" (EE, 49).

As in "Amour de vivre" consciousness of death sharpens awareness of the precious quality of human life: "La vie est courte et c'est péché de perdre son temps" (EE, 48). This world is his only kingdom and all is contained in it, both "l'envers et l'endroit":

> Ce soleil et ces ombres, cette chaleur et ce froid qui vient du fond de l'air: vais-je me demander si quelque chose meurt et si les hommes souffrent puisque tout est écrit dans cette fenêtre où le ciel déverse sa plénitude à la rencontre de ma pitié (EE, 49).

He desires now not happiness but full awareness. Pulled in two directions, toward "l'endroit" and the beauty of the world, and "l'envers" of suffering men, he will refuse neither:

> Les hommes et leur absurdité? Mais voici le sourire du ciel. La lumière se gonfle et c'est bientôt l'été? Mais voici les yeux et la voix de ceux qu'il faut aimer. Je tiens au monde par tous mes gestes, aux hommes par toute ma pitié et ma reconnaissance. Entre cet endroit et cet envers du monde, je ne veux pas choisir, je n'aime pas qu'on choisisse (EE, 49).

The virtues exalted in "L'Envers et l'endroit" are of stern quality--authenticity, honesty, lucidity. The writer, like his as yet unborn protagonist, Sisyphe, "n'aime pas qu'on triche. Le grand courage, c'est encore de tenir les yeux ouverts sur la lumière comme sur la mort" (EE, 49). The positive and negative factors of human existence are maintained with all their paradox and contradiction, in the tension which characterizes Camus' universe.

As has been noted earlier, for twenty years Camus refused to permit the reedition of L'Envers et l'endroit because of his dissatisfaction with the form. Although some English critics have also found fault with the essays on that ground, they have not always been in agreement nor have they always been precise in their criticism. Earlier in this study I remarked that Camus' friend, Jean de Maisonseul, although praising the book had criticized the author's lack

of objectivity; Camus, in his reply to Maisonseul, admitted that he would like its style to be "plus extérieur." It is interesting to note that Philip Thody, who has written one of the best studies on Camus in English, sees not a lack of objectivity, but a "stilted tone" which he perceives as a result of Camus' possible attempt to imitate his mentor, Jean Grenier. He sees a similarity in "the refusal of both authors to involve themselves emotionally with what they describe," and remarks that Noces is more aesthetically satisfying "because he [Camus] does allow himself to write in a more directly sensuous style"[54] that is natural to him. While I agree that the style of Noces is the one in which Camus writes best, I believe it would be more accurate to define it as "lyrical," since this would encompass not only the sensuous poetry typical of Noces, but also the very personal "cri du coeur" which appears there as well as in parts of L'Envers et l'endroit and other works. The latter is in fact the very quality which Camus, at least in his letter to Maisonseul, would seem to want to correct. In the case of "L'Ironie" I would agree too that there is an apparent effort toward objectivity, perhaps the "laconic approach"[55] of Grenier but I find this is not so great a source of

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[54]Philip Thody, Albert Camus: 1913-1960 (London: Hamish Hamilton Ltd., 1961), p. 18.

[55]Ibid., p. 18.

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dissatisfaction as the inconsistency in the situation of the narrator's voice in this essay. If, as I believe, lyricism is Camus' forte, he has proven in other works that he is also capable of a controlled objectivity. If "L'Ironie" does not yet demonstrate it in perfected form, and if on the other hand the four essays which follow it in L'Envers et l'endroit do not attain the lyrical heights of Noces, all five essays are nevertheless outstanding examples of the genre in both their literary and emotive qualities.

John Cruickshank, another respected English critic, faults L'Envers et l'endroit in other areas--lack of unity and vagueness:

> . . . the book contains no really unified argument. In each of the five essays emotional attitudes are vividly expressed but there is little attempt to justify them adequately in the light of further thought. There is a great deal of vagueness, too, in the way Camus arrives at his conclusions, and these conclusions themselves do not form a coherent whole but alternate uncertainly between the positive and negative poles of carpe diem and stoic withdrawal. . . .[56]

The statement that the book contains no unified argument is scarcely a legitimate criticism of a collection of essays, which by its very nature may present separate reflections and need in fact present no argument at all. True, some common thread should connect essays which are published

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[56]John Cruickshank, Albert Camus and the Literature of Revolt (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 30.

under one cover, but the connection need not be either close-knit or precise. L'Envers et l'endroit nevertheless does possess a unifying theme in the Absurd and the tension present in the maintenance of two opposing factors. Roger Quilliot notes that the thread present in this first collection will remain in all his subsequent works: " ... l'absurde reste présent toujours, contrebattu par le désir d'en guérir ou, du moins, de lui faire équilibre."[57] Germaine Brée also recognizes the common theme of the Absurd shared by these five essays, and in addition perceives others:

> This theme of the essential futility or absurdity of human existence--including human suffering--as revealed in certain stark situations familiar to the young man brought up in Belcourt is not the only link between the five essays. There is the presence of the narrator, who describes the people he observes so pitilessly and yet so compassionately. . . . The essays are also connected by the common, graceless decor of mediocre lives that know no embellishment, by the inner poverty and silence so gently yet so penetratingly portrayed.[58]

Finally Camus' own words are perhaps the best defense against Mr. Cruickshank's criticism:

> Pour ceux qui prendront ces pages pour ce qu'elles sont vraiment: des essais, la seule chose qu'on puisse leur demander, c'est d'en suivre la progression. De la première à la dernière, peut-être y sentira-t-on une démarche sourde qui en fait

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[57]Quilliot, Essais, p. 1179.

[58]Brée, Camus, p. 76.

> l'unité, j'aurais envie de dire qui les légitime, si la justification ne me paraissait pas vaine. ...[59]

To the charge of vagueness I would respond that as vehicles for personal reflection, a legitimate function of the genre, these five essays with the possible exception of "L'Ironie" are transcribing emotions of the writer, one of the characteristics which justifies their being called lyrical. Neither their style nor their "raison d'être" are those of Le Mythe de Sisyphe or L'Homme révolté, leaving aside the youth and inexperience of the writer. As for the "uncertainty between the positive and negative poles," while Camus has not as yet formulated the elements of the absurd as he will later in Le Mythe de Sisyphe, there is little that is uncertain about such statements in L'Envers et l'endroit as "Je tiens au monde par tous mes gestes, aux hommes par toute ma pitié. Entre cet endroit et cet envers du monde, je ne veux pas choisir, je n'aime pas qu'on choisisse" (EE, 49), or the constant insistence on lucidity. The "uncertainty" is in fact not uncertainty but the maintenance in perpetual tension of both opposing poles, a theme and characteristic which prevails throughout his work and is clearly delineated already in L'Envers et l'endroit.

Camus undeniably improved as a writer subsequent to the publication of his first published book. However,

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[59]Camus, Carnets I, pp. 48-49.

in the process of praising his later and better-known works I believe some usually acute critics have been too hasty in their assessment of this early effort and have exaggerated its minor "maladresses" while failing to recognize passages which equal if they do not excel his more mature creations.

As noted in the comments on style the common theme which connects the five essays of L'Envers et l'endroit, is the Absurd. It is the author's first attempt to set down his thoughts before the absurdity of the human condition as he had observed and experienced it. Philip Thody has remarked that "in many ways L'Envers et l'endroit is the most depressing of Camus' early works, for it holds out no possibility of escaping from loneliness and frustration." He adds "Man's loneliness is particularly tragic in L'Envers et l'endroit because all possibility of a religious solution is denied, and because man is shown as unable to find any kind of happiness in his own thoughts."[60] The rejection of religious solutions to man's dilemma, the denial of an afterlife, and the necessity of lucidity will remain permanent elements in Camus' thought, and the heroes of his novels will repeat in their own ways the words of the narrator in "L'Envers et l'endroit": " ... tout mon royaume est de ce monde" (EE, 49). Happiness plays a very small

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[60]Thody, Albert Camus, p. 19.

role in Camus' first collection, and even in "Amour de vivre" it is linked with despair. But along with the compassion he feels for the poor and the old, and for all men who must die, there is an urge to forget everything except the sheer enjoyment of life. As Germaine Brée points out: "The irony Camus detected lurking behind all things was also lurking within him, questioning the meaning of his effort. He found himself strongly tempted to yield, to throw himself into a rapturous enjoyment of the beauty of the earth."[61] In Noces, the subject of the next chapter, the lyric poet comes into his own as he describes this temptation in detail.

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[61] Brée, Camus, p. 79.

CHAPTER IV

NOCES: LIFE AND DEATH

> "Je pense alors: fleurs, sourires, désirs de femmes, et je comprends que toute mon horreur de mourir tient dans ma jalousie de vivre."
>
> Camus
> "Le Vent à Djémila" (1936-37)

Camus' second collection, Noces, was published in May of 1939. Its four essays--"Noces à Tipasa," "Le Vent à Djémila," "L'Eté à Alger," and "Le Désert"--were written during 1937 and 1938, although a few scattered lines dated 1936 from the writer's Carnets I appear in "Noces à Tipasa" and "Le Vent à Djémila." Louis Faucon, who provides the chronological data and commentary on Noces in the Pléiade edition of the essays, calls attention to the fact that two years separated L'Envers et l'endroit and Noces, and he also reminds us of the changes in the life of the author that occurred between 1935 and 1939 which may account to some degree for the difference in tone of the two collections, 1937 marking the center of this time-span:

> La première période accumule les déceptions en divers domaines: politique, universitaire, conjugal; la seconde suscite ... la conquête de

> l'indépendance matérielle et morale, l'exercice effectif du métier d'écrivain, l'adoption raisonnée d'une vision philosophique du monde.[1]

If L'Envers et l'endroit had insisted on the misery and solitude of the human condition, Noces responds that the very hopelessness of our situation magnifies and enhances the value of our simplest pleasures. The dualism of human destiny brought out in L'Envers et l'endroit is still presint in Noces but its positive side is the focus of attention. In the earlier work happiness is persistently linked to despair, whereas in Noces Camus writes, in Philip Thody's words, "with less irony and more enthusiasm of the full satisfaction to be gained in the physical joys of life."[2]

Most of the Camusian themes appear in these essays: nature, the life of the body with its inevitable end, a paganism which rejects any afterlife, the Absurd, the importance of lucidity, and as always, the tension of opposed factors. The relationship of Noces with later works is clearly apparent in many of these. It is the most lyrical of his writings, with the possible exception of "La Mer au plus près" in L'Eté, and it is interesting to note the terms employed by various critics when referring to it: Roger Quilliot calls it "un long cri d'amour";[3] Germaine Brée

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[1]Faucon, Essais, p. 1334.

[2]Thody, Albert Camus, p. 21.

[3]Quilliot, La Mer, p. 45.

likens its vocabulary to the "lyrical language of the ode or hymn";[4] John Cruickshank describes it as "a remarkably sustained paean of praise to immediate physical existence";[5] Robert de Luppé, who has stated that "la poésie est au commencement et à la fin de l'oeuvre de Camus," repeatedly uses the words "poète" and "poésie" when writing of Noces.[6]

Nature's role as poetic Muse for Camus was already noted earlier in this study. However he cannot be classified as a "poet of nature" in the Romantic tradition. Roger Quilliot has seized on the essential quality of the difference by stressing the strongly physical and "naïve" approach of Camus, quite in keeping with the latter's emphasis on the concrete:

> Le romantique ... recherche des terres inconnues, des forêts vierges, des espaces infinis--le dépaysement pour tout dire. Il aime les couleurs exotiques; il se complaît aussi dans le diaphane qui laisse entrevoir un coin des cieux. L'univers sensuel de Camus, au contraire, est épais et charnu; il éclate de partout comme un fruit mur. ... L'aventure est à rechercher dans la violence des sensations, dans l'ivresse plus que dans l'enchantement. Camus aborde le monde sensible avec une gourmandise insolente et naïve.[7]

Camus' rapport, he says, is rather with the Renaissance, when "une sorte de fièvre, héritée des siècles chrétiens

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[4]Brée, Camus, p. 81.

[5]Cruickshank, Camus and the Literature of Revolt, p. 32.

[6]Luppé, Camus, p. 113.

[7]Quilliot, La Mer, pp. 48-49.

et des danses macabres du XVe, exaspérait les désirs et avivait la jouissance par la conscience de leur fragilité."[8]

The poet of "Noces à Tipasa," as in L'Envers et l'endroit, draws again from personal experience. Tipasa and its ruins, about forty-two miles west of Algiers, were visited by him several times in 1935 and 1936, and a visit fifteen years later will inspire another essay in his last collection--"Retour à Tipasa" in L'Eté. The ruins of Djémila, which aroused quite different emotions, were visited in 1936. "L'Eté à Alger" concerns the human inhabitants of the Algerian landscape, the men and women with whom Camus spent his youth. "Le Désert" relates themes in the first three essays to his experience on another trip to Italy in 1937. Here, as in "L'Eté à Alger," the focus is on man, but a different sort of man than the Algerians of the preceding essay. While the latter burn quickly their brief span of life, in complete harmony with nature, wagering everything on the flesh, the artists and the monks of Italy seek intensification of life by other means.

All four essays take the form of personal meditation. They reiterate the importance of life here and now which was for Camus "la seule vérité" (N, 80), and the necessity for lucidity. They also reject more explicitly and emphatically

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[8]Ibid., p. 47.

than L'Envers et l'endroit any hope for an afterlife, in an attitude which Camus will maintain to the end of his life. John Cruickshank has noted this consistency in his comments on Noces: "In fact what he presents in Noces is an early form of that 'passionate disbelief' which he was to describe ten years later as the distinguishing feature of contemporary atheism."[9] Professor Cruickshank's corresponding footnote refers to Camus' article in La Vie intellectuelle of 1949, but the statement first appeared in an earlier article of April, 1943 in Cahiers du Sud, in which Camus reviewed Jean Guitton's Portrait de M. Pouget.[10] The fact that he repeated it in 1949, and in the years that followed consistently asserted his own unbelief, would seem to lend no support to those Christian admirers of Camus who choose to see in his later writings signs of a "rapprochement" with Christianity.

"Noces à Tipasa"

The narrator begins his reflections with the words, "Au printemps, Tipasa est habitée par les dieux ... " (N, 55), and the next lines leave no doubt as to their identity--they are the gods of nature who speak "dans le soleil et l'odeur des absinthes, la mer cuirassée d'argent, le ciel

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[9]Cruickshank, Camus and the Literature of Revolt, pp. 37-38.

[10]Essais, p. 1596.

bleu écru, les ruines couvertes de fleurs et la lumière à gros bouillons dans les amas de pierres" (N, 55). No solitary romantic, the narrator is with friends: "Pour moi, je ne cherche pas à y être seul. J'y suis souvent allé avec ceux que j'aimais et je lisais sur leurs traits le clair sourire qu'y prenait le visage de l'amour" (N, 56).

They arrive first in the village itself, which opens on the bay, and it is a world of warmth and vivid colors which Robert de Luppé remarks "font penser à certaines toiles du fauvisme."[11] Already the dominant atmosphere of Noces makes itself felt--the vitality and fecundity, to the point of satiety, of nature. Sunlight and flowers are everywhere, all the stones are warm, the scent of the Algerian earth greets them. Mounting the stone steps leading to the ruins, this atmosphere augments: " ... de grosses plantes grasses aux fleurs violettes, jaunes et rouges, descendent vers les premiers rochers que la mer suce avec un bruit de baisers" (N, 55). Finally, entering "le royaume des ruines," the writer is present at a wild and joyous bacchanal in which restraint has no place:

> ... les absinthes nous prennent à la gorge. ... Leur essence fermente sous la chaleur, et de la terre au soleil monte sur toute l'étendue du monde un alcool généreux qui fait vaciller le ciel. ... Hors du soleil, des baisers et des parfums sauvages, tout nous paraît futile (N, 56).

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[11]Luppé, Camus, p. 116.

It is first a celebration of the union of natural elements, "le grand libertinage de la nature et de la mer" (N, 56). The stones of the ruins--taken from nature and polished by man--have now returned to nature, in a "mariage des ruines et du printemps" (N, 56), and to celebrate the return of her "filles prodigues" (N, 56), nature has scattered an abundance of flowers. Gradually as the spectator becomes a participant and himself enters into harmony with the world, it is again a vital union, without restraint:

> Que d'heures passées à écraser les absinthes, à caresser les ruines, à tenter d'accorder ma respiration aux soupirs tumultueux du monde! Enfoncé parmi les odeurs sauvages et les concerts d'insectes somnolents, j'ouvre les yeux et mon coeur à la grandeur insoutenable de ce ciel gorgé de chaleur (N, 56).

At last he feels himself a part of the world of nature: "J'apprenais à respirer, je m'intégrais et je m'accomplissais" (N, 56).

The wedding of nature's elements, and of man with nature, is depicted with images of sexual love, already implicit in the repeated evocations of fecundity. The flowers grow down to the water, "vers les premiers rochers que la mer suce avec un bruit de baisers" (N, 55); the wanderers go "à la rencontre de l'amour et du désir" (N, 56); the earth and the sea "soupirent lèvres à lèvres" (N, 57); "Etreindre un corps de femme, c'est aussi retenir contre soi cette joie étrange qui descend du ciel vers la

mer" (N, 58). Later, back with his friends in the village, "Le visage mouillé de sueur, mais le corps frais dans la légère toile qui nous habille, nous étalons tous l'heureuse lassitude d'une jour de noces avec le monde" (N, 58). Alone in the evening his "corps d'étendu goûtait le silence intérieur qui naît de l'amour satisfait" (N, 59).

Union with the world is portrayed with similar images elsewhere in Camus' work. "L'Eté à Alger," third essay in Noces, describes the earth in the evening, or after a rain as follows:

> ... la terre entière, son ventre mouillé d'une semence au parfum d'amande amère, repose pour s'être donnée tout l'été au soleil. Et voici qu'à nouveau cette odeur consacre les noces de l'homme et de la terre, et fait lever en nous le seul amour vraiment viril en ce monde; périssable et généreux (N, 76).

The union with the natural world of Janine, middle-class housewife of "La Femme adultère" is described as a sexual consummation:

> Alors, avec une douceur insupportable, l'eau de la nuit commença d'emplir Janine, submergea le froid, monta peu à peu du centre obscur de son êtra et déborda en flots ininterrompus jusqu'à sa bouche pleine de gémissements.[12]

The vital forces of Tipasa are positive and benevolent, and if they sweep man briefly into the non-human world it is in a natural harmony, a cosmic happiness which rejects

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[12]Camus, Théâtre, Récits, Nouvelles, p. 1575.

anything beyond it: "Sous le soleil du matin, un grand bonheur se balance dans l'espace" (N, 57). Out of this harmony surges an immense feeling of love and the narrator senses a glory and a truth attained only in the physical world of nature:

> Je comprends ici ce qu'on appelle gloire: le droit d'aimer sans mesure. Il n'y a qu'un seul amour dans ce monde. ... Tout à l'heure, quand je me jetterai dans les absinthes pour me faire entrer leur parfum dans le corps, j'aurai conscience, contre tous les préjugeeś, d'accomplir une vérité qui est celle du soleil et sera aussi celle de ma mort (N, 57-58).

There is also in the joy of this harmony a feeling of accomplishment, "d'être entrés en quelque sorte dans un dessin fait à l'avance" (N, 60), and at the end of his day at Tipasa the writer feels fulfilled:

> ... j'avais bien joué mon rôle. J'avais fait mon métier d'homme et d'avoir connu la joie tout un long jour ne me semblait pas une réussite exceptionnelle, mais l'accomplissement ému d'une condition qui, en certaines circonstances nous fait un devoir d'être heureux (N, 60).

As Roger Quilliot has written, the unrestrained liberty of Tipasa is not that of the human world, "l'ubris meurtrière et nietzschéenne d'un Caligula," which Camus had exposed in his 1944 play: "mais une démesure naturelle, cosmique, soumise en définitive à l'ordre du monde, accordée à sa respiration et a ses soupirs."[13]

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[13]Quilliot, La Mer, p. 51.

In harmony with the world the writer feels not only joy but pride:

> J'aime cette vie avec abandon et veux en parler avec liberté: elle me donne l'orgueil de ma condition d'homme. Pourtant, on me l'a souvent dit: il n'y a pas de quoi être fier. Si, il y a de quoi: ce soleil, cette mer, mon coeur bondissant de jeunesse, mon corps au goût de sel et l'immense décor où la tendresse et la gloire se rencontrent dans le jaune et le bleu (N, 58).

Pride here is dissociated with moral ideas of merit. All that is beautiful feels pride, and the world itself is no exception: "Tout être beau a l'orgueil naturel de sa beauté et le monde aujourd'hui laisse son orgueil suinter de toutes parts" (N, 58).

Does the world really "feel" pride? One might be tempted, in the reading of Noces, to attribute anthropomorphism to the writer. Certainly in "Noces à Tipasa" there are numerous examples of personification or of images closely approximating it. In addition to those previously mentioned in connection with sexual imagery, the sea is described with "le sourire de ses dents éclatantes" (N, 55); the geraniums "versent leur sang ... " (N, 56); the stones of the ruins are "filles prodigues" (N, 56) who are welcomed with flowers upon their return to "la maison de leur mère" (N, 56); the blossoms of a pomegranate tree are "clos et côtelés comme de petits poings fermés" (N, 59); "La terre soupirait lentement" (N, 60); the smile of the Algerians is

a "sourire complice" turned toward the "sourire éclatant de ses ciels" (N, 60). W. M. Frohock in his article comparing Camus' imagery with that of Giono, likens the metaphors at the end of the first part of L'Etranger with those of Noces and states that "their mechanism is again the personification of a natural element, and again involves an unusual application of the pathetic fallacy."[14] He makes an important distinction, however: for Giono the metaphors are correlative to his message, whereas what Camus has done "is to overlook the idea and seize upon its correlative."[15] Henry Bonnier, writing on "Noces à Tipasa" cautions bluntly against perceiving anthropomorphism in it:

> Les lieux sont ce qu'ils sont, ... ce serait commettre une grossière erreur que de céder à la tentation de l'anthropomorphisme. Affirmer que Tipasa est impérative ou qu'elle est généreuse ne prouve rien. En tant que tels, les lieux ne possèdent aucune personnalité propre. Toute l'harmonie existentielle dont nous les croyons dotés naît seulement du rapport souvent parfait que nous établissons, de façon parfois inconsciente, entre eux et nous.
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> Il y aurait également quelque vanité à les doter d'un statut moral, ainsi que J.-J. Rousseau s'y essaya.[16]

Again one is struck by the "aspect charnel" of Camus' style which has little in common with Romanticism. Both Henry Bonnier and John Cruickshank also deny the presence of

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[14]Frohock, "Camus: Image, Influence, Sensibility," p. 95.

