

ALBERT CAMUS: THE QUESTION OF HOPE

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“IF A GENERATION grows up without an example strong enough to motivate a complete metamorphosis,” Ernst Robert Curtius wrote in 1952, “it is missing something that cannot be replaced.” Certainly no author is being read more fervently by European youth than Albert Camus, the Nobel Prize winner for literature in 1957. When he went to Stockholm to receive the award, reporters commented on the impassioned discussions he carried on with young people, who must have felt that here was someone of whom they could ask the most fundamental questions. Camus, who is director of the publishing series *Espoir*, seemed almost to represent a new human hope, but surely we remain—as in the title of Tibor Mende’s new book—“Between Fear and Hope.”

Man’s hope lies in his soul, his very breath, the resiliency of his *élan*. There is a great deal that should be said on this subject, in order to indicate the more tangible possibilities of hope before becoming absorbed in a supernatural expectation (*espérance*). But we want to make the connection between this human hope and Christian expectation; we cannot forget the two great threats to human hope—moral fragility, which constantly places the achievement of civ-

ilization in jeopardy, and the shadow of death, which brings everything to completion. It is with this problem of hope in mind that I would like to examine the work of Camus, and try to determine what kind of example he is capable of providing.

A WORK WHICH EXALTS POVERTY AND LIGHT

A human achievement is nothing more than the long road on which to find again, through the detours of art, the two or three great and simple images by which the heart, for the first time, was opened (*Nouvelle Nouvelle Revue Française* [NNRF], p. 12).

THE IMAGE upon which Sartre’s eyes opened, according to Francis Jeanson, was that of a bourgeois household. Bereft of his father, brought up by his grandfather, the child felt himself surrounded by a kind of affection so excessive that it seemed to him “play acting”; he himself was unnecessary to it. The image which dominated the world of the young Camus was silent poverty. “I respect only poverty and great adventures of the mind,” he was to say later on; “between the two there is only a society which is laughable.” That statement was not made for rhetorical effect; it is the expression of his own childhood. Writing, in 1954, a preface for a new edition of his first work, *L’envers et l’endroit*, Camus explains further:

For myself, I know that my source is in *L’envers et l’endroit*, in that world of poverty and light where I lived a long while and the memory of which still preserves me from the two contradictory dangers which threaten every artist, resentment and complacency (NNRF, p. 2).

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Camus' father was killed in 1914 at the battle of the Marne (he was buried at Saint-Brieuc); the child grew up in an apartment in the crowded Belcourt section of Algiers; two tiny rooms sheltered an older brother, a sick uncle, a rather tyrannical grandmother who was also something of a comedian, and his mother:

Rereading *L'envers et l'endroit* after so many years, for this edition, I know instinctively, at certain pages and in spite of their awkwardness, that that's it. It, I mean—this old woman, a silent mother, poverty, the light on the Italian olive trees, a love that is solitary and yet crowded with all that bears witness, in my eyes, to the truth (NNRF, p. 9).

"At this hour my whole kingdom is of this world," he wrote in his first work. "A poor kingdom," Roger Quilliot commented, "dominated by the thin shade of a mother! She is a woman like many others, less favored than others by nature, a woman who goes out to do housework all day and returns exhausted in the evening to a hearth without a soul. She is passive, moulded over the years by her authoritarian mother." "Her life, her interests, her children limit her to just being there, a presence too natural to be felt," wrote Camus. He was to speak aloud the profound silence of this humble maternal tenderness—the same silence that he found in the faces of the poor in his squalid neighborhood. "The clamoring of a crabbed grandmother or the muteness of a resigned mother—here is the very language of poverty, that of the poor whites of the South in Caldwell, or of the Negroes in Faulkner, as well as that of our miners huddled against the wall of their company houses in silent little groups, waiting for the next mail" (Quilliot, pp. 33-34).

Thus Camus can sincerely affirm, "I did not learn about liberty in Marx;

indeed, I learned it in destitution" (Quilliot, p. 9). At the age of eighteen he was reading *La douleur*, André de Richaud's novel of wretchedness; but he had already seen it in the streets, in his own house. Like Péguy, he knew what care-worn existence meant, where the beauty of women passes quickly and where the "Parisian charmer" is a joke.

Fifteen thousand French francs a month, Camus exclaims in the preface to *La maison du peuple* of Louis Guilloux, fifteen thousand francs a month and Tristram no longer has anything to say to Iseult. Even love is a luxury (Quilliot, p. 34).

