

## *INTRODUCTION*

‘Albert Camus serait-il le Duhamel de sa génération?’<sup>1</sup>

This question, asked by Jacques Peuchmaurd in 1952, is the starting point for this thesis. After a limited enquiry, Peuchmaurd concludes that Camus’ *L’Homme révolté* (1951) can be seen as nothing more than what André Breton describes as “un rideau de beaux sentiments” (Peuchmaurd, p. 4). Duhamel is mentioned only once in the body of the article, when Peuchmaurd suggests that revolt could be given another name: “Pourquoi pas alors «humanisme», cet humanisme si cher aux «hommes de bonne volonté» de l’entre-deux-guerres? Albert Camus serait-il le Duhamel de sa génération?” (p. 4).

Luc Estang also unites Camus and Duhamel as humanists.

Ces convictions — ou comme on dit aujourd’hui, ces «options» — se résument en une «sagesse humaniste», nimbée chez Georges Duhamel de quelque «évangélisme laïque» où la génération littéraire de 1950 trouvait sujet à raillerie. C’était la même sorte de reproche que, de la part de certains, maintenant, à l’adresse de Camus. Et quant à moi ce n’est pas accidentellement que je rapproche les deux noms...

Eh bien, en 1951, face à ce qu’on voulait que signifîât le nouvel humanisme de Camus, celui de Georges Duhamel, plus ancien mais répondant aux mêmes aspirations — car enfin, Tarrou et Salavin sont frères dans «la sainteté sans Dieu» — constatait sa carence [...]<sup>2</sup>

Using similar language to Peuchmaurd, Reine-Marie Desnues suggests that Camus and Duhamel “se comportent tous les deux en hommes de bonne volonté, mais il n’y a de l’un à l’autre ni

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<sup>1</sup> Jacques Peuchmaurd. ‘Albert Camus serait-il le Duhamel de sa génération?’. *Arts*. September (1952), p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Luc Estang. ‘L’Humanisme au tournant’. *Georges Duhamel 1884-1966*. Paris: Mercure de France, (1967), p. 113.

filiation ni influence.”<sup>3</sup> Further, it is suggested that Camus and Duhamel exhibit “philosophies de la vie bien différentes” (Desnues, p. 227).

These various references to ‘hommes de bonne volonté’ recall the cycle of works published by Jules Romains between 1932 and 1946; Duhamel also uses the phrase much earlier in *La Possession du monde* (1919): “Mais je souhaite, de tout mon cœur, poursuivre avec quelques hommes de bonne volonté un entretien affectueux dont l’objet demeure bien la possession du monde.”<sup>4</sup>

This thesis seeks to demonstrate that the links that bind Camus and Duhamel are much deeper than these critics suggest. Indeed, the question posed by Peuchmaurd permits a much broader analysis of the fundamental convergences and similarities between Duhamel and Camus. We seek to show that, contrary to Desnues’ suggestion otherwise, Duhamel influenced Camus, and that both authors share essentially the same philosophy of life.

### ***DUHAMEL, CAMUS AND THE READING PUBLIC***

There is no doubt that Camus’ works have enjoyed a more enduring popularity than those of Duhamel. When Arlette Lafay examined Duhamel in 1998, she entitled her work *Duhamel revisité* and spoke of a “redécouverte de l’œuvre duhamélienne.”<sup>5</sup> She describes Duhamel’s body of work as one which, “après avoir connu dans l’entre-deux-guerres un éclatant succès, fut, à

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<sup>3</sup> Reine-Marie Desnues, *Des auteurs et des hommes*. Paris: Fleurus, 1961, p. 227.

<sup>4</sup> Georges Duhamel. *La Possession du monde*. Paris: Mercure de France, 1919, p. 13.