[15]Ibid., p. 97.

[16]Bonnier, Albert Camus, pp. 38-39.

pantheism in Noces. The former reminds us of the troubled state of Europe, as well as Camus' own poor health, at the time the essay was written, and says the writer made no effort to rise above sensation to a superior domain:

> Plus par impossibilité que par inclination, il laissera donc le philosophe en chemin et Tipasa, avant tout, constituera pour lui l'expérience d'une force dont il veut s'administrer la preuve avec éclat.[17]

Cruickshank likewise rejects the possibility of pantheism, and sees the language of Noces simply as a poetic expression of the correspondence between the writer's mood and the natural landscape.[18]

The celebration of "Noces à Tipasa" is a purely physical one--the narrator feasts on life as he feasts on the fresh peaches in the café:

> ... on mange en y mordant de sorte que le jus en coule sur le menton. Les dents refermées sur la pêche, j'écoute les grands coups de mon sang monter jusqu'àux oreilles, je regarde de tous mes yeux (N, 58).

He swims with abandonment: "Il me faut être nu et puis plonger dans la mer, encore tout parfumé des essences de la terre" (N, 57); for the moment his world is entirely of the senses: " ... je ne m'obstine pas à nier ce que ma main peut toucher et mes lèvres caresser, ... Il me suffit de vivre de tout mon corps" (N, 59). He wants no part of the

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[17]Ibid., pp. 42-43.

[18]Cruickshank, Camus and the Literature of Revolt, p. 33.

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spirit or the intellect--"Nous ne cherchons pas de leçons ni l'amère philosophie qu'on demande à la grandeur" (N, 56), nor is this the time for the creation of art:

> Il y a un temps pour vivre et un temps pour témoigner de vivre. Il y a aussi un temps pour créer, ce qui est moins naturel. Il me suffit de vivre de tout mon corps et de témoigner de tout mon coeur. Vivre Tipasa, témoigner et l'oeuvre d'art viendra ensuite (N, 59).

Life is to be lived and only imbeciles are afraid to enjoy it, nor is there shame in it: " ... pourquoi nierais-je la joie de vivre, si je sais ne pas tout renfermer dans la joie de vivre. Il n'y a pas de honte à être heureux" (N, 58). Much later, in La Peste, when the journalist Rambert informs Dr. Rieux that he means to stay and help fight the plague instead of rejoining his mistress, the doctor tells him there is no shame in preferring happiness. Rambert replies: "Oui, mais il peut y avoir de la honte à être heureux tout seul."[19]

In the narrator's joy of life he is not unaware of death, but for the moment it doesn't concern him. At Tipasa life has the ascendance over death. Seeing the ruins of old sarcophagi he reflects that once they had contained the bodies of dead men, but now "il y pousse des sauges et des ravenelles" (N, 57), and through the ruins of the Christian basilica it is "la mélodie du monde qui parvient jusqu'à

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[19]Camus, Théâtre, Récits, Nouvelles, p. 1389.

nous" (N, 57). The truth of the natural world is also that of his death, but since it is part of the cosmic harmony he will not reject it. As the sun sets the gods of the day depart, "Mais d'autres dieux viendront. Et pour être plus sombres, leurs faces ravagées seront nées cependant dans le coeur de la terre" (N, 60). It is not death which is the final message of "Noces à Tipasa," but union with the world: "Non, ce n'était pas moi qui comptais, ni le monde, mais seulement l'accord et le silence qui de lui à moi faisait naître l'amour" (N, 60).

In "Noces à Tipasa" Eros and Dionysus rule, and the beauty and vitality of nature are described in a vocabulary and imagery filled with all the perfume and vivid colors of spring in Algeria, season of rebirth. Its richness and fertility are mirrored in the writer's language, not only in its content and associations, but also in its quantity, all contributing to an atmosphere of satiety.[20] In an interview with Jeanine Delpech for Les Nouvelles littéraires in 1945 Camus responded to the remark that he was known as "un écrivain révolutionaire": "Je ne connais qu'une révolution en art, elle est de tous les temps. C'est l'exacte appropriation de la forme et du sujet."[21] In "Noces à Tipasa" he amply demonstrates the principle.

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[20]See supra, p. 17 and p. 55.

[21]Camus, Essais, p. 1427.

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"Le Vent à Djémila"

Djémila, like Tipasa, is the site of Roman ruins, and here too, as at Tipasa, the author will experience the truth of the world which is also that of his death. However, Djémila will be a turning point, the full awakening to awareness of death after the intermittent reflections on it in L'Envers et l'endroit, and its postponement in the exaltation of Tipasa. Its significance in the totality of Camus' work cannot be overemphasized. In the words of Henry Bonnier, "De très loin, elle est la plus grave de toute son oeuvre, puisqu'elle la déterminera, du moins jusqu'à L'Homme révolté inclus."[22]

From the beginning it is the contrast between the two sites which makes itself felt, rather than their superficial similarities. At Tipasa it was life which was celebrated, and living, growing plants forced their way between the stones of its ruins. Djémila is repeatedly referred to as "la ville morte" and her stones are portrayed with metaphors of death: " ... son squelette jaunâtre" is "comme une forêt d'ossements, ... " (N, 61). Instead of the profusion of colors and odors that assaulted the senses of the visitor at Tipasa, the dominant sense perception here is a negative one--silence: " ... il y régnait un grand silence lourd et

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[22]Bonnier, Camus, p. 64.

sans fêlure" (N, 61). The faint sounds that reach the listener are small and frail, making all the more evident the immensity of the silence. There is "le son feutré de la flute à trois trous," "un piétinement de chèvres," the sounds of birds--"un claquement sec, un cri aigu," but they are only "autant de bruits qui faisaient le silence et la désolation de ces lieux" (N, 61).

Djémila has all the characteristics of the Absurd: "Ce n'est pas une ville où l'on s'arrête et que l'on dépasse. Elle ne mène nulle part et n'ouvre sur aucun pays" (N, 61). It is situated on a plateau surrounded by ravines and exposed to the full force of sun and wind, and in the concurrence of its ruins with these natural elements the writer begins to sense his own connection with the silence and solitude.

He becomes more and more conscious of the wind as it augments, and the relentlessness of its force is transmitted through a long series of verbs: "soufflait," "accourait," "venait bondir en cascades," "sifflait," "tournait," "baignait les amas de blocs grêles," "entourait chaque colonne de son souffle," "venait se répandre en cris incessants" (N, 62). Gradually through his senses, he is drawn into the landscape, and once more for Camus the body becomes the vehicle through which emotion and thought, in that order, are generated. At Djémila it is the sense of

touch which is most immediately involved. The writer feels himself whipped by the wind like the mast of a ship: "Creusé par le milieu, les yeux brûles, les lèvres craquantes, ma peau se desséchait jusqu'à ne plus être mienne" (N, 62). In the past, separated from the world, it was through his skin that he deciphered its moods: "Il y traçait les signes de sa tendresse ou de sa colère, la réchauffant de son souffle d'été ou la mordant de ses dents de givre" (N, 62). Now, however, under the incessant assault of the wind he loses consciousness of the "otherness" of his own body and gradually of his own identity:

> Mais si longuement frotté du vent, secoué depuis plus d'une heure, étourdi de résistance, je perdais conscience du dessin que traçait mon corps. Comme le galet verni par les marées, j'étais poli par le vent, usé jusqu'à l'âme. J'étais un peu de cette force selon laquelle je flottais, puis beaucoup, puis elle enfin, confondant les battements de mon sang et les grands coups sonores de ce coeur partout présent de la nature. Le vent me façonnait à l'image de l'ardente nudité qui m'entourait. Et sa fugitive étreinte me donnait, pierre parmi les pierres, la solitude d'une colonne ou d'un olivier dans le ciel d'été.
> ... Bientôt, répandu aux quatre coins du monde, oublieux, oublié de moi-même, je suis ce vent et dans le vent, ces colonnes et cet arc, ces dalles qui sentent chaud et ces montagnes pâles autour de la ville déserte. Et jamais je n'ai senti, si avant à la fois mon détachement de moi-même et ma présence au monde (N, 62).

Michel Benamou has admirably analyzed the experience of Djémila in his article concerning Camus' attitude toward nature. He comments on the importance of touch for this writer as the privileged sense through which he both

interprets and joins with the world. He points out, alluding to Merleau-Ponty"s Phénoménologie de la perception, that "a predominantly epidermic experience of integration cannot dissociate body-consciousness from world-consciousness."[22] In epidermic experience man remains conscious of his own body, his individuality. In "Le Vent à Djémila," on the other hand, epidermic perception is almost erased by the force of the wind, and with it consciousness of self. For a brief moment the writer becomes a part of the non-human world and the "faible révolte de l'esprit" (N, 62) is stifled. As part of the world he finds himself sharing its characteristics. There is no past, no future, only the eternal present. It is as if he were "emprisonné à perpétuité" (N, 62), and tomorrow and all the days to come will be the same. But "pour un homme, prendre conscience de son présent, c'est ne plus rien attendre" (N, 63). It is the awakening of lucidity. The world, after all, remains separate, apart from man, who must die. It has nothing in common with human feeling: "S'il est des paysages qui sont des états d'âme, ce sont les plus vulgaires. Et je suivais tout le long de ce pays quelque chose qui n'était pas à moi, mais de lui ... " (N, 63). The writer at Djémila, unsentimental, is already aware of the world's role in the Absurd which he will formulate in Le Mythe de Sisyphe:

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[23]Benamou, "Romantic Counterpoint," p. 45.

> ... et voici l'étrangeté: s'apercevoir que le monde est "épais," entrevoir à quel point une pierre est étrangère, nous est irréductible, avec quelle intensité la nature, un paysage peut nous nier. Au fond de toute beauté gît quelque chose d'inhumain ... " (MS, 107).

But the deisre for some kind of unity, even if it be through loss of self, cannot be fulfilled.

Louis Faucon has called lucidity "le maître-mot de Noces,"[24] and it is at Djémila that the point of climax is reached. In his moment of rapport with the world the writer senses a change within himself--his fears and worries dissolve and are replaced by a new kind of vision, a "lucidité aride" (N, 63). He has been, and after Djémila will forever remain, both inside and outside the world of men, with a kind of double vision of both eternity and his own mortality. "L'inquiétude naît du coeur des vivants. Mais le calme recouvrira ce coeur vivant: voici toute ma clairvoyance" (N, 63). Like all men he too yearns to deny death, but at Djémila, he tells us, "je me sentais sans défense contre les forces lentes qui en moi disaient non" (N, 63). For there can be no evasion and the writer, like Djémila itself, rejects the lie of human immortality:

> Djémila dit vrai ce soir, et avec quelle triste et insistante beauté! Pour moi, devant ce monde, je ne veux pas mentir ni qu'on me mente. Je veux porter ma lucidité jusqu'au bout et regarder ma fin avec toute la profusion de ma jalousie et de mon horreur (N, 65).

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[24]Faucon, Essais, p. 1332.

If he rejects the hope of an afterlife he does not deny his horror of death: it is for him "une aventure horrible et sale" (N, 63). The horror is primitive and physical, akin to disgust: "J'ai vu des gens mourir. Surtout, j'ai vu des chiens mourir. C'est de les toucher qui me bouleversait" (N, 64). When he must face it he will react viscerally, "sa peur aux entrailles et un regard idiot" (N, 65). But above all his horror of death stems from the thought of what he must leave behind, all the plenitude of life celebrated at Tipasa to be lost:

> Je pense alors: fleurs, sourires, désirs de femmes, et je comprends que toute mon horreur de mourir tient dans ma jalousie de vivre. Je suis jaloux de ceux qui vivront et pour qui fleurs et désirs de femmes auront tout leur sens de chair et de sang. Je suis envieux, parce que j'aime trop la vie pour ne pas être égoïste (N, 64-65).

The absurd hero of Le Mythe de Sisyphe is already prefigured:

> On a compris déjà que Sisyphe est le héros absurde. Il l'est autant par ses passions que par son tourment. Son mépris des dieux, sa haine de la mort et sa passion de la vie, lui ont valu ce supplice indicible où tout l'être s'emploie à ne rien achever. C'est le prix qu'il faut payer pour les passions de cette terre (MS, 196).

Refusal of hope does not mean renouncement of these precious joys: "Si je refuse obstinément tous les 'plus tard' du monde, c'est qu'il s'agit aussi bien de ne pas renoncer à ma richesse présente" (N, 63). Life is all the more to be valued in the face of death. Repeatedly hope is rejected as the enemy of lucidity and of life itself. It is

an evasion which would discharge him from the burden of his own mortal life--a weight that he has no wish to relinquish. Like Djémila he will defend himself against "les jeux de l'espoir" (N, 62).

Briefly he meditates on the build-up of hope and illusions regarding death, of man's great effort, "qui est de se dérober à la certitude de mourir tout entier (N, 64). The young have no such illusions since these take time to develop, and consequently they confront death head-on with all the fear it merits: "Ce doit être la jeunesse, ce dur tête-à-tête avec la mort, cette peur physique de l'animal qui aime le soleil" (N, 64). The writer was not yet seventeen when he first learned that he had tuberculosis.

In this head-on confrontation there are three qualities present which strongly attracted Camus: instinctual reaction, innocence, and pagan accord with the natural world. Those older men worthy of the name, reaching the end of their lives, will cast off the illusions they have accumulated and return to this primitive reunion:

> ... arrivés à la fin d'une vie, les hommes dignes de ce nom doivent retrouver ce tête-à-tête, renier les quelques idées qui furent les leurs et recouvrer l'innocence et la vérité qui luisent dans le regard des hommes antiques en face de leur destin" (N, 64).

The only real progress of civilization lies in the creation of "morts conscientes" (N, 64).

With all of man's desperate efforts to hide from the reality of death through myths and illusions, there is nevertheless an astonishing paucity of ideas about it: "De la mort et des couleurs, nous ne savons pas discuter" (N, 64). They are simple, and once again it is the simplicity of the non-human world which blocks understanding, as it had for the young man in "Entre oui et non" (EE, 28): " ... cela prouve aussi que tout ce qui est simple nous dépasse" (N, 64). And how is one to form ideas about what has not been experienced? "Je me dis: je dois mourir, mais ceci ne veut rien dire, puisque je n'arrive pas à le croire et que je ne puis avoir que l'expérience de la mort des autres" (N, 64). The primacy of bodily experience as prerequisite to consciousness so fundamental with Camus is explicit here and appears later in Le Mythe de Sisyphe:

> C'est qu'en réalité, il n'y a pas d'expérience de la mort. Au sens propre, n'est expérimenté que ce qui a été vécu et rendu conscient. Ici, c'est tout juste s'il est possible de parler de l'expérience de la mort des autres (MS, 108).

It is through separation from the world, from the cosmic order of things, that man comes to fear death: "C'est dans la mesure où je me sépare du monde que j'ai peur de la mort, dans la mesure où je m'attache au sort des hommes qui vivent, au lieu de contempler le ciel qui dure" (N, 65). Lucidity diminishes this separation, and if our entry into the natural order is "sans joie" it is at least epicurean

ataraxie.[25] "Créer des morts conscientes, c'est diminuer la distance qui nous sépare du monde, et entrer sans joie dans l'accomplissement, conscient des images exaltantes d'un monde à jamais perdu" (N, 65).

When Camus visited Djémila in 1936 it was by charter-plane, and it is apparent that his aerial view of the dead city as he departed from it reinforced his thoughts on man's impermanence in a world that is eternal. Like Shelly's "Ozymandias," the men of Djémila proclaim "Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!"[26] Only ruins remain. The world of nature makes derisible the transitory accomplishments of men:

> ... cette ville squelette, vue de si haut dans le soir finissant et dans les vols blancs des pigeons autour de l'arc de triomphe, n'inscrivait pas sur le ciel les signes de la conquête et de l'ambition. Le monde finit toujours par vaincre l'histoire (N, 65).

The ruins of Djémila, like those in Malraux' novels, speak only of man's transience beside the non-human world:

> ... quelque chose d'inhumain faisait peser sur les décombres et les plantes voraces fixées comme des êtres terrifiés une angoisse qui protégeait

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[25]See <u>supra</u>, p. 105.

[26]Percy Bysshe Shelly, "Ozymandias" in Bernbaum, p. 869.

> "Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
> Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
> The lone and level sands stretch far away."

> avec une force de cadavre ces figures dont le geste séculaire régnait sur une cour de mille-pattes et de bêtes des ruines.[27]

In the poet's last glimpse of Djémila he perceives the riches of its gift of lucidity--the double aspect of the world, the paradox of despair and beauty:

> Ce grand cri de pierre que Djémila jette entre les montagnes, le ciel et le silence, j'en sais bien la poésie: lucidité, indifférence, les vrais signes du désespoir ou de la beauté (N, 66).

"Noces à Tipasa" had begun with the words "Au printemps, Tipasa est habitée par les dieux. ... " Djémila too has its god, and again it is not that of Christianity, concerned with men, but the pagan god of nature; the essay's final image is of "le visage vivant d'un dieu à cornes au fronton d'un autel" (N, 66).

Noces, which sings of life and the harmony of man with the world, brings also the awakening to awareness of mortality. "Le Vent à Djémila" opts for lucidity before the "aventure horrible et sale" that is death, and the sole progress of civilization is the creation of "conscious deaths." During the time in which the essays of Noces were written Camus suffered recurrent severe attacks of tuberculosis and undoubtedly this contributed to the hunger for

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[27]André Malraux, La Voie royale (Paris: Grassett, 1930), p. 77.

life expressed so vividly in "Noces à Tipasa" as well as the lucidity and "horreur de mourir" so evident in "Le Vent à Djémila." Roger Quilliot writes that with Noces comes "le passage de la vie du corps à celle de l'esprit, du végétal à l'humain: le corps a perdu 'son avance' en découvrant la mort."[28] The influence of the experience of Djémila will be particularly far-reaching, affecting the development of all of Camus' subsequent thought and work. That this is not an exaggeration becomes clear in the analysis of Henry Bonnier. At Djémila the writer had for a moment become a part of the eternal order--he had stepped out of his human individuality:

> Sans le secours de Dieu ni de la foi, il a goûté à l'éternel. Cet instant privilégié lui laissera sur l'âme une sorte de brûlure qu'il ne pourra jamais guérir, qui s'étendra peu à peu sur son âme entière et la rendra sensible à un point difficilement imaginable.
>
> Et le regard qu'il posera désormais sur tous et sur tout sera tout à la fois du dehors et du dedans, quotidien et éternel, un regard double, partagé entre l'amour et l'ironie, selon qu'il s'agit de ce qui passe ou de ce qui dure. ...[29]

The effects of this double vision will extend into every area of his life, including the ethical, and will broaden the scope of his sense of responsibility toward other men. At the same time it will cause him to continually reëxamine his revolt and his actions:

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[28]Quilliot, La Mer, p. 109.

[29]Bonnier, Camus, pp. 69-70.

> ... un regard double, en vérité, devant lequel chaque problème--fût-il le plus humble, le plus immédiat--se gonflera d'universel, deviendra le problème unique, solitaire, le problème humain par excellence, celui de l'homme. Grâce à cette brûlure rayonnante, douloureuse et bienfaisante,--il n'y aura pas une goutte de sang versée, une larme répandu, un geste de peur fait, une injustice commise, qui ne fasse basculer le ciel infini, ... tout de même qu'il n'y aura pas un sourire, un port de tête feminin, un parfum de fleur, une action noble, qui ne remette en question sa révolte. Tout Camus se trouve dans cette alternance de passion et de consentement, même si l'une l'emporte parfois sur l'autre. Tout s'est fait à Djémila.[30]

This, I believe, is the key to the significance of Djémila: it is an awakening, but in a broader sense than the sudden awareness of human destiny. It is rather the beginning of an expanded view of the universe, and man's relationship to it and his fellow-men, brought about by the author's brief step outside of the normal confines of time and space. The "double vision" of Djémila will henceforth affect all of Camus' life and work.

"L'Eté à Alger"

Notes in Camus' Carnets I indicate that "L'Eté à Alger" was written between mid-1937 and mid-1938. It is longer than the two previous essays, and consists of five parts which the author separates simply by wide spacing. A common theme, the physical and psychological life of the

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[30] Ibid., pp. 70-71.

people of Algiers, connects all five. The first three concern various aspects of this life, the fourth is a summary of the thoughts aroused in the author by contemplating it, and the fifth is a word-for-word reproduction of a street-fight.

The essay begins with a brief meditation on cities and the author compares those of western Europe, closed up in themselves, with Algiers and other "lieux privilégiés comme les villes sur la mer" (N, 67), which are open to the world. Characteristically, this opening is described in dual terms, both of a physical nature--"une bouche ou une blessure" (N, 67). The positive aspects of life in Algiers--"Ce qu'on peut aimer à Alger"--are then enumerated, and they are, as might be expected, its physical, natural elements: "la mer au tournant de chaque rue, un certain poids de soleil, la beauté de la race" (N, 67). Here man's emotional energy need not be expended in yearning for the beauties of nature, as in Paris: since all is already given he is free to simply be aware of his wealth.

But we come quickly to the other side of the coin, the by-products of an "excès de biens naturels" (N, 67). Life here is one-dimensional, of the senses only, and lived entirely in the present. The beautiful landscape "tout entier livré aux yeux" (N, 67), is a fitting one for the young:

> A Alger, pour qui est jeune et vivant, tout est refuge et prétexte à triomphes: la baie, le soleil, les jeux en rouge et blanc des terrasses vers la mer, les fleurs et les stades, les filles aux jambes fraîches (N, 68).

The same landscape, however, offers no solace for the old, whose physical powers have waned:

> ... pour qui a perdu sa jeunesse, rien où s'accrocher et pas un lieu où la mélancolie puisse se sauver d'elle-même. Ailleurs, les terrasses d'Italie, les cloîtres d'Europe ou le dessin des collines provençales, autant de places où l'homme peut fuir son humanité et se délivrer avec douceur de lui-même (N, 68).

The sign of youth here is "une précipitation à vivre qui touche au gaspillage" (N, 72), for its span of time is brief:

> A Belcourt, comme à Bab-el-Oued, on se marie jeune. On travaille très tôt et on épuise en dix ans l'expérience d'une vie d'homme. Un ouvrier de trente ans a déjà joué toutes ses cartes. Il attend la fin entre sa femme et ses enfants. Ses bonheurs ont été brusques et sans merci. De même sa vie (N, 72).