He came to know the tenacious patience of the poor, which is something that does not die because in it there is a reflection of the *Anakims* of the Bible; he saw the aging woman, progressively abandoned by youth, but whose "starved ardor" burns and continually awaits. He described desiccated little old men, tenacious and wretched, with all their manias—Salamono tied to his dog, the old man who spat on the cats, the asthmatic old Spaniard who incessantly counted his little peas—but also with their fidelity—like that of old Perez obstinately following the funeral procession of Meursault's mother.

The deep source of Camus' work is to be found in the vision and love of a poor mother: "The mother of Rieux, of Meursault, of Jan—all three silent, like his own. Strange source of a life with no return, obscure hearth covered by its own ashes, the mother remains for Camus more than a memory; she remains a conscience. She is the unalterable sign of an abolished childhood. However far he may go, she guarantees for us his fidelity to the world of poverty" (Quilliot, p. 43).

This fidelity to poverty has never flagged: his latest work, *Exile and the Kingdom*, seems to return entirely to this source. Here is Janine, wife of Mar-

cel, a little cloth tradesman, married almost twenty-five years: "Yet she wasn't so fat—tall and well rounded rather, plump and still desirable, as she was well aware when men looked at her, with her rather childish face, her bright, naïve eyes contrasting with this big body she knew to be warm and inviting" (p. 7). Formerly her husband took her to the beach on Sunday, where she came to know the noon times of the poor, by virtue of the truth of bodies that have been stripped of deceptive adornment, noontimes on beaches where blunt physical forcefulness reigned, noontimes of love and nude beauty" (Quilliot, p. 36). For, "on the African coast the years of youth can be happy ones. But that was twenty-five years ago; Marcel didn't much like physical effort and very soon had given up taking her to the beaches" (p. 8). Life then became a long boredom, eaten away by the haunting specter of the breadwinner, her husband's compulsion relentlessly repeated: "If something happened to me, you'd be provided for."

"The Silent Men" are workers, who must return to their joyless work after an unsuccessful strike. Among them is Yvars, who loves the sea:

"When he was twenty he never got tired of watching it, for it used to hold in store a happy week-end on the beach. Despite or because of his lameness, he had always liked swimming. Then the years had passed, there had been Fernande, the birth of the boy, and, to make ends meet, the overtime, at the shop on Saturdays and on various odd jobs on Sundays. Little by little he had lost the habit of those violent days that used to satiate him. The deep clear water, the hot sun, the girls, the physical life—there was no other form of happiness in this country. And that happiness disappeared with youth. Yvars continued to love the sea, but only at the end of the day when the water in the bay became a little darker.

The moment was pleasant on the terrace beside his house where he would sit down after work, grateful for his clean shirt that Fernande ironed so well and for the glass of anisette all frosted over. Evening would fall, the sky would become all soft and mellow, the neighbors talking with Yvars would suddenly lower their voices. At those times he didn't know whether he was happy or felt like crying. At least he felt in harmony at such moments, he had nothing to do but wait quietly, without quite knowing for what (*Exile and the Kingdom*, pp. 63-64).

We meet the Arab children whom Daru taught: actually they had all been victims because they were all poor. Every day Daru would distribute a ration to the children. They had missed it, he knew, during these bad days. Possibly one of the fathers or big brothers would come this afternoon and he could supply them with grain (p. 87).

And the last story in the collection concerns D'Arrast, the French engineer who arrives in the little town to build a dyke and thereby prevent the periodic flooding of the lower sections: "Ah, surely the poor people of Iguape would long remember the noble engineer's name and many years from now would still mention it in their prayers" (p. 170). We soon see him just as he enters a poor lodging:

In the hut, D'Arrast saw nothing at first but a dying fire built right on the ground in the exact center of the room. Then in a back corner he made out a brass bed with a bare, broken mattress, a table in the other corner covered with earthenware dishes, and, between the two, a sort of stand supporting a color print representing Saint George. Nothing else but a pile of rags to the right of the entrance and, hanging from the ceiling, a few loincloths of various colors drying over the fire. Standing still, D'Arrast breathed in the smell of smoke and poverty that rose from the ground and choked him (pp. 176-177).

"The great problems are to be found in the streets," wrote Camus; his lucidity, and also his love for the poor, caused him to discover, beneath the laughter of a pretty girl, the mask of her old age or her death-grimace" (Quilliot, p. 38).

One is apt to feel as one does when Abbé Pierre speaks on the theme "either brothers or men condemned" (apropos of the undeveloped countries), that here is the one real problem of the century.