<sup>5</sup> Arlette Lafay. *Duhamel revisité*. Paris-Caen: Lettres Modernes Minard, 1998, p. 7.

partir des années Cinquante, décriée et vouée à l’oubli” (p. 7). When Vincent Laisney came to write about Duhamel in 2001, he began his article with the following words:

Il est agaçant aujourd’hui de devoir préciser chaque fois que l’on parle de Duhamel qu’il s’agit bien de Georges, et non d’Alain ou d’Olivier... Outre que ce malentendu est tristement révélateur de l’effondrement des valeurs littéraires, il permet de mesurer à quel degré d’oubli est parvenu l’auteur de *La Chronique des Pasquier*, et ce en dépit du regain d’intérêt qu’il suscite chez les universitaires depuis une vingtaine d’années.<sup>6</sup>

Linda Pontré considers that waning interest in Duhamel after the Second World War might be explained on the basis that the Nazis forbade the publication of his works from 1941. More persuasively, Pontré suggests: “Les techniques et les valeurs traditionnelles qui sont centrales à l’œuvre de Duhamel se sont trouvées dénoncées comme bourgeoises par Sartre, et ont été largement abandonnées par toute la génération de l’après-guerre.”<sup>7</sup>

As Pierre Brodin suggests, Camus has “sa place assurée dans une histoire de la littérature française de l’après-guerre.”<sup>8</sup> The passing of the years did not detract from the rightly perceived quality of Camus’ work. Indeed, Sartre considered Camus’ last major work, *La Chute* (1956) as his best. Following the motor vehicle accident that claimed Camus’ life in January 1960, the manuscript for *Le Premier Homme*, published posthumously in 1994, was found in his briefcase. There was also a return train ticket that, if taken up, would have spared him. For a man who had always regarded fate as the enemy, the irony was plain for all to see. His readers wondered what other projects he might have formed. As so often happens, a premature death helped to ensure the success of Camus’ novels into the future.

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<sup>6</sup> Vincent Laisney. ‘Duhamel, l’œuvre silencieuse’. *La Quinzaine Littéraire*. (2001), p. 36.

<sup>7</sup> Linda Pontré. ‘L’Optimisme dans les romans de Georges Duhamel’. PhD thesis. University of Western Australia, 1992, p. 7.

<sup>8</sup> Pierre Brodin. *Présences contemporaines*. Paris: Nouvelles Éditions Debresse, 1955, p. 445.

In contrast, many consider that the later part of Duhamel's career saw a significant decline in the quality of his work. Jean Dodd suggests that:

his faithful followers were no doubt more dismayed by a certain fall in the standard of his later novels which became more and more, vehicles for pre-conceived ideas and [which] were impregnated with a religiosity distasteful to both Christians and non-Christians.<sup>9</sup>

Jean Carduner agrees, commenting on both Camus and Duhamel in his review of the literary year 1959-60:

Camus a eu le privilège de disparaître avant que les ravages du temps ne l'atteignent. Il reste à jamais cet homme passionné, honnête et intransigeant que nous aimions. Tandis que d'autres... Car, si un Mauriac trouve dans ses 75 ans un épanouissement admirable, combien plus nombreux sont ceux qui, à l'exemple de Jules Romains (*Mémoires de Madame Chauverel II*) et Georges Duhamel (*Nouvelles du sombre empire*) nous donnent le triste exemple d'une régression intellectuelle?<sup>10</sup>

There is some merit in these assertions. Works such as *Le Complexe de Théophile* (1958) and *Nouvelles du sombre empire* (1960) lack the intensity, power and appeal of *Confession de minuit* (1920).

Lafay suggests that many readers turned away from Duhamel because he was not afraid to treat the uncomfortable realities of the human condition:

Or, les difficultés que nous éprouvons à entrer dans l'œuvre duhamélienne tiennent, me semble-t-il, à une appréhension du temps qui est non seulement le "premier des méconnaissables", ainsi que le définit le philosophe Jankélévitch, mais la réalité la plus étrangère au monde actuel de la mort de l'homme.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Jean Catherine Dodd. 'The Salavin Cycle of Georges Duhamel: a Revaluation'. PhD thesis. University of Hull, United Kingdom, 1975, p. 2.

<sup>10</sup> Jean Carduner. 'L'Année littéraire 1959-60'. *The French Review*. Vol 34, No3. January (1961), p. 237.

<sup>11</sup> Arlette Lafay. 'Le Purgatoire de Duhamel'. *Les Cahiers de l'Abbaye de Créteil*. December (1985), p. 26.

