

Albert Camus, a personal profile

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Abstract

In this work, Professor Octavi Fullat (1928) offers us a profile of Albert Camus, the author he discovered on a trip to Paris and on whom he wrote his doctoral thesis, which he defended at the University of Barcelona in 1961. This is a personal memoir in which the author surveys his early years while making the character of Camus a primary reference in his intellectual universe.

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In 1956, I earned my Bachelor's in Philosophy and Letters with a specialisation in Philosophy from the University of Barcelona after having passed the three end-of-degree eliminatory exams. At that time, it was a five-year degree.

There were fourteen of us graduating, and only half of us managed to successfully complete the three eliminatory exams in the first round in June. Where should we celebrate it? In Plaça Reial, of course, with a beer. It was not a time of plenty. Nor is today, even though the absentminded don't realise it.

However, we did take a bonus: we went barrelling ahead. How? A night-time excursion to the Bertí cliffs. We took the train as far as Aiguafreda and then camped in a tent. All seven of us went, a mix of boys and girls. We admired the Montseny massif on the other side of the Congost River. Round the fire at night, dinner and chatting as we recalled the fun times in the years we had spent together at the university. Joan Claret in particular had us in stitches as he imitated our professors.

I told my parents the great news that I had earned my Bachelor's. I had gone to their house on Rambla de Poble Nou to have dessert after the Sunday dinner with the Piarists at number 277 Diputació Street. Congratulations and back-slapping.

Then my father got serious and urged me thus:

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- Now your doctorate.
- I need to take a bit of a breather.
- No way. Next year you'll start your doctoral courses.

I asked for a respite because I had earned my degree while simultaneously working as a baccalaureate teacher with the Piarists. I had taken the exams in two courses every June and left the other three for September. So in five years I had had no vacation. He, the son of farmers from Alforja, got his teaching degree paid for. Afterwards, he worked to pay for a degree in the exact sciences, and then medicine, which ended with a doctorate in that medicine. He was only able to earn his PhD in Madrid, the state capital. I swallowed his order, uttered with such resoluteness. There was no turning back. On the other hand, I could refuse to obey him; I was a Piarist and was not dependent on him. But I did as ordered. And it went off well. If I had put it off for later, I would not be what I am today. Effort and discipline are major anthropological values. The "mores" of our days, in contrast, have enshrined the simpletons and idle loafers.

Two more years of university studies. Once I finished them I was faced with the task of a doctoral thesis. What subject should I study? It dawned on me to ask Dr Joan Tusquets, a professor in the recently-launched degree in Education.

- Why don't you do a thesis on something related to animal psychology?
- OK – I responded, unconvinced.

I asked my Piarist superiors for permission to go to Paris for a week in order to browse through the bookshops and contact Sorbonne professors should the occasion arise. There was no Internet. Permission granted.

On the second day of my sojourn in Paris, after walking down boulevard Saint-Michel, when I arrived at the square of the Sorbonne I discovered the PUF (Presses Universitaires de France) bookshop. I went in. A little book published by Gallimard caught my eyes: *L'Étranger* (1942) by some author named Albert Camus, about whom I knew nothing. General Franco had banned him in Spain. You know how dictators are. The communist Stalin had done the same in the Soviet Union.

Oh lord, what a night! I devoured the text hardly coming up for air. What a blow to my spirit! The edifice I had been built was shattered with the merciless axe that splintered a night that was supposed to be mild. One thing became crystal clear: neither animal psychology nor other boring nonsense. The subject of my doctoral thesis would be Albert Camus. Later I would figure out what tack to take.

The following morning I bought *Noces* (1939), *Le mythe de Sisyphe* (1942) and *Calígula* (1944). I also purchased the first volume of Charles Moeller's *Littérature du XX siècle et christianism*, where he examined Camus under the title of *Silence de Dieu*. The title of the first chapter read: "Albert Camus ou l'honnêteté désespérée". But who in Barcelona could supervise my

thesis on a banned author? I thought about one of my professors, Dr Joaquim Carreras Artau, who had taught us the history of contemporary philosophy. He accepted but confessed that he had never read my author. So then I spoke to him about Moeller's book.

- I know what we could do, he suggested.
- What?
- Professor Moeller could advise you and I would accept his decisions.
- Fine.

Charles Moeller was a professor at the Université Catholique in Louvain (Leuven in Flemish) in Belgium. This was a guarantee of respect for Catholic dogma. And thus began a long journey for my restless, alarmed intellect.

Four and a half years later I would submit my doctoral thesis, which examined the possibilities of an atheistic ethics according to the literary output of Albert Camus. Camus himself gave me the gift of his books through his secretary in his office at the Gallimard publishing headquarters in Paris. I continued to teach classes on philosophy and the history of art and culture in the baccalaureate programme to earn a living. But this did not detract from my almost irascible dedication to my thesis. Not only did I devour everything Camus had written, I also wanted to study his own readings. Only in this way could I understand what might penetrate the author's interior. There were no Sundays, no Christmases, no Easter weeks nor summer vacations. Only studying and more studying. In the country home my father owned half an hour from the village of Alforja (Tarragona), I closed myself up with books every summer to make headway. Since there was no electricity, I worked from the first light until sunset. Nor did we have running water. No matter: we had the watering ponds.