Bathing in the sea plays a large role in the joy of being young in Algiers, and when Camus describes it his tone lightens, and colloquialisms or gentle humour alternate with more serious reflections:

> A Alger, on ne dit pas "prendre un bain," mais "se taper un bain." N'insistons pas. On se baigne dans le port ... Quand on passe près d'une bouée où se trouve déjà une jolie fille, on crie aux camarades: "Je te dis que c'est une mouette" (N, 68).

The body, like the spirit, he tells us, evolves and thus it too has a history. However, whereas the spirit has many nuances and gradations, the body has only one, "la couleur":

> ... on prend conscience d'un passage simultané de toutes les peaux du blanc au doré, puis au brun, et pour finir à une couleur tabac qui est à la limite extrême de l'effort de transformation dont le corps est capable (N, 69).

This slightly tongue-in-cheek account then becomes more profound as he notes in these changes a cyclic harmony between men and nature:

> Et, à mesure qu'on avance dans le mois d'août et que le soleil grandit, le blanc des maisons se fait plus aveuglant et les peaux prennent une chaleur plus sombre. Comment alors ne pas s'identifier à ce dialogue de la pierre et de la chair à la mesure du soleil et des saisons? (N, 69).

There is happiness in the rapport of youth with nature: "Toute la matinée s'est passée en plongeons, en floraisons de rires parmi des gerbes d'eau, en longs coups de pagaie autour des cargos rouges et noirs ... " (N, 69). Their sun-bathing, which continues even in winter, has no object other than pleasure--and the writer shows his impatience for those who would force on this pleasure a utilitarian purpose, "les naturistes, ces protestants de la chair" who have "une systématique du corps qui est aussi exaspérante que celle de l'esprit" (N, 68). A quality of innocence pervades these "joies saines" of Algerian youth and in it they share a pagan bond with the Greeks. With characteristic irony the author wraps the knuckles of Christianity, as he applauds the appearance of nude bodies on the beaches:

> Pour la première fois depuis deux mille ans, le corps a été mis nu sur des plages. Depuis vingt siècles, les hommes se sont attachés à rendre décents l'insolence et la naïveté grecques, à diminuer la chair et compliquer l'habit (N, 69).

Other lines also indicate that Camus saw the youth of Algiers as modern-day Greeks: " ... la course des jeunes gens sur les plages de la Méditerranée rejoint les gestes des athlètes de Délos" (N, 69); seen from the level of the water against the white background of the Arab dwellings "les corps déroulent une frise cuivrée" (N, 69).

If the reader should fail to perceive by himself the simplicity and naïveté of Camus' "cult of the body," the author makes it explicit in a footnote in which he expresses disfavor with the intellectual manipulation of Gide's attitude:

> Puis-je me donner le ridicule de dire que je n'aime pas la façon dont Gide exalte le corps? Il lui demande de retenir son désir pour le rendre plus aigu. Ainsi se rapproche-t-il de ceux que, dans l'argot des maisons publiques, on appelle les compliqués ou les cérébraux (N, 69).

Amusements other than bathing occupy the young. There is public dancing on a floor open to the beach, protected from the heat of the sun by wooden blinds which are raised when the sun sets. Here "la jeunesse pauvre du quartier danse jusqu'au soir" (N, 71), and from the simplicity of this pleasure, remembered by the writer, has developed his idea of innocence: "L'idée que je me fais

de l'innocence, c'est à des soirs semblables que je la dois" (N, 71).

The childlike quality of these people, old and young alike, has other extensions as well. Their morality is a simple one, befitting a life which "n'est pas à construire, mais à brûler" (N, 72):

> Il ne s'agit pas alors de réfléchir et de devenir meilleur. La notion d'enfer, par exemple, n'est ici qu'une aimable plaisanterie. De pareilles imaginations ne sont permises qu'aux très vertueux. Et je crois bien que la vertu est un mot sans signification dans toute l'Algérie" (N, 72).

A few rules suffice: one doesn't fail one's mother, one sees that one's wife is respected, pregnant women are treated with consideration, fights must be fair, never two against one. (A colorful illustration of the latter is provided in the "Note" appearing at the end of "L'Eté à Alger.") It is not a bourgeois morality--"law and order" are distrusted and sympathy is always with the arrested, who is either "le pauvre," or, with admiration, "un pirate" (N, 72).

There is also a simplicity of mind and spirit. Their amusements are devoid of any intellectual or refined content: "Une société de boulomanes et les banquets des 'amicales,' le cinéma à trois francs et les fêtes communales suffisent depuis des années à la récréation des plus de trente ans" (N, 72-73). Nor is there any profundity in their attitude toward death:

> Comment ce peuple sans esprit saurait-il alors habiller de mythes l'horreur profonde de sa vie? Tout ce qui touche à la mort est ici ridicule ou odieux. Ce peuple sans religion et sans idoles meurt seul après avoir vécu en foule (N, 73).

Their bad taste in tombstones is the appropriate expression for death's ugliness, "une tristesse affreuse de ces lieux où la mort découvre son vrai visage" (N, 73); the clichés carved on them are only "phrases qui servent à tous les désespoirs," "feinte sinistre par quoi on prête un corps et des désirs à ce qui au mieux est un liquide noir" (N, 73). With ironic humour the writer comments on one inscription:

> "Jamais ta tombe ne restera sans fleurs." Mais on est vite rassuré: l'inscription entoure un bouquet de stuc doré, bien économique pour le temps des vivants ... " (N, 73).

On another he notes with amusement that an airplane has replaced the traditional warbler.

Death, however, is inextricably bound to life. The young have rendezvous in the cemetery. The favorite joke of the hearse-drivers when their vehicle is empty is to call to the girls they pass, "Tu montes, chérie?" (N, 73). The writer approves of the flippant responses that are made at the news of a death, for death, being fearsome and ugly, does not merit respect.

In this simple world of the physical there are no spiritual or intellectual blocks to impede a clear view of the human condition: life followed by a final and permanent

death. The landscape of Algiers requires of its people "des âmes clairvoyantes, c'est-à-dire sans consolation" and "qu'on fasse un acte de lucidité comme on fait un acte de foi" (N, 67). Here men have bet on the flesh, "mais ils savaient qu'ils devaient perdre" (N, 68). In the last pages of "L'Eté à Alger" Camus reiterates his passionate attachment to life here and now rather than to a hypothetical eternity. The much longed-for unity exalted in "Noces à Tipasa" can indeed be found here on earth in nature, but for man it is provisional since he must die and the world will remain: "Je sais seulement que ce ciel durera plus que moi. Et qu'appellerais-je éternité sinon ce qui continuera après ma mort?" (N, 75).

As at Djémila, and later in Le Mythe de Sisyphe, the writer rejects hope as the enemy of life, and turns to his beloved Greeks for confirmation:

> De la boîte de Pandore où grouillaient les maux de l'humanité, les Grecs firent sortir l'espoir après tous les autres, comme le plus terrible de tous. Je ne connais pas de symbole plus émouvant. Car l'espoir, au contraire de ce qu'on croit, équivaut à la résignation. Et vivre, c'est ne pas se résigner (N, 76).

The "imbécile" of "Noces à Tipasa" who was afraid to enjoy life becomes in "L'Eté à Alger" a sinner against life on earth because of his hope for an afterlife--it turns him from the beauty of the here-and-now: "Car s'il y a un péché contra la vie, ce n'est peut-être pas tant d'en désespérer

que d'espérer une autre vie, et se dérober à l'implacable grandeur de celle-ci" (N, 76). If men may not have eternity there are still the riches of this world, "ces biens dérisoires et essentiels, ces vérités relatives" that the hand can touch, and

> sentir ses liens avec une terre, son amour pour quelques hommes, savoir qu'il est toujours un lieu où le coeur trouvera son accord, voici déjà beaucoup de certitudes pour une seule vie d'homme (N, 75).

The final section of the essay, headed simply "Note," is a one-page account of a street-fight "reproduit mot à mot" according to the author. Its style, that of "l'homme du peuple," is clearly one with which Camus was familiar. In his Carnets I a note dated April, 1939 gives a similar passage, parts of which will be used in L'Etranger to describe Raymond's first fight with the brother of his mistress.

In "L'Eté à Alger" the theme of nature is more closely related to the lives of men, and the inherent paradox and tension of human existence is repeatedly expressed by the juxtaposition of opposed factors:

> Tout ce qui exalte la vie, accroît en même temps son absurdité (N, 75).

> ... une seule chose est plus tragique que la souffrance et c'est la vie d'un homme heureux (N, 75).

> Singulier pays qui donne à l'homme qu'il nourrit à la fois sa splendeur et sa misère! (N, 67).

> La richesse sensuelle dont un homme sensible de ces pays est pourvu, il n'est pas étonnant qu'elle coincide avec le dénuement le plus extrême (N, 67).
>
> ... ce pays où tout est donné pour être retiré (N, 67).

From the men of Algeria, "ces barbares qui se prélassent sur des plages" (N, 74) the writer dares to hope for the emergence of a new culture, lucid and in harmony with nature, which will finally permit full expression of human dignity. John Cruickshank believes this view approaches "the myth of the happy savage in which sophisticated minds occasionally indulge,"[31] and he points out that Camus himself, although born among these people, differed from them by virtue of his education, his travel, his reading and the fact of his own reflective mind. Philip Thody too feels that "Camus is romanticising his compatriots and seeing them as more harmoniously adjusted to the world than they actually are" and that "it is doubtful whether so culturally and politically carefree a race ever really existed."[32] It is just possible that Camus himself belatedly sensed he had exaggerated their qualities, but if so he permits himself only a few lines near the end of the essay to correct the misapprehension: "Sans doute, je ne me fais pas d'illusions. Il n'y a pas beaucoup d'amour

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[31]Cruickshank, Camus and the Literature of Revolt, p. 36.

[32]Thody, Albert Camus, pp. 25-26.

dans les vies dont je parle. Je devrais dire qu'il n'y en a plus beaucoup. Mais, du moins, elles n'ont rien éludé" (N, 76).

In the description of the Algerians one perceives other men of Camus' world, both real and fictional. Meursault, living in the present, in his hum-drum job, his afternoons on the beach, is one of them. Roger Quilliot, comparing the protagonists of Camus with those of Sartre, writes of him:

> Intelligent, mais rien moins qu'intellectuel, Meursault est un être rudimentaire, une conscience brute, libre de toute hiérarchie de valeurs. Le choix de Camus est significatif. Tandis que Sartre découvrait l'existence à travers Roquentin, personnage cosmopolite, cultivé et formé de longue date à l'introspection, Camus l'exprime au travers d'une condition nue et quasiment prolétarienne.[33]

The workers in "L'Eté à Alger" who at thirty have exhausted themselves are the dwellers of the "quartiers pauvres" with whom Camus had lived and of whom he had written in L'Envers et l'endroit and later in "Les Muets" in L'Exil et le royaume. When he writes of the Algerian landscape in "L'Eté à Alger" he adds: "Comment s'étonner alors si le visage de ce pays, je ne l'aime jamais plus qu'au milieu de ses hommes les plus pauvres (N, 68).

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[33]Quilliot, La Mer, p. 90.

"Le Désert"

In 1937 Camus' state of health was critical and on the advice of his doctor he spent a period of time resting in the French Alps in Savoy. He returned through Tuscany in Italy and "Le Désert" consists of his reflections in the wake of that trip. According to Louis Faucon the title may be traced to lines from Nietzsche's Genealogy of Morals:

> . . . that "desert" into which strong, independent minds like to withdraw. . . . A deliberate obscurity; a sidestepping of fame; a backing away from noise, adulation, accolades, influence; a modest position, a quotidian existence, something which hides more than it reveals; occasional intercourse with harmless and gay birds and beasts, the sight of which refreshes; a mountainside for company, not a blind one but one with lakes for eyes; sometimes even a room at a crowded inn where one is sure of being mistaken for somebody else and may securely speak to anyone: such is our desert, and believe me, it is lonely enough.[34]

In "Le Désert" Camus deals again with the theme of human mortality and the impossibility of eternity, but from a different perspective. Lucidity is still the watchword but the "nostalgie d'union, d'absolu" which Nguyen-Van-Huy posits as an integral part of Camusian man[35] emerges more strongly. The earlier emphasis on the beauty of nature and the joys of physical life has diminished: they are

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[34]Friedrich Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy and The Genealogy of Morals, trans. by Francis Golffing (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1956), p. 244.

[35]Nguyen-Van-Huy, La Métaphysique du bonheur, p. 50.

present, but chiefly as an "initiation" which prepares for "des illuminations plus hautes" (N, 82). In contast to the naïve "barbares" of "L'Eté à Alger," the men who inspire the meditations of "Le Désert" are artists, "les grands maîtres toscans" (N, 79).

The preoccupation with the eternal manifests itself almost immediately as the traveler in Italy remarks on the similarities between the faces in the paintings of the masters and the passers-by in the streets: we no longer know how to perceive the real faces of the people around us--(later the author remarks, "Et j'appelle vérité tout ce qui continue" (N, 79)--but only their transitory emotions insofar as they may affect us. The Tuscan masters, however, were aware of the difference between this "poésie" of the transitory, and "la vérité"--they recognized that a man's true face arises from his innermost being, from "les grands sentiments simples et éternels autour desquels gravite l'amour de vivre, haine, amour, larmes et joies, ... " (N, 79). Possessing this knowledge "seuls les peintres peuvent apaiser notre faim" (N, 79), our hunger for eternity.

Although he explicitly denied the connection on more than one occasion[36] Camus' name is often associated with

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[36]For example, in the 1945 interview with Jeanine Delpech: "Non, je ne suis pas existentialiste. Sartre et moi nous nous étonnons toujours de voir nos deux noms associés." Camus, Essais, p. 1424.

existentialism. His consistent espousal of the relative over any absolute, and of the concrete particular over abstractions, would seem to preclude labelling him essentialist. There are, however, indications that the writer did presume a common human nature, thus giving man an essence. As noted earlier, Roger Quilliot perceived such essentialism in Camus' attitude toward old age and death.[37] In the fourth of his "Lettres à un ami allemand" Camus remarks: "Je continue à croire que ce monde n'a pas de sens supérieur. Mais je sais que quelque chose en lui a du sens et c'est l'homme, parce qu'il est le seul être à exiger d'en avoir."[38] In L'Homme révolté the indications are even more explicit:

> L'analyse de la révolte conduit au moins au soupçon qu'il y a une nature humaine, comme le pensaient les Grecs, et contrairement aux postulats de la pensée contemporaine. Pourquoi se révolter s'il n'y a, en soi, rien de permanent à préserver?[39]

In "Le Désert" again there is clearly the suggestion of a fundamental human nature based on certain essential and universal qualities--"grands sentiments simples et éternels," as well as on human mortality.

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[37] See supra, p. 93.

[38] Camus, Essais, p. 241.

[39] Ibid., p. 425.

To capture eternity the great masters employ the stuff of the present, "cette matière magnifique et futile" (N, 79), but it is not the present of states-of-mind, but rather that of physical gestures, of flesh and blood, for these artists have chased away "la malédiction de l'esprit" (N, 80). Camus' predilection for the physical is again evident here. In the present context, focussing as it does on art, one is irresistibly drawn to recall lines of another poet of the senses, John Keats, who writes of the figures on a Grecian urn, their movements caught and immortalized:

> Fair youth, beneath the trees, thou canst not leave
> Thy song, nor ever can those trees be bare;
> Bold Lover, never, never canst thou kiss,
> Though winning near the goal--yet, do not grieve;
> She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,
> For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair![40]

There are other parallels to be drawn. "Ode on a Grecian Urn" was written in 1819, two years before Keats died of tuberculosis in Italy. He, like Camus recuperating in 1937 from an attack of the same disease, must have been acutely sensitive to the evanescence of human life.

If the Italian masters have captured a bit of the eternal, it is in the very locus of man's transience, the perishable body, yet it is interesting to note how doggedly the writer clings to this perishability as of the essence of humanness. In contrast the spirit is a "malédiction,"

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[40]John Keats, "Ode on a Grecian Urn, in Bernbaum, p. 820.

and we see very quickly why--it conducts to hope, that worst evil to escape from Pandora's box. If certain "bons esprits" concern themselves with immortality it is because they refuse the "seule vérité qui leur soit donnée et qui est le corps" (N, 80). They cannot face a truth which must decay and prefer in its stead "la poésie" of illusion. The writer chooses the higher poetry of lucidity:

> ... la flamme noire que de Cimabué à Francesca les peintres italiens ont élevée parmi les paysages toscans comme la protestation lucide de l'homme jeté sur une terre dont la splendeur et la lumière lui parlent sans relâche d'un Dieu qui n'existe pas (N, 80).

The eternal quality in the "captured present" is best expressed by "indifférence," "détachement," "impassibilité" (N, 80), and theologians alert to the threat to faith posed in these attitudes, have named them "hell":

> Cette impassibilité et cette grandeur de l'homme sans espoir, cet éternel présent, c'est cela précisément que des théologiens avisés ont appelé l'enfer (N, 80).

Further reflections on indifference pick up this theme as it appeared in "Entre oui et non" in the figure of Camus' mother, symbol of nature, and also in the union with nature expressed in "Noces à Tipasa" and "Le Vent à Djémila":

> A force d'indifférence et d'insensibilité, il arrive qu'un visage rejoigne la grandeur minérale d'un paysage. Comme certains paysans d'Espagne arrivent à ressembler aux oliviers de leurs terres, ainsi les visages de Giotto, dépouillés des ombres dérisoires où l'âme se manifeste, finissent par rejoindre la Toscane

> elle-même dans la seule leçon dont elle est prodigue: un exercice de la passion au détriment de l'émotion, un mélange d'ascèse et de jouissances, une résonance commune à la terre et à l'homme, par quoi l'homme, comme la terre, se définit à mi-chemin entre la misère et l'amour (N, 80-81).

The lesson of Giotto's faces, "double vérité du corps et de l'instant" (N, 82), that man is both part of and separate from the non-human world, gives rise to both sadness and happiness. The same lesson is projected from the Italian landscape. However it is not immediately apparent in the profusion of surface beauty that dazzles the traveler--part of his "initiation"--first in the countryside viewed from the train and later in the enchantment of Pisa with its fountains and smiling women: "C'est dans la joie que l'homme prépare ses leçons ... " (N, 82).

The somber part of this lesson is brought more sharply home to the writer in Florence as he wanders about the cloister of the dead of the Santissima Annunziata, and reads the inscriptions on the tombstones, all signs of resignation to death. A distinct change of tone takes place at this point in the essay. The writer senses the awakening of what he first believes is distress and then finally recognizes as anger:

> Tout en moi protestant contre une semblable résignation. "Il faut," disaient les inscriptions. Mais non, et ma révolte avait raison. Cette joie qui allait, indifférente et absorbée comme un pélerin sur la terre, il me fallait la suivre pas à pas. Et, pour le reste, je disais non. Je disais non de toutes mes forces (N, 83).

L'Homme révolté is forecast here, but the figure of Sisyphus looms larger. Like Sisyphus the writer is without hope, lucid, in "la double conscience de son désir de durée et son destin de mort" (N, 85). Aware of the uselessness of his revolt, nevertheless he will not relinquish it.

Futility is an essential element of the Absurd. Man's grandeur lies not only in his efforts, but in his awareness that they are vain. Later in Le Mythe de Sisyphus Camus will write:

> Travailler et créer "pour rien," sculpter dans l'argile, savoir que sa création n'a pas d'avenir, voir son oeuvre détruite en un jour en étant conscient que, profondément, cela n'a pas plus d'importance que de bâtir pour des siècles, c'est la sagesse difficile que la pensée absurde autorise (MS, 189-190).

In "Le Désert" this aspect of the Absurd is stressed again and again: the present, depicted by the Tuscan masters, is "cette matière magnifique et futile" (N, 79); the entrance into lucid communion with the world brings "un bonheur plus haut où le bonheur paraît futile (N, 86). The visitor in the cloister of the dead knows that his revolt is useless, but senses that this very uselessness adds to its value: " ... je ne vois pas ce que l'inutilité ôte à ma révolte et je sens bien ce qu'elle lui ajoute" (N, 83). The final lines of the essay emphasize the vanity of human hopes for permanence: "La terre! Dans ce grand temple déserté par les dieux, toutes mes idoles ont des pieds d'argile" (N, 88).

If the visitor to the tombs in Florence revolts, it is in the name of the concrete and the physical, however impermanent it may be. For him the most repulsive materialism is

> celui qui veut nous faire passer des idées mortes pour des réalités vivantes et détourner sur des mythes stériles l'attention obstinée et lucide que nous portions à ce qui en nous doit mourir pour toujours" (N, 82-83).

The reality at the heart of his revolt is that of the world's beauty--all the more poignant because he must lose it. In the Franciscan monastery at Fiesole overlooking Florence he finds concrete expression of this paradox. The monks live surrounded by flowers, with the vista of Florence before them, and each of them has on the table in his cell a skull:

> Les mêmes hommes qui, à Fiesole, vivent devant les fleurs rouges ont dans leur cellule le crâne qui nourrit leurs méditations. Florence à leurs fenêtres et la mort sur leur table (N, 84).

Demonstrating again his almost obsessive emphasis on the physical, Camus makes an ironical and bizarre analogy between the monks--who have discarded worldly possessions for a life of the spirit--and the youth of Algiers--who have shed their clothes to enjoy the sun and the water. "S'ils se dépouillent, c'est pour une plus grande vie (et non pour une autre vie). C'est du moins le seul emploi valable du mot 'dénuement'" (N, 84).

Other elements recall "L'Eté à Alger." Conventional morality finds few supporters in the midst of beauty: " ... le chemin qui va de la beauté à l'immoralité est tortueux, mais certain"; "Quoi d'étonnant si des esprits élévés devant le spectacle de la noblesse, dans l'air raréfié de la beauté restent mal persuadés que la grandeur puisse s'unir à la bonté?" (N, 85).

Intermittently the theme of harmony with nature, so dominant in "Noces à Tipasa" appears, but it is closely tied to the Absurd, and in its celebration tears are mixed with the sunlight: "Florence! ... Dans son ciel mêlé de larmes et de soleil, j'apprenais à consentir à la terre et à brûler dans la flamme sombre de ses fêtes" (N, 88).

Tension continues to be a basic theme underlying all of the others and again it is reflected stylistically in a balancing of opposing terms: " ... j'ai compris qu'au coeur de ma révolte dormait un consentement" (N, 88); " ... toute négation contient une floraison de 'oui'" (N, 87); for the monks at Fiesole, "Une certaine continuité dans le désespoir peut engendrer la joie" (N, 84). It is most evident, of course, in the theme of the Absurd, which Camus has brought to a fuller development since the awakening at Djémila.

