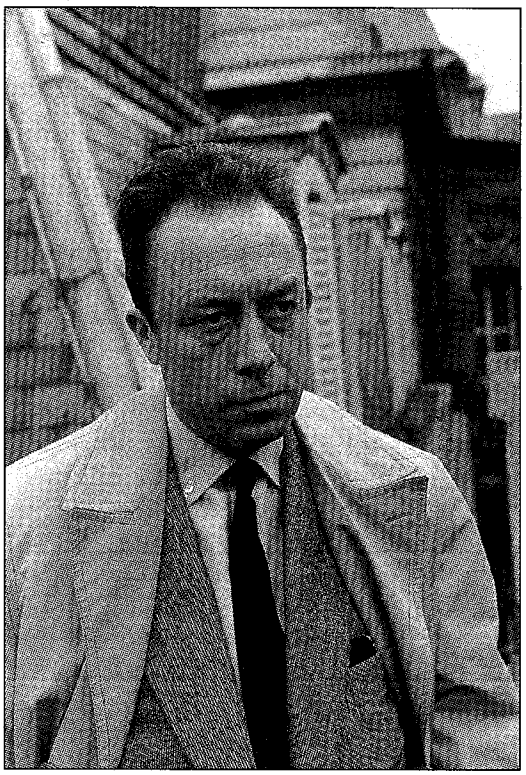
THE OTHER CAMUS



Albert Camus, 1956

Among Paris's postwar intellectuals, Albert Camus stood apart—both for his independence and his compelling lucidity. Yet few of his admirers knew how different Camus was even from the persona that came through in his early, existential writings. As our author shows, the publication of Camus's last, uncompleted novel brings us closer to the man we barely knew.

BY ROBERT ROYAL

What they did not like in him was the Algerian.
—From *The First Man* (Notes and Sketches)

Albert Camus died in literature's most stunning car crash on January 4, 1960; he had lived in two very different worlds. One extended into the highest reaches of French intellectual and political life and brought him fame and honors, including the 1957 Nobel Prize for literature. The other was that of the lower-class European workers in the Belcourt quarter of Algiers where Camus was reared, a world of "poverty and sunlight."

Even the details of his death reflected his movement between these two worlds. Returning from a vacation in the south of France with Michel Gallimard, scion of the prestigious Parisian publishing family,

Camus died instantly when Gallimard lost control of his Facel Vega and struck a tree. (Gallimard died several days later.) Camus's body, accompanied by only a few family members and close friends, was taken back to the cemetery at Lourmarin, a humble village in Provence where, in the last few years of his life, he liked to write.

Camus's deep loyalty to the worlds of high art and simple human existence may be sensed in almost everything he wrote, but nowhere more poignantly than in *The First Man*, the unfinished manuscript found in his briefcase near the scene of the crash. The Camus family allowed scholars to consult the text of *The First Man* after the author's death, but, because it was unpolished and incomplete, withheld it from publication. Destroying it was unthinkable, however. Camus's daughter, Catherine, finally decided to oversee its publication. An instant sensation when it appeared in France last year, the novel remained on the best-seller lists for months. In her note to the American edition, which came out in August, Catherine reminds us that her father "was a very reserved man and would no doubt have masked his own feelings far more in its final version." But she also points to one of the novel's more intriguing qualities: in it, Camus's voice sounds much as it did to those who knew him best.

The First Man also reveals how Camus, throughout his career, was both shadowed and inspired by the voiceless mass of people who, like the Algerians of his youth, go through their lives leaving barely a trace of their existence. Many of his tensions as a writer may have had to do with, on the one hand, his fear of sterility, a falling back into the simple silence of those people, and, on the other, his will to express the truth and beauty of their existence to a wholly different world.

In the preface to a new edition of some of his early work that appeared shortly before his death, Camus remarked that a writer "keeps within himself a single source which nourishes during his lifetime what he is and what he says. As for myself, I know that my source is in . . . the poverty and sunlight I lived in for so long, whose memory still saves me from two opposing dangers that threaten every artist, resentment and self-satisfaction."

In its printed version, *The First Man* runs to more than 300 pages, an already large text for the usually succinct Camus. But there are many indications that he was embarking on something even larger. *The First Man* was to have been, Camus said, "the novel of my maturity," a large-scale saga on the order of Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, encompassing the whole panorama of Algerian history from the 1830 French conquest and subsequent colonization down through the Nazi Occupation and the eventual Nazi defeat.