Fear started to surge in my soul when confronted with a human history drenched in the absurd and lacking any possible redemption.

After killing an Arab and imprisoned, Mersault receives a visit from Marie, his lover. She asks him if he loves her, and Mersault, the main character of *L'Étranger*, answers: "Je lui ai dit que cela ne voulait rien dire, mais qu'il me semblait que non".

I hereby warn that I sometimes am going to cite Camus in French and other times in translation. That's how I keep myself entertained.

Mersault's trial after he murdered the Arab is a Kafkaesque process which convinces him of his death. He rebelled against fate, against the world and against God, who is deaf:

"Pour que tout soit consommé, pour que je me sente moins seul, il me restait à souhaiter qu'il y ait beaucoup de spectateurs le jour de mon exécution et qu'ils m'accueillent avec de cris de haine".

Le Mythe de Sisyphe (1942) opens solemnly with a formula which at the time left me frozen: “Il n’y a qu’un problème philosophique vraiment sérieux: c’est le suicide”.

Does human life have meaning? This is the major challenge. Still, despite being corrupted and absurd, life is worth living. Kierkegaard, Shestov and Husserl pretend to have eliminated absurdity, but Camus ventures out in other directions: “La vie sera d’autant mieux vécue qu’elle n’aura pas de sens”.

So how do to it? To begin with: “Il faut imaginer Sisyphe heureux”.

We only have the present and we must dive into it no matter how incomprehensible it may be. The epigraph that Camus himself placed at the beginning of this work reproduces a text by the lyric poet Pindar (died 438 BC):

“Oh, my soul, do not aspire to immortal life but exhaust the limits of the possible”. (Epinikia or Victory Odes; Pythian iii)

Paul Valéry’s *Le cimetière marin* (1920) was inspired by the same philosophy. This poem set in the Sète cemetery meditates lyrically on life and death, light and consciousness, regarding the absolute and being, and concludes with an invitation to pare life down into the simple act of transit. Consciousness and rebellion, says Camus, are man’s only freedom; and therein also lie his grandeur. Sisyphus, the absurd hero, overcomes his fate by finding joy in futile effort. Sophocles, in his *Oidipous tyrannos (Oedipus Rex)* from 430 BC, along with the Dostoyevsky (1821-1881) character, Kirilov, declare it outright: *everything is fine*. Waiting for another world is the job of the fearful and the timid.

Throwing out the absurd? I wasn’t then, nor am I now, up to it. Still, the extravagance and illogic of human existence came to penetrate me deeply. What to do with God and his incarnation? The affliction gradually got the best of me.

The play *Caligula* (1944) only rubbed salt into the wound. The world is hostilely opaque. The Roman emperor never manages to go beyond absurdity:

*“Les hommes meurent et ils ne sont pas heureux...
Qu’il est dur, qu’il est amer de devenir un homme!...
Vous avez fini par comprendre qu’il n’est pas nécessaire d’avoir
fait quelque chose pour mourir...
On est toujours libre aux dépens de quelqu’un...
Il n’y a qu’une façon de s’égalier aux dieux: il suffit d’être aussi
cruel qu’eux.”*

Ivan Kalyayev from *Les justes* (1946) represents the hero who tries to give justice a chance to eliminate the entrenched chaos. But when the terrorist poet has to actually kill human beings (children), instead of accomplishing his goal

with an idea, the act of justice becomes impossible: “Pour une cité lointaine, dont je ne suis pas sûr, je n’irai pas frapper le visage de mes frères”.

Kalyayev wants to wield justice, not be a murderer. However, he cannot bring justice without committing injustices. Killing a life for the love of life: how absurd! The entire story relies on collective blindness; it gravitates around incongruence.

Le malentendu (1944) returns to the theme of the absurd. The world is made in such a way that human beings are convinced that they will never be given what they deserve. Heidegger’s category of *Geworfenheit* (“thrownness”) helped me to deal with this insipid work. *Dasein* is made up of the “here-despite-it”. Moving headlong towards death as long as we exist. In *La peste*, Camus diabolically states it: “Nous ne pouvons pas faire un geste en ce monde sans risquer de faire mourir”.

We are guilty despite ourselves. Freud claimed that precisely through guilt we accept that we consist of desire; however we are as guilty when we desire as when we renounce desire. Camus repeats it:

“There is only one way to equal the gods: be as cruel as they are”.
(Caligula)

“We shall be guilty forever. This night is heavy, heavy as all of human suffering”. (Caligula)

But God? What about God? To God:

“The objection will be raised of evil and of the paradox of an all-powerful and malevolent, or benevolent and sterile, God”. (L’Homme révolté)

But good or evil, powerful or impotent, might God really exist?

“Man is thrown on an earth whose splendour and light speak to him without respite of a God that does not exist”. (Noces)

So what is left of our life?