By the same token how can we not fervently approve these words of Camus:

If, in spite of so much effort spent in purifying the language and making myths live, I do not one day succeed in re-creating *L'envers et l'endroit*, I shall never have succeeded in anything—that is my strange belief. In any case, nothing prevents my dreaming that I shall succeed, or my imagining that I still may center this work in the admirable silence of a mother and the effort of a man to rediscover a kind of love or justice equal to this silence. (NNRF, p. 12).

What does he present to us, then, of love and justice which can balance the silence of poverty? What hope can he extend to the thousands of Tristrams and Iseults who no longer have much to say to one another because they are dying of the work which is calculated to keep them alive?

First of all, a deep love of the light: Poverty has never been a misfortune for me: in it the light pours out its riches. Even my revolt has been illuminated by it. I believe I can truthfully say that my revolt has almost always been a revolt for all men, to let the life of all men be raised into the light . . . To correct a natural indifference I was placed at the midpoint between misery and the sun. Misery only prevented me from believing that everything is good under the sun and in history; the sun taught me that history is not everything (NNRF, pp. 2-3).

The work prior to *The Fall* is in fact marked by "carnal mean and excess"—

that of the "wedding" of man and the sea: fair and dark bodies on the sand, lightly dressed young girls renewed each summer in their premature bloom, the powdery blaze of light on the ruins of Tipasa, dry absinthe, the burning rocks over which lizards run, and the sweet soughing of the waves:

For a week, a long time ago, I lived overwhelmed by the good things of this world: we slept under the sky on a beach, I nourished myself on fruit, and I spent half my days in the deserted water. I learned at that time a truth which has since always moved me to perceive the marks of comfort, or of settling down, with irony, impatience, and sometimes with fury . . . I was miserly of that freedom which disappears as soon as an excess of goods appears. For me the greatest luxury always coincides with a certain denudation. I love the bare houses of the Arabs and Spaniards (NNRF, pp. 4-5).

We come to see that this sort of "Franciscan poverty," at the breast of generous nature, was the dream of Janine and Yvars in *Exile and the Kingdom*. A happiness of the senses is the only kind of happiness that can be conferred upon men, and it justifies any sacrifice. We see this light extend to more and more profound areas in Camus' work: at first a romanticism of solar happiness, it becomes a religion of happiness. It is "secularist" of course, but it has its "men of good will": Rieux, who struggles honestly for the health of the people of Oran; Rambert, who discovers that it would be shameful to be happy all alone. It also knows its "saints," without God, in Tarrou. It has its "martyrs," in Kalyaev, who dies on the scaffold to assure to men freed by the revolution a "summer" of happiness, while he and Dora feel themselves caught in the ice of an interminable winter of grief.

Our contemporary youth loves immediate happiness, preferring to seek it on ski slopes or on beaches, where one

is not concerned with dressing or burdened with too much introspection. It likes the title Roger Quilliot gave to his essay on Camus, *The Sea and the Prisons*, because it is haunted by the prisonhouse of the undeveloped countries and starved for a life of freedom. The "noontime thought" which pits itself against the Moloch of revolution and sustains a modest and patient revolt against men's unhappiness, has, in Camus' work, no common ground with the *juste milieu* which would arrange the busts of Corneille and Racine on the mantels of literary salons. It resembles the light of lanterns on the roadway, lighting up the necessary fifty meters. It rejects the "isms" in the name of which the first half of the 20th century has been made an antechamber of hell: fascism, liberalism, nazism, Marxism.

THE SHADOW OF DEATH

WHAT THE CRITICS like in Camus is the hope in *this* life which many of his characters possess. In a special Camus issue of *Livres de France* (Dec. 1957), Émile Henriot writes:

The Stranger, that novel of negation and despair, would have been simply unbearable, if at the same time Albert Camus had not shown, in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, that man was capable of rediscovering a morality by reflecting on the nobility of the human struggle taken in itself, and with no final end other than itself, and of the stoic acceptance of that courage, in taking this burden on himself and bearing it voluntarily; destiny was a man's affair, to be decided between men. In *The Plague* Camus rediscovered that brotherly love among men which Christianity calls charity, and confronted with the practice of this virtue detached from any metaphysical foundation, raised the moving question as to whether, though restricted to the closed world of men, there can be a holiness of men with-

out the hope of a reward, a secular goodness without God. Camus, who wants only to be a man, and who knows nothing but this world, has proceeded unflinchingly to the logical end of his agnosticism. No supernatural hope illuminates his path. But his noble preoccupation with the theme of good and evil is that of a mind which, even if without "religion," remains religious, although not touched by grace (p. 4).