It is impossible to say how the novel would have finally turned out,

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At his uncle's workshop in 1920, Camus sits in the center of the front row, wearing a black smock.

> "There was a mystery about this man, and a mystery he wanted to clear up. But at the end there was nothing but the mystery of poverty that creates people without a name and without a past."
>
> —*The First Man* (Notes and Sketches)

or even whether Camus could have done what he intended. But the man painting on that large a canvas with the full palette of colors is quite different from the Camus that American readers of *The Stranger* and *The Plague* may expect. *The First Man* is neither stark nor anguished. Instead, a naked exuberance and love animate its pages. Camus seems to have been working back toward the wellsprings of his genius: "A man's work is nothing but this slow trek to discover, through the detours of art, those two or three great and simple images in whose presence his heart first opened," he wrote in the late 1950s. "This is why, perhaps after working and producing for 20 years, I still live with the idea that my work has not even begun."

By the end of his short life (he was only 46 when he died), Camus seems to have been shifting into a new phase as an artist and thinker. We know from various sources, including his journals, that Camus had early on formulated a multiphase writing plan. The first phase consisted of a triad of works—the play *Caligula* (1938), the novel *The Stranger* (1940), and the book-length essay *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1941). In them, he set out to confront the absurd—the nihilism that seemed to have gripped modern Europe. Unfortunately, many readers in his lifetime,

and some even today, identify Camus exclusively with this first stage. To Camus, the radical confrontation with the absurd was an absolute necessity in the 20th century, but only as a first step toward a fuller vision of human meaning and value.

Even before completing the first phase in 1941, Camus, who was then still in his late twenties, laid out the second. Having faced and rejected the existential abyss, he believed that values could be constructed out of rebellion against the human predicament. Another triad of works was projected and took a decade to complete: a play entitled *The Misunderstanding* (1944), a novel, *The Plague* (1947), and an essay, *The Rebel* (1951). The first two phases contain many of the works usually associated with Camus, but, as he remarked in his journals in 1949, he regarded these early works as a necessary depersonalization before speaking "in my own voice."

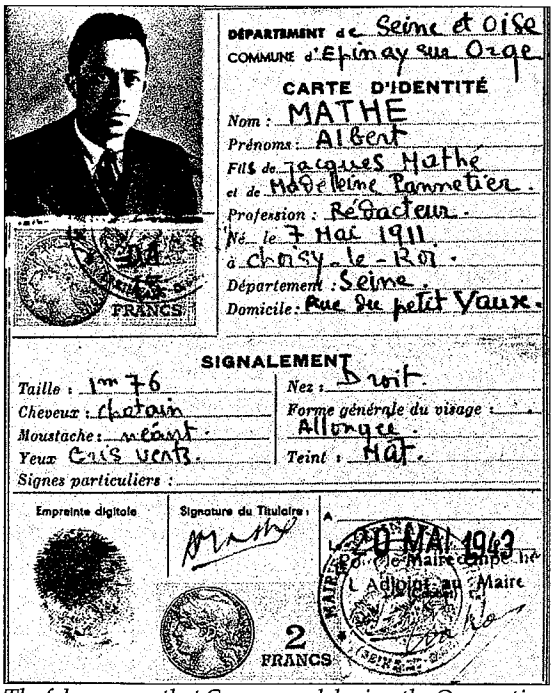
For a subsequent phase, he planned on another triad of works exploring the need for limits and measure, even in revolt: *The First Man*, *The System* (a long essay never written), and another play. Camus saw these various phases as falling under three mythological markers: Sisyphus, Prometheus, and Nemesis. To readers who think writers produce spontaneously, this scheme may appear calculated and surprisingly rigid. But for Camus it was necessary. He believed that an inborn tendency to anarchy, unless vigorously disciplined, would lead to a fatal dispersal of his powers.

In many ways, it is remarkable that a man like Camus ever conceived of such a scheme. He had grown up with few of the supports that normally provide direction and order. Less than a year after his birth on November 7, 1913, Camus lost his father—a victim of wounds received at the Battle of the Marne. The penniless youth from Belcourt, one of the poorer quarters of Algiers, went on to the lycée and university only because certain kind teachers convinced his grandmother, who dominated the Camus household, that it would profit the family if he continued studying rather than go directly to work. At 17, just out of the lycée, he came down with tuberculosis and might well have died had not one of his uncles, a butcher, taken him under his wing and kept him well fed. Even so, his prospects were not bright: the tuberculosis meant that Camus, though intellectually promising, could not pass the physical for the *agrégation*, the usual route to a teaching position in the French university system.