“The plague is life, and that is all”. (La Chute)

Jean-Paul Sartre reaches the pessimistic consequences of such an anthropological vision:

“There are equal reasons for loving men as for hating them”. (La Nausée)

He discovered the metaphysical underpinning of this thesis in Heidegger, who claims that being and nothingness are one and the same.

My thesis advanced tortuously. God became to me the number one evil-doer.

If there was still an urge to be good, one had to wonder like Tarrou:

“Peut-on être un saint sans Dieu?” (La Peste)

Obviously it is always possible to be a blessed idiot, giving oneself to others just because, willy-nilly. But this was not in my nature, so the faltering, the vacillation persisted. Nor did I accept that God would become the private recourse of beings deprived of a future.

What is more:

“Who could say that an eternity of delight could compensate for an instant of human suffering?” (La Peste)

At that time I was reading Heidegger’s *Beiträge zur Philosophie* (Contributions to Philosophy). *Dasein* needs no windows to the outside; it consists of living outside itself; it is nothing more than openness. Things make themselves present to us; we give them presence. Camus’ absurdity disappears in such a way even though the price to pay is exorbitant: it costs as much as losing the very act of consciousness, of shedding the conscious self to become *something* instead of *someone*. In contrast, to Camus:

“If I were a tree, I would not be absurd. The absurd emerges from my lucid reason, from my consciousness that sets me in opposition to all of creation”. (The Myth of Sisyphus)

I stuck with Camus. He was more direct, more mine. I studied him via Freud’s text *Jenseits des Lustprinzips* (1920) or *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Death drive or *Todestriebe*. We are aggressive towards our inside and also towards the outside... masochism and sadism. Absurd, absurd no matter how you look at us; we are disconcerting realities. In life we have no conclusions to argumentation: we only dangle from decisions. Said Heidegger in *Being and Time*, in *What is Metaphysics?* and in *Nietzsche I-II*, being is nothingness, the nothingness of being. For this reason, *Dasein* is defined by *Sorge*, care and concern; *Sorge* elucidates temporality and finiteness. History is not an education targeted at something but a multiplicity of durations intertwined with

each other. All we needed was today's unbridled and suicidal consumerism to fill to overflowing the anthropological absurdity in which I was imprisoned.

Studying Camus' oeuvre had led me to a dead-end: existence is absurd, demented. I wrote to Professor Charles Moeller in Lovain. His response was encouraging. So I went there, with the due permission of my Piarist superiors.

I spent two days in Paris. Years later I bought *Le Cahier bleu et le Cahier brun* at the Gallimard bookshop, along with Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Investigations philosophiques*, books which later helped me to digest Camus. Plays with words like a game of chess, but language is different from chess in that it is applied to reality, while chess is applied to nothing. In order to carry on with my study of hermeneutics in Camus' books, I sought Popper, specifically his book *Conjectures et Réfutations* (1986, in the French edition by Payot). Language marks the division between man and animal, my apologies to the zoophiles out there. Animal language only serves an *expressive function* – it expresses psychological states – and a *stimulating function* – it prompts reactions. But human language also serves a *descriptive function* and an *argumentative function*.

However, in 1958 when I went to Belgium to meet with Moeller, I had not yet examined the linguistic perspective. I quit Paris and travelled by train to Brussels, which at that time was hosting the Exposition Universelle. I toured it and took another train to Louvain, where the professor met me at the Université Catholique. Later, in 1968 that university would be divided into Flemish- and French-speaking faculties; between 1972 and 1979 the latter faculties were moved to the Walloon Brabant, the home of Louvain-la-Neuve, but back in 1958 Charles Moeller welcomed me at the old university where the voice of Cardinal Désiré Mercier (1851-1926), who had been a professor of neo-Thomist philosophy there, still echoed.

I camped out accompanied by a lack of money. The first day, Moeller invited me to a nourishing repast at a *brasserie* near the university. I remember that the hearty dish I ate, plus the beer, went to my head, rendering my brain rather unfit to discuss the topic of my thesis.

I had hardly eaten a single warm meal since leaving Barcelona. Instead, I settled for what I had packed, tins of sardines and tuna, and I bought bread, milk and fruit along the way. I felt unwell.

- Camus – Moeller told me – certainly found the absurd, but don't lose sight of the fact that there is also the quest for the Mystery, even though he doesn't realise it.
- In what text, for example? – I objected.
- *Il peut y avoir de la honte à être heureux tout seul*. You'll find it in *La Peste* coming from the mouths of both Rieux and Rambert.

We spent two days engaged in extremely useful conversations for my purposes. I decided to uncover Camus' hidden intentions regarding the Mystery, the Greek *mysterion*, which is what can be neither seen nor heard, what is inaccessible to reason.

- I would like to be able to talk to Camus — I hinted.
- I'll set it up and arrange a meeting — he answered.

Back in Barcelona I felt comforted. Moeller, a cultivated man with a penetrating yet stable spirit, had spurred me on. Even his body displayed solidity and vigour.

Camus' mother, Catalina Sintes, was of Mallorcan extraction. This made him more familiar to me. Albert had been born in Mondovi, a town in Algeria, on the 7th of November 1913 during the time of French colonisation. Before being a French domain, Algerian lands had been under Ottoman rule. The French period lasted from 1830 until 1962, when Ben Bella earned independence for his people.