This is quite correct. But death is no less real for all that. When one is very young, and has been fortunate enough to first see daylight in a sun-lit land, it is possible to unite poverty and light. But ever since 1938, when he returned from his trip to make a report on the Kabyles, Camus has understood that a certain type of poverty is a permanent interdict on the beauty of Mediterranean countries:

There we watched the descent of night. And at that hour, when the shadow which drops from the mountains down to this shining earth causes a stir in the most hardened heart, I realized that there was no peace for those who, on the other side of the valley, were gathering for a meal of pancakes, made from bad barley. I realized too that it would be sweet to abandon oneself to this night of splendor and surprise, but that the lighted fires of destitution which blazed before us were like an interdict placed on the beauty of the world (Quilliot, p. 149).

When poverty is added to the drabness of overcrowded cities, when men are in the grip of what Saint-Exupéry called "a machine to stamp out men as if they were pieces of metal," then it is responsible for many "murdered Mozarts." Camus says this directly in the dense preface he wrote for the 1954 edition of *l'Envers et L'endroit*:

When poverty is linked with a life without sky or hope—such as I saw as a young man in the terrible slums

of our cities—then the ultimate and most revolting injustice is consummated: everything must be done so that man may escape the double humiliation of destitution and ugliness. Even though born a poor man in a poor quarter of the city, I did not know what true tragedy was until I saw our cold slums in factory towns. Not even the most abject Arab destitution can match it, beneath such a different sky. When you have experienced these industrialized neighborhoods, you feel soiled once and for all, and, I believe, responsible for their existence (*NNRF*, p. 4).

But it is not enough to feel "responsible," we must know what remedy to offer. Surely none of those "concrete universals" which are called syndicalism, workers' rights, guaranteed vacations, and increased leisure time can afford to be neglected. Nevertheless, even if all these proletarian camps were to be turned into cities of sun, and hunger and cold lost all dominion over men, what would survive of hope for men, since they will still be alone, and looking forward to death?

We just cited several passages from *Exile and the Kingdom* which evoked the joy of sun-covered beaches, but Camus concedes that this kind of happiness dies with youth. What else is left for Janine in this grey life, except to follow behind her busy husband in the cold tracks of the oasis?

She was waiting, but she didn't know for what. She was aware only of her solitude, and the penetrating cold, and of a greater weight in the region of the heart... She was standing, heavy, with dangling arms, slightly stooped, as the cold climbed her thick legs. She was dreaming of the erect and flexible palm trees and of the girl she had once been (p. 14).

Towards the end of the same afternoon, on the battlements of the fort, she contemplates the desert. In the distance she sees some nomads, beggar lords of a

strange kingdom, and for a moment's ecstasy she believes she understands this "dry land, stripped to the bone." But the ecstasy of nothingness is to no avail against the fear of death which makes her clutch Marcel's shoulder:

Then she dragged herself toward her bed, where Marcel came to join her and put the light out at once without asking anything of her.... She could feel only Marcel's warmth. For more than twenty years every night thus, in his warmth, just the two of them, even when ill, even when traveling, as at present... Besides, what would she have done alone at home? No child! Wasn't that what she lacked? She didn't know. She simply followed Marcel, pleased to know that someone needed her. The only joy he gave her was the knowledge that she was necessary... They made love in the dark by feel, without seeing each other. Is there another love than that of darkness, a love that would cry aloud in daylight? She didn't know, but she did know that Marcel needed her and she needed that need, that she lived on it night and day, at night especially—every night, when he didn't want to be alone, or to age or die, with that set expression he assumed which she occasionally recognized on other men's faces, the only common expression of those madmen hiding under an appearance of wisdom until the madness seizes them and hurls them desperately toward a woman's body to bury in it, without desire, everything terrifying that solitude and night reveals to them (pp. 26-28).

In this we are far from the sun-lit beaches; Janine is no longer the young girl who believes in death only "for others," and who imagines that the stuff of life is inexhaustible and that an accidental slip of the scissors can be remedied; she is beyond that young hope which came as easily as breathing—in one's thirties, Camus writes, it diminishes imperceptibly; she has arrived at winter where life throws off its petrified mask:

She cuddled a little closer and put her hand on his chest. And to herself she called him with the little love-name she had once given him, which they still used from time to time without even thinking of what they were saying.

She called him with all her heart. After all, she too needed him, his strength, his little eccentricities, and she too was afraid of death. "If I could overcome that fear, I'd be happy..." Immediately, a nameless anguish seized her. She drew back from Marcel. No, she was overcoming nothing, she was not happy, she was going to die, in truth, without having been liberated (pp. 28-29).