The lyricism of "Le Désert" does not have the passionate, exciting quality of "Noces à Tipasa" or "Le Vent

à Djémila" but the writer's emotion is nonetheless very apparent, particularly when he declares his attachment to the world: " ... cette entente amoureuse de la terre et de l'homme délivré de l'humain--ah! je m'y convertirais bien si elle n'était déjà ma religion" (N, 85); "Le monde est beau, et hors de lui, point de salut" (N, 87). The poetic images in the essay are too numerous to cite them all. One passage, however, deserves special mention. In an extended metaphor which at its climax divides into two, Camus describes one manifestation of the world of nature and its effect on him (N, 86). From the garden of Boboli overlooking Mount Oliveto he regards the hills of Florence that extend to the horizon. Each one is covered with the pale foliage of olive trees and the darker, thicker stands of cypress. In the sky are huge clouds which cover the hilltops, and as the afternoon advances a silvery light falls in the silence.

Then suddenly a breeze springs up and the clouds part "comme un rideau qui s'ouvre"; at the same moment the cypresses at the summit seem to grow up all at once, and gradually the rest of the landscape, with its olive trees and stones, appears to rise slowly. Other clouds come, the curtain closes, and the entire hill "redescends." The same thing is now happening alternately to all of the other hills off in the distance--"la même brise qui ouvrait ici les plis

épais des nuages les refermait là-bas," until at last the watcher senses in it the rhythm of the "grande respiration du monde." As the "breathing" reverberates in the distance it picks up "le thème de pierre et d'air d'une fugue à l'échelle du monde" and the writer grows calm as the tone of this music lowers. The passage concludes in the joining of both poetic images--the breath and the song of the world:

> Et parvenu au terme de cette perspective sensible au coeur, j'embrassais d'un coup d'oeil cette fuite de collines toutes ensemble respirant et avec elle comme le chant de la terre entière (N, 86).

"Le Désert," while developing further the theme of the Absurd, adds other facets to the human dimension of Noces. At the same time it gives evidence of the writer's continued attachment to the natural world and the intense feeling it arouses in him.

If the theme of Noces can be summed up in one sentence from the essays it is "Le monde est beau, et hors de lui, point de salut" (N, 86). Their motto, says Henri Peyre, is "a vehement denial of any longing for another life,"[41] and its logical corollary is a rejection of transcendence. John Cruickshank correctly describes Camus' own "passionate unbelief" as an arbitrary choice on his part

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[41]Henri Peyre, "Camus the Pagan," Yale French Studies No. 25 (Spring, 1960), 21.

rather than the naïve atheism he depicts in the men of Algiers.[42] Philip Thody remarks that in Noces "Camus' humanism takes on for the first time something of the defiant quality of Le Mythe de Sisyphe and L'Etranger."[43] Certainly the "Que m'importe l'éternité" (N, 65) of Djémila, and the words of the traveler in "Le Désert"-- " ... qu'ai-je à faire d'une vérité qui ne doive pas pourrir?" (N, 87)-- will be echoed by the Absurd Man: " ... je n'ai rien à faire des idées ou de l'éternel" (MS, 167), and also by the angry and defiant Meursault near the end of L'Etranger. Behind the defiance, however, may lie the "nostalgie d'absolu" which haunts the pages of "Le Désert." If this cannot be satisfied by eternal life, there remains the pull of its opposite. Germaine Brée suggests that in the celebration of Noces there is a kind of exorcism, "for could the No opposed to death have been so insistent if the attraction of death had not been so strong?"[44]

Some examples of themes from Noces reappearing in Camus' later works have already been cited; however, one that is essential in the evolution of his work has so far not been stressed: love. In Noces love manifests itself

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[42]Cruickshank, Camus and the Literature of Revolt, p. 37.

[43]Thody, Albert Camus, p. 25.

[44]Brée, Camus, p. 83.

in an attitude toward nature which inspires the writer with intense feelings of both desire and satisfaction, the sexual associations of which were previously noted. Like his protagonist, Meursault, Camus' first love seems to have been the natural world. At Tipasa he learns to love "sans mesure" (N, 57), and it is nature which activates feelings in him that will expand the early compassion of L'Envers et l'endroit even further into human society. In his 1958 preface to the latter he wrote that some day he hoped to create a work which would speak of "une certaine forme d'amour" and to find "une justice ou un amour" to balance the silence of human existence.[45] His journalistic and later literary works are a part of his personal effort to bring love and justice to his fellow human beings. In La Peste it is love which wages war against the common enemy, the plague. Writing of the swim of Rieux and Tarrou in this novel, Kay Killingsworth recalls "le bain à Tipasa, où l'homme atteignait l'union avec les éléments," and she adds, "La communion entre les hommes ... ne s'accomplit définitivement que dans le cadre de la nature."[46] In summing up Camus' morality and ethics Serge Doubrovsky notes the role of nature in its development:

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[45]Camus, Essais, pp. 12-13.

[46]Killingsworth, "Faulkner et Camus," p. 223.

> Il retrouve les valeurs de vie et de bonheur, perdues dans le tumulte et les terreurs de ce temps. Dans le même mouvement, il met donc le bonheur, c'est-a'dire la réconciliation de l'homme et de la nature, au-dessus de la morale, et puis il corrige l'indifférence de la nature [et] de sa nature, par la morale, c'est-à-dire l'éclatement de la solitude vers autrui.[47]

The development will be gradual. First will come further cognizance of the Absurd. However, it is in Noces, through nature, that love, for Camus, receives the vital force and the impetus to envelop all men in its fraternal communion.

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[47]Doubrovsky, "La Morale d'Albert Camus," p. 48.

CHAPTER V

L'ETÉ: REAFFIRMATION

> "Vingt ans après, ces nouvelles Noces témoignent donc, à leur manière, d'une longue fidélité."
>
> Prière d'insérer, 1954

L'Eté, published in 1954, consists of eight essays, the earliest dating from 1939 and the latest 1953. A note from Carnets II dated February, 1950 gives tentative titles for the projected collection: "Titre essais solaires: L'Eté. Midi. La fête."[1] In February, 1951 appears the note, "Réunir livre d'essais: la Fête."[2] Widely separated in the dates of their composition, dissimilar, at least superficially, in their subject matter, the essays derive from a common source of inspiration which gives the collection its unity. In his "prière d'insérer" the author makes this explicit:

> Ils reprennent tous, quoique avec des perspectives différentes, un thème qu'on pourrait

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[1]Camus, Carnets II, p. 311.

[2]Ibid., p. 343.

> appeler solaire, et qui fut déjà celui d'un des premiers ouvrages de l'auteur, Noces. ... [3]

In the 1954 interview given to Frank Jotterand Camus was asked whether there was any order other than chronological in L'Eté and in his reply he again alluded to Noces:

> Non. La seule évolution que l'on puisse y trouver est celle que suit normalement un homme entre vingt-cinq et quarante ans. Ces essais se rattachent naturellement à Noces, par une sorte de fil d'or. ... [4]

The common "thème solaire" shared by the essays demonstrates the author's reaffirmation, in his maturity, of values which had their source in the Mediterranean land of his birth. In three of them Algeria is the setting: "Le Minotaure," "Petit Guide pour les villes sans passé," and "Retour à Tipasa." Certain of their lines betray the weariness that has come with age and experience, and nostalgia for a time of youth and innocence--that of the author as well as the world. In addition, as Roger Quilliot has remarked, they reveal to us "la permanence d'une vie intérieure, ... un havre du souvenir."[5] They also reveal that resistance to history which Camus had expounded in L'Homme révolté, and finally, offer a hope for return to balance and repose for both the world and the writer.

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[3]Camus, Essais, p. 1829.

[4]Ibid., pp. 1836-1837.

[5]Quilliot, La Mer, p. 250.

"Le Minotaure ou la halte d'Oran"

The first essay of L'Eté was written between 1939 and 1941. Notes in Camus' Carnets I[6] during two trips to Oran in 1939 were later used in the essay, as were several paragraphs written in 1940 and 1941. There are also indications that in 1941 he was already considering Oran as the locale for La Peste. "Le Minotaure" was ready for publication in 1942, but according to a letter in the fall of that year to his friend, Emmanuel Roblès, the censors would not permit it. The allied landings in North Africa caused a further delay and it was not until February of 1946 that the essay finally appeared in the review, L'Arche. With the publication of L'Eté in 1954 Camus attached to "Le Minotaure" a brief epigraph noting the date the essay was written and explaining the objections of the Oranese. After informing the reader that he has now been assured of the protection of Oran's beauties as well as the correction of its defects, he ends on a humorous, but conciliatory note: " ... Oran désormais n'a plus besoin d'écrivains: elle attend des touristes" (E, 811).

Certainly in "Le Minotaure" Camus has aimed the full force of his gift for ironic humour at Oran and the

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[6]Carnets I: The notations from the April trip appear on pp. 148-49, those for the trip in November on pp. 188-90. Other notes from 1940 can be found on pp. 197-99 and several from 1941 on pp. 226, 228. The notations for La Peste are dated April 1941 and are on pp. 229-31.

Oranese, and Roger Quilliot quite rightly places this essay "dans la lignée des oeuvres ironiques."[7] However, it is not the bitter-as-gall irony of La Chute, but rather the chuckle of friendship and brotherhood mentioned at the end of "Petit Guide pour des villes sans passé": " ... je reconnais ses fils et mes frères à ce rire d'amitié qui me prend devant eux" (E, 850). In an interview given to Jean-Claude Brisville in 1959 Camus was asked if he believed there were any important facets of his work which had been neglected by his commentators, and he replied, "L'humour."[8] Nowhere does he give it freer rein than in "Le Minotaure."

The essay, which is divided into five parts with a brief introduction, begins with reflections on solitude, on a time for withdrawal and recuperation. What he seeks resembles both Nietzsche's "desert" and the "Iles fortunees" of Jean Grenier[9] but today, he tells us, "Il n'y a plus de déserts. Il n'y a plus d'îles" (E, 813). Of the possible alternatives he rejects the cities of Europe with their history, art, and tradition, those "rumeurs du passé" (E, 813). They can offer him no quiet: "On y sent le vertige des siècles, des révolutions, de la gloire. On s'y souvient

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[7]Quilliot, La Mer, p. 249.

[8]Jean-Claude Brisville, Camus (Paris: Gallimard, 1959), p. 259.

[9]Grenier, Les Isles (see supra, pp. 28-29).

que l'Occident s'est forgé dans les clameurs. Cela ne fait pas assez de silence" (E, 813).

Of course there are those who seek precisely the "solitude peuplée" offered by such cities as Paris--those independent souls who revel in the company of the voices from the past that make up this city. However, a moment comes when such voices are importune. Rastignac had shouted to Paris, "A nous deux!" but, says Camus, at times even two is too many! Even the deserts of the world cannot fully satisfy him, since, as refuges from sorrow, they are filled with "poésie" and he seeks a peace in which there is neither thought nor feeling--"la paix des pierres" (E, 814). Martha in Le Malentendu hopes to find the same kind of peace in the heat of a climate where "le soleil dévorait tout." She tells her mother,

> J'ai lu dans un livre qu'il mangeait jusqu'aux âmes et qu'il faisait des corps resplendissants, mais vidés par l'intérieur ... Oui, j'en ai assez de porter toujours mon âme, j'ai hâte de trouver ce pays où le soleil tue les questions.[10]

Oran, "sans âme et sans recours" (E, 814), offers such peace.

In his first sketch of Oran as a place in which the spirit and the intellect are conspicuously absent, Camus turns to "La Rue." The Oranese themselves complain from time to time that their city is dull, and consequently some

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[10]Camus, Théâtre, Récits, Nouvelles, p. 120.

"bons esprits."[11] have tried to force upon it a culture foreign to its elemental way of life--"les moeurs d'un autre monde" (E, 814). As a result, says the writer, tongue-in-cheek, the only really instructive places are those of the poker-players, amateur boxers, bowlers, and the regional clubs: these are at least natural! For "il existe une certaine grandeur qui ne prête pas à l'élévation. Elle est inféconde par état" (E, 814-15).

Physically the streets of Oran are hot, dusty, and when it rains, muddy; spiritually they are absurd, extravagant, and filled with examples of bad taste. Nevertheless there is a certain baroque quality in this "application dans le mauvais goût" which makes it pardonable. The writer then makes an inventory of what Oran has to offer: little cafés, their counters liberally sprinkled with wings and legs of dead flies; photographers' studios "où la technique n'a pas progressé depuis l'invention du paper sensible," and where can be seen such unlikely subjects as the "pseudo-marin qui s'appui du coude sur une console" and the "jeune fille à marier, taille fagotée, bras ballants devant un fond sylvestre." With ironic humour he adds: "On peut supposer

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[11]In "Le Desert" of Noces, p. 80, it was the "bons esprits" who opted for the "myths" of religion--the reverse of Pascal's "bons esprits." In "Le Minotaure" Camus uses the term to describe those who try to foist a false culture on the Oranese.

qu'il ne s'agit pas de portraits d'après nature; ce sont des créations" (E, 815). There is also "une édifiante abondance" of shops selling funeral supplies--"Ce n'est pas qu'à Oran on meure plus qu'ailleurs, mais j'imagine seulement qu'on en fait plus d'histoires" (E, 815).

Other evidence of the "naïveté sympathique" of the Oranese appears in the movie advertisements, where such inflated adjectives as "fastueux," "extraordinaire," and "prestigieux" are used to describe third-rate films. He hastens to point out, however, that this is not mere exaggeration but rather proof of the advertisers' knowledge of psychology: it takes a great deal of pressure to force a choice on these people whose indifference and profound apathy make it an effort for them to decide "entre deux spectacles, deux métiers, et, souvent même, deux femmes" (E, 816). The author perceives in it an uncomplimentary parallel to America: advertising in Oran "prendra des proportions américaines, ayant les mêmes raisons, ici et là-bas, de s'exaspérer" (E, 816).

The two essential pleasures of Oranese youth are having their shoes shined and then displaying these "merveilles" while strolling on the boulevards. Camus' ironic humour finds ample material as he depicts the paradoxical importance of trivialities. Matching his style to the paradox, he approaches the business of shoe-shining in

oratorical tones: "Juché sur de hauts fauteuils, on pourra goûter alors cette satisfaction particulière que donne, même à un profane, le spectacle d'hommes amoureux de leur métier ... " (E, 816). His description of the prolonged and meticulous effort put into the shoe-shine derives much of its humour from the same kind of effort in the description:

> Tout est travaillé dans le détail. Plusieurs brosses, trois variétés de chiffons, le cirage combiné à l'essence: on peut croire que l'opération est terminée devant le parfait éclat qui naît sous la brosse douce. Mais la même main acharnée repasse du cirage sur la surface brillante, la frotte, la ternit, conduit la crème jusqu'au coeur des peaux et fait alors jaillir, sous la même brosse, un double et vraiment définitif éclat sorti des profondeurs du cuir (E, 816).

In their daily strolls the young men of Oran try to imitate their current idol, Clark Gable, and in the afternoon the boulevards are invaded by "une armée de sympathiques adolescents qui se donnent le plus grand mal pour paraître de mauvais garçons" (E, 817). The girls on their part, feeling themselves promised to these "gangsters au coeur tendre" also model themselves after American film stars. Both boys and girls provoke sarcastic comments from the over-thirty crowd who, says the author, fail to understand this confluence of youth and romance. His own tone of affectionate mockery discloses the attitude of an adult who remembers with a smile his own adolescence.

To all those who view Oran as too commonplace, and say "Il faudra s'occuper de quelque chose d'élevé,"

he retorts scornfully that this would be irrelevant and unnecessary--in Oran it is sufficient simply to see, "Voyez plutôt,"--for Oran has its own peculiar value, not only in its physical surroundings, both natural and man-made, but "dans la ville elle-même ces jeux et cet ennui, ce tumulte et cette solitude" (E, 818). In this environment the traveler finds respite.

The topography and plan of Oran occupy the author in the next section, "Le Désert à Oran," and again the Oranese become the butt of his irony. Compelled to live before a beautiful landscape, he says, they have somehow managed to triumph over it with the construction of ugly buildings. Instead of remaining open to the sea Oran turns back upon itself in circles, like a snail, or a labyrinth. The wanderer through it seeks the sea as if it were the sign of Ariadne, but the search is vain, and finally the Minotaur--"l'Ennui"--devours him. Camus adds cynically, "Depuis longtemps, les Oranais n'errent plus. Ils ont accepté d'être mangés" (E, 818).

In this dusty city "le caillou est roi"--one sees stones everywhere: in piles in the streets, as paperweights in shop-windows, in the cemeteries. Even the trees appear petrified, and "Vue des Planteurs, l'épaisseur des falaises qui l'enserrent est telle que le paysage devient irréel à force d'être minéral" (E, 819). The association of the

mineral world and its physical characteristics with the Absurd mentioned earlier in this study[12] is apparent here. It is a world of weight and thickness from which man is excluded:

> L'homme en est proscrit. Tant de beauté pesante semble venir d'un autre monde (E, 819).
>
> ... Le désert a quelque chose d'implacable. Le ciel minéral d'Oran, ses rues et ses arbres dans leur enduit de poussière, tout contribue à créer cet univers épais et impassible où le coeur et l'esprit ne sont jamais distraits d'eux-mêmes, ni de leur seul objet qui est l'homme (E, 819-20).

If Oran offers a certain kind of respite and recuperation, it is nonetheless a "retraite difficile." The cultured cities of Europe may nourish men's souls with momories of past grandeur,

> Mais comment s'attendrir sur une ville où rien ne sollicite l'esprit, où la laideur même est anonyme, ou le passé est réduit à rien? Le vide, l'ennui, un ciel indifférent, quelles sont les séductions de ces lieux? (E, 820).

Oran's gifts are two in number: "la solitude et, peut-être, la créature" (E, 820).

"Les Jeux," which follows, offers a marked contrast of tone with the somber, thoughtful ending of "Le Désert à Oran." It describes a boxing-match, in one of the "milieux instructifs" mentioned earlier in the essay, and except for the final paragraph it is an extremely funny account, in

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[22]See <u>supra</u>, pp. 57-59.

which the gradations of humour rise and fall with the action. If Camus pokes fun at the primitive naïveté of the Oranese, however, the laughter is never contemptuous.

The sights and sounds of the scene are faithfully reproduced in a breezy and picturesque style which might give the impression that the writer is wholly caught up with the crowd. However, amused and observant as he is, he remains on the sidelines, a spectator not only of the fight but of the other spectators. Roger Quilliot writes of the episode as follows:

> ... le duel homérique des boxeurs Pérez et Amar, nous vaut, au temps du "minotaure," une scène pittoresque, aux limites du burlesque. On devine l'auteur séduit mais lointain pourtant. Un temps de recul, une marge d'indifférence lui révèlent les contradictions de la foule, les mécanismes et les naïvetés du spectacle.[13]

The Central Sporting Club, sponsor of the match, has advertised it as one that will be appreciated by "les vrais amateurs," and Camus will continue to repeat this term as a comic device when referring to the spectators. The physical details of the scene are described in exaggerated and mocking terms, but never with malice: the "vrais amateurs" do not expect to be comfortable--the ring is "au fond d'une sorte de garage crépi à la chaux, couvert de tôle ondulée et violemment éclairé," and the seats are

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[13]Quilliot, La Mer, p. 251.

folding chairs so tightly packed that "pas une des cinq cent personnes qui s'y trouvent ne saurait tirer son mouchoir sans provoquer de graves accidents" (E, 820). The crowd is an earthy, joyous one, reminiscent of the Spanish spectators at the café in Palma in "Amour de vivre." It is warm, the men are in shirt-sleeves, their animated discussions interrupted by gulps of lemonade or the voice of the popular singer coming from the loud-speaker, "la romance avant le meurtre" (E, 821). Even as the writer observes and describes, his own enjoyment and rapport with the working-class audience is apparent.

Yet another type of comedy is used to describe the preliminaries--they appear as the burlesque of a religious ceremony:

> La foule s'est un peu animée, mais c'est encore une politesse. Elle respire avec gravité l'odeur sacrée de l'embrocation. Elle contemple ces successions de rites lents et de sacrifices désordonnés, rendus plus authentiques encore par les dessins propitiatoires, sur la blancheur du mur, des ombres combattantes. Ce sont les prologues cérémonieux d'une religion sauvage et calculée. La transe ne viendra que plus tard (E, 821).

At the announcement of the next event the crowd goes wild, which might lead "un profane" to think that the two combatants are going to settle some personal grudge. But the real battle is between Oran and Algiers, in a rivalry that has lasted a hundred years. Their respective champions are Amar, "le coriace Oranais" and Pérez, "le puncheur

algérois" (E, 821). Camus' mockery is perhaps directed not only at the Algerians, but men in general when he writes "Leur rivalité est d'autant plus forte qu'elle ne tient sans doute à rien. Ayant toutes les raisons de s'aimer, elles se détestent en proportion" (E, 821).

The author then returns to the mock-epic tone employed earlier:

> Cest donc une page d'histoire qui se déroule sur le ring. Et le coriace Oranais, soutenu par un millier de voix hurlantes, défend contre Pérez une manière de vivre et l'orgueil d'une province. La vérité oblige à dire qu'Amar mène mal sa discussion. Son plaidoyer a un vice de forme: il manque d'allonge. Celui du puncheur algérois, au contraire, a la longueur voulue. Il porte avec persuasion sur l'arcade sourcilière de son contradicteur. L'Oranais pavoise magnifiquement, au milieu des vociférations d'un public déchaîné (E, 822).

In spite of shouts of encouragement from the crowd--and Camus reproduces a colorful series of them--the Oranese loses the match on points. But the real fights are only beginning. The scene that follows is a wild and joyous mêlée in which the spectators engage in their own defense of their respective cities, and from the author's portrayal of it arises not only a vivid mental picture of all this exuberant action, but the laughter of the writer observing it, a laughter that is contagious:

> ... dans la salle, des combats que le programme ne comportait pas ont déjà éclaté. Des chaises sont brandies, la police se fraye un chemin, l'exaltation est à son comble. Pour calmer ces

> bons esprits et contribuer au retour du silence, la "direction," sans perdre un instant, charge le pick-up de vociférer Sambre-et-Meuse. Pendant quelques minutes, la salle a grande allure. Des grappes confuses de combattants et d'arbitres bénévoles oscillent sous des poignes d'agents, la galerie exulte et réclame la suite par le moyen de cris sauvages, de cocoricos, ou de miaulements farceurs noyés dans le fleuve irrésistible de la musique militaire (E, 822).