In the 1930s, while he worked on his thesis at the University of Algiers, Camus took various odd jobs. He tutored, directed a theater company, recorded weather data for a meteorological office, sold car parts, and finally became a journalist at the *Alger Républicain*. During the same period, he also was briefly an activist and member of the Communist Party and found time to write two collections of essays, his play *Caligula*, and part of two novels, *A Happy Death* and what would become *The Stranger*.

By 1940, when he gave up on job prospects in Algeria and took a job at *Paris-Soir* under Pascal Pia, his former editor at *Alger Républicain*,

Camus was still unknown but had already accomplished some remarkable work. Despite the war, he continued writing, publishing both *The Stranger* and *The Myth of Sisyphus* in 1942. The following year, he began writing for the Resistance paper *Combat* and eventually became its director.


DÉPARTEMENT de Seine et Oise
COMMUNE d'Epinay sur Orge
CARTE D'IDENTITÉ
Nom : MATHE
Prénoms : Albert
Fils de Jacques Mathé
et de Madeleine Pannetier
Profession : Rédacteur
Né le 7 Mai 1911
à Choisy-le-Roi
Département : Seine
Domicile : Rue du petit Vaux
SIGNALEMENT
Taille : 1m 76
Cheveux : Chatain
Moustache : néant
Yeux Gris vert
Nez : Droit
Forme générale du visage : Allongée
Teint : Mat
Signes particuliers :
Empreinte digitale
Signature du Titulaire :
20 MAI 1943
L'Adjoint au Maire
2 FRANCS

The false papers that Camus used during the Occupation identified the Resistance worker as Albert Mathé.

Camus emerged from this period an almost legendary figure. In addition to his fame as a novelist, he had won recognition as perhaps the most distinguished moral voice in Europe. No one else wrote more movingly, for example, of the spiritual resistance to Nazism. His *Letters to a German Friend*, which came out in the months before the liberation of Paris, are still worth reading not only for the testimony they give to the human spirit but for their lyrical invocation, even in the flush of victory, of a humanity that refuses to sink to the enemy's level: "It would not be enough for me to think that all the great shades of the West and that 30 nations were on our side; I could not do without the soil. And so I know that everything in Europe, both landscape and spirit, calmly negates you, without feeling any rash hatred, but with the calm strength of victory."

To many readers, Camus was the romantic model of the 20th-century French intellectual. Attractive, modest, irresistible to women, a talented actor and director, a voice of the Resistance, he exerted a strange fascination over a whole generation. As one commentator put it, "He was like Bogart but more exuberant." Susan Sontag says in her well-known but often misleading essay on Camus's *Notebooks*, "Kafka arouses pity and affection on the part of his readers, Joyce admiration, Proust and Gide respect, but no modern writer that I can think of, except Camus, has aroused love."

This is even more curious because of a certain *pudeur* in everything Camus wrote, a reserve and a distance evident even in his notes to himself. The journal entries from the 1940s, for example, barely acknowledge the world war and nowhere mention how the publication of *The Stranger* and *The Myth of Sisyphus* brought the talented but obscure

French Algerian to the forefront of the Paris literary scene.

Camus is often called the French Orwell, a fair comparison if not pressed too far. Both men suffered from tuberculosis and derived wisdom from their proximity to death. Both championed the working class but were by nature incapable of the public exaggerations and mendacities required by partisan politics. Both recognized early on a truth to which George Orwell gave precise formulation: "The sin of nearly all left-wingers from 1933 onwards is that they have wanted to be anti-fascist without being anti-totalitarian." Both writers demand description as decent human beings who tried to promote justice and a clear public language at a time when most intellectuals were ideologically corrupt or obscurantist.

Camus's reputation continued to grow steadily in the late 1940s and early '50s. He was a nonpartisan, humane voice during the Cold War and Algerian conflicts, and a reliable commentator on Communist injustices, the invasion of Hungary in 1956, and various other crises. Though a man of the Left, he clashed repeatedly with the Parisian literary leftists—at no time more pointedly than when his essay *The Rebel* appeared in 1951.