The work of Camus has come to a crossroad; the anguish of dying has become simpler and more profound, and at the same time the accent on poverty has become stronger: the result is that the problem—the absence of hope—is all the more urgent. We want to know the meaning of this story of man, which in the eyes of the last man on earth, even if he were to be some sort of demi-urge, would appear as "a tragedy for those who feel and a comedy for those who think." We want to know, not just out of concern for our corruptible bodies, but because of our efforts to give bread and justice to the poor, because of that love, which yearns for immortality, and has made so many Janines throw themselves on the bodies of so many Marcells. What is the point of this story, this "route that has been lost in the fog"? What answer are we to offer to those faces of men "hiding under an appearance of wisdom until the madness strikes them"?

It is at this point that the thought of someone like Teilhard de Chardin—whatever problems it may pose for scientists, philosophers or theologians—can mark out a direction for those souls who are passionately concerned for "the glory of the earth," and whose "kingdom is in this world." Such men will be able

to accept Jesus only on the day when they can see reflected in him the power of reconciliation belonging to the religious man, and "that earthly face" which the best poets and thinkers have loved so much. To say that, for Camus, the soul is at the intersection of the urge to live and the fear of death is to understand something of the desire for eternity that animates him. But if it is added, in agreement with Quilliot, that the soul is situated "at that precise point where clear-sightedness gives us a detachment in regard to both these urges" (p. 55), then we are saying that man is great only in his victory over the fear of death, without accepting his own death. This victory, however, does not resolve the problem of the immense effort of life, which is meaningless if it falls into nothingness, unless it is the prelude of an immortal Pysché, or rather, of the resurrection.

The first triptych of Camus' work was rather negative, Quilliot says: a short novel, (*The Stranger*), a play (*Caligula*), and an essay (*The Myth of Sisyphus*), were a defense of hope against the absurd. The second triptych was positive: a novel (*The Plague*), a play (*The Just*), an essay (*The Rebel*), outlined "the religion of happiness" to which everyone must be sacrificed. Two collections of poetic texts, *Noces* (1937) and *Summer* (1954) flanked the edifice with their harmonious lyricism. The third panel, on which Camus is presently working, will be devoted to love: a novel (*The First Man*), a play (*Doctor Juan*), and an essay, (*The Myth of Nemesis*). But between the second triptych which is finished and the third which is in process, has not the balance been disturbed by an unforeseen question? What is the meaning of love if it expires along with our death? This question, which haunted Unamuno and for which he was reproached by his atheist friends, has attached itself to the

hinges of Camus' work. We need only recall the biblical text, "God did not will death," to become aware of the new world which hope opens up to us, when it is relieved by Christian expectation.

THE SHADOW OF EVIL

WE HAVE SEEN that the problem of unhappiness remains unanswered. With *The Fall*, Camus takes up the problem of evil, which is even more urgent. Like a grain of sand which could cause the breakdown of a well-oiled machine, the question of man's moral frailty is unavoidably posed by the ambiguous character of Clamence.

Camus considers *The Fall* as a purely satirical work, since, in an interview in *Le Monde* (Aug. 31, 1956), he said:

I would have liked to entitle this book *A Hero of Our Time*. At the beginning it was only a short story planned to appear the following January in a collection called *Exile and the Kingdom*. But I was carried away by my subject, in trying to present the portrait of one of those minor prophets who are so common these days. They announce nothing at all and find nothing better to do than accuse others by accusing themselves.

Nevertheless, in the satirical traits which we will discuss, how can we fail to see the appearance of a wickedness deep in the bones of men? Clamence cries out his disgust with a freezing irony, an irony which according to Camus marks all his work, through which he flogs the pharisaism of society today. The Frenchman has two manias, ideas and fornication—nevertheless, the average European is no better, and some day it will be said of him: "He fornicated and read the papers" (pp. 6-7). Bourgeois institutions are killing because of their usury; "certain marriages, which are merely formalized debauches, become the monotonous hearses of daring

and invention. Yes, cher ami, bourgeois marriage has put our country into slippers and will soon lead it to the gates of death" (p. 106). Professional and family life, even leisure, too often resemble those millions of tiny fish which attack the unwary swimmer in Brazilian rivers, and reduce him to a skeleton within a matter of minutes. When Clamence merely says "Thank God" in front of our café atheists: "A moment of amazement would follow that outrageous expression, they would look at one another dumfounded, then the tumult would burst forth. Some would flee the café, others would gabble indignantly without listening to anything; and all would writhe in convulsions like the devil in holy water" (p. 93). In such a world of mocking wickedness, there is the lyricism of the prison camp: "We children of the mid-century don't need a diagram to imagine such places. A hundred and fifty years ago, people became sentimental about lakes and forests" (pp. 123-4). And Camus emphasizes that further hypocrisy which makes us judge and condemn others: "Today we are always ready to judge as we are to fornicate. With this difference, that there are no inadequacies to fear" (p. 77).