The change that takes place at the announcement of the main event is rendered all the more comic through the contrast to what preceded it and the rapidity of the change itself. The effect is one of an electric switch being turned off:

> ... il suffit de l'annonce du grand combat pour que le calme revienne. Cela se fait brusquement, sans fioritures, comme des acteurs quittent le plateau, une fois la pièce finie. Avec le plus grand naturel, les chapeaux sont époussetés, les chaises rangées, et tous les visages revêtent sans transition l'expression bienveillante du spectateur honnête qui a payé sa place pour assister à un concert de famille (E, 822-23).

The portrait of the Oranese that emerges is one of child-like simplicity, expressing its excitement elementally but responding obediently to a call-to-order that promises a reward.

In the final match, which pits a French sailor against an Oranese, there is little excitement until the seventh round when the Frenchman is floored, gets to his feet, and rushes the Oranese. "Ça y est, ça va être la corrida," says the writer's neighbor, and what happens next is a total unloosing of animal passions both in and out of

the ring, in a kind of contagion of violence, physical for the fighters, vicarious for the spectators: " ... dans ce temple de chaux, de tôle et de ciment, une salle tout entière livrée à des dieux au front bas" (E, 823). The brief trace of a serious tone perceptible here on the subject of violence is resumed by the writer at the end of the episode, as the spectators disperse and depart for home in the darkness: "C'est que la force et la violence sont des dieux solitaires. Ils ne donnent rien au souvenir" (E, 824). If the author sees in the fights one form of expression of a simple and natural people, he is at the same time aware of the nature of violence itself, and its potential for destruction, a theme he will treat seriously and in greater detail in L'Homme révolté.

As a winner is declared in the final match one more facet of the simplistic Oranese temperament manifests itself. At the beginning of the fight each spectator had chosen a favorite, according to "la bonne règle." A decision has now been made and in their "sensibilité toute manichéenne" the spectators recognize no shades of gray:

> Il y a le bien et le mal, le vainqueur et le vaincu. Il faut avoir raison si l'on n'a pas tort. La conclusion de cette logique impeccable est immédiatement fournie par deux mille poumons énergiques qui accusent les juges d'être vendus, ou achetés (E, 824).

The author himself, whose thought and work constantly demonstrate sensitivity to nuances and to the tension necessary

to resist simplistic divisions into black and white, finds himself at the end reconciled with the crowd, for when the boxers embrace each other the spectators forget their differences and break into applause. "Ce ne sont pas des sauvages" (E, 824).

Camus now turns his attention to another aspect of Oran, "Les Monuments." Many of these are not local products, he remarks blandly, but "les marques regrettables de la civilisation" (E, 824), whereas the Maison du Colon, a structure built to house various agricultural offices, is a true creation of the Oranese themselves, and as such mirrors their three outstanding virtues: bad taste, love of violence, and an affinity for "des synthèses historiques" (E, 825):

> L'Egypte, Byzance et Munich ont collaboré à la délicate construction d'une pâtisserie figurant une énorme coupe renversée. Des pierres multicolores, du plus vigoureux effet, sont venues encadrer le toit ... (E, 825).

These questionable aesthetic qualities are further enhanced by the location of the building in the center of an intersection crossed by tramways whose "saleté est un des charmes de la ville" (E, 825).

The Oranese are also very proud of the two sculptured lions adorning their Place d'Armes, of whom a charming local legend has it that at night they descend from their pedestals, walk silently around the square and urinate

copiously under the dusty trees. A brief thought about the artist, Caïn, leads Camus to a meditation on the relative importance of works of art, and the bantering tone used to describe the lions is abandoned briefly. Artists may create a masterpiece, like Michelangelo's David, or the "deux mufles hilares" of Caïn, but only fate determines which will last.

The lions possess two qualities, insignificance and solidity: "L'esprit n'y est pour rien et la matière pour beaucoup" (E, 826). But nonetheless they, and Oran, have a lesson for men--they force us to pay attention to what has no importance.[14] In this regard their lesson resembles that of Sisyphus, whose efforts were forever futile: it too calls for lucidity. The writer states: "Tout ce qui est périssable désire durer ... et, à cet égard, les lions de Caïn ont les mêmes chances que les ruines d'Angkor. Cela incline à la modestie" (E, 826). The implication, I believe, is that men too must face their own insignificance in an indifferent universe and recognize realistically, and "avec modestie," their perishability and their limitations. Later in La Peste the author's concern with what is human and therefore perishable, will give rise to another call to

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[14]Of "insignificance" Camus noted in his Carnets II, p. 86, "Elle décrit ... notre avenir commun." An article by him in Cahiers des saisons, No. 15, in 1959 was entitled "De l'Insignificance."

modesty. Tarrou in a conversation with Dr. Rieux says, "ce qui m'intéresse, c'est de savoir comment on devient un saint." The doctor replies, "Je n'ai pas le goût, je crois, pour l'héroïsme et la sainteté. Ce qui m'intéresse, c'est d'être un homme." Tarrou then speaks for Camus, stressing the difficulty and the dignity of being a man, in spite of perishability, insignificance, and the futility of human actions: "Oui, nous cherchons la même chose, mais je suis moins ambitieux."[15] To be a man may be no more important in the grand scheme of the universe than Caïn's lions in the hierarchy of art. But a man may perceive through lucidity, through "paying attention," that this very "unimportance" endows him with dignity if he persists in his efforts in spite of it.

One last group of "monuments" is discussed: Oran's enormous work-project to enlarge her port. The author's regret at the mutilation of nature is barely concealed when he writes "il s'agit de transformer la plus lumineuse des baies en un port gigantesque" (E, 826). Here again man is confronted with an inhuman world of stone and his insignificance is stressed by comparison. The workers are likened to insects, and their locomotives to toys. Yet man attacks the stone with machines, and both stone and machinery take

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[15]Camus, Théâtre, Récits, Nouvelles, p. 1427.

on human characteristics: " ... d'énormes mâchoires d'acier fouillent le ventre de la falaise" (E, 827). The stones themselves serve man's purposes. Slowly, as they are dumped into the water, they accumulate and form the foundations on which he can advance farther into the bay: "A mesure que le front de la corniche s'abaisse, la cote entière gagne irrésistiblement sur la mer" (E, 827). The obsession of the Occident with action and the transformation of nature described by Malraux[16] is here put into practice.

If man can move the stones, he cannot outlast them: "Mais changer les choses de place, c'est le travail des hommes: il faut choisir de faire cela ou rien." Camus adds the following footnote: "Cet essai traite d'une certaine tentation. Il faut l'avoir connue. On peut ensuite agir, ou non, mais en connaissance de cause" (E, 827). Both Sisyphus and the Rebel are forecast, as well as the Plague. In the face of the Absurd, man has a choice--to act knowing his acts are futile, or succumb to nothingness--"cela ou rien" (E, 827). The true monuments of Oran are still its stones.

The last section of "Le Minotaure" is entitled "La Pierre d'Ariane," and in it the light-hearted irony of the earlier parts is discarded for the more elevated and lyrical

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[16]André Malraux, La Tentation de l'Occident (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1926).

tones that Camus inevitably adapts when speaking of nature's beauty. For beauty is here, though the Oranese have turned their backs on it, and beyond Oran's yellow walls the sea and the earth pursue their dialogue, indifferent to man yet having a double effect on him: "Cette permanence dans le monde a toujours eu pour l'homme des prestiges opposés. Elle le désespère et l'exalte" (E, 828).

Overlooking the city is the mountain of Santa Cruz. Old carriage-roads cling to the sides of the surrounding hills and in certain seasons they are covered with flowers: "Pâquerettes et boutons d'or en font des allées fastueuses, brodées de jaune et de blanc" (E, 828). The beaches of Oran are deserted in winter and spring except by the flowers and the sea, but nature's colors are a forecast of the youth of Oran who will soon cover the sand, the girls as bright as the flowers that preceded them:

> Déjà pourtant, le soleil, le vent léger, la blancheur des asphodèles, le bleu cru du ciel, tout laisse imaginer l'été, la jeunesse dorée qui couvre alors la plage, les longues heures sur le sable et la douceur subite des soirs. Chaque année, sur ces rivages, c'est une nouvelle moisson de filles fleurs. Apparemment, elles n'ont qu'une saison. L'année suivante, d'autres corolles chaleureuses les remplacent qui, l'été d'avant, étaient encore des petites filles aux corps durs comme des bourgeons (E, 829).

Not far from the city is a landscape without traces of man. The poet traces the evolution of a summer day there. Mornings are like the first of the world, and with the darkening

of nature's colors come the twilights, which are like the last:

> Sur ces plages d'Oranie, tous les matins d'été ont l'air d'être les premiers du monde. Tous les crépuscules semblent être les derniers, agonies solennelles annoncées au coucher du soleil par une dernière lumière qui fonce toutes les teintes. La mer est outremer, la route couleur de sang caillé, la plage jaune (E, 829).

With the setting of the sun everything disappears and soon moonlight streams over the dunes: "Ce sont alors des nuits sans mesure sous une pluie d'étoiles" (E, 829).

A very different tone from that of "Noces à Tipasa" pervades these lines. The same bright colors are present, but the atmosphere of ardor has gone, to be replaced by stillness. Nature in "Noces à Tipasa" was active, throbbing with life. Colors were piled one on top of the other, and the writer used active verbs with figures of nature: the odor of the plants "scraped" the throat, the sea "sucked" the rocks, the geraniums "poured" their blood. In addition other senses came into play--touch, and especially smell--which contributed to the feeling of richness. In "Le Minotaure" the sensual experience is primarily visual and the quantitative build-up so evident in "Noces à Tipasa" is conspicuously absent. Nature is passive, observed rather than participating. In the light of the setting sun the road appears red as blood, the color of the geraniums in "Noces," but now it is "sang caillé" (E, 829).

The writer's experience of solitude, of grandeur, of pure joys, are preserved in his memory:

> Après tant d'années, elles durent encore, quelque part dans ce coeur aux fidélités pourtant difficiles. Et je sais qu'aujourd'hui, sur la dune déserte, si je veux m'y rendre, le même ciel déversera encore sa cargaison de souffles et d'étoiles. Ce sont ici les terres de l'innocence (E, 829).

But this beauty and innocence has need of sand and stones. Like an enemy army they besiege Oran, the capital of "l'Ennui" where man--who no longer knows how to live in innocence--has barricaded himself. The author adds, "quelle tentation de passer à l'ennemi!" (E, 830). Once more arises Camus' old temptation, a passionate longing to end his separation from the world in a complete abandonment of self. The anguish of this longing is unmistakable:

> ... quelle tentation de s'identifier à ces pierres, de se confondre avec cet univers brûlant et impassible qui défie l'histoire et ses agitations! Cela est vain sans doute. Mais il y a dans chaque homme un instinct profond qui n'est ni celui de la destruction ni celui de la création. Il s'agit seulement de ne ressembler à rien (E, 830).

Only in such union can there be deliverance from despair:

> "N'être rien!" Pendant des millénaires, ce grand cri a soulevé des millions d'hommes en révolte contre le désir et la douleur. Ses échos sont venus mourir jusqu'ici, à travers les siècles et les océans, sur la mer la plus vieille du monde. Ils rebondissent encore sourdement contre les falaises compactes d'Oran (E, 831).

Should one succumb to the temptation? The writer ponders the question and recalls the story of Çakia-Mouni

in the desert. Seeking wisdom in this "destin de pierre" he remained many years motionless, eyes turned to the sky, and the swallows came to nest in his outstretched hands:

> Mais, un jour, elles s'envolèrent à l'appel de terres lointaines. Et celui qui avait tué en lui désir et volonté, gloire et douleur, se mit à pleurer. Il arrive ainsi que des fleurs poussent sur le rocher (E, 830).

His answer finally is yes, "consentons à la pierre quand il le faut," and let us accept "les rares invitations au sommeil que nous dispense la terre" (E, 831). It cannot be a permanent consent in any case, for "le néant ne s'atteint pas plus que l'absolu" (E, 831).

This then is the thread of Ariadne, the lesson of Oran. If we are to survive being torn between "les roses" and "la souffrance humaine" there is need for pause and rest. Germaine Brée perceives in the call of the Minotaur the temptation to abandon the life of the mind, "that attribute (in Camus' idiom) of Europe as opposed to Africa."[17] and this is true, but the abandonment is not meant to be permanent--only a period of respite and recuperation before resuming all the joys and burdens of human existence: "Les fleurs, les larmes ... , les départs et les luttes sont pour demain" (E, 831). This brief moment of precarious balance finds concrete expression in a panoramic view of Oran:

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[17]Brée, Camus, p. 214.

> Au-dessus de la mer, silencieuse au pied des falaises rouges, il suffit de se tenir dans un juste équilibre, à mi-distance des deux caps massifs qui, à droite et à gauche, baignent dans l'eau claire (E, 831).

"Le Minotaure," longest of all the essays treated in this study, contains passages of sober reflection as well as lyrical beauty, in which much of Camus' basic thought is reiterated from a new perspective. Another element is present, of which only glimpses appeared before--his humour. In "Le Minotaure" it runs the gamut from sharp to gentle irony, through outright laughter and shows clearly that, in Philip Thody's words, Camus had nothing of the rigorous and austere attitude which was sometimes attributed to him."[18] His humour too is made the vehicle of his own feelings in experienced situations, making it all the more effective.

Written only a few years later than Noces, the inclusion of this essay in L'Eté fifteen years later is proof of the author's continuing adherence in his maturity to the thoughts it expresses. Looking backwards from the perspective of its composition date, it indicates at the same time a considerable increase in sophistication since Noces in his attitude toward Algeria and its people, who appeared in the earlier essays almost completely devoid of faults. Only two of the essays in L'Eté were written during

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[18]Thody, Albert Camus, p. 167.

the period of World War II, "Le Minotaure" and "Les Amandiers" and while there is no trace of the war in the first, the second essay has a direct connection with it.

"Les Amandiers"

This brief essay was composed in 1940 after the fall of France and first published in La Tunisie française of January, 1941 under the title, "Pour préparer les Fruits." Addressed to the French people, it upholds the spirit against force, cautions against the debilitating effects of gloomy defeatism, and calls for courage and action. Less than a year after its publication Camus was himself working actively in the Resistance.

He begins by recalling the words of a famous conqueror, Napoleon, to the effect that of the two powers present in the world, the sword and the spirit, the spirit will always emerge victorious. In the twentieth century, however, the tank has replaced the sword and the spirit has lost ground; it further exhausts itself in impotent curses: "L'esprit a perdu cette royale assurance qu'un conquérant savait lui reconnaître; il s'épuise maintenant à maudire la force, faute de savoir la maîtriser" (E, 835). His counsel is first of all to make clear the objective--to never again permit the ascendancy of any force which does not serve the spirit. At the same time he recognizes the impossibility of any permanent victory in this direction:

it is rather "une tâche ... qui n'a pas de fin," "une tâche surhumaine," (E, 835-36, words that will be echoed in La Peste. Dr. Rieux knew that the chronicle of the plague "ne pouvait pas être celle de la victoire définitive."[19] The germ of evil neither dies nor disappears.

However, the fact that there can be no end in sight for our efforts must not deter us. The lesson of Sisyphus is explicit in "Les Amandiers": "Nous savons que nous sommes dans la contradiction ... ", but in the balance of the sentence it is the Rebel who speaks: " ... mais que nous devons refuser la contradiction et faire ce qu'il faut pour la réduire" (E, 835).

If the resigned acceptance exemplified by the Vichy government is rejected, so is despair: "La première chose est de ne pas désespérer. N'écoutons pas trop ceux qui crient à la fin du monde. Les civilisations ne meurent pas si aisément ... " (E, 836).

The situation is indeed tragic, but instead of ineffective lamentation, he would oppose to it a more energetic attitude:

> "Le tragique, disait Lawrence, devrait être comme un grand coup de pied donné au malheur." Voilà une pensée saine et immédiatement applicable. Il y a beaucoup de choses aujourd'hui qui méritent ce coup de pied (E, 836).

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[19]Camus, Théâtre, Récits, Nouvelles, pp. 1473-74.

Vigor, not tears, is required to save the life of the spirit:

> ... si l'on veut sauver l'esprit, il faut ignorer ses vertus gémissantes et exalter sa force et ses prestiges. ... Il est vain de pleurer sur l'esprit, il suffit de travailler pour lui (E, 836-37).

The writer finds inspiration for renewed strength in a recollection of Algeria: during the winter he patiently awaited the one cool, pure night when the almond trees in the valley would all at once be covered with white blossoms, and it seemed a miracle that they could withstand the wind and the rain:

> Je m'émerveillais de voir ensuite cette neige fragile résister à toutes les pluies et au vent de la mer. Chaque année, pourtant, elle persistait, juste ce qu'il fallait pour préparer le fruit (E, 836).

With typical impatience toward the abstract, Camus insists that he is not employing a symbol but drawing strength from the memory of a place where natural, physical forces are still plentiful: "Nous ne gagnerons pas notre bonheur avec des symboles. Il y faut plus de sérieux" (E, 836). In such places "où tant de forces sont encore intactes ... la contemplation et le courage peuvent équilibrer" (E, 836).

We should, I believe, take him at his word and recall the real, concrete value of the outdoor life of Algeria for this writer who suffered intermittently with tuberculosis all of his life. With the outbreak of war he had tried to enlist and was rejected for health reasons.

In March of 1940, out of favor with the government in Algeria for his articles concerning the poverty of the Moslem population of Kabylia, Camus left Oran for Paris to work for Paris-Soir. The German invasion took place while he was there and he departed with the other newspaper personnel for Clermont-Ferrand. While still in Paris he had completed L'Etranger. In Lyon after leaving the newspaper, he married Francine Faure, a young Frenchwoman who had been born in Oran, and early in 1941 they left Lyon for Algeria. Le Mythe de Sisyphe was finished in February of that year. In the meantime Camus' health had worsened and the doctor advised a stay in the mountains of central France, but he was unable to leave until the middle of 1942. At that time his wife accompanied him there but had to return to Oran for the opening of school while he remained. When he attempted to return to Algeria in November the allied landings prevented it, and he was to be separated from his wife until the Liberation. In the light of the many pressures of health, work, and political turmoil that he was undergoing during this period it is not strange that the physical hardiness of the almond trees in Algeria had concrete significance for him.

There is nonetheless a poetic analogy implied in the budding of the trees--it is part of a natural cycle of renewal which France too can anticipate. In April, 1944,

in the third "Lettre à un ami allemand" Camus employs a similar image as a warning rather than an encouragement--German force will not succeed in destroying the free spirit of the French:

> ... tous ces paysages, ces fleurs et ces labours, la plus vieille des terres, vous démontrent à chaque printemps qu'il est des choses que vous ne pouvez étouffer dans le sang. C'est sur cette image que je puis finir. ... La lutte que nous menons a la certitude de la victoire puisqu'elle a l'obstination des printemps"[20]

The final paragraph of "Les Amandiers" enumerates "les vertus conquérantes de l'esprit," of which the most important is "la force de caractère." He adds:

> Je ne parle pas de celle qui s'accompagne sur les estrades électorales de froncements de sourcils et de menaces. Mais de celle qui résiste à tous les vents de la mer par la vertu de la blancheur et de la sève. C'est elle qui, dans l'hiver du monde, prépara le fruit (E, 837).

According to Rober Quilliot's editorial notes, Camus' manuscripts indicate that some changes were made in the text before its republication in L'Eté. One such alteration was the replacement of "théâtre" in the earlier edition with "estrades électorales" cited above, relating it to the post-war situation. It is clear that for Camus the attitudes he expressed in 1940 concerning the impossibility of definitive progress are equally valid in post-war France of 1954 when L'Eté was published. They manifest the

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[20]Camus, Essais, p. 236.

same rejection of historically-oriented ideologies that Camus had expounded in L'Homme révolté in 1951.

"Les Amandiers" indicates plainly that already in 1940 Camus' thought was evolving from its focus on the Absurd in the direction of Revolt. Georges Hourdin says in this connection, "Il faut relire ce texte. Il est capital." Forecasting L' Homme révolté, he adds, "Plus tard, ... Camus mettra de l'ordre dans ses idées et rattachera ses positions nouvelles à celles qu'il avait tenues autrefois."[21] Roger Quilliot also notes the historical importance of the essay: "'Les Amandiers' nous confirment qu'en 1940 Camus n'était nullement l'homme de l'absurde mais déjà celui d'un combat prochain."[22]

"Prométhée aux enfers"

This essay was written in 1946, in the aftermath of the war, and published in 1947. Philip Thody refers to it and to "L'Exil d'Hélène" as the only two "moralizing" essays in L'Eté, where Camus uses the example of classical Greece "as a stick with which to beat the modern world."[23] The two essays share other common ground in that both prefigure L'Homme révolté. The spirit of revolt in the person of

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[21]Georges Hourdin, Camus le juste (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1960), p. 43.

[22]Quilliot, La Mer, p. 249.

[23]Thody, Albert Camus, p. 170.

Prometheus figures in Camus' Carnets I as early as February, 1938: "Une révolution s'accomplit toujours contre les Dieux--à commencer par celle de Prométhée."[24] There are several other references between that date and 1950, when in Carnets II appears the notation: "I. Le Mythe de Sisyphe (absurde).--II. Le Mythe de Prométhée (révolte).--III. Le Mythe de Némésis."[25] It is evident that at that time, a year before the completion of L'Homme révolté, Camus was already considering treatment of a third Greek myth to complete the sequence of thought elaborated in Le Mythe de Sisyphe and L'Homme révolté--the Absurd and revolt--that of the goddess of justice and "la mesure." The essay on the Absurd was concerned primarily with individual man in his condition; with revolt the struggle became a collective one--"Je me révolte, donc nous sommes" (HR, 432).

Socioeconomic justice was Camus' hope for post-war France. In Emmett Parker's words, "His primary aim in 1944 was to see that all Frenchmen shared in the benefits to be derived from the political and economic institutions of the new nation that he hoped would rise from the ashes of World War II."[26] However, he became increasingly disillusioned

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[24]Camus, Carnets I, p. 106.

[25]Camus, Carnets II, p. 328.

[26]Parker, Artist in the Arena, p. 90.

with post-war politics which he felt were making no sincere attempts in that direction. The essay on Nemesis never materialized and after the publication of L'Homme révolté in 1951 he tended to isolate himself from controversy. In 1946, at the time of the composition of "Prométhée aux enfers" Camus was still very much concerned with the direction of the new politics and he was not alone in his dissatisfaction with what he saw. More and more, however, there was disagreement within the ranks of this opposition. Camus found Marxist solutions unacceptable, and eventually found himself attacked by both the Right and the intellectual Left with which he had close ties, among them Sartre. L'Homme révolté, denouncing the history-oriented ideology of communism, was to quote Dr. Parker, "to explode like a bombshell over the rocky terrain of the Parisian political and intellectual battleground, and make the break irreparable."[27]

The 1946 essay sets forth plainly two of Camus fundamental objections to communism--objections entirely consistent with values he had expressed repeatedly in his work: first, it does not concern itself with the whole man but only with his material needs; second, it is directed toward a hypothetical future and if necessary will sacrifice the concrete living individual of today in order to achieve it. Camus' play, Les Justes, treats the same issues. The

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[27]Ibid., p. 118.

essay also rebukes modern man of Western Europe for being amenable to this betrayal of the original Prometheus.