From the book's opening sentence—"There are crimes of passion and crimes of logic"—to its lyrical conclusion about a measured brotherhood, *The Rebel* is a vibrant exposition of Camus's belief both in the need for rebellion and in the equally strong need for limits to it. Camus indicts radical revolt not only among 20th-century Marxists and fascists but also its expressions in the French Terror, de Sade, Hegel, Marx, portions of Nietzsche, the Russian anarchists, the French surrealists, and others.

To leftists, an appeal for limited rebellion always sounds like a defense of the status quo, and in fact Camus was disturbed to find that only French conservatives seemed to agree with him. But Camus was determined to present some third way that would not simply fall into the simplistic left-right dichotomies of the Cold War. Unfortunately, those very dichotomies shaped the early reactions to his argument.

Stung by Camus's criticism of their apologies for communist atrocities, Jean-Paul Sartre and other left-wing intellectuals savaged the essay in Sartre's magazine *Les Temps modernes*. They accused him, variously, of apologizing for capitalist exploitation, of misreading the historical record on several philosophers and literary figures, of having no political solutions, and of being in over his head. Though there was some truth to the latter charges, Camus was right on his main points—and his accuracy cost him his standing in Parisian literary circles for years to come.

The sharp intellectual criticism of *The Rebel* by Sartre and his circle seems to have shaken Camus's confidence during the early 1950s. Besides pointing to technical philosophical deficiencies, his critics had put their finger on a real problem: Camus had no concrete political program. That shortcoming became even more apparent in his agonized response to the growing conflict in Algeria. Camus found it impossible to follow most left-wing intellectuals in Paris, who blithely took the Arab side against their own government. In a famous remark, Camus denounced

the National Liberation Front's policy of indiscriminate violence against all Europeans in Algeria, among other reasons because it would strike "my mother or my family." Unable to choose between the only available alternatives, Arab terrorism or France's repression, he lapsed into what he hoped was an eloquent silence: "When words lead men to dispose of other men's lives without a trace of remorse, silence is not a negative attitude."

The ferocity on both sides was something his instinctive moderation could not reach. When he went to Algiers in 1958, just two years before his death, to speak in favor of a just French-Arab society, he arrived as a hometown hero of the Resistance, a Nobel laureate, and a writer who commanded worldwide moral authority. Yet he was shouted down when he tried to speak at a political gathering and was threatened by both sides.

Personal as well as political tensions exacted a heavy emotional toll on Camus during the 1950s. He began having attacks of "claustrophobia" in restaurants and trains, he saw a psychiatrist, and extensive womanizing caused his second marriage to unravel, with Camus finally moving to a separate but nearby apartment in order to remain close to his two children.

The almost epic promiscuity that destroyed his marriage raises questions about Camus's relationships with women in general. In his early life, he was reserved, and Algerian friends teased him about his shyness. That changed after his short-lived marriage to Simone Hié in the early 1930s. A fellow French Algerian, wealthy, flamboyant, and beautiful, Hié knew how to manipulate men. She got together with Camus while her then-boyfriend Max-Pol Fouchet, one of Camus's best friends, was out of town. To make matters worse, Hié was also a morphine addict, who, if necessary, would seduce doctors for the drug. Discovering that the seductions were still going in 1935, a year after their marriage, Camus left her and almost never spoke of Hié again.

But the discovery deeply changed him. Camus became promiscuous, and something cold and strangely cynical in an otherwise remarkably uncynical man broke loose. It was five years before he married again, this time to a more proper French-Algerian beauty, Francine Faure. She was talented, attractive, and intelligent in her own right, but with a more stable nature that promised something Camus may have felt he needed: a regular family life.

Unfortunately for both of them, the war intervened. Faure came to Lyons in France for the wedding. But when she returned to Algeria for a visit, the Allied invasion of North Africa and the Nazi Occupation of the south of France separated her from Camus for the rest of the war. (In *The Plague*, an allegorical treatment of the Occupation, Camus writes of the effects of a similar separation caused by a medical quarantine.) When Camus moved to Paris during the Occupation, things took an even more tragic turn.

In the highly emotional atmosphere of the time, as he continued writing and producing plays, Camus met a passionate Spanish-French actress who would become the central romantic figure in his life, Maria Casarès. Camus valued the "Castilian pride" he had inherited from his mother's Spanish ancestors, and some strange harmony

of passion, pride, and vulnerability united the two. Camus, whose reserve was legendary, could even be open with Casarès.