If Lafay is right, how might one explain the enduring popularity of Camus, whose works treat the same themes? Perhaps R-M. Albérès provides the answer to this question. Commenting specifically on Duhamel's Salavin and Camus' Meursault, Albérès concludes:

Le Salavin de Duhamel représente assez bien, vingt ans à l'avance, le héros de Camus, et passe par les mêmes étapes. Mais en 1920, le thème ne s'était pas dégagé: Salavin reste «un cas», le héros de Camus devient un «symbole».<sup>12</sup>

### ***THE 'MOOD' OF THE ABSURD IN THE PERIOD BETWEEN THE TWO WARS***

Although Camus gave a name to the absurd in 1942, he recognises that its influence began much earlier: “Qu'il ait donné sa couleur à tant de pensées et d'actions entre les deux guerres prouve seulement sa puissance et sa légitimité.”<sup>13</sup> Lev Braun agrees, suggesting that “the mood of the absurd had started in Paris in the early twenties.”<sup>14</sup> Albérès includes Duhamel's Salavin with the heroes of Camus and Sartre as men “traqués par l'absurdité de l'univers” (*Les Hommes traqués*, p. 10), and further, that *L'Étranger* (1942) and *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (1942) express “de façon nette, brutale, tragique, cette impression de Fatalité que la littérature suggérait depuis plusieurs décades” (p. 187).

Writers like Julien Green also contributed to this mood in the period between the world wars. In *Adrienne Mesurat* (1926),<sup>15</sup> the heroine rebels against her father, involuntarily pushing him down a flight of steps to his death, an act which prefigures Meursault's instinctive shooting of the Arab in *L'Étranger* (1942). Consistent with Meursault's indifference to the murder of the Arab,

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<sup>12</sup> R-M. Albérès. *Les Hommes traqués*. Paris: La Nouvelle Édition, 1953, p. 191.

<sup>13</sup> Albert Camus. *L'Homme révolté*. Paris: Gallimard, 1951, p. 22.

<sup>14</sup> Lev Braun. *Witness of Decline Albert Camus: Moralist of the Absurd*. New Jersey: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1974, p. 33.

<sup>15</sup> Julien Green. *Adrienne Mesurat*. Paris: Plon, 1973.

Adrienne's killing of her father "est effacé de sa mémoire sans qu'elle décide elle-même cet oubli" (Albérès, *Les Hommes traqués*, p. 117).

In 'Vie et mort d'un héros de roman', part of *Semilles au vent* (1947), Duhamel confirms that, by 1914, he had formed a plan for *Vie et aventures de Salavin* and had written the first chapter of *Confession de minuit*.<sup>16</sup> If, as we suggest, *Confession de minuit* is a story of Salavin's awakening to the absurd, then his creator had been thinking about these themes well before the Great War.

### ***DUHAMEL, PRECURSOR OF CAMUS***

Although Duhamel rarely uses the term 'absurde', for convenience we shall adopt it when discussing evidence of this phenomenon in his works. Many critics also choose to do so. Lafay suggests that his works represent "une tragédie de l'absurde,"<sup>17</sup> and describes Duhamel as "un représentant de la crise morale de l'après-guerre et un précurseur de l'absurde" (*Duhamel revisité*, p. 43). She describes *Confession de minuit* in a manner that, as we shall see, confirms the fundamental conflict at the heart of Camus' notion of the absurd. Salavin's story, she says, is of the "conflit qui l'engendra, entre les forces de la vie et les ténèbres de la mort" (*Duhamel revisité*, p. 54).

In another work on Duhamel, Lafay mentions Jean Touzot, saying: "Et de citer Nathalie Sarraute, Sartre, Camus, d'où il [Touzot] conclut que Duhamel 'a renouvelé le stock d'images que ses

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<sup>16</sup> Georges Duhamel. *Semilles au vent*. Monaco: Éditions du Rocher, 1947, p. 12.

<sup>17</sup> Arlette Lafay. *Témoins d'un temps troublé — Roger Martin du Gard Georges Duhamel correspondance 1919-1958*. Paris: Lettres Modernes Minard, 1987, p. LIX.

successeurs pilleront, sans qu'ils le sachent ou sans qu'ils le disent."<sup>18</sup> Éliane Tonnet-Lacroix is of the same view, suggesting that "Salavin est le héros tragique d'une époque tragique et à bien des égards il préfigure les héros de l'absurde."<sup>19</sup> René Garguilo suggests that:

Les années qui suivront la Seconde Guerre Mondiale seront plus favorables au premier cycle romanesque de Duhamel: la "littérature de l'Absurde", mise à la mode par Sartre et Camus, aidera alors à mieux comprendre Salavin qui, décidément, était bien en avance sur son temps.<sup>20</sup>