He begins by conceding that there are indeed many in the world who are not only without liberty but without the barest necessities of life. While their material suffering continues, their liberty diminishes at the same time. The original Rebel was concerned that man should have both: "Prométhée, lui, est ce héros qui aima assez les hommes pour leur donner en même temps le feu et la liberté, les techniques et les arts" (E, 841). But today man is only interested in "les techniques"--in the new stress on efficacy, art and the things of the spirit are simply obstacles or "un signe de servitude" (E, 841). Prometheus would free man's body and spirit simultaneously, while modern (Marxist) man thinks the body must be liberated first, even at the cost of the temporary death of the spirit. But, asks Camus, is it possible for the spirit to die only "provisoirement"? He adds, were Prometheus to return today men themselves would nail him again to his rock--and in the name of that very humanism of which he was the first symbol. The voices that taunted him there would be those of Force and Violence.

In the following lines there is a more personal cry--one of nostalgia: "Est-ce que je cède au temps avare, aux arbres nus, à l'hiver du monde? (E, 841). Roger Quilliot believes that Camus was thinking of his work--he had

been forced, living through this time, to put in abeyance the world's beauty in order to point out men's defects: "Son oeuvre même, il lui a fallu tolérer qu'elle se dessèche au contact de la morale, rongée par le cancer des villes et des civilisations."[28]

However, Camus goes on, it is his very nostalgia for this beauty which makes him know he is right to continue the struggle. A personal reference to the war follows, and it is depicted as a hell from which France and Europe have not yet emerged. The strong feeling and concrete imagery give this passage unusual impact:

> J'ai pris ma place dans la file qui piétinait devant la porte ouverte de l'enfer. Peu à peu, nous y sommes entrés. Et au premier cri de l'innocence assassinée, la porte a claqué derrière nous. Nous étions dans l'enfer, nous n'en sommes plus jamais sortis (E, 842).

For six years, from 1940 to 1946, men have tried to come to terms with this hell, but now, after the war, a better society is far from realization. Communism proposes such amelioration in a future even further removed in time: "Les fantômes chaleureux des îles fortunées ne nous apparaissent plus qu'au fond d'autres longues années, encore à venir, sans feu ni soleil" (E, 842). The ideologies of history are soon attacked more directly. "L'histoire est une terre stérile où la bruyère ne pousse pas," but western

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[28]Quilliot, La Mer, p. 254.

man has chosen it and betrayed Prometheus. In satisfying his material wants, he will have to put off until later "la liberté et ses vendanges, le pain de l'âme." But the man of here-and-now cries out in anguished protest: "Ils ne seront plus jamais ou ils seront pour d'autres" (E, 842-43).

Is there hope of bringing back a world where the needs of the spirit as well as of the body can be fulfilled? Prometheus answers yes, providing that men reject history and its blind justice, in favor of a justice conceived by the spirit. The author concludes with an exhortation to act. "Les mythes n'ont pas de vie par eux-mêmes. Ils attendent que nous les incarnions" (E, 843). If it should prove impossible to save today's men at least there is hope for their children, but they must be saved in their totality--"dans leur corps et dans leur esprit" (E, 843): " ... on ne sert rien de l'homme si on ne le sert pas tout entier" (E, 843).

"Prométhée aux enfers" is a short essay, and suffers in places from being overly rhetorical as well as from the moralizing tone mentioned by Professor Thody. However, in its content it sustains Camus' concern for the concrete and the present, his love for beauty, and his idea of "la totalité harmonieuse de l'homme." In a later essay, "L'Exil de'Hélène," the writer turned again to the Greeks for his inspiration but in the interim he wanted to give himself

what Roger Quilliot calls "un divertissement qui le ramène aux plaisirs naturels de "L'Eté à Alger."[29] In the course of that trip he composed the next essay, a playful guide to the cities of Algeria.

"Petit Guide pour des villes sans passé"

In "Le Minotaure" Camus had referred to cities without a past, that is to say, cities without a heritage of history, tradition and art. The "Petit Guide," written in 1947, is for three such cities in Algeria--Algiers, Oran and Constantine. Algiers, he tells us, has something of the "douceur italienne" while Oran and Constantine possess more the "éclat cruel" of Spain in her aspect of a "beau désert" (E, 848). However, while Italy and Spain have much to offer the spirit, the Algerian cities "ne sont faites ni pour la sagesse ni pour les nuances du goût" (E, 847). For this reason he is reluctant to recommend them to his European friends.

At the same time he acknowledges Algeria's "sly power" which seduces the visitor who lingers there too long: " ... il les immobilise, les prive d'abord de questions et les endort pour finir dans la vie de tous les jours" (E, 847). It offers a life-style bound up with the brilliant sunlight, totally physical. If the European feels this

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[29]Quilliot, in Essais, p. 1817.

lack, however, the Algerians do not: " ... c'est là leur force" (E, 847). Here Camus appears at first to over-extend himself in order to make a relationship: the Algerians' stress on the physical and their indifference to the spirit, is associated with their having "plus de coeur" (E, 847). However, if one recalls this writer's enormous admiration for nature and a physical life in harmony with it, it is not difficult to understand their close association in his thought with what is good--in this case love. Serge Doubrovsky in his article, "La Morale d'Albert Camus," had remarked on the importance of the vital force as a value for Camus, and associated it with "une morale de l'ouverture au monde et à autrui, de la participation."[30] His article concludes, referring to Camus' thought:

> Ce soleil, ce savoir, ce n'est pas grand-chose pour les bâtisseurs d'empires ou de systèmes. Pourtant, si elle les néglige, l'époque court à sa perte, et c'en est fait de l'homme le jour où il desapprend d'aimer, malgré le mal et la souffrance, cette création sans créateur.[31]

The Algerians possess heart: "Ils peuvent être vos amis (et alors quels amis!)." However, "ils ne seront pas vos confidents" (E, 847). Theirs is a simple, primitive affection in which any spiritual exchange of confidences is out of place, in contrast with Paris "où se fait une si

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[30]Doubrovsky, "La Morale d'Albert Camus," p. 43.

[31]Ibid., p. 47.

grande dépense d'âme et où l'eau des confidences coule à petit bruit, interminablement, parmi les fontaines, les statues et les jardins" (E, 848).

Camus explains the difficulty for him in naming Algeria's attractions by likening it to a beloved woman: "Est-ce qu'on fait la nomenclature des charmes d'une femme très aimée? Non, on l'aime en bloc, ... " (E, 848). One is struck at once by the importance of physical beauty to this writer, and as Claudine Gothot comments, the beauty he admires "n'a rien d'apprêté. C'est, avant tout, le naturel, la perfection--on l'a dit--de l'animal qui est exactement ce qu'il est."[32] In Algeria "la jeunesse ... est belle"--and Camus calls attention to the fine wrists of the young boys and girls in contrast with those one sees in the Paris Metro (E, 848); "les femmes y sont belles"--he names particular vantage points in Algiers and Oran for watching them; in summer all this beauty is all the more apparent on the beaches, which in Oran are the most beautiful of all, "la nature et les femmes étant plus sauvages" (E, 849).

For the traveler seeking the picturesque he gives specific directions for each of the three cities and goes on to recommend things to see and do, to eat and drink.

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[32]Claudine Gothot, "Les essais méditerranéens d'Albert Camus: études de thèmes," Marche Romane, IX, No. 2 (1959), 59-74, and IX, No. 3 (1959), 113-132.

This part of the essay is written in a casual, familiar style, with occasional touches of light humour: "Oran a peu d'arbres, mais les plus belles pierres du monde" (E, 849). Bits of homely advice are inserted from time to time: In the Kasbah be sure to smoke a cigarette: "(la cigarette est nécessaire, ce moyen âge ayant l'odeur forte)" (E, 849); when in Algiers remember to speak against Oran "(accepter sans réserves l'idée que les Oranais 'ne savent pas vivre')," and when in Oran stress her commercial superiority to Algiers. Finally, the French traveler should "en toutes occasions, reconnaître humblement la supériorité de l'Algérie sur la France métropolitaine" (E, 849).

In concluding Camus changes his tone and justifies his earlier light banter by the very depth of his feeling for Algeria: "Après tout, la meilleure façon de parler de ce qu'on aime est d'en parler légèrement" (E, 850). His love for his country is inextricably bound up with its people: "Oui, ce que j'aime dans les villes algériennes ne se sépare pas des hommes qui les peuplent" (E, 850). It is still for him the center of natural beauty and human love of which he wrote in L'Envers et l'endroit and Noces.

The final paragraph contains a series of those opposed terms which are a permanent part of Camus' style. At the same time it is a lyrical expression of love and pride in his native land:

> Non, décidément, n'allez pas là-bas si vous vous sentez le coeur tiède, et si votre âme est une bête pauvre! Mais, pour ceux qui connaissent les déchirements du oui et du non, du midi et des minuits, de la révolte et de l'amour, pour ceux enfin qui aiment les bûchers devant la mer, il y a là-bas, une flamme qui les attend (E, 850).

"L'Exil d'Hélène"

Claudine Gothot, writing on Hellenism in Camus' work, notes his use of Greek myths as one aspect of it. (Camus himself had written in his Carnets II, "Le monde où je suis le plus à l'aise: le mythe grec."[33]) The myth presents a poetic value which awakens in the reader a wealth of images that enrich the thought expressed. Miss Gothot, quite correctly I believe, has also perceived in the writer's use of myths an expression of his love for the concrete and hatred of abstraction: " ... le mythe peut être une représentation imagée de la réalité."[34] At times Camus has even employed a myth to represent a reality having little to do with it, as in the case of "Le Minotaure," as the image of "l'ennui."

In "L'Exil d'Hélène," however, he makes use of yet another Greek myth to represent more profound elements of Hellenism--Greek love of beauty and respect for limits, "la mesure." The essay was written in 1948 and published that

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[33]Camus, Carnets II, p. 317.

[34]Gothot, "Les Essais méditerranéens," p. 128.

year in Cahiers du sud. It is basically a comparison between the civilizations of Greece and Western Europe, in which the latter comes off very badly. A moralizing tone is present but its quality is more biting and sarcastic than that of "Prométhée aux enfers" as the author attacks History, Hegel, the United States, Christianity, modern philosophers, and pure reason.

The essay begins with reflections on the presence and value of beauty in the Greek culture. We have already seen its importance for the writer himself as recently as the "Petit Guide." Twentieth-century Europe on the other hand "a nourri son désespoir dans la laideur ... Elle nie la beauté, ... " (E, 853). Greek civilization is based on the idea of limits, of permitting no extremes and seeking no absolutes: "La pensée grecque s'est toujours retranchée sur l'idée de limite" (E. 853). Europe today, however, "lancée à la conquête de la totalité, est fille de la démesure" (E, 853).

In the ensuing scathing indictment of modern Western society it is to the enthronement of pure reason in the wake of Hegel--"l'empire futur de la raison" (E, 853)--that most of the blame is laid. In "Prométhée aux enfers" he had spoken of western man's predilection for "les techniques." In "L'Exil d'Hélène" there are several specific allusions to such products of pure reason as nuclear power: we of

Western civilization "avons désorbité l'univers" (E, 854); "Nous allumons dans un ciel ivre les soleils que nous voulons" (E, 854). Nature remains and will oppose her calm skies to man's madness, "Jusqu'à ce que l'atome prenne feu lui aussi et que l'histoire s'achève dans le triomphe de la raison et l'agonie de l'espèce" (E, 855). Though not directly named, there is also reference to the United States--the absurdity of Europe's assumption that it can regain its balance after so many errors merits "que des peuples enfants, héritiers de nos folies, conduisent aujourd'hui notre histoire" (E, 854).

With the enshrinement of History, man has been cut off from nature, with which the Greeks had lived in harmony: life has become increasingly urbanized and in the process more abstract, further removed from what were for Camus the inevitably beneficent effects of nature. He then cites Hegel's remarks on the modern city as the only terrain in which the spirit becomes fully conscious, and he notes sarcastically how one false theory is made to support another: "Il n'y a plus de conscience que dans les rues, parce qu'il n'y a d'histoire que dans les rues, tel est le décret" (E, 855).

The separation of man from nature is a serious charge: "Délibérément, le monde a été amputé de ce qui fait sa permanence: la nature, la mer, la colline, la

méditation des soirs" (E, 854-55). Camus touches briefly on the negative role of Christianity in this regard, but adds that at least with God a spiritual nature was at its center which gave it a certain fixity (E, 855). With the death of God History and power reign, and the philosophers of reason and their descendants continually try to shift values from "la nature humaine" to "situation"; in place of "l'harmonie ancienne" we have now "l'élan désordonné du hasard ou le mouvement impitoyable de la raison" (E, 855). The Greeks had preëxistent values which governed their actions, but modern Europe gives the priority to action and its values depend on the outcome of that action.

Instead of the modest wisdom of Socrates, the West has esteemed the conquerors of history, "la puissance qui singe la grandeur" (E, 854). They are the heros that the authors of our manuals, "par une incomparable bassesse d'âme" (E, 854) teach us to admire. Camus' thought here again recalls lines from Malraux:[35]

> Malgré sa puissance précise, le soir européen est lamentable et vide, vide comme une âme de conquérant. Parmi les gestes les plus tragiques et les plus vains des hommes, aucun, jamais, ne m'a paru plus tragique et plus vain que celui

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[35]Malraux is mentioned several times in Camus' Carnets I and II; and in the 1959 interview with Jean-Claude Brisville in response to the question, "Quels écrivains vous ont formé--ou du moins vous ont aidé à prendre conscience de ce que vous aviez à dire?" he replied, "Parmi les modernes: Grenier, Malraux, Montherlant ... "

> par lequel vous interrogez toutes vos ombres illustres, race vouée à la puissance, race désespérée ... [36]

Inevitably there will be retribution. Nemesis, the goddess of limit, watches and the Furies will destroy those guilty of "la démesure." Nguyen-Van-Huy has called attention to the fact that in addition to Nemesis, these punishers, "les Errineyes," are female, and relates it to the conflict of maternal and paternal values as it appears in Camus' work and in Greek tradition. He finds Camus' yearning for unity centered in the maternal--his own mother, for example, and nature itself, "la Terre-Mère." One of the dominant paternal values, however, is reason:

> Le patriarcat, au contraire, se caractérise par le respect de la loi qu'édicte l'homme, par la prédominance de la pensée rationnelle et par l'effort de l'homme pour modifier et dépasser les phénomènes de la nature.[37]

The ferocity of the Furies is almost equalled in this essay by the author's. The contemporary spirit of the West is everywhere associated with chaos and madness, by use of such words as "démences," "convulsions," "ivre," "folie." Very concrete imagery adds to the impression of the writer's contempt: Western philosophers are likened to "la taupe"; even our tragedies are "misérables"--they

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[36]Malraux, La Tentation de l'Occident, p. 114.

[37]Nguyen-Van-Huy, La Métaphysique du bonheur, pp. 107-08.

"traînent une odeur de bureau et le sang dont elles ruissellent a couleur d'encre grasse" (E, 854). Camus is indignant: " ... il est indécent de proclamer aujourd'hui que nous sommes les fils de la Grèce" (E, 854), and the verbs that portray the actions of Western man today are typical of his violent spirit: man is "amputé" from nature (E, 854); friendship is "assassinée" (E, 857).

How does the artist fit into today's Western civilization? Like History, the artist wants to remake the world, but the fundamental difference between them is that the artist, like the Greeks, recognizes limits, while History does not. Camus opposes their aims in a typically balanced sentence: "C'est pourquoi la fin de ce dernier est la tyrannie tandis que la passion du premier est la liberté" (E, 854). In the struggle for liberty the artist at the same time fights for the beauty so important to the Greeks, so scorned by the twentieth-century West: " ... l'homme ne peut se passer de la beauté et c'est ce que notre époque fait mine de vouloir ignorer" (E, 856). In "Révolte et art" in L'Homme révolté he will reiterate this thought: "Peut-on, éternellement, refuser l'injustice sans cesser de saluer la nature de l'homme et la beauté du monde? Notre réponse est oui ... " (HR, 679).

Near the end of "L'Exil d'Hélène" Camus' own bitter disillusionment makes itself felt. He cites Saint-Exupéry's

words, "Je haïs mon époque," although he says he will not succumb to the same feelings: "Quelle tentation, pourtant, à certaines heures, de se détourner de ce monde morne et décharné! Mais cette époque est la nôtre et nous ne pouvons vivre en nous haïssant" (E, 856). Love rather than hate is the best cure for the problems that beset France and the world.

The conclusion of the essay contains a phrase, "pensée de midi," which Camus will use as title to the final section of L'Homme révolté. Embodying the Greek concept of "la mesure," accord with nature, and love of beauty, its bright light shines in contrast with "la philosophie des ténèbres":

> O pensée de midi, la guerre de Troie se livre loin des champs de bataille! Cette fois encore, les murs terribles de la cité moderne tomberont pour livrer, l'âme sereine comme le calme des mers, la beauté d'Hélène (E, 857).

Many of the ideas in "L'Exil d'Hélène" had appeared in Camus' "diplôme."[38] In 1937 he gave a speech at the dedication of the "Maison de la Culture" in Algiers[39] in which he posited the existence of a "vérité méditerranéenne" which links together all men who share this geographical bond. He opposes to it northern European philosophy and asks the question of whether a new Mediterranean culture

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[38]See supra, p. 34.

[39]Camus, Essais, p. 1321.

in accord with liberal, humanistic social goals is feasible. In Noces (N, 74) he had expressed a similar hope.[40] L'Homme révolté further develops this idea in the concept of "la pensée solaire." Opposed to historic absolutism and "la pensée autoritaire" is "une exigence invincible de la nature humaine dont la Méditerranée, où l'intelligence est soeur de la dure lumière, garde le secret" (HR, 702-03). Europe continues to be the battleground for the struggle between the two:

> L'Europe n'a jamais été que dans cette lutte entre midi et minuit. Elle ne s'est dégradée qu'en désertant cette lutte, en éclipsant le jour par la nuit. La destruction de cet équilibre donne aujourd'hui ses plus beaux fruits. Privés de nos médiations, exilés de la beauté naturelle, nous sommes à nouveau dans le monde de l'Ancien Testament ... (HR, 703).

In the midst of the strife, however, Mediterranean men will remain faithful to the light of beauty, nature, and limit:

> Jetés dans l'ignoble Europe où meurt, privée de beauté et d'amitié, la plus orgueilleuse des races, nous autres méditerranéens vivons toujours de la même lumière. Au coeur de la nuit européenne, la pensée solaire, la civilisation au double visage, attend son aurore (HR, 703).

"L'Exil d'Hélène," written three years before publication of L'Homme révolté, treats some of the same issues appearing in the latter, but is more emotional in tone, and in spite of its final lines, conveys a message of disillusionment and anger rather than hope.

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[40]See supra, p. 180.

"L'Enigme"

In 1950 when "L'Enigme" was composed Camus had achieved recognition as a major writer. In the process he had become identified with his heroes, Meursault and Sisyphus, and had acquired a reputation for pessimism and nihilism. That this was already a source of annoyance to him in 1944 is apparent from a note in his Carnets II in that year:

> J'ai mis dix ans à conquérir ce qui me paraît sans prix: un coeur sans amertume. Et comme il arrive souvent, l'amertume une fois dépassée, je l'ai enfermée dans un ou deux livres. Ainsi je serai toujours jugé sur cette amertume qui ne m'est plus rien. Mais cela est juste. C'est le prix qu'il faut payer.[41]

"L'Enigme" concerns the problem of the successful writer around whom a false legend develops, due to the joint efforts of journalists, who perceive him as a rich source of material, and a public which prefers to accept second-hand information rather than to read for themselves and form their own opinions. Camus' treatment of the problem, although ironically humourous, does not conceal his irritation at being categorized "prophet of the Absurd."

The essay opens with a burst of sunlight, and the author speaks of "une énigme heureuse" which helps him to understand when faced with such questions as:

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[41]Camus, Carnets II, p. 124.

> Où est l'absurdité du monde? Est-ce ce resplendissement ou le souvenir de son absence? Avec tant de soleil dans la mémoire, comment ai-je pu parier sur le non-sens? (E, 861).

His reply is that the sunlight itself aids him to this conclusion and that "sa lumière, à force d'épaisseur, coagule l'univers et ses formes dans un éblouissement obscur" (E, 861). It is noteworthy that here, in its role as clarifier and ally of the Absurd, the sun has attributes of thickness.[42] In the light of the Algerian sunlight, which is like truth in its dual quality--"cette clarté blanche et noire" (E, 861)--the writer wishes to clarify his position on the Absurd, which can be discussed, he knows all too well, only in nuances.

In Claudine Gothot's article in Marche Romane there is a serious misunderstanding of the question above--"Avec tant de soleil dans la mémoire, comment ai-je pu parier sur le non-sens?" Miss Gothot states that for Camus the beauty of the Mediterranean world ends by triumphing completely over the Absurd:

> Il ne s'agit plus d'affirmer que l'idée de la mort augmente la saveur de la vie: Camus supprime purement et simplement la contradiction, lui qui voulait au'on y prêtât une attention obstinée.[43]

The misunderstanding results from the common error of extracting a statement from context. Camus' question is

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[42]See supra, pp. 56-57.

[43]Gothot, "Les Essais méditerranéens," p. 123.

not an exclamation on his part, but a question posed by others about him, in astonishment. He admits that sometimes he too is surprised by it. However, he does not withdraw this bet "sur le non-sens" for all his surprise. The sun too is part of the Absurd, and the beauty of the world renders all the more tragic its absurdity.

Camus goes on to comment that a man cannot say what he is, only from time to time what he is not; yet while he himself is still searching for the answer, others already have him defined--"Mille voix lui annoncent déjà ce qu'il a trouvé ... " (E, 861). And yet:

> Je ne sais pas ce que je cherche, je le nomme avec prudence, je me dédis, je me répète, j'avance et je recule. On m'enjoint pourtant de donner les noms, ou le nom, une fois pour toutes. Je me cabre alors; ce qui est nommé, n'est-il pas déjà perdu? (E, 861).