Until the liberation of Paris, they carried on a torrid affair. Both knew the relationship might end when the war did, and though Casarès wanted all or nothing, Camus could not make up his mind to divorce Francine. He split with Casarès, seemingly forever, in 1944, after a passionate struggle that she said "placed me at the center of life but left me completely vulnerable."

But the strange Castilian alchemy between them did not go away. Francine came to live in Paris and had twins after the liberation. Five years later, Camus and Casarès met by accident on the street and never separated again. Oddly, Camus continued to have many other affairs. His secretary had to keep a list of young women who were to be put right through to him at the Gallimard offices, and of others who were to be told he was unavailable. He and Casarès agreed that since they could not have everything, they would live by what they called the "75 percent rule." They existed mostly for each other, with some gaps. Ultimately, however, for Casarès, this meant that she could not even attend Camus's funeral.

Hard as this was for Casarès, Camus's irregularities were even harder on his wife. Unable either to leave Francine or curb his appetites, Camus finally drove her to a nervous breakdown. When he won the Nobel Prize in 1957, they went to Stockholm together for the sake of appearances, even though they were living apart. Camus was aware of his moral problem, even if many of his admirers were not, and it may have had something to do with his frequent confessions of weakness. In *The Fall* (1956), the protagonist makes a lengthy confession about all the women he seduced or harmed, one he may even have allowed to die, while appearing to the world to be an upright man. Though told humorously and with no little irony, the narrator's confessions may be Camus's as well.

It is in light of all of these political and psychological circumstances in the 1950s that we must read *The First Man.* What appears to be facile nostalgia floats over an immense abyss. Amid the Algerian apocalypse and personal troubles, Camus was trying to preserve an image of youthful innocence from total oblivion and perhaps make a statement as well. The critic Paul DeMan, writing without knowledge of *The First Man* and before his own past as a pro-Nazi writer was known, took Camus to task for believing that "he could shelter mankind from its own contingency merely by asserting the beauty of his own memories." DeMan wickedly went on to conclude that Camus the writer was like Camus the young man and soccer goalie: he did not enter the fray but merely defended a disappearing society from attacks against it. While the charge is unfair in many ways, DeMan had a point.

Yet the personal and political uncertainties and paralysis during the 1950s had some good effects for Camus. In an unforeseen divergence from his plan, he began writing the short stories that eventually were

Simone Hié (upper left), Camus's first wife, was bright and beautiful, but suffered from a morphine addiction. Camus's second marriage, to Francine Faure, pictured here (lower left) with their two children, Jean and Catherine, lasted longer but was almost as tumultuous as the first. Although he had many mistresses, Camus's passion for the actress Maria Casarès (right), whom he met during the war, never subsided.

collected as *Exile and the Kingdom*. These powerful stories display a wider range of human life and emotion than appears in the earlier work. One story, "The Fall," grew into a long, intricate monologue that had to be published separately as a short novel. The speaker, Jean-Baptiste Clamence, a former Parisian lawyer living in Amsterdam, provides an anatomy of the moral hypocrisy of his time, and perhaps of Camus himself, in language that often becomes epigrammatic: "A single sentence will suffice for modern man: he fornicated and read the newspapers."

At first, these works were relatively neglected and disparaged, perhaps because they were so different from what Camus's readers had come to expect. Today, *The Fall* seems Camus's best novel, and the stories show a life that *The Plague* and perhaps even *The Stranger* no longer have. Some unanticipated impulse was making itself felt, an impulse that broke loose in 1958, when he began *The First Man*.

The First Man has been described as a book about a man in search of a father, and that is a central part of protagonist Jacques Cormery's story. The novel opens on the night of Cormery's birth, during a downpour, as his father, together with a sympathetic Arab, drives a wagon bearing Cormery's mother, already in labor, to their new home in Algeria. A note in the appendix may explain part of the significance of this

scene: "At 40, he realizes he needs someone to show him the way and to give him censure or praise: a father. Authority and not power."

This strikes an unusual note in Camus, as does the whole novel, which is highly autobiographical and personal. Forty years after the death of his father, Camus (like Cormery in the novel) visited a military cemetery and discovered, with a shock that is physical as much as emotional, that his father died at 29. Until then, Camus had little interest in his unknown progenitor. But the silent graveyard confrontation with the fact of unfulfilled aspirations spurred Camus, as it does the fictional Cormery, to find out more about his family's Algerian past.