Clark Keating describes Duhamel as "a pioneer in the study of the twentieth-century psychological outcast," and suggests that "novelists like Sartre and Camus have based much of their reputation on this kind of character."<sup>21</sup>

Bettina Knapp goes even further, suggesting that Camus "certainly [...] must have read *Confession at Midnight* when he created his character, Meursault, in *The Stranger*."<sup>22</sup> Knapp might be justified in drawing this conclusion, because there is evidence that Camus read Duhamel. In an article for the newspaper *Combat*, Camus offers this rather pointed criticism of Duhamel's *Scènes de la vie future* (1930): "Devant une nouvelle civilisation, il n'a trouvé que les mots du petit retraité."<sup>23</sup>

Alexander Ablamowicz succinctly sums up Duhamel as a commentator on the absurd:

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<sup>18</sup> Arlette Lafay. 'A la rencontre de Salavin'. *Les Cahiers de l'Abbaye de Créteil*. December (2001), p. 127.

<sup>19</sup> Éliane Tonnet-Lacroix. 'Le Personnage de Salavin et la crise morale de l'après-guerre'. *Georges Duhamel, témoin du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle*. Eds. Robert Jouanny and Arlette Lafay. Paris: Minard, (1987), p. 174.

<sup>20</sup> René Garguilo. 'Le "Cycle" de Salavin: Un "Nouveau Roman" des années vingt'. *Les Cahiers de l'Abbaye de Créteil*. December (1985), p. 47.

<sup>21</sup> L. Clark Keating. *Critic of Civilization: Georges Duhamel and his Writings*. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1965, p. 55.

<sup>22</sup> Bettina Knapp. *Georges Duhamel*. New York: Twayne, 1972, p. 65.

<sup>23</sup> Jacqueline Lévi-Valensi. *Camus à Combat*. Paris: Gallimard, 2002, p. 419.

On voit combien Duhamel est imprégné d'idées réfléchies, qui le font se pencher sur le sort de l'homme et tracer les portraits de ses héros à l'instar de ce qui s'est déjà avéré efficace et juste dans cette lutte constante contre l'absurdité de la vie à laquelle rien n'échappe et qui rend toute existence tragique à priori. Tout est désordre dans ce monde, tout est chaos et absurdité, lesquels sont imminents à la nature des choses. L'homme se perd dans cette immensité incompréhensible qui l'empêche d'organiser sa vie et de trouver ainsi son salut.<sup>24</sup>

If Duhamel prefigures the Camusian absurd, then Henri Massis—at least implicitly—suggests that Duhamel's work might also evidence themes of revolt: “Sollicité, écouté, Duhamel aura été pour une génération incertaine et troublée ce que [...] le Camus de *L'Homme révolté* a pu être vingt-cinq ans plus tard.”<sup>25</sup>

Camus' readers may have noticed in Meursault the same dislocation from mainstream society that Salavin reveals, or the indifference of Aufrère, the self-professed ‘spectateur pur’ of *Le Club des Lyonnais* (1929). As does Myriam Boucharenc, they might also have remarked upon the use of the medium of the confession by both authors. This device was used by Duhamel “dans le roman français avant que Camus, comme on sait, ne le reprenne dans *La Chute*.”<sup>26</sup>

As we shall see, the *Vie et aventures de Salavin* share many common themes with *La Chute* (1956). It is therefore reasonable for Pontré to conclude: “Il n'est pas impossible, nous semble-t-il, que *Confession de minuit* ait pu exercer une certaine influence sur Camus, même inconsciente, dans ce détail” (p. 53). Similarly, Garguilo concludes:

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<sup>24</sup> Alexander Ablamowicz. ‘L'Humanisme d'une écriture romanesque’. *L'Humanisme de Georges Duhamel*. Ed. Richard J. Bourcier. Scranton: Ridge Row Press, (1992), p. 50.

<sup>25</sup> Henri Massis. ‘Un défenseur de la personne humaine’. *Georges Duhamel 1884-1966*. Paris: Mercure de France, (1967), p. 35.

<sup>26</sup> Myriam Boucharenc. ‘Salavin, héros représentatif ou héros exemplaire?’. *Les Cahiers de l'Abbaye de Créteil*. December (2008), p. 57.