My author's father, Lucien Camus, died in the Battle of the Marne in 1914 in World War I (1914-1918). He hailed from a family from Alsace. So Albert barely knew his father, who had been a worker at a vineyard. His mother, however, earned the daily bread as a housekeeper. She was almost totally deaf and did not speak.

“Je n'ai pas appris la liberté dans Marx. Il est vrai: je l'ai apprise dans la misère”. (Actuelles I)

Camus was born into poverty and lived in a two-room apartment. How did he manage to get educated? Since he was a war orphan, he was awarded a scholarship which enabled him to pursue secondary school and higher education.

Albert Camus' absurdity has entered my existential biography, yet it has remained bound by the inquiry into the Mystery, an inquiry which, as Moeller led me to believe, underlies much of Camus' output.

Human beings have aspired to being God. Sartre wrote that man is the useless passion of becoming god. Christianity speaks about the divinisation of the believer: the incarnation of the Son, redemption, grace, sacraments, the post-mortem vision of God.

How should we understand God? In the 20th century, the Jewish author Levinas (1905-1995) addressed this question so insightfully (*De Dieu qui vient à l'idée*, 1993) that it cannot be confused with either the ass's braying of the masses who believe in him nor with the roar, the mule's bellow, of the atheistic rabble. God lacks presence given that his sanctity separates him absolutely from our knowledge. His transcendence is so radical that it ends up in absence. God is neither substance nor concept; therefore, he cannot be perceived either at the end of an argument or in the content of an impossible revelation. God, in consequence, is nothingness. He exists beyond the immanence of the available presences. Sanctity, separation, serious, all-encompassing, absolute transcendence. Later the teacher Eckhart helped me to understand Levinas.

A person's religious feelings? They are his own business. Like the fellow who likes hot chocolate with pastries, while others prefer juicy, peppery escargots; others like socialism, while there is no dearth of those who adore capitalism. There are no dogmas regarding tastes; it is self-service for everyone.

In Judaism sanctity consists of separation. It only befits YHWH, the different, the pure, separate from the world, from the perceptible, from the conceptualisable. Therefore, He lacks definition. God is holy. Not a rosebush, nor a grub, not a brain, nor an image, nor an idea, nor a spirit, nor even a being, not even Being. So what is left? Nothingness. Nothing of anything that is ours.

Albert Camus is restless. He seeks what cannot be found.

“Nous ne sommes pas de ce monde, nous sommes des justes. Il y a une chaleur qui n'est pas pour nous”. (Les Justes)

In the same play Kalyayev, or Yanek, has died in order to pay for the crime of having murdered the tyrant, the Grand Duke of Moscow. His beloved Dora exclaims: “Yanek est mort... Il doit rire maintenant. Il doit rire, la face contre terre”.

Why laugh? Because he has eliminated the despot and then has paid with his own life for his act of justice that led him to kill a human being. A thirst for justice. The Mystery is not incarnate; it remains furtive and clandestine. Laughing is now useless, gratuitous. Has Yanek failed?

In the plague that besieged the city of Oran (*La Peste*, 1947), Camus found the allegory of Nazism, of Stalinism, of racism and, we could add, of AIDS. It is necessary to struggle against the plague. Why? Camus is distant from the historic religious phenomenon but has an intense feeling of the holy. This should be interpreted, in my opinion, as his concern with what is holy and its relationship with behaviour (*L'homme révolté*, p. 35).

In the preface to the American edition of *L'Étranger* he claims that Mersault is the only Christ we deserve. He thus poses the meaning of *Mysterion*. Etymologically, this Greek word means “to close eyes and mouth”; therefore, it is a matter of a secret, hidden reality. Mysteries of Eleusis, of Serapis, of Mitra. There is no direct knowledge of the Mystery; one gradually approaches it without ever grasping it. The Mystery announced by Paul of Tarsus in his first letter to the faithful in the city of Corinth, where he had founded a Christian community between the years 49 and 51, fits with the Hellenistic concept of *mysterion*. The letter was sent in the year 54 from the city of Ephesus. The first nine verses of the first chapter of the epistle introduce the mystery of Jesus Christ, a mystery which is not limited to perfecting knowledge but instead to exceeding it for a higher order.

In *Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence* (1974), Emmanuel Levinas notes the mysterious, what is shown without being shown, what remains merely hinted at enigmatically via traces. The notion of *événement* developed by Deleuze in *Logique du Sens* (1969) also examines the *mysterion* because the *événement* marks a caesura, a break, in the temporal discourse, leading to an interval in what is known and natural. We thus draw closer to Heidegger's

Göttliche, divine, in *Beiträge zur Philosophie* (1989), in *Besinnung* (1997) and in *Approches de Hölderlin* (1962, in the French version). Even *Entgötterung*, characteristic of our undivine times, can be interpreted as a way of positing the divine beyond the Judeo-Christian interpretation in which God is cause and underpinning. This is how Levinas refers to *enigme* in *En découvrent l'existence avec Husserl et Heidegger* (1949 and 1979): transcendence is not phenomenal but is heralded in phenomena as an imprint which, however, is not captured by the same phenomena.