This misanthropic rage is only the reverse side of an interior wound. This great lawyer who won all his cases, this child of mountain peaks and high bridges who felt at his ease only within his skin, who experienced no joy but that of his body, this man who frankly admits that what he liked in love was "only what one did"—surely it was necessary that one day he would have to contemplate his real self. Like Augustine of Tagaste, who was pulled back by the voice of a child who said, "Take and read," and was forced to see himself as a sensual rhetorician and the cause of his mother's tears, Clamence too experienced his "moment of truth," that instant in which we know, as Montaigne

said, whether what we affirm comes from our mouth or our stomach.

It was not a child who robbed Clamence of his illusion of virtue, but a laugh, a simple, frank healthy laugh, which he heard one night as he went past a bridge over the Seine; it seemed to mock the fine window-dummy who strolled through the streets of Paris, and seemed to say, "A man like you, *voyons*..." The memory of this laugh forced itself upon him three years later:

Look, the rain has stopped! Be kind enough to walk home with me. I am strangely tired, not from having talked so much but at the mere thought of what I still have to say. Oh, well, a few words will suffice to relate my essential discovery. What's the use of saying more, anyway? For the statue to stand bare, the fine speeches must take flight like pigeons. So here goes. That particular night in November, two or three years before the evening when I thought I heard laughter behind me, I was returning to the Left Bank and my home by way of the Pont Royal. It was an hour past midnight, a fine rain was falling, a drizzle rather, that scattered the few people on the streets. I had just left a mistress, who was surely already asleep. I was enjoying the walk, a little numbed, my body calmed and irrigated by a flow of blood gentle as the falling rain. On the bridge I passed behind a figure leaning over the railing and seeming to stare at the river. On closer view, I made out a slim young woman dressed in black. The back of her neck, cool and damp between her dark hair and coat collar, stirred me. But I went on after a moment's hesitation. At the end of the bridge I followed the quays toward Saint-Michel, where I lived. I had already gone some fifty yards when I heard the sound—which, despite the distance, seemed dreadfully loud in the midnight silence—of a body striking the water. I stopped short, but without turning around. Almost at once I heard a cry, repeated several times, which was going downstream; then it suddenly ceased. The silence

that followed, as the night suddenly stood still, seemed interminable. I wanted to run and yet didn't stir. I was trembling, I believe from cold and shock. I told myself that I had to be quick and I felt an irresistible weakness steal over me. I have forgotten what I thought then. "Too late, too far..." or something of the sort. I was still listening as I stood motionless. Then, slowly under the rain, I went away. I informed no one.

But here we are; here's my house, my shelter! Tomorrow? Yes, if you wish. I'd like to take you to the island of Marken so you can see the Zuider Zee. Let's meet at eleven at *Mexico City*. What? That woman? Oh, I don't know. Really I don't know. The next day, and the days following, I didn't read the papers (pp. 69-71).

Of course, we do not have the opportunity every day to save someone who is drowning. But, as Ivan Karamazov said, "Which one of us here, gentlemen, has not wanted to kill his father?" Can we not equally recognize ourselves in Duhamel's Salavin, the young office boy who wanted to be a saint, and who wrote in his diary: "Monday, nothing; Tuesday, nothing; Wednesday, again nothing; Thursday, still nothing." It went on in this way until one day he goes to his neighborhood movie theater. That very morning he had dreamed of some great crisis, like a shipwreck, which would be the longed-for opportunity of his life. The banal film that he watches seems real to him. Suddenly fire breaks out in the theater. And he, the long-delayed saint, pushes his neighbors aside, even knocks down something—or someone—and finds himself outside safe, and a lost man.

We are uneasy when we are reminded of such weakness. Duhamel and Camus know that "Revolutions will not change man's conscience"; Salavin insists that man must be converted, that he must change the very source of his acts, "man's heart from which both his good and his

bad thought derive"; he must expose the secret places of his own conscience which only God's glance can observe and transfigure. Clamence's story tells us that there is a limit which cannot be exceeded. When someone asked Salavin why he is so concerned about being changed,

Salavin lowered his head and said, very softly, "Because . . . because I am a coward." Then the whole company was silent, as if something extremely embarrassing had been said . . . Salavin fell back on his seat like a man who has been judged (*Club des Lyonnais*, pp. 159-60).