The larger saga of Algeria, the Tolstoyan dimension the author projected for *The First Man*, had not yet been sketched when Camus died. This is particularly unfortunate because Camus would have produced a balanced account of Algerian colonial experience, which, for all its moral ambiguities and outright horrors, had something heroic to it.

The manuscript of *The First Man* has been consulted by scholars in the years since Camus's death, and some parts of the story are fairly widely known. What is less known, and what alters our overall view of Camus, is the emphasis he gives to the aliterate, basically ahistorical silence of the people from whom he sprang. It is one of Camus's admirable qualities that his family, which knew nothing of civilizations, history, or wars other than their immediate effects on family members, never caused him shame or self-doubt. Those silent lives buffeted by nature and history were, for him, reasons for pride, not embarrassment. They were part of that great, wordless mass of humanity that, since the beginning of time, has had to face life without intellectual illusions. As Cormery says at one point, for all his travels and experience in a larger world, "they were greater than I am."

Prominent among these mute figures, almost to the point of obsession, is Camus's mother, Catherine. If much of *The First Man* involves the search for a father, some of the narrative and fragments at the end of the volume suggest that Camus intended to dedicate the book to his mother. In fact, he contemplated an unusual literary strategy: some scenes would be presented as they would appear to an average literate person, others as they would appear to a woman, like Camus's mother, whose everyday vocabulary ran to about 400 words. Dedicating the entire book to her, Camus explained, would add the irony that it would be an expression of love and admiration for a person, and a whole world, that could never understand it.

Though, like any writer, Camus changed, there is also much continuity in his emotional universe. For example, the very first entry in his first notebook, started in his early twenties, speaks of childhood poverty and the crucial importance of mothers: "The bizarre feeling that the son has for his mother constitutes *his whole sensibility*. The manifestations of that sensibility in the most diverse fields is adequately explained by hidden memory, material from his youth (a glue that sticks to the soul)." Read in isolation, this passage might ap-

pear to be either a truism or a confirmation of vaguely Freudian intuitions. But Camus's relationship to his mother has profound and particular echoes in his other work.

The mother who is dead before the action of *The Stranger* begins, it is now clear, belongs only to Camus's early "absurd" phase. And the indifference of her son, Meursault, is mostly an absurdist literary device. More normative is the presence of the mother in *The First Man*, who carries a startling, and almost defining, meaning for Camus's work and sensibility. Camus's mother was an odd type: illiterate, taciturn to the point of muteness, distant, and, to an outside eye, cold. (His grandmother was the more active presence in the household, and a violent one at that.) Most boys would have resented such a mother, but Camus made her a kind of ideal figure of rugged human love, a representative of the silent people who accept life and death with calm equanimity.

In terms of pure literary craftsmanship, Camus reveals himself here as a highly capable painter of scenes from life, whether they be set in the lycée, on the beach, in the streets, or at home. There is a great deal of color, taste, sound, and smell that is largely absent from the novels that were admired for their spareness and intellectual rigor. *The First Man* shows Camus's old genius for making fiction do the work of thought, but he is less concerned here to strip the story down to bare essentials. In fact, the story's main interest is its recreation of the lost life of Algiers, a world that nurtured the sensibility of the author and his fictional counterpart.

All his life, Camus pursued a kind of personal quest beyond or above politics, especially in his fiction. In some ways, the quest was philosophical. Although Camus received the *Diplôme d'études supérieures* in philosophy from the University of Algiers, both he and his professors knew that he would never make a proper academic philosopher. It was not that Camus was incapable: his essay "*On a Philosophy of Expression* by Brice Parain" shows philosophical gifts that could have been developed further, had he wished. But there was too much personal engagement in Camus's philosophizing and too little technical reasoning to satisfy the academic philosophers. A journal entry from 1935, just around the time he was finishing his university studies, expresses Camus's sense of his own path: "One only thinks through images. If you want to be a philosopher, write novels."