These lines, according to Hazel Barnes, reflect a point of view which Camus never lost sight of: " . . . that man overflows all logical categories and that those who would try to put him into a system (political or philosophical) can do so only by partially depriving him of what is most truly his."[44]

After his brief introduction Camus comes to the point. A writer may develop a formula or an idea which is in fact just one projection, at a given moment, of his

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[44]Barnes, "Balance and Tension," p. 436.

total sensibility, this latter being complex and constantly evolving: ("Ce qui est nommé, n'est-il pas déjà perdu?") The formula is isolated, fixed, henceforth forever attached to its living, changing creator, who may now have "le désir de parler d'autre chose" (E, 862). He cites as an example Nerval, who in effect, he says, hung himself twice: " ... pour lui d'abord qui était dans le malheur, et puis pour sa légende, qui aide quelques-uns à vivre" (E, 862). The heavy sarcasm of the last clause betrays the degree of Camus' irritation against the critics and over-zealous journalists who were the source of his own problem.

He announces then his intention to describe and, hopefully, dispel his personal legend. Writers for the most part write in order to have their works read, but more and more in France they write in order to achieve "cette consécration dernière qui consiste à ne pas être lu" (E, 862):

> A partir du moment, en effet, où il peut fournir la matière d'un article pittoresque dans notre presse à grand tirage, il a toutes les chances d'être connu par un assez grand nombre de personnes qui ne le liront jamais parce qu'elles se suffiront de connaître son nom et de lire ce qu'on écrira sur lui (E, 862).

His first conclusion, therefore, is: "Pour se faire un nom dans les lettres, il n'est donc plus indispensable d'écrire des livres. Il suffit de passer pour en avoir fait un dont la presse du soir aura parlé ... " (E, 862).

Granted, the writer who achieves such journalistic success will soon be forgotten as new stars appear on the

horizon. He remarks, however, in a comic analogy, that this apparently unfortunate state of affairs can in fact be beneficial, in the same way that certain minor physical disorders may forestall a more serious illness: "Il y a ainsi de bienheureuses constipations et des arthritismes providentiels" (E, 862). Thus, in the flood of publicity and premature judgments that characterizes contemporary literary criticism the writer cannot help but learn modesty--a virtue he sorely needs in a society which does in fact attribute too much importance to his profession. Here and there in this humourous recital one detects a gibe aimed at a specific target: "Voir son nom dans deux ou trois journaux que nous connaissons est une si dure épreuve qu'elle comporte forcément quelques bénéfices pour l"âme" (E, 865).

In referring to the passing fame of the lionized author, Camus employs an image which appears elsewhere in his writings--the "feu d'étoupes," burned before Alexander Borgia when he became pope to symbolize, by its rapid combustion and brightness the evanescence of glory. A note on it appears in Carnets I of November, 1939,[45] and in May, 1941 it provides the introduction for an article that appeared in La Tunisie française, under the title, "Comme

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[45]Camus, Carnets I, p. 191.

un Feu d'étoupes."[46] The latter was written in the same period as "Les Amandiers" and contains much of the same exhortation to confront the nation's problems with vigor and courage. The image of the "feu d'étoupes" is used in it not so much to signify the transience of glory, but the rapid passage of time and the importance of not wasting it.

In "L'Enigme," with humour and mock-resignation, Camus comments that the writer must accept the projection of a false image of himself and his work, in the wake of his "fame." A very funny passage follows in which he cites the example of a well-known author, possibly Jean-Paul Sartre, who in spite of his self-disciplined and rather austere life, is imagined by the public as an unwashed Bohemian type who spends his nights in drunken orgies:

> J'ai connu ainsi un écrivain à la mode qui passait pour présider chaque nuit de fumeuses bacchanales où les nymphes s'habillaient de leurs cheveux et où les faunes avaient l'ongle funèbre. On aurait pu se demander sans doute où il trouvait le temps de rédiger une oeuvre qui occupait plusieurs rayons de bibliothèque. Cet écrivain, en réalité, comme beaucoup de ses confrères, dort la nuit pour travailler chaque jour de longues heures à sa table, et boit de l'eau minérale pour épargner son foie (E, 863).

In the lines that follow he uses irony to poke fun at the average Frenchman, but here the mockery is gentle. In spite of the aforementioned writer's ordered life:

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[46]Camus, Essais, p. 1465.

> Il n'empêche que le Français moyen, dont on connaît la sobriété saharienne et l'ombrageuse propreté, s'indigne à l'idée qu'un de nos écrivains enseigne qu'il faut s'enivrer et ne point se laver (E, 863).

As another example, he refers to his easily acquired reputation for austerity, because he declined to have dinner with a newspaper manager he didn't like. It is easier for the public to infer complex motives than to accept the simple truth:

> Personne n'ira d'ailleurs jusqu'à penser que si vous refusez le dîner de ce directeur, cela peut être parce qu'en effet vous ne l'estimez pas, mais aussi parce que vous craignez plus que tout au monde de vous ennuyer ... " (E, 865).

Resignation appears the only attitude possible in the face of all this misunderstanding. However, from time to time one can try to rectify the error. At this point he arrives at the crux of his complaint and denies that the Absurd is his only subject. In his rejection of the notion that an author is necessarily writing about himself there is both irony and indignation:

> ... il est toujours possible d'écrire, ou d'avoir écrit, un essai sur la notion d'absurde. Mais enfin, on peut aussi écrire sur l'inceste sans pour autant s'être précipité sur sa malheureuse soeur et je n'ai lu nulle part que Sophocle eût jamais supprimé son père et déshonoré sa mère (E, 864).

Gradually the author has dropped his humourous tone and become more direct. He discloses one of his private aspirations regarding his writing: " ... j'aurais aimé

être ... un écrivain objectif" (E, 864). However, the current rage to perceive the author in everything he writes does not allow him this freedom: he is instead named "prophet of the Absurd," although he has in fact simply analyzed an idea which preoccupies his whole generation.

It is understandable, in view of the success of L'Etranger and Le Mythe de Sisyphe, that Camus should be closely associated with the idea of the Absurd. However, the introduction to Le Mythe de Sisyphe had already stated clearly that "l'absurde, pris jusqu'ici comme conclusion, est considéré dans cet essai comme un point de départ" and:

> On trouvera seulement ici la description à l'état pur, d'un mal de l'esprit. Aucune métaphysique, aucune croyance n'y sont mêlées pour le moment. Ce sont les limites et le seul parti pris de ce livre (MS, 97).

In "L'Enigme" he repeats this statement: " ... l'absurde ne peut être considéré que comme une position de départ, même si son souvenir et son émotion accompagnent les démarches ultérieures" (E, 864).

The idea of the Absurd never disappears from Camus' universe, but the manner of confronting it evolves and expands as the author's priorities change. Thus the early works stop with the definition and exposition of the Absurd, counseling lucidity in the face of it, and their main concern is the individual's confrontation with his destiny. With La Peste and L'Homme révolté men join hands in the

struggle against the Absurd, confrontation becomes revolt, still with lucidity and in the full knowledge that any victory can be only "provisoire." Camus' later works maintain the presence of the Absurd, and to a certain extent they indicate some disillusionment concerning man's capacity to care about his fellow-men. However, even at this point in his career he does not merit the name "pessimist." There is always a "royaume" to balance "l'exil." Concerning the Absurd, what happened in the course of his career is that he did indeed progress from this "point de départ," but only up to a central position between two extremes, which he tried to maintain throughout the balance of his life. There were no "happy endings" in his world, only a precarious balance and a perpetual tension. This central position is reiterated near the end of "L'Enigme" as the writer objects strenuously to the charge of nihilism. That this charge was unfair was already clear to those who had read his works. In Caligula particularly he had demonstrated dramatically the disastrous results of such a course.

In "L'Enigme" he also rejects the label of exponent of despair. If one really despairs one is silent: "Une littérature désespérée est une contradiction dans les termes" (E, 865). On the other hand, he adds, "un certain optimisme n'est pas mon fait," (E, 865)--he knows very well that the struggle against injustice and cruelty is endless.

He chooses struggle rather than despair, and "au plus noir de notre nihilisme, j'ai cherché seulement des raisons de dépasser ce nihilisme" (E, 865). He attributes his attitude not to virtue, but to a "fidélite instinctive à une lumière où je suis né" (E, 865). The lesson of his youth, of poverty and light, has continued to be his guide and his safeguard. Aeschylus' work, often full of despair, had at its center not a "maigre non-sens" but rather "l'énigme, c'est-à-dire un sens qu'on déchiffre mal parce qu'il éblouit" (E, 865). Likewise those unworthy sons of Greece who still survive in the twentieth century have at the center of their work, gloomy as it may seem, "un soleil inépuisable" (E, 865).

The essay ends with another reference to the "feu d'étoupes"--let it burn:

> ... qu'importe ce que nous pouvons paraître et ce que nous usurpons? Ce que nous sommes, ce que nous avons à être suffit à remplir nos vies et occuper notre effort (E, 866).

Recalling Plato's Republic, he remarks that "Paris est une admirable caverne, et ses hommes, voyant leurs propres ombres s'agiter sur la paroi du fond, les prennent pour la seule réalité" (E, 866). But Camus, Algerian, knows that there is a light at his back and that he must face it and seek its meaning.

The images of nature which contribute so much to Camus' lyricism are absent from "L'Enigme," concerned as

it is with a problem essentially urban and intellectual. The repeated references to the sun and its light, however, attest to the fact that Camus' thought consistently maintained a rapport with this aspect of his youth.

An English version of the essay, which except for the beginning closely follows the French text, appeared in the Atlantic Monthly of June, 1953 under the title, "What a Writer Seeks."

The final lines of "L'Enigme" ring with yearning and forecast a later creation of Camus: "Qui, tout ce bruit ... quand la paix serait d'aimer et de créer en silence! Mais il faut savoir patienter. Encore un moment, le soleil scelle les bouches" (E, 866). Jonas, the "artiste au travail" in L'Exil et le royaume, was also plagued by a thousand and one critics and friends who did not understand either his work or his need for peace in which to create it. In the Discours de Suède of 1957 Camus again treats with ironic humour the subject of misconceptions concerning writers discussed earlier in "L'Enigme":

> Des millions d'hommes auront ... le sentiment de connaître tel ou tel grand artiste de notre temps parce qu'ils ont appris par les journaux qu'il élève des canaris ou qu'il ne se marie jamais que pour six mois. La plus grande célébrité, aujourd'hui, consiste à être admiré ou détesté sans avoir été lu. Tout artiste qui se mêle de vouloir être célèbre dans notre société doit savoir que ce n'est pas lui qui le sera, mais quelqu'un d'autre sous son nom, qui finira par lui échapper et, peut-être, un jour, par tuer en lui le véritable artiste.[47]

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[47]Camus, Essais, p. 1083.

"Retour à Tipasa"

"Depuis cinq jours que la pluie coulait sans trêve sur Alger, elle avait fini par mouiller la mer elle-même" (E, 869). The opening lines of "Retour à Tipasa," written in 1953, contrast sharply with those of "Noces à Tipasa"; "Au printemps, Tipasa est habitée par les dieux et les dieux parlent dans le soleil et l'odeur des absinthes, la mer cuirassée d'argent, ... " (N, 55). They reflect the melancholy and spiritual fatigue of the man of forty who has returned to a scene of his youth in the hope of finding spiritual renewal.

The atmosphere of gloom is unrelieved. He has fled "la nuit d'Europe, l'hiver des visages" but though Algiers has remained in his thoughts "la ville des étés," he encounters no smiles, only the rounded and glistening backs of people hurrying in the rain. In the cafés, seeing vaguely familiar faces after this long absence, he is aware that these were the companions of his youth, and they are no longer young. Stubbornly, though, he persists in his intention of going to Tipasa, knowing very well the folly of returning to the scenes of one's youth--he had returned once before after the war to find the ruins of Tipasa surrounded by barbed wire. On that day too it was raining. He tries to define the object of his search--"J'espérais, je crois, y retrouver une liberté que je ne pouvais oublier" (E, 869)--and he recalls the time of his harmony with nature

there, mornings spent wandering among the flowers and the stones, the hot sun at mid-day, and later sleeping under the stars: "Je vivais, alors" (E, 870).

His search that time had been vain: " ... je ne pouvais, en effet, remonter le cours du temps, redonner au monde le visage que j'avais aimé et qui avait disparu en un jour, longtemps auparavant" (E, 870). For the war had come and suddenly the world was old:

> Il avait fallu se mettre en règle avec la nuit: la beauté du jour n'était qu'un souvenir. Et dans cette Tipasa boueuse, le souvenir lui-même s'estompait. Il s'agissait bien de beauté, de plénitude ou de jeunesse! Sous la lumière des incendies, le monde avait soudain montré ses rides et ses plaies, anciennes et nouvelles. Il avait vieilli d'un seul coup, et nous avec lui (E, 870).

The immense distance separating past beauty from the barbed wire was also within the spirit of the writer. As he speaks of the end of innocence, the tone is one of bitter helplessness, and one is reminded of the sun-bronzed young "barbares" on the beaches of Algiers, for whom the word "sin" had no meaning:

> D'abord innocents sans le savoir, nous étions maintenant coupables sans le vouloir: le mystère grandissait avec notre science. C'est pourquoi nous nous occupions, o dérision, de morale. Infirme, je rêvais de vertu! Au temps de l'innocence, j'ignorais que la morale existât. Je le savais maintenant, et je n'étais pas capable de vivre à sa hauteur (E, 871).

Disappointed, he had gone back to Paris to remain there five years, before returning once more to Tipasa. Vaguely

during the five-year absence feelings of disappointment and frustration had continued to plague him. He attempts to explain these feelings, and in the process a great deal of what might be called his philosophy of life emerges. Typically, it is a call for equilibrium and the rejection of absolutes which exclude:

> Le renoncement à la beauté et au bonheur sensuel ... , le service exclusif du malheur, demande une grandeur qui me manque. Mais, après tout, rien n'est vrai qui force à exclure. La beauté isolée finit par grimacer, la justice solitaire finit par opprimer. Qui veut servir l'une à l'exclusion de l'autre ne sert personne, ni lui-même, et, finalement, sert deux fois l'injustice (E, 871).

He had remained too long in Paris--his life was out of balance. "C'est le temps de l'exil, de la vie sèche, des âmes mortes. Pour revivre, il faut une grâce, l'oubli de soi ou une patrie" (E, 871). And so once more he returns to Algiers and in spite of "cette immense mélancolie qui sentait la pluie et la mer," he allows himself to hope that this time he will find what he is seeking. An image from nature encourages this hope:

> Ne savais-je pas d'ailleurs que les pluies d'Alger, avec cet air qu'elles ont de ne jamais devoir finir, s'arrêtent pourtant en un instant, comme ces rivières de mon pays qui se gonflent en deux heures, dévastent des hectares de terre et tarissent d'un seul coup? (E, 872).

Soon the rain stops and he awakens to find the sky washed clean and filled with vibrant light: "La terre, au matin du monde, a dû surgir dans une lumière semblable" (E, 872).

The drive to Tipasa is filled with memories of the past, but the writer hurries, anxious to see Chenoua, the mountain to the west which descends to the sea. At a distance it appears to blend with the sky, but as he approaches it assumes the color of the sea and becomes, in a startling metaphor, a "grande vague immobile dont le prodigieux élan aurait été brutalement figé au-dessus de la mer calmée d'un seul coup" (E, 872). Closer yet: " ... voici sa masse sourcilleuse, brune et verte, voici le vieux dieu moussu que rien n'ébranlera, refuge et port pour ses fils ... " (E, 872).

At Tipasa the narrator crosses the barbed wire and enters the ruins. There, in the beauty of the morning the climax of the essay is reached. His search ended, there is a momentary pause:

> Il semblait que la matinée se fut fixée, le soleil arrêté pour un instant incalculable. Dans cette lumière et ce silence, des années de fureur et de nuit fondaient lentement. J'écoutais en moi un bruit presque oublié, comme si mon coeur, arrêté depuis longtemps, se remettait doucement à battre (E, 873).

The flood of happiness that fills him is reflected in the augmented tempo of the day:

> ... peu après le soleil monta visiblement d'un degré dans le ciel. Un merle préluda brièvement et aussitôt, de toutes parts, des chants d'oiseaux explosèrent avec une force, une jubilation, une joyeuse discordance, un ravissement infini. La journée se remit en marche (E, 873).

The closing theme of the essay is love, and as always for Camus it is associated with nature. Looking out at the sea from the sandy, flower-covered slopes of Tipasa the writer is aware of two thirsts which must be satisfied in man: to love and to admire: "Car il y a seulement de la malchance à n'être pas aimé: il y a du malheur à ne point aimer. Nous tous, aujourd'hui, mourons de ce malheur" (E, 873). Love is exhausted in the battle for justice, even though it was love which first motivated the struggle. In the blood and clamor of today love is impossible and justice alone does not suffice. How to renew the capacity to love? At Tipasa he rediscovers the answer:

> ... il fallait garder intactes en soi une fraîcheur, une source de joie, aimer le jour qui échappe à l'injustice, et retourner au combat avec cette lumière conquise (E, 874).

The writer realizes then that in the darkest days of the war the memory of this beauty had never left him--it had kept him from despairing: "Au milieu de l'hiver, j'apprenais enfin qu'il y avait en moi un été invincible" (E, 874). From this line derives the title of the last essay collection.

The essay's conclusion sums up once more Camus' rule for living. The writer returns to Europe and the struggles of men, but the memory of Tipasa will remain with him and help him maintain the equilibrium between love of men and need for the beauty of nature without men. It means

refusing neither and recognizing the tension involved in this acceptance. The contradiction is maintained over and over:

> Oui, il y a la beauté et il y a les humiliés. Quelles que soient les difficultés de l'entreprise, je voudrais n'être jamais infidèle ni à l'une ni aux autres (E, 875).
>
> A l'heure difficile où nous sommes, que puis-je désirer d'autre que de ne rien exclure et d'apprendre à tresser de fil blanc et de fil noir une même corde tendue à se rompre (E, 874).
>
> Il y a pour les hommes d'aujourd'hui un chemin intérieur que je connais bien pour l'avoir parcouru dans les deux sens et qui va des collines de l'esprit aux capitales du crime (E, 874).

Perhaps in the last quotation the author was thinking of his own temptation to act with the executioners in the collaborationists' trials in 1944 and 1945. But now his inner voice tells him he can never separate himself from the family of men though he knows how strong is the desire at times to leave it for the peace and beauty of nature:

> Parfois, à l'heure de la première étoile dans le ciel encore clair, sous une pluie de lumière fine, j'ai cru savoir. Je savais en vérité. Je sais toujours, peut-être. Mais personne ne veut de ce secret, je n'en veux pas moi-même sans doute, et je ne peux me séparer des miens. Je vis dans ma famille qui croit régner sur des villes riches et hideuses, bâties de pierres et de brumes ... Sa puissance qui me porte m'ennuie pourtant et il arrive que ses cris me lassent. Mais son malheur est le mien, nous sommes du même sang (E, 875).

Roger Quilliot has written of "Retour à Tipasa," "On ne recrée pas Tipasa; on le regrette."[48] The 1953 essay, in spite of the equilibrium reached at its conclusion, is filled with nostalgia, melancholy, and a certain disillusionment, all the more apparent when compared with "Noces à Tipasa." In the latter the sea smiles, while in "Retour" it is "grise et molle"; the sun's warmth and light permeates "Noces" while in "Retour" a constant rain contributes to the general air of sadness. In "Noces" nature has overcome the ancient Roman city and flowers push between its stones, whereas in "Retour" it is the cities that dominate, "riches et hideuses"; the narrator in "Noces" is proud of his "coeur bondissant de jeunesse," while in "Retour," "[le monde] avait vieilli d'un seul coup, and nous avec lui"; the innocence of "Noces" is replaced by guilt in "Retour"; finally, it is in "Noces" that the writer learns the true definition of glory--"le droit d'aimer sans mesure," while in "Retour" "l'amour est impossible."

"Retour à Tipasa" is the mirror of Camus' mood in 1953. He had reached forty and was still feeling the effects of the controversy aroused by L'Homme révolté; the situation of Algeria was a source of grave concern, and always there was the recurring problem of his health.

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[48]Quilliot, La Mar, p. 254.

Between 1951 and 1956 he produced no major work except L'Eté.

"La Mer au plus près: journal de bord"

A two-months voyage to South America in the summer of 1949 left the writer thoroughly exhausted and he suffered a severe relapse into his old illness which was to last two years. Notes in his Carnets II from this period, between the end of 1949 and 1951, make reference to "l'essai sur la mer," and contain some of the lines incorporated later in "La Mer au plus près." There is also a note headed "Fin octobre 49. Rechute," concerning his illness:

> Après une si longue certitude de guérison, ce retour devrait m'accabler. Il m'accable en effet. Mais succédant à une suite ininterrompue d'accablements, il me porte à rire. A la fin, me voilà libére. La folie aussi est libération.[49]

"La Mer au plus près" was first published in January, 1954 in La Nouvelle Revue française before appearing in L'Eté. Though it derives mainly from the South American voyage there are also references to his trip to the United States in 1946. As the title indicates, the essay takes the form of a ship's diary or logbook, and it is divided into two parts. In the first, the writer's voice is that of an exile who awaits the end of separation and a return to a happier time. In the second he is the traveler-by-sea,

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[49]Camus, Carnets II, p. 283.

recounting his voyage in a series of brief prose-poems, relatively independent but each reflecting the interplay between the sea and the writer's emotions.

With the exception of Noces, "La Mer au plus près" is the most poetic of Camus' works. Nature and its personification, which we have come to expect of this writer in his most lyrical moments, are again present, but the poetic atmosphere has altered to one in which real and unreal blend through the medium of bizarre images. As Germaine Brée notes, "the natural décor which incarnates Camus' own spiritual décor greatly expands, ... "[50]

The writer has lost the sea of his youth and now he waits. Outwardly he performs all the actions that are expected of him, but his innermost being exists only at the level of his waiting:

> Je patiente, je suis poli de toutes mes forces. On me voir passer dans de belles rues savantes, j'admire les paysages, j'applaudis comme tout le monde, je donne la main, ce n'est pas moi qui parle. On me loue, je rêve un peu, on m'offense, je m'étonne à peine. Puis j'oublie et souris à qui m'outrage, ou je salue trop courtoisement celui que j'aime. Que faire si je n'ai de mémoire que pour une seule image? (E, 879).