For Émile Henriot, *The Fall* would seem to be a similar false note:

Camus is sometimes sarcastic, and in his noble ascension from one book to another, it is only in his next to last book, *The Fall*, that he has failed to find the next rung of the ladder. Because the central figure is a scoundrel, there is an exaggerated pessimism, which has caused Camus blindly to incriminate all men in the same guilt. It is almost as if this atheist shared a belief in an original sin from which no man would be exempt. It is the only part of his work where one cannot follow him (*Livres de France*, December 1957, pp. 5-6).

For myself, I wonder if it is not precisely here that Camus is to be followed.

Of course Camus knows that all men are not cowards or judges who condemn life. In *Exile and the Kingdom* there is D'Arrast who takes up the enormous stone that another could no longer carry; there is Daru who refuses to judge the Arab; there is the humble Jonas who allows himself—like his biblical ancestor—to be thrown into the sea, to be deprived of his art work, since "it is because of him that this great calamity has come upon us." But certainly the theme of exile is given greater emphasis than that of the kingdom, and the moral agony is made so lacerating in *The Fall* that the gestures of solidarity made by

D'Arrast, Daru and Jonas may not convince us. How could these men succeed in loving when Clamence could not? Did they then complete the "descent into hell" that the "judge-penitent" forces us to make with him? Their solidarity may seem to us an illusion. And if they have made this exploration of the depths of cowardice which lie in all of us, how have they succeeded in rediscovering the simple glance of the man who holds out his hand to his brother? It is the end of the story Clamence wants to understand. How could he become again a Tarron, a Rieux, a Kolyaev, since he knows he is a coward, and brags of his superficiality? He is a cynical accomplice and says so out loud; he makes us shudder; he is a detestable scoundrel; but with Baudelaire we know that he is "like us, our brother." These stories in *Exile and the Kingdom* seem to belong to an earlier geological period. An earthquake has occurred with Clamence's confession; from now on we may perhaps speak of *The Fall* as constituting a dividing line in Camus' work. It is the post-*Fall* Camus whom we are waiting for, and for whom we would have the most intense questions.

THE SHADOWS OF THOSE WE HAVE KILLED

ALL THIS WILL NOT prevent some Philinthe from trying to prove to us that, after all, men are wicked only when they want an impossible purity, and that apart from such attempts, they are able to succeed. This means that we should sacrifice our "half-vices" on the altar of "classical wisdom," and in this way we will save our "half-virtues"; we may then agree with Henriot that Clamence is a scoundrel and that "we have nothing in common with that sort," at least not much.

But even if we can accept the evil that we have to undergo, the evil that

we do to others keeps us from enjoying our meals. Clamence's story brings up the problem of conversion, surely, but it also evokes the shadows of those we have allowed to die. It confronts us with the problem, or rather, the mystery, of how to do reparation for the evil that we have done.

That unknown girl whom he had encountered by the river, whom he had momentarily desired, Clamence had heard her cry, and then fall in the cold dark water with a muffled sound; the "great lawyer," who had saved all his clients, had not saved her. Beyond his sarcasm, with which he tries to distract himself, Clamence constantly finds again the living figure of this girl, and his saddest secret is at the end of his monologue, when he admits it:

Then please tell me what happened to you one night on the quays of the Seine and how you managed never to risk your life. You yourself utter the words that for years have never ceased echoing through my nights and that I shall at last say through your mouth: "O young woman, throw yourself into the water again so that I may have the chance of saving both of us!" (p. 147).

In these words Clamence is expressing our agony when we realize how much we are responsible for everyone, to what extent our most secret thoughts poison the air of others without our knowing it, and help create temptations to despair or even murder. In the face of this problem of reparation, which is both necessary and impossible when the person we have killed is gone for ever, "classical wisdom" becomes ludicrous.

We are at the point that Graham Greene called *The Heart of the Matter*. Similarly, in the last scene of *Requiem for a Nun*, when Temple asks Nancy Mannigoe, "Is there any place in the world where children could forgive us?", she is expressing Clamence's supreme agony. The wheel of time never goes

backward; that cool neck and that muffled sound will always haunt the sleep of the judge-penitent; the hands which choked a six months-old baby will always prevent Temple from finding peace. Clamence admits that he was called, but he didn't listen. All the perfumes of Araby can never remove the stain which for years will keep Temple from sleeping: "Macbeth will sleep no more."