These reflections came after my earliest readings of Camus, but he was the one who set me along the pathway of the Mystery, of that which is impossible for human beings.

“Since the night when I heard the call, I really was called, I had to answer or at least look for the answer”. (La Chute)

Clarence has asked himself the ethical question: Can man move forward with morals? Are morals possible without reference to God? Can an atheistic morality exceed the plane of customs or convulsive ties?

In *Lettres à un ami allemand* I discovered a sentence that forced me to ponder this. It was the following:

*“You have concluded from all this that man is negligible...
I saw no argument to answer you except a fierce love of justice”.*

In the same book by Camus I found a text which linked up with the previous one:

*“What is man? ...
Man is that force which ultimately cancels all tyrants and gods”.*

In *Les Justes*, Camus once again reveals the quest for the mystery, the inquiry into reality that begins from the solely zoological world, the reality that is human. Anankov exclaims: “Hundreds of our brothers have died so that you know that all is not permissible.”

Throughout my readings of Camus I detected a landscape where light was the outward appearance of what is mysterious and holy:

“Misery prevented me from believing that all was well under the sun and in history, but the sun taught me that history wasn't everything”. (L'Envers et l'Endroit)

The concept of epistemological transcendence, not ontological transcendence as Sartre understood it in his conception of phenomenology, helped me to understand Camus' effort in his quest for the *mysterion*. Sartre wrote in *L'Être et le néant*: "La conscience est conscience 'de' quelque chose: cela signifie que la transcendance est structure constitutive de la conscience".

The act of consciousness is not only the vision of something that is precisely not located inside this act; it goes even further, towards what consciousness will never be. Human consciousness is a *lack of*, it is a *desire to be*. In this way, I find Camus' formula clarifying: "S'il est vrai que nous naissons dans l'Histoire, nous mourrons en dehors d'elle".

Years later, Levinas assuaged me in his notion of *trace*, a notion that could illuminate more than one Camus text. The infinite is heralded as a *trace*, a footstep, in phenomenality grounded upon upsetting it. The trace is the rupture of the order of the world; it is a preterit that has never been present; it is an immemorial past. In the lecture Camus delivered in Uppsala, Sweden on the 14th of December 1957, he uttered words that inexorably referred to the holy, to the Mystery. They are the following:

"Le monde n'est rien et le monde est tout, voilà le double et inlassable cri... cri qui...réveille...l'image fugitive et insistante d'une réalité que nous reconnaissons sans jamais l'avoir rencontrée".

Today I read these sentences by Camus in light of Levinas' *Humanisme de l'autre homme* (1973). The Other or the Infinite are not substances that pre-exist in the visage, which, incidentally, is not a phenomenon; it is only a symbol of the vulnerability of one that exists, towards the unapproachable *mysterion*, moving towards the secret that cannot be revealed, cannot become visible. The Mystery is nothingness, nothing of anything we have.

Art viewed as fatigue for contemplating *Kallos*, *Pulchritudo*, *Bellezza*, *Schönheit*, *Beauty*, understood as words that signal a metaphysical sphere, art understood thus is another pathway that humans have set out to tip-toe closer to the Mystery. This Art of Immortal Beauty pointed towards the Perfect Unreal: this is now Malraux conceived of it in *La Tête d'Obsidienne* (1974). In this supposition, that of Impossible Beauty, I shall borrow Bergson's words when he writes:

"A quoi vise l'art, sinon à nous montrer... des choses qui ne frappaient nos sens et notre conscience?" (La Pensée et le mouvant, 1934)

This way of conceiving art helped me to understand *Antigone*. The victory over fate is what characterises art as a demiurge; Malraux saw it thus in *Les voix du silence* (1951).

In *L'État de Siège* (1948), Camus told me: "I have experienced nihilism, contradiction... But I have also saluted the power of creation and the honour of living."

Why did he rebel? What reality sustained his protest? His literary art is a quest.

“The right way is one that leads to life, to the sun. It can't be cold forever”. (Les Justes, 1950)

And in *La Peste* (1947): “He recognised that he was afraid... Even he needed human warmth.”

As I noted above, I was writing my thesis during the three summer months holed up in a country house that my father owned in his hometown of Alforja. The estate had four hectares of hazelnut, olive and almond trees. My sister Maria typed the text for me. Camus haunted me. I engaged with him in a merciless one-on-one. He seriously marred the *Weltanschauung* in which I had been inculcated since nursery school. Immersed in the condensed nights and sunrises and sunsets that turned on and off the light in my space, I grasped texts like this one from *L'envers et l'endroit* (1937):

“Ce monde de pauvreté et de lumière...

La misère m'empêcha de croire que tout est bien sous le soleil et dans l'histoire; le soleil m'apprit que l'histoire n'est pas tout”.

Nights of absurdity, but also a sun that sought something more.