D'avisés critiques, recherchant les "sources" de *La Chute*, ont cité Baudelaire, Jean Lorrain, Nietzsche, Kafka, Dino Buzzati, Faulkner et même Victor Hugo... De plus avisés critiques ont cité Dostoïevsky et remarqué une parenté entre *La Chute* et *l'Écrit dans un souterrain*... Mais entre Dostoïevsky et Camus, personne n'a songé à l'intercesseur capital que fut Georges Duhamel (*Le "Cycle" de Salavin: Un "Nouveau Roman" des années vingt*, p. 52).

One could speculate that Meursault's inexplicable murder of the Arab and Salavin's reaching out and touching the ear of his employer might be functions of a common catalyst. Jean-Louis Bory draws that inference: "Le geste qui pousse Meursault à tuer l'Arabe est le même que celui qui pousse Salavin à toucher l'oreille de son patron: né d'un vertige où la volonté n'entre pas."<sup>27</sup>

In the period 1942 to 1957 these readers may also have concluded (as does Luc Estang), that Salavin and Tarrou of *La Peste* (1947) share the aim of becoming lay saints.

It is also interesting to note that, long before Camus wrote *La Peste*, Duhamel used the metaphor of illness and plague to describe the German threat in both world wars. In *Entretiens dans le tumulte* (1919), he speaks of "l'atmosphère empestée de notre Europe."<sup>28</sup> In *Positions françaises* (1940), he describes the German invasion of Poland and Belgium and the threat to France and England. Here, he speaks of the "contamination de la Pologne,"<sup>29</sup> the "amputation cruelle" (p. 29) of Lithuania, and the "infection" (p. 28) spread by "des nécrophages" (p. 30). Many critics have read *La Peste* in the same light. While ultimately considering it dangerous to place any particular interpretation on the image of the plague, James S. Williams concedes that the fact that:

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<sup>27</sup> Jean-Louis Bory. 'Il faut toucher à l'oreille'. *Nouvelle Littéraires*. April (1966), p. 7.

<sup>28</sup> Georges Duhamel. *Entretiens dans le tumulte*. Paris: Mercure de France, 1919, p. 253.

<sup>29</sup> Georges Duhamel. *Positions françaises*. Paris: Mercure de France, 1940, p. 28.

the people of Oran are still able to take trams to go about their daily business (in the case of Cottard, the black-market), or congregate at theatres, cinemas, cafés and restaurants almost as if nothing happened, says perhaps more about life in France during the Occupation than about plague conditions.<sup>30</sup>

For all these reasons, one must disagree with Jean David when he suggests that Duhamel “a refusé les philosophies de l’absurde et du désespoir à un moment où elles étaient très à la mode.”<sup>31</sup> Similarly, one must challenge César Santelli’s assertion that Duhamel’s works ought necessarily to be excluded from those “philosophies sommaires qui ont la prétention de justifier «leurs gémissements devant le présent, leur anxiété devant l’avenir, leur révolte devant la destinée.»”<sup>32</sup> These are the very reflections undertaken by Salavin, by Laurent Pasquier and, indeed, by Duhamel himself as, under threat of bombardment, he created *La Possession du monde* (1919).

Neither should Camus necessarily be excluded (if, as is likely, Santelli means to include Camus’ thought in the reference to ‘philosophies sommaires’) from those “grands esprits désintéressés tels que Duhamel, qui voudraient tellement les tirer de cette solitude d’enfants abandonnés, comme le sont les hommes du livre de Duhamel” (*Adieu à Georges Duhamel*, p. 154). As we shall see, the disinterested pursuit of a rule of life respectful to the lives of others and faithful to the nostalgia for a lost youth, is at the heart of Camus’ thought.

Arnold Hinchliffe declares that it is “axiomatic that for Absurdity to exist, God must be dead...”<sup>33</sup> In *Georges Duhamel, L’homme et l’œuvre*, Achille Ouy concurs with this view: “S’il y a un Dieu

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<sup>30</sup> James S. Williams. *Camus — La Peste*. London: Grant and Cutler, 2000, p. 20.

<sup>31</sup> Jean David. ‘Réponses de Georges Duhamel pour le temps présent’. *Les Cahiers de l’Abbaye de Créteil*. December (1997), p. 108.

<sup>32</sup> César Santelli. ‘Adieu à Georges Duhamel’. *Georges Duhamel 1884-1966*. Paris: Mercure de France, (1967), p. 153.