Unless there is a God who gives pardon, and can take away the sting that poisons Clamence's bitterness, unless a divine power could help us find our past again, free it from the darkness of "Never more," and restore fluidity to a life which is reborn There could be repentance to a God who, through his eternal life, in which our own existences are present, could deliver us from the deadly spell of our past acts. How many vocations of saints have begun by this discovery of previous cowardice!

But it is not enough for God to pardon us; we also want to save those whom we caused to be lost. We are ready to offer him anything if he will receive into his mercy those whom we have abandoned here below. There has to be a place "where our children will no longer remember the hands that have choked them." This is what Nancy says to Temple:

You are not alone . . . We need only believe in Him, because of what He is. I don't understand everything He says, but I love Him because they killed Him. You ran away because you love what is wrong, like me. I was like that. And He cannot prevent us from desiring evil. But, in order to make up a little, He has invented suffering which is the light of the poor world. He it is who will pardon us, for there is surely a place somewhere, where your child will remember nothing, not even those hands that choked her.

One can hardly describe "paradise" better than this, not as a place, but a state, or better yet, as a kingdom.

This speech is Faulkner's, not Camus.' The latter has insisted that adapting *Requiem for a Nun* did not mean that he was converted. He told a reporter for *Dagens Nyheter* what he thought of religion in December 1957:

I have an awareness of the sacred, of the mystery that exists in man, and I see no reason for not admitting the emotion that I feel for Christ and his teaching. Unfortunately, I am afraid that in certain areas, especially in Europe, the admission of ignorance, of a limit to man's knowledge and a respect for the sacred, will appear simply as a weakness. If it is, I fully accept it. I have only respect and veneration for the person and the life of Christ; I do not believe in his resurrection.

There are many passages in *The Fall* which show Camus' admiration for Christ; and in *Exile and the Kingdom* for example, we find in "The Renegade":

'Here is my Lord, just look at him, he never strikes or kills, he issues his orders in a low voice, he turns the other cheek, choose him . . . ' (p. 36).

and later, in "The Growing Stone," this bit of dialogue between the cook and D'Arrast:

"You are a captain," he said. "My house is yours. Besides, you are going to help me keep my promise, and it's as if you had made it yourself. That will help you too."

D'Arrast smiled saying, "I don't think so."

"You are proud, Captain."

"I used to be proud; now I'm alone. But just tell me: has your good Jesus always answered you?"

"Always . . . no, Captain!"

"Well, then?"

The cook burst out with a gay, childlike laugh.

"Well," he said, "he's free, isn't he?" (p. 187).

The simple frankness of the last words recall the faith of those who have gone to Lourdes asking to be cured, and re-

turn, still sick but without bitterness. This is the real miracle of faith, which restores the dead to life.

We realize that, "cut off from his divine ascendance, Christ becomes for Camus what he was for Alfred de Vigny, the highest incarnation of solitude and human grandeur" (Quilliot, pp. 103-4). He himself said, "My lack of imagination forbids me to go any further"; he gives these words to Clamence, and has Nancy Mannigoe say (a line which is not in Faulkner's text): "I love him, my friend, who died without knowing it." This expresses both the admiration Camus feels for the humanity of Christ, and for everything human which radiates from him, and also the limit beyond which he cannot go.

But must we not begin, like the apostles, by being struck by the radiance of the man Jesus? Is it not moving to discover the place—modest, perhaps, but quite visible—that this countenance has in Camus' work? It appears that the hypocrisy and cowardice which, rightly or wrongly, he finds in our society today, brings him to discover, by contrast, the sweetness of that man "who asks only one thing, that we love," and who says to the woman taken in adultery, "Go, I do not condemn you."

Camus' disbelief has none of that intellectual bitterness and sharp spirit of competition which obsess Sartre.

It is true that I do not believe in God. But that does not mean I am an atheist. I would be in agreement with Benjamin Constant in finding irreligion rather vulgar and trite (*Le Monde*, Aug. 31, 1956).

Camus' thought should be an appeal to our own fidelity; let us not try too hard to baptize it at any cost. With Camus, let us love the poor; give them light—and first of all, that of the sun, which is also a creature of God. If the shadow of death, the fascination of evil, or especially despair at not being able

to make reparation for evil weigh on the recent characters of Camus, let us make sure that our response to these concerns bears witness to something more than an abstract ready-answer, or a quick paste job to hide the holes in our pet system.

At the end of his preface to the new edition of *L'envers et l'endroit*, Camus

says: "After 25 years of writing, I continue to live with the idea that my work has not even begun" (*NNRF*, p. 12). It seems to me that this is so. After beginning with a question, his work approached a kind of serenity; now a new question appears, the question of hope in the face of death.

translated by E. S., L. K., S. H., J. C.

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