What kind of philosopher Camus became is difficult to specify. After their break with Camus, Sartre and his collaborators took him to task for the philosophical simplicity and second-hand knowledge in his work, especially *The Rebel*. But just as a standard political reading of Camus provides too narrow a focus, readers who approach him with the wrong philosophical expectations miss a crucial dimension of his work. Like Nietzsche, Camus valued the ancient Greeks, not the philosophers but the pre-Socratic thinkers and poets, as he construed them. Plato is too otherworldly for Camus, who always proclaimed loyalty to the earth

Returning to Belcourt

In this scene from The First Man, *we follow Jacques Cormery (Camus's fictional alter ego) as he returns from school to his apartment in a poor working-class neighborhood of Algiers.*

At seven o'clock came the rush out of the *lycée*; they ran in noisy groups the length of the rue Bab-Azoun, where all the stores were lit up and the sidewalk under the arcades was so crowded that sometimes they had to run in the street itself, between the rails, until a trolley came in sight and they had to dash back under the arcades; then at last the Place du Gouvernement opened up before them, its periphery illuminated by the stalls and stands of the Arab peddlers lit by acetylene lamps giving off a smell the children inhaled with delight. The red trolleys were waiting, already jammed—whereas in the morning there were fewer passengers—and sometimes they had to stand on the running board of a trailer car, which was both forbidden and tolerated, until some passengers got off at a stop, and then the two boys would press into the human mass, separated, unable in any case to chat, and limited to working their way slowly with elbows and bodies to get to one of the railings where they could see the dark port with its big streamers outlined by lights that seemed, in the night of the sea and the sky, like skeletons of burned-out buildings where the fire had left its embers. The big illuminated trolleys rode with a great racket over the water, then forged a bit inland and passed between poorer and poorer houses to the Belcourt district, where the children had to part company and Jacques climbed the never lighted stairs toward the circle of the kerosene lamp that lit the oilcloth table cover and the chairs around the table, leaving in the shadow the rest of the room, where Catherine Cormery was occupied at the buffet preparing to set the table, while his grandmother was in the kitchen reheating the stew from lunch and his older brother was at the corner of the table reading an adventure novel. Sometimes he had to go to the Mzabite grocer for the salt or quarter-pound of butter needed at the last minute, or go get Uncle Ernest, who was holding forth at Gaby's café. Dinner was at

and made a lucid recognition of the beauties and brutalities of the world—a joyful forgetting of death in the frank embrace of life—into a kind of personal ideal.

We might even think of Camus as a Stoic or Epicurean in the ancient sense of those terms. The original Stoics were not merely grim heroes; nor were the Epicureans pleasure addicts. Instead, both pursued a rational enjoyment of the world among friends, a resignation to inevitable evils, and a state of deep calm in the soul. Though much of that shared ethos harmonizes with the endurance of the simple people described in *The First Man*, Camus's love of beauty and the world was a bit too exuberant for either ancient school. Nevertheless, several entries in his notebooks show that he thought of himself as trying to find a kind of religious order: "The real problem, *even without God*, is the problem of psy-

eight, in silence unless Uncle Ernest recounted an incomprehensible adventure that sent him into gales of laughter, but in any event there was no mention of the *lycée*, except if his grandmother would ask if he had gotten good grades, and he said yes and no one said any more about it, and his mother asked him nothing, shaking her head and gazing at him with her gentle eyes when he confessed to good grades, but always silent and a bit distracted; "Sit still," she would say to her mother, "I'll get the cheese," then nothing till the meal was over, when she stood up to clear the table. "Help your mother," his grandmother would say, because he had picked up *Pardaillan* and was avidly reading it. He helped out and came back to the lamp, putting the big volume that told of duels and courage on the slick bare surface of the oilcloth, while his mother, pulling a chair out of the lamplight, would seat herself by the window in winter, or in summer on the balcony, and watch the traffic of trolleys, cars, and passersby as it gradually diminished. It was, again, his grandmother who told Jacques he had to go to bed because he would get up at five-thirty the next morning, and he kissed her first, then his uncle, and last his mother, who gave him a tender, absentminded kiss, then assumed once more her motionless position, in the shadowy half-light, her gaze lost in the street and the current of life that flowed endlessly below the riverbank where she sat, endlessly, while her son, endlessly, watched her in the shadows with a lump in his throat, staring at her thin bent back, full of an obscure anxiety in the presence of a misfortune he could not understand.