Later, after having worked as a professor at the Collège de France, Claude Lévi-Strauss taught me how to read Camus another way. In *Anthropologie structurale Deux* (1973), I learned to read history not as linear progress which encompasses humanity as a whole but as stories that reflect human diversity, a diversity that objectifies the impossibility of a single form of humanity having the ability to fulfil all the anthropological powers. Between sunset and sunrise, I learned that *Rede* – speaking – is not an easy job; the goal is not to speak without saying anything but to remain silent in order to be able to say something. After all, science does not come from a prior universal doubt but from a newer, relentless doubt. I take pleasure in Heidegger, who understands *Dasein* as both an appellant and a call to the interior of the *Gewissen* – consciousness – as well as to *Sein und Zeit* (1927).

Freedom to rebel against the Absurd. In *Phénoménologie de la perception* (1945), Merleau-Ponty defines freedom as “le pouvoir de garder à l'égard de toute situation de fait une faculté de recul”.

So we can personally accept a situation which has arisen; to the contrary there is only inertia and repetition. With this freedom, one can grapple with this text by Camus:

“Rebellion... demands order in the midst of chaos and unity at the very heart of what flees and disappears”. (L'Homme Révolté, 1951)

In the epigraph of the quatrième lettre in his work *Lettres à un ami allemand* (1945), we read:

“L’homme est périssable. Il se peut; mais périssons en résistant, et si le néant nous est réservé, ne faisons pas que ce soit une justice!”

Only the holy can give rise to such boldness, such exigent yearnings. It is not the fragile, evanescent desire, always to be reconstructed, which Lacan refers to in *Écrits* (1966); rather it is Levinas’ *Désir in Totalité et infini* (1961). This thinker distinguishes between *need*, which seeks consummation, and *desire*, which is a relation beyond the horizon of the world, yet a yearning which will never be satisfied. If we embraced satisfaction, we would become gods. This was the temptation to which Adam and Eve succumbed in the mythical story in Genesis.

Alerted by Camus’ quest for the Mystery, for the holy, one evening I received a huge blow from my author at my country house in Alforja. That day I had finished reading *La Chute* (1956), believing that unforgiveable *guilt* was an anthropological categorical question which opened the doorway to the Other. However, the last word, an adverb – *Heureusement!* (“Fortunately”) – plummeted me into disconsolate disappointment. The night was pitiable, even lamentable.

The main character decided not to save the girl who was crying for help in the waters of the Seine. It was night-time and he saw no one. He was guilty of a death.

“O young girl, throw yourself into the water once again so that I may have a second chance to save both of us... What imprudence! Suppose someone actually took our word for it? ... The water is so cold! ... It's too late now. It will always be too late. Fortunately!”

However, this pessimism is constantly pricked by a certain hope, as noted in this text from *L’Homme Révolté* (1951): “Comment vivre sans la grâce, c’est le problème qui domine le XXe siècle”.

We get an answer in the same essay, even though it is ambiguous. It is the following: “La vraie générosité envers l’avenir consiste à tout donner au présent”.

This could be interpreted as pouring oneself wholeheartedly into the instant, setting aside both religious utopia and revolutionary utopia – Marxism and anarchism; alternatively, the sentence could be understood as freeing oneself from the present for a thrilling intrahistoric future. In this second supposition, we could find aid from Levinas’ concept of *autrui* or *visage*. Back then I tended toward the second alternative, viewing Camus’ entire output as a call that must be answered.

My author’s oeuvre is more insinuating when read through the prism of Merleau-Ponty’s notion of *parole parlante* as elaborated in both

Phénoménologie de la perception (1945) and *Le Visible et l'invisible* (1964). The *parole parlante* transcends the universe of already settled meanings and seeks meanings in its nascent state, which objectivise *un certain* silence in words.

On the 13th of December 1957, after receiving the Nobel Prize, Camus answered a young Algerian who questioned his behaviour in this way: “Je crois à la justice, mais je défendrait ma mère avant la justice”.

We can perceive the mother, but not universal, perfect justice. However, we must understand the following quote:

“I continue to believe that this world does not have any superior meaning. But I know one thing in it that has meaning and that is man. This world has at least the truth of mankind”.

The day came when I had to defend my doctoral thesis. It took place in a makeshift room in the Rectorate in Plaça de la Universitat. The year was 1961. Springtime was in full bloom. The sun accompanied me, as did my sister Maria. In those days of ashy leadenness, permission to read the thesis came from the state capital. It took a long time coming. After all, Camus was a banned author. Finally it was granted thanks to Professor Joaquim Carreras Artau's machinations in the Ministry of Education, where he was respected.

The jury was made up of Professors Joaquim Carreras Artau, Jaume Bofill, José Alcorta, José Maria Valverde and Joan Tusquets. Of all of them, only Valverde was familiar with Camus. The other four limited themselves to posing me relevant philosophical problems.

Camus made two mistakes in his life. In June 1934 he married; two years later he broke the promise. In 1940 he wedded Francine Faure; this marriage lasted. In late 1934 he joined the communist party; in 1937 he left it. I have made more mistakes in my life. And anyway there are the Cathars, the pure, the communists and their successors; they never make mistakes: they are infallible, perfect.