The next lines recall Clamence in La Chute. They are ironic but without Clamence's hypocrisy--are simply another example of the surface gestures carried on while waiting: "C'est

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[50]Brée, Camus, p. 233.

aux enterrements que je me surpasse. J'excelle, vraiment" (E, 879). And the waiting goes on--"J'attends longtemps" (E, 879). Sometimes he dreams of the sea, and the awakening to reality leaves him sick and distressed. At other times the memory of it is a support when he would give way to panic. He recalls his feeling of suffocation in New York:

> A New York, certains jours, perdu au fond de ces puits de pierre et d'acier où errent des millions d'hommes, je courais de l'un à l'autre, sans en voir la fin, épuisé, jusqu'à ce que je ne fusse plus soutenu que par la masse humaine qui cherchait son issue. J'étouffais alors, ma panique allait crier (E, 879).

But he remembers in time that Manhattan is an island and the sea is not far; even though here where it touches the Battery it is black and rotten, it is still the water of his baptism. It is enough to sustain him and he does not despair:

> Ainsi, moi qui ne possède rien, qui ai donné ma fortune, qui campe auprès de toutes mes maisons, je suis pourtant comblé quand je le veux, j'appareille à toute heure, le désespoir m'ignore. Point de patrie pour le désespéré et moi, je sais que la mer me précède et me suit, j'ai une folie toute prête. Ceux qui s'aiment et qui sont séparés peuvent vivre dans la douleur, mais ce n'est pas le désespoir: ils savent que l'amour existe. Voilà pourquoi je souffre, les yeux secs, de l'exil. J'attends encore. Un jour vient, enfin ... (E, 880).

The tempo of the essay accelerates as the ship departs, and the author's voice becomes that of the traveler. His notes on each day passed at sea will reflect movement--the cycle of the days and the motion of the sea--as well as

the rich play of his imagination and feelings. Land is still in sight as the first in a series of remarkable images transmits to us the movement of the foam churned up by the passage of the ship. "Salive des dieux," it drifts back in the wake of the ship like the hide of a weary blue and white cow:

> une écume amère et onctueuse, salive des dieux coule le long du bois jusque dans l'eau où elle s'éparpille en dessins mourants et renaissants, pelage de quelque vache bleue et blanche, bête fourbue, qui dérive encore longtemps derrière notre sillage (E, 880).

Gulls follow the ship until a splash of refuse from the galley "jette une alarme gourmande parmi les oiseaux, saccage leur beau vol et enflamme un brasier d'ailes blanches" (E, 880).

The day advances--it is noon--and through strong verbal imagery we sense the movement of the sea:

> ... la mer se soulève à peine, exténuée. Quand elle retombe sur elle-même, elle fait siffler le silence. Une heure de cuisson et l'eau pâle, grande plaque de tôle portée au blanc, grésille. Elle grésille, elle fume, brûle enfin. Dans un moment, elle va se retourner pour offrir au soleil sa face humide, maintenant dans les vagues et les ténèbres (E, 880-81).

Swiftly then landmarks vanish in the distance until one morning the gulls too have disappeared and the traveller is alone with the sea. As the waves approach and then withdraw he compares the sea with rivers: the latter pass by, while the sea passes and yet remains. It is a time of

"noces" with the sea: "C'est ainsi qu'il faudrait aimer, fidèle et fugitif. J'épouse la mer" (E, 881).

The next next passage begins, in the abbreviated style of a ship's diary, with two words: "Pleines eaux" (E, 881). The sun descends as porpoises play about the ship and then flee toward the horizon. With their departure the vast emptiness of the open sea seems part of an earlier age: " ... c'est le silence et l'angoisse des eaux primitives" (E, 881). An iceberg drifts by. More and more the traveler, and the reader, feel they are entering a strange world, outside of time and all human experience. The approach of darkness is described in a strange reversal of the procedure on land:

> La nuit ne tombe pas sur la mer. Du fond des eaux, qu'un soleil déjà noyé noircit peu à peu de ses cendres épaisses, elle monte au contraire vers le ciel encore pâle (E, 882).

Soon the sky is filled with stars, and the moon lights up a corridor of the sea, "riche fleuve de lait" (E, 882).

The passing of another ship brings a brief trace of communication with other human beings--but it is a vain and pathetic effort:

> ... les signaux des passagers perdus sur la mer et alertés par la présence d'autres hommes, la distance qui grandit peu à peu entre les deux navires, la séparation enfin sur les eaux malveillantes, tout cela, et le coeur se serre (E, 883).

But the separation itself, the inability to communicate, arouses feelings of pity and love in the traveler, reflecting Camus' own feelings toward all men, who share the same common destiny but find it difficult to reach each other. Camus, like the traveler, sees them objectively, as from a distance, but rather than detracting from his love the separation adds to it the quality of compassion--the same reaction the writer had had as a child before his mother in "Entre oui et non":

> Ces déments obstinés, accrochés à des planches, jetés sur la crinière des oceans immenses à la poursuite d'îles en dérive, qui, chérissant la solitude et la mer, s'empêchera jamais de les aimer? (E, 883).

The same theme of separation appears in the next brief prose-poem. As savage winds lash the ship, "Chaque cri que nous poussons se perd, s'envole dans des espaces sans limites" (E, 883). But there is hope that one day the cry will continue to echo until far off, "un homme, quelque part, perdu dans sa coquille de neige, l'entende et, content, veuille sourire" (E, 883).

One day the traveler awakens to a universe turned upside-down. His vision takes on a quality of hallucination--of a mad world where men, in spite of love, cannot understand each other:

> Je vis le soleil au fond de la mer, les vagues régnaient dans le ciel houleux. Soudain, la mer brûlait, le soleil coulait à longs traits

> glacés dans ma gorge. Autour de moi, les marins riaient et pleuraient. Ils s'aimaient les uns les autres mais ne pouvaient se pardonner (E, 883).

But the vision has its lesson:

> Ce jour-là, je reconnus le monde pour ce qu'il était, je décidai d'accepter que son bien fût en même temps malfaisant et salutaires ses forfaits. Ce jour-là, je compris qu'il y avait deux vérités dont l'une ne devait jamais être dite (E, 883).

The movement of time, sea and voyage continues. In a curious image, the moon slips from the sky into the water, which swallows it. For a while all is still, in a peaceful and benevolent calm: " ... le vent tombe tout à fait"; the masts are "immobiles. ... voilure en panne"; "les machines se taisent"; the sea jostles the ship amicablement" (E, 883-84). With an emotion vaguely reminiscent of Rousseau's Fifth Promenade the traveler abandons himself to a state in which thought is suspended: "Nous sommes comblés, une muette folie, invinciblement nous endort. Un jour vient ainsi qui accomplit tout; il faut se laisser couler alors, ... " (E, 884). For a moment we perceive the traveler's, and Camus', desire for the supreme peace of death: "O lit amer, couche princière, la couronne est au fond des eaux!" (E, 884).

Other fantastic images appear. In the morning a herd of elk, "venus de lointains continents" swims by toward the north. Multicolored birds rest on their antlers, until finally "Cette forêt bruissante disparaît peu à peu à

l'horizon" (E, 884). Later the sea is covered with strange yellow flowers.

The ship now moves in a brisk breeze on a sea that is "claire et musclée" (E, 884). The experience leads the author to a personal digression of a concrete nature: he compares his sea voyage to an earlier trip by plane, in an explicit description of the claustrophobia from which he was known to suffer in the latter method of travel, undoubtedly also related to his illness:

> Je mourais alors dans ma cellule métallique, je rêvais de carnages, d'orgies. Sans espace, point d'innocence ni de liberté! La prison pour qui ne peut respirer est mort ou folie; qu'y faire sinon tuer et posséder? Aujourd'hui, au contraire, je suis gorgé de souffles, toutes nos ailes claquent dans l'air bleu, je vais crier de vitesse, nous jetons à l'eau nos sextants et nos boussoles (E, 885).

Here once more appears the close association of the physical with both psychological and moral states for Camus: innocence and liberty are opposed to prison, death, and madness, and the whole is bound up with the restricted air and space of a plane's cabin.

The voyage draws to a close as the ship moves along the coast of South America. The essay's tone becomes one of repose that is also a contemplation of death. It is once more Camus' "goût de néant," and the role of the sea is a benevolent one, a means to this fulfillment:

> Que dit la vague? Si je devais mourir, entouré de montagnes froides, ignoré du monde, renié par les miens, à bout de forces enfin, la mer, au dernier moment, emplirait ma cellule, viendrait me soutenir au-dessus de moi-même et m'aider à mourir sans haine (E, 886).

Alone on the shore at midnight the traveler becomes briefly the exile: "Attendre encore, et je partirai" (E, 886). For life is not repose but an "intolérable anxiété, doublée d'un attrait irrésistible:

> Délicieuse angoisse d'être, proximité exquise d'un danger dont nous ne connaissons pas le nom, vivre, alors, est-ce courir à sa perte? A nouveau, sans répit, courons à notre perte (E, 886).

The final lines of the essay are a poignant expression of emotion from a man who walked most of his life with death as a companion, but who, because of it, found life a royal happiness: "J'ai toujours eu l'impression de vivre en haute mer, menacé au coeur d'un bonheur royal" (E, 886).

"La Mer au plus près" expresses both the sadness of the exile, and the general theme of separation that had taken the form, in "Retour à Tipasa," of barbed wire and time. Roger Quilliot also perceives it as a kind of "vision, fiévreuse" somewhat analogous to Rimbaud's "Bateau ivre."[51] As mentioned earlier, a hallucinatory quality is developed in the essay through imagery outside the norm: the voyagers on the passing liner are "déments obstinés"; the ships'

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[51]Quilliot, La Mer, p. 257.

sirens are like the "grands cris d'animaux pré-historiques" (E, 883); natural laws no longer operate, and fantastic sights appear among the waves. It is possible that Camus' serious illness during this period contributed in some degree to the dreamlike, unreal quality of the essay, but even more, there is evidence of deep emotion on his part, resulting, as in Noces, in lines of intense lyrical beauty.

In the first chapter of this study mention was made of Les Isles of Jean Grenier, as decisively influencing Camus to become a writer. Two meditations from this book may well have come to the mind of the traveler to South America twenty years later. The first is from Grenier's chapter on "L'Attrait du vide":

> Le caractère illusoire des choses fut encore confirmé en moi par le voisinage et la fréquentation assidue de la mer. Une mer qui avait un flux et un reflux, toujours mobile comme elle l'est en Bretagne. ... [52]

The second concludes his chapter on "Les Iles fortunées":

> Fleurs qui flottez sur la mer et qu'on aperçoit au moment où on y pense le moins, algues, cadavres, mouettes endormies, vous que l'on fend de l'étrave, ah, mes îles fortunées! [53]

S. Beynon John, in discussing the importance of the sea in Camus' work, sees it as a positive, benevolent element. As examples he cites Meursault's enjoyment of

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[52] Grenier, Les Iles, p. 26.

[53] Ibid., p. 93.

it in L'Etranger--it becomes the symbol of freedom; in La Peste it is "an act of purification, . . . a rite of friendship, and a means of recovering freedom."[54] In Camus' play of 1948, L'Etat de siège, it becomes again a symbol of freedom as the chorus calls the people to the sea to escape the tyranny of the Plague: "A la mer! La mer enfin, la mer libre, l'eau qui lave, le vent qui affranchit![55] Professor John adds that Camus turns so often to the sea "because it is for him an intensely lived experience."[56] In "La Mer au plus près" the writer created from this experience what is perhaps his most poetic work.

Camus had written in "Retour à Tipasa" that "ces années de guerre ... marquèrent pour moi la fin de la jeunesse" (E, 869). L'Eté is evidence of this end of youth, in contrast with Noces. The writer's work had taken him to the urban centers of the world, away from the landscape of his youth, and images of nature are now superseded more and more by descriptions of cities and a preoccupation with the problems of twentieth-century man in conflict with social and political institutions. With the exception of "La Mer

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[54]S. Beynon John, "Image and Symbol in the Work of Albert Camus," in Camus: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. by Germaine Brée (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1962), p. 142.

[55]Camus, Théâtre, Récits, Nouvelles, p. 224.

[56]John, "Image and Symbol in the Work of Albert Camus," p. 141.

au plus près" there is less lyricism and more commentary in L'Eté, although personal feeling is evident throughout.

L'Eté shows no deviation from the fundamental themes of Camus' earlier work. If it is true as Roger Quilliot remarks, that "Noces était un présent; L'Eté n'est qu'un espoir ou un souvenir,"[57] at least the basic elements of his thought are preserved in that hope and memory. Algeria is still very much present, although now he regards it with nostalgia as a place of rest and renewal that can be only temporary. The naïveté of L'Envers et l'endroit and the sheer joy of Noces are replaced by sophistication, sadness, and traces of disillusionment and cynicism, but the belief in love and happiness has not disappeared: "Ceux qui s'aiment et qui sont séparés peuvent vivre dans la douleur, mais ce n'est pas le désespoir: ils savent que l'amour existe" (E, 880).

In 1955 Camus was finally able to make the voyage to Greece that he was forced to postpone in 1939. The publication of L'Eté the year before made it very evident that Hellenism was still a dominant element in his thought. The Greek ideals of "limite" and love of beauty are sustained there. Like the Greeks, Camus will renounce nothing of life, but continually maintain its double aspect in a

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[57]Quilliot, La Mer, p. 252.

precarious equilibrium, striving always for their reconciliation:

> Mieux que la révolte contre les dieux, c'est cette longue obstination qui a du sens pour nous. Et cette admirable volonté de ne rien séparer ni exclure qui a toujours réconcilié et réconciliera encore le coeur douloureux des hommes et les printemps du monde (E, 844).

His continuing affinity for Greek myth appears prominently in L'Eté, with the Minotaur, Prometheus and Helen, as well as Nemesis and the Furies. Franz Hellens writes that "le chemin tout entier de l'écrivain est jalonné de ces mythes,"[58] and he adds "Cela est d'autant plus ... étonnant, que la pensée de l'écrivain ne quitte jamais la terre et se concentre sur l'homme dans ce que celui-ci a de plus hautainement et volontairement humain."[59] Claudine Gothot's explanation[60] is a valid one, that they provided a physical embodiment of the abstractions Camus detested. At the same time it is to be expected that Camus' great interest and admiration for the Greeks would lead him quite naturally to turn to Greek myths as a literary device.

Life and death are still a preoccupation of the author, but while death still appears in the form of loss-of-self, life has lost most of the exuberance of the earlier

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[58]Franz Hellens, "Le Mythe chez Albert Camus," in Hommage à Albert Camus: 1913-1960 (Paris: Gillimard, 1967), p. 86.

[59]Ibid., p. 89.

[60]See supra, p. 235.

essays and has taken on the passive attributes of recuperation, or the active ones of struggle. He continues to maintain the primacy of the concrete over the abstract, the living man over his hypothetical descendant.

L'Eté provides a wealth of material helpful to an understanding of his total work from the standpoint of enlarged perspective and development of thought. "Les Amandiers," as mentioned earlier, shows for example that in 1940 Camus was already turning in the direction of revolt. The description of Oran in "Le Minotaure" will provide much of the material for the opening pages of La Peste. The resistance to history of "Prométhée aux enfers" and "L'Exil d'Hélène" will be developed more fully and logically in L'Homme révolté, and the theme of exile in "La Mer au plus près" will be renewed in the collection of short stories, L'Exil et le royaume, in 1957. L'Eté marks an evolution in Camus' work, but as he himself had replied to Frank Jotterand, it is only "celle que suit normalement un homme entre vingt-cinq et quarante ans."[61]

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[61]Camus, Essais, pp. 1836-37.

CONCLUSION

Moralist, champion of justice, lover-of-life, Camus was all of these, but above all he was an artist, and his numerous writings and comments on the subject of art bear witness to the fact that it was his continual preoccupation. In Le Mythe de Sisyphe he had written "Créer, c'est vivre deux fois," and that the work of art "marque à la fois la mort d'une expérience et sa multiplication" (MS, 173-74). Thus for the absurd artist, his art is a means of "increasing" life by multiplying it. In addition, the absurd artist creates knowing his work will not endure. Concrete reality will be his material, and Camus praises novelists like Balzac, Stendhal, Proust, Malraux for "le choix qu'ils ont fait d'écrire en images plutôt qu'en raisonnements ... " (MS, 178).

In L'Homme révolté he writes that art, like all great human endeavor, is motivated by a "fièvre de l'unité," a desire to give order and form to a world without coherence. Through style the artist "corrects" the world:

> Cette correction, que l'artiste opère par son langage et par une redistribution d'éléments puisés dans le réel, s'appelle le style et donne à l'univers recréé son unité et ses limites (HR, 672).

Art is also a vindication of nature and of beauty against history:

> L'art, du moins, nous apprend que l'homme ne se résume pas seulement à l'histoire et qu'il trouve aussi une raison d'être dans l'ordre de la nature. Le grand Pan, pour lui, n'est pas mort ... On peut refuser toute l'histoire et s'accorder pourtant au monde des étoiles et de la mer ... La beauté sans doute, ne fait pas les révolutions. Mais un jour vient où les révolutions ont besoin d'elle (HR, 679).

In a speech before an international meeting of writers in 1948, later included in Actuelles I, he wrote that the artist is on the side of life, and consequently is never a successful politician or conqueror:

> Les vrais artistes ne font pas de bons vainqueurs politiques, car ils sont incapables d'accepter legérèment, ah, je le sais bien, la mort de l'adversaire. Ils sont du côté de la vie, non de la mort. Ils sont les témoins de la chair, non de la loi.[1]

The Discours de Suède, of 1957, repeatedly stresses the perpetual tension in which the artist must live in order to fulfill his responsibilities to both his art and his fellow-men: "L'artiste se forge dans cet aller-retour perpétuel de lui aux autres, à mi-chemin de la beauté dont il ne peut se passer et de la communauté à laquelle il ne peut s'arracher"[2] and:

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[1]Camus, Essais, p. 406.

[2]Ibid., p. 1072.

> Il chemine entre deux abîmes, qui sont la frivolité et la propagande. Sur cette ligne de crête où avance le grand artiste, chaque pas est une aventure, un risque extrême. Dans ce risque pourtant, et dans lui seul, se trouve la liberté de l'art.[3]

Camus also expressed himself frequently on the dilemma of the artist torn between conflicting responsibilities, or harassed by distraction and misunderstanding. The story of Jonas in L'Exil et le royaume and the essay "L'Enigme" fall into this category.

In the previously mentioned interview with Jeanine Delpech, as well as elsewhere, Camus expressed his great admiration for "la grande littérature classique française." His friend and teacher, Jean Grenier alludes to both Corneille and the Greeks to illustrate two opposing tendencies in Camus' style. At the same time he mentions "le génie déclamatoire" of the Spanish as analogous to one of these tendencies and associates it with Camus' theatrical viewpoint.

> Albert Camus, par ses origines, était au moins aussi proche de l'Espagne que de la France et son langage était castillan d'allure. Ce qui eût été emphatique chez un autre ne l'était pas plus chez lui que le Cid chez Corneille.
>
> Et puis il faut tenir compte de l'optique de l'auteur: celle d'Albert Camus était théâtrale. Il calculait en vue de l'effet à produire, comme doit le faire tout artiste puisque l'oeuvre est destinée à celui qui voit et qui entend de sorte que sa voix doit porter et son geste doit

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[3]Ibid., pp. 1092-1093.

> signifier. D'ailleurs, il usait du minimum de moyens et il les choisissait pour leur maximum d'efficacité.
>
> Dans son effort pour définir et pour préciser il était le fidèle disciple des Grecs et la rectitude qui en résultait corrigeait les écarts que pour un goût français (toujours timoré) lui aurait fait commettre le génie déclamatoire de l'Espagne (et de la Russie).[4]

At certain points in L'Eté, most notably "L'Exil d'Hélène" and "Prométhée aux enfers," this declamatory tendency is very apparent, though not to the extent it is noticeable in Caligula and L'Etat de siège, his dramas of 1944 and 1948. Gay-Crosier, writing on Camus' dramatic works, gives as one reason for dissatisfaction with the latter play the fact that its characters are too depersonalized and "cornelian."[5] An elevated heroic style does not perhaps suit theatrical tastes today. However, I believe that more than this, some of Camus' failure in the drama in comparison with other genres is due to lack of the very personal voice that is so effective in the lyrical essays.

In some of his other works where lyrical passages occur, such as "La Femme adultère," "Lettres à un ami allemand," portions of L'Etranger, Le Mythe of Sisyphe, L'Homme révolté, notably "La Pensee de midi," the writer is again expressing feelings related to his own experience--

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[4]Jean Grenier, Albert Camus: Souvenirs (Paris: Gallimard, 1968), pp. 150-51.

[5]Gay-Crosier, Les Envers d'un échec, p. 151.

the close attachment to nature, the war years, a constant and intense awareness of death, associated with his illness. The portrayal of these experiences joins the writer's emotions to his art and in Camus' case the marriage was a happy one.

In 1952 he stated in an interview: "Je ne crois pas, en ce qui me concerne, aux livres isolés. Chez certains écrivains, il me semble que leurs oeuvres forment un tout où chacune s'éclaire par les autres, et où toutes se regardent."[6] The lyrical essays support this conclusion. There is no major theme in his work which is not expressed in them, both in style and content. Some of the important relationships between the themes in the essays and in other works have already been mentioned. Others worth citing occur in his plays. Without giving resumés, an obvious rapport can be noted in the following: Caligula demonstrates the disastrous results of pursuing an impossible absolute; Le Malentendu dramatizes lack of communication between people, the theme of exile, and the absurdity of human destiny; L'Etat de siège denounces abstraction and defeats the evil of the Plague by means of love; Les Justes concerns the taking of human life, of human beings weighed against abstract ideologies, the consequences of a philosophy which declares the end justifies the means, however

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[6]Brisville, Camus, p. 255.

murderous; the stories in L'Exil et le royaume all treat one side or the other of the dual human existence.

Duality, paradox, contradiction, maintained in a perpetual tension, are at the heart of all of Camus' thought and work. Roger Quilliot writes that "Camus ne parle que de lui-même,"[7] and tension too is a lived experience for this writer. It is born of a double exigency leading to a philosophy of openness: to live one's life to the fullest since it is brief and must end permanently; to admit, in the responsibility toward others, all possibilties that do not destroy human life. His own words from "Retour à Tipasa" best sum it up:

> ... que puis-je désirer d'autre que de ne rien exclure et d'apprendre à tresser de fil blanc et de fil noir une même corde tendue á se rompre ... (E, 874).

In the maintenance of this tension, from his first published work through L'Eté, and the six years that remained to him before the accident that took his life in 1960, all of Camus' work represents "une longue fidélité" to "les deux ou trois images simples et grandes"[8] which, as he pointed out in the 1958 reedition of L'Envers et l'endroit, were at the heart of his earliest essays.

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[7]Quilliot, La Mer, p. 266.

[8]Camus, Preface to L'Envers et l'endroit in Essais, p. 13.

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