<sup>33</sup> Arnold P. Hinchliffe. *The Absurd*. London: Methuen, 1969, preface.

personnel, si, en d'autres termes, il y a une Providence, nul spectacle, si affreux, si inhumain, si sanglant soit-il, ne pourra jamais nous faire douter de l'harmonie finale et souveraine."<sup>34</sup>

Camus' own view is that God is either dead or indifferent. We will produce evidence which suggests that Duhamel might have subscribed to the same view. Whatever the case, both authors reject God as a potential source of unity in an absurd world. Pierre-Henri Simon describes Salavin's quest in precisely those terms:

Cette épaisseur d'un personnage et cette liberté de son développement dans le récit sont bien liées, en même temps, à une intuition métaphysique et à une intention morale qui laissent pressentir dans cette œuvre des années 20, les grands thèmes dont la littérature va se charger dix et vingt ans plus tard. Disons que les *Aventures de Salavin* sont déjà un roman de la mort de Dieu et de la quête de l'homme sous un ciel sans signe.<sup>35</sup>

Lafay agrees, defining Salavin as "le représentant d'une génération ayant à assumer, selon une formule de Nietzsche 'toutes les conséquences de la mort de Dieu'" (*A la rencontre de Salavin*, p. 120).

It is surprising, therefore, to discover that in some major works on the absurd, Duhamel does not rate a mention. Hinchliffe devotes whole chapters to Camus and Sartre, but the index does not list any reference to Duhamel. In John Cruikshank's *Albert Camus and the Literature of Revolt* (1960), the author traces the development of absurdist theory, and, although his work focuses primarily on Camus, it contains many references to writers such as Roger Martin du Gard, André Gide and Jean Giradoux. Duhamel is not mentioned.

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<sup>34</sup> Achille Ouy. *Georges Duhamel, l'homme et l'œuvre*. Paris: Les Écrivains Réunis, 1927, p. 68.

<sup>35</sup> Pierre-Henri Simon. 'Modernité de Salavin'. *Georges Duhamel 1884-1966*. Paris: Mercure de France, (1967), p. 92.

This thesis will compare the theme of the absurd in the works of Duhamel and Camus. It could be argued that at first blush, Duhamel and Camus could not be farther apart as writers. The gratuitous, humanist aspirations of Duhamel's *La Possession du monde* (1919) seem worlds away from the scarcely-concealed nihilism of Camus' *L'Étranger* (1942). However, a deeper reading of the works of Duhamel — particularly his *Vie et aventures de Salavin* — reveals themes in common with Camus.

In his introduction to *The Return of Thematic Criticism*, Werner Sollors asks: “Can literary comparisons based on a theme, by taking one variable as a constant, bring other variables into a sharper focus?”<sup>36</sup> We believe so. A detailed reading of Camus' notebooks and the major essays of *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (1942) and *L'Homme révolté* (1951) reveals that Camus often adopts a logical, formulaic approach when fleshing out his concepts of the absurd and revolt. For the purposes of this thesis, this formulaic net will serve as our constant, through which we will sift the works of the earlier writer, Duhamel, to extract and reveal what we see as the same fundamental principles that underpin Camus' notions of the absurd and of revolt. Our investigation will necessarily cover some familiar and well-worn ground on Camus.

Themes are the ‘resonances’ which remain with the reader and constitute a network of associations and connections. We will posit that Duhamel influenced Camus, an influence until now largely unnoticed, precisely because, in Duhamel's work, Camusian vocabulary is necessarily missing. A comparative analysis will reveal many convergences. Some of these have already been noted but not fully explored by the critics. An analysis which compares not only

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<sup>36</sup> *The Return of Thematic Criticism*. Ed. Werner Sollors. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, (1993), p. xxi.

themes, but also plot and character, is therefore essential; this thesis will be the first critical work to engage in this task. In this way it will bring to light important but neglected aspects of Duhamel's *œuvre* and thus make a valuable contribution to the recent reinvigoration of Duhamel studies, opening up the field for further investigation. This thesis also addresses important aspects of Camusian criticism, namely the historical contextualisation of his writings and the question of influence, particularly in his fiction.

In chapter one of this thesis, we will examine what Camus means by the absurd, and identify its presence within the works of Duhamel. We will discuss the dual aspect of the human condition and, using Meursault and Salavin as examples, discover how a feeling for the absurd may arise out of the clash between the desire for physical pleasures and the realm of the intellect. In chapters two and three, we will examine in greater detail how the absurd manifests itself in the protagonists of both authors, and see that it is initially felt, rather than properly understood by them.