Rummaging through my memory overflowing with biographical life, now buried, I unmask a third core of Albert Camus' encroachment into my conclusive thinking, that is, my terminal, definitive thinking, I venture to say. I am not allowed to take considerable leaps since I cannot hit the road. For me, only a few metres are missing to reach the threshold after which only luxuriant, solid shadow prevails.

“Accomplir une vérité qui est celle du soleil et sera aussi celle de ma mort”. (Noces, 1939)

Love of the body, of life, of nature. The rest: death and ruin. In life, Camus said *oui, un oui définitif... Se nourrir de l'intensité du moment*. In *Actuelles-I*, he reinforced it as follows: “I was born poor, beneath a happy sky, into a natural world with which one feels harmony.”

I had written my doctoral thesis on Camus over the course of three summers, three months long each, in a poor, cramped country house with no electricity. His texts readily penetrated me. I drank them in naturally. And the countryside – the sun, the birds, the rain, the wind – embraced me without fatiguing me. They were the summers of 1958, 1959 and 1960.

“This amorous understanding between earth and man. Ah! This pact would convert me if it were not already my religion”.

They were three summers that were, however, informed by the three years I spent there during the Spanish Civil War, my three years in the belly of that same rustic house equally surrounded by hazelnut, olive and almond trees. The Civil War with its four seasons: every year, back then, I married nature. My eighth, ninth and tenth years were christened in the same endothymic setting by the sun, the water, the cold, the heat, the birds, the foxes, the wine that is impetuous in my village, the *seré*. The village was half an hour from the country house. My “body-soul” already awaited Camus, and the encounter would take place in Paris years later.

The three-year baptism relived during the summer months while I wrote my thesis should be understood based on Russell’s concept of sense-data in *Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description* (1911). The things we perceive do not dovetail with the things that exist beyond their perception. We cannot confuse perception with the physical object perceived; that would be ingenuous. Yet regardless:

“Hors du soleil, des baisers et des parfums sauvages, tout me paraît futile”. (Noces, 1939)

After all, as Lévi-Strauss wrote in *Anthropologie structurale Deux* (1973), humanity itself is nothing other than a *possibilité* of nature. We need not do anything else: “Accomplir une vérité que est celle du soleil” (Noces, 1938 and 1947).

This sensibility was handed down to us from the Greek poet Aiskylos (Aeschylus), who lived between 525 and 456 BC. He left it written: *pontiôn kumatôn anérthmon gélasma* (“the unnameable smile of the sea”; may it apply to the political pedants in Spain who have stripped education of its Greek habit).

Already a Piarist, in 1953 I had organised scouting in the schools of Catalonia, convinced of the edifying value of nature. With a group of boys I ascended to the peak of Aneto, 3,404 metres tall. We camped in the valley. Air, snow, white clouds and also dark clouds threatening storms:

“I woke up with the stars in my face. Sounds of the countryside were drifting in. Smells of night, earth and salt air were cooling my temples. The wondrous peace of that sleeping summer flowed through me like a tide”. (L’Étranger, 1942)

At this point it seems appropriate to refer to the concept of chair that Merleau-Ponty develops in his book *Le Visible et l'invisible* (1964), where *chair* is defined as the unit of being which is simultaneously *voyant-visible*. I shall not pursue this vein because of my Camusian hermeneutics, although I am convinced that it would yield fruit.

“Il n’y a pas de honte à être heureux. Mais aujourd’hui l’imbécile est roi, et j’appelle imbécile celui qui a peur de jouir”. (Noces, 1938 and 1947)

Like it or not, years later I read this notion through the prismo of Freud’s *Liebe*. *Eros* is the name for the sexual instinct that feeds life, in opposition to *Thanatos*; *Eros* keeps everything alive in cohesion. In Freud’s text, there is polysemy around this idea; still, we could say that the Latin word *libido* would point toward the sexual dimension whereas the Greek word *Eros* would signal the instinctive space – *Trieb* in German, while the term *Liebe* would indicate the psychological sphere. Still, there persists in Freud a polysemic terminology throughout his intellectual evolution. In Lacan, however, the *principe de plaisir* is defined more confidently and is never confused with the *sensation de plaisir*; the pleasure principle holds that the mind tends to avoid what is unpleasant or painful, instead seeking fruition.

“We think that happiness is the greatest of conquests; it is acting against the fate that has been imposed upon us”. (Lettres à un ami allemand, 1948)

I interpreted this quote by Camus according to the Freudian concepts of *Lebenstrieb* and *Todestrieb*, which somehow echo the notions of the Greek philosopher Empedocles (483-424 BC) on *philia* and *neikos*.

In Greek mythology, *Eros* is the god of love, the deity that ensures both the continuation of the species and the internal cohesion of the *kosmos*. Both the *Kama Sutra* (3rd century) by the Brahmin Vatsyayana and Ovid’s *Ars amandi* (1st century) stressed the value of love; however, only the *Kama Sutra* grants love the purpose of cosmic balance. We can also read Publius Ovidius, who discusses how to captivate the coveted woman as a specific case of the order of everything: “I used to wait patiently until Saturday to hold Marie’s body in my arms” (L’Étranger, 1940, 1942).