His mother, Catherine Camus

chological unity (the only problem really raised by the operation of the absurd is that of the metaphysical unity of the world and the mind) and inner peace. . . . Such peace is not possible without a discipline difficult to reconcile with the world. *That's where the problem lies.* It must indeed be reconciled with the world. It is a matter of achieving a *rule of conduct in secular life.*"

This brings us to a crucial point. One of the more attractive features of Camus's thought and art to many readers is his sense of the sacred. By all accounts, his family in Algeria was only nominally Catholic and he made his First Communion at the insistence of his grandmother for social rather than religious reasons. Otherwise, the family seems to have been entirely non-practicing. Nothing conventionally religious appears in *The First Man.* In fact, a note states baldly: "Christ did not set foot in

Algeria," perhaps echoing Carlo Levi's *Christ Stopped at Eboli.* In later years, Camus would describe religion as treason to the stoic endurance of his family. Yet something in Camus, even during his youth, suggested a deep religious sense to those who knew him.

Because of a certain tone and attitude in his work, it is often said that Camus might have become a Christian had he lived longer. But there is little reason to doubt his own words on the matter: " I feel closer to the values of the classical world than to those of Christianity. Unfortunately, I cannot go to Delphi to be initiated!"

Yet if Camus is pagan, he is also post-Christian, and Christian influences mark his work. He has a profound sense of the disunity of the human soul that parallels religious ideas such as original sin. Camus once described himself as an "independent Catholic" to his friend Paul Raffi and even allowed that a Christian reading of *The Fall* was legitimate. (Every element in the name of the single speaker in *The Fall,* Jean-Baptiste Clamence, has clear Christian overtones, as does the very title of the book.) Camus's highly successful stage adaptation of Faulkner's *Requiem for a Nun* in the late 1950s and several of the stories in *Exile and the Kingdom* involve dark and primitive spiritual themes. But in the final analysis, his was a pagan voice—though an unusual one. As he said in an interview shortly before he died, "I have a sense of the sacred and I don't believe in a future life, that's all."

"That's all," however, covers quite a bit of ground. Camus early became and remained a Nietzschean, of the rare sweet-tempered variety. In the same briefcase that held the unfinished manuscript of *The First Man,* there was also a copy of *The Gay Science.* Camus agreed with Nietzsche that Christianity had damaged the human race's image of itself. More seriously, he thought Christianity had inspired a neglect of justice and joy in this world in anticipation of happiness in the next. And like Nietzsche, Camus regarded the way back to real virtues as involving a confrontation with the abyss and a heroic response.

But Camus was not simply a blind disciple of Nietzsche. In Camus's work, there is no hint of the Nietzschean scorn for the great masses of people too hamstrung by Christianity and the usual human-herd instincts to pursue the heroic ideal. Camus was too aware of his own failings and too sympathetic to the human predicament for such arrogance. And Camus had too great a love and reverence for the way of life and kinds of people who appear in *The First Man.*

Camus was powerfully attracted by the notion of a return to simple happiness after a plumbing of existential depths—for modern intellectuals. Whatever relationship this stance has to the truth about ancient Greece (probably very little), it was his task to make the simple greatness of his poor Algerians visible to the literate world. In the last analysis, it may be this Camus, the Camus of post-Christian pagan piety and the expansive energy emerging toward the end in *Exile and the Kingdom, The Fall,* and *The First Man,* that says the most to us in the post–Cold War world and that will endure. We may now also have

to think about this Camus in unexpected company—that of Leo Tolstoy.

Such a pairing seems odd only if we insist on the spare, existential Camus as the essential man. The Camus of the first phase is certainly closer to Kafka and Dostoyevsky as one of the radical explorers of the modern predicament. By the 1950s, however, Camus said he preferred re-reading Tolstoy. Even earlier, in a note to himself, Camus revealed that the example of Tolstoy's life was much on his mind: "I must break with everything. If there is no desert at hand there is always the plague or Tolstoy's little railway station."

Tolstoy's troubled pacifism and humanitarianism, his moral stature and his irregular Christianity, and even his domestic problems, we now see, have striking parallels in the life and career of the later Camus. More pointedly, Tolstoy's descent into the confused wreckage of modern culture in search of "what men live by" unexpectedly anticipates Camus's own quest. Tolstoy saw in his Russian peasants and Camus in his *pied-noirs* some simple virtue and calm hope that the intellectual and political world spurned. Tolstoy remains the much larger figure, of course. But we will never know how much closer their intellectual odysseys might have brought them had Michel Gallimard's car not strayed from the road that winter day, sending Camus to the grave at an age when Tolstoy had just reached the height of his powers.