Love is desire, and Freud captures this with *Traumdeutung*. What we have dreamt about is an unconscious psychological formation which can be interpreted as the veiled realisation of a thwarted desire. Dreams do not consist of nocturnal evasions or cerebral wanderings or supernatural revelations; they are nothing other than the nocturnal workings of our dreaming desire. Loving means yearning.

The last verse which French poet Paul Valéry (1871-1945) uses to close his poem *Cimetière marin* (Charmes, 1922) reads as follows: “Le vent se lève, il faut tenter de vivre”.

Despite oblivion, we have to have the courage to live. The poem is set in the cemetery in the village of Sète, near Montpellier, a cemetery constantly bathed by the Mediterranean Sea. It is a meditation on life and death. Valéry was buried in this cemetery; I visited it years ago with my sister Maria. Camus made himself present to me there. At this moment, the heartrending memory evokes Montjuïc cemetery, where what remains of Maria rots in a communal grave. She no longer has the *tenter de vivre*.

Camus' theme of the pleasure of living should be viewed through the prism of Freudian *Tiefenpsychologie*, but I am out of time. The *Ödipuskomplex*, with its conflictive mix of tender feelings towards the mother and hostile feelings towards the father, could be a stimulating point of departure.

The “life-death” or “pleasure-pain” struggle led Camus to measure and containment, not to frenzy or debauchery. *Sophrosyne* in Camus, but never *hubris*, excess.

Albert Camus is buried in Lourmarin, a village in Vaucluse at the foot of the Liberon Mountains. I spent three Christmases there, in the Le Moulin de Lourmarin hotel, which had a fine restaurant. I was clearly interested in the place, but the appeal was Camus' tomb, the holy site which was located fifteen minutes away on foot. Camus lived near Lourmarin in the summers of 1946, 1947 and 1948. In November 1958, he bought a house in the village with the money he had gotten from the Nobel Prize on the 17th of October 1957. On one of the three Christmases I spent there, I peeked into the home from the outside. I was debating whether or not to knock on the door when the daughter of the house left it accompanied by a large dog. I desisted upon seeing the tough mien of the woman and the dog, which did not presage fortuitous encounters.

In *Noces*, Camus provided a motive for freeing himself from the lands of the French *Midi*: “What should I do with a truth that should not rot? It would not be in my measure.” What future awaits the human being? “L'homme sans autre avenir que lui même”.

Noces, a work published in Algiers in 1939, includes four essays that reveal a love of life; that is, the beauty of bodies and the exuberance of nature. Both Greek philosophy and Latin culture and the permanence of the Mediterranean ensured Camus that the world is open and gives itself to us. Nuptials, thus, with the earth and the sea, following Nietzsche's lesson. Human beings are delivered to themselves against all metaphysical prejudices. This is the lesson of *Noces*. Sensations place us in contact with virginal freshness. Pleasure is the supreme passion. Ultimately, as Merleau-Ponty claimed in *Phénoménologie de la perception* (1945): “le corps fait le temps au lieu de le subir”. For this reason, Camus writes in *L'Étranger* (1942): “It is too hard to bear my love. Therefore, I cannot bear the pain of the world.”

Measure, moderation, containment, caution. The messiahs and redeemers hang from a cross. They think they are divine but they end up dead. Human beings are not gods. The Delphic *Gnothi seauton*: know your limits and do not pretend to be on par with the gods. The last part of *L'homme révolté* (1951), entitled *La pensée du midi*, shows that philosophy should lead to a

philosophie des limites. This philosophical endeavour bears the tension between the irrational and the rational, politics and morality, violence and meekness, justice and freedom. I set forth these ideas at the University of Gröningen in Holland, invited by Professor Delfgaauw, in 1966. It was one way of unveiling the first fruits of my doctoral thesis. I distinctly recall telling them that Camus particularly affected them because the faculty was primarily Protestant. My words were these:

“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”. (Noces, 1939)

Albert Camus died on the 4th of January 1960, in an automobile accident in Villeblevin, near Montereau. Michel Gallimard, his editor, was driving. Before departing myself for the cemetery, I am planning to greet him one last time in his tomb in Lourmarin.

In the study he performed on my three autobiographical volumes, Professor Conrad Vilanou from the University of Barcelona referred explicitly to Camus’ influence on my written output. I had never reflected on that before. Vilanou’s text, which is both penetrating and well-documented, led me to write these pages. I am grateful to him for his insight¹.

To close this chapter, as a kind of postscript I would like to underscore the fact that Camus has even influenced my literary style, just as Camus acknowledged about his own style: “Gide a régné sur ma jeunesse ou pour être exact, la conjonction Malraux-Gide”.

That night in Paris when I opened the book to the beginning of *L’Étranger* still impacts me today: “Mother died today. Or maybe yesterday; I can’t be sure.”

A bare yet intense style. I would love to master it, although I have never gone beyond being a mere apprentice.

¹ “La trilogia autobiogràfica del professor Octavi Fullat: quan la confessió esdevé memòria pedagògica”, *Revista Catalana de Pedagogia*, vol. 7, 2009-2010, pp. 503-570. [Note by the editor of *Temps d’Educació*].