Following this 'emotional awakening', we will see how Camus' absurd man might take one of two possible paths, framed by the author as "le retour inconscient dans la chaîne, ou [...] l'éveil définitif."<sup>37</sup> The subconscious desire in the protagonists of both authors to flee the absurd will be the subject for detailed examination in chapters four and five. As part of this discussion, we will examine the temptation to absolute indifference in the works of both authors.

Chapter six will examine the difference, evident in the work of both authors, between an emotional response to the absurd, and the more refined, intellectual response, which becomes the

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<sup>37</sup> Albert Camus. *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*. Paris: Gallimard, 1942, p. 29.

catalyst for revolt. We will see how the protagonists of both Duhamel and Camus undergo this intellectual awakening to their own mortality.

Whilst a number of critics have noted the theme of the absurd in the works of Duhamel, few have noted evidence of revolt in the same works. This aspect will be the subject of discussion in chapter seven.

Let us begin by identifying exactly what Camus means by 'l'absurde'.

## **CHAPTER I: THE NATURE OF THE ABSURD**

Expressed simply, the absurd for Camus is a feeling that, in the absence of some overriding principle to give it direction, life has no meaning:

Un monde qu'on peut expliquer même avec les mauvaises raisons est un monde familier. Mais au contraire, dans un univers soudain privé d'illusions et de lumières, l'homme se sent un étranger (*LMS*, p. 20).

In *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (1942), Camus suggests that the absurd is made up of “*tous les sentiments* (our italics) irrationnels sur lesquels l'analyse ne saurait avoir de prise” (p. 27). This is consistent with Cruikshank's definition of the absurd as “the conclusion arrived at by those who had assumed the possibility of a total explanation of existence by the mind but who discover instead an unbridgeable gap between rationality and experience.”<sup>38</sup>

This is precisely the conflict experienced by biologist Laurent Pasquier in Duhamel's *Vue de la terre promise* (1934):

Il y a quelque chose d'inexplicable, chez moi. Je me destine à la science et mes maîtres, mes amis, mes compagnons de laboratoire estiment que je suis un bon observateur. Hélas! Ce n'est pas vrai. Sûrement, ce n'est pas vrai. Si j'étais ce qu'on appelle un bon observateur, je verrais tout, je saurais tout, j'aurais l'œil ouvert sur tout. Il y a quantité de choses que je ne vois pas, que je comprends trop tard, quand je me cogne le nez dessus. Qu'est-ce que tout cela signifie? Une grande part de la vie m'échappe, se passe en dehors de moi.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> John Cruikshank. *Albert Camus and the Literature of Revolt*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1960, p. 49.

<sup>39</sup> Georges Duhamel. *Vue de la terre promise*. Paris: Mercure de France, 1934, p. 207.

Camus points out that *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* is primarily concerned with “une sensibilité absurde” (*LMS*, p. 16) and not a philosophy of the absurd. Thomas Nagel argues that if there is a philosophical notion of absurdity, it arises out of “the collision between the seriousness with which we take our lives and the perpetual possibility of regarding everything about which we are serious as arbitrary, or open to doubt.”<sup>40</sup> For Nagel, the absurd arises when individuals take a “step back [to] survey themselves” (p. 15) and so discover that much of what motivates them is based on arbitrary or habitual choices. From this viewpoint, argues Nagel, “we ignore the doubts that we know cannot be settled” (p. 14). From this, absurdity is born.

According to Camus, the absurd initially manifests itself in the form of a general sense of anxiety, a feeling that all is not right with the world: “Le simple «souci» est à l’origine de tout” (*LMS*, p. 29). In *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, Camus describes this feeling in terms of a disconnection: “Ce divorce entre l’homme et sa vie, l’acteur et son décor, c’est proprement le sentiment de l’absurdité” (p. 20).

In the works of Duhamel, medical student Antoine Ressayeur of *La Pierre d’Horeb* (1926) demonstrates this same sense of dislocation, describing “le contraste, chaque jour plus rude, entre ma joie, mon juvénile besoin de joie et la désespérante amertume des spectacles qui m’étaient offerts.”<sup>41</sup>

Camus discusses a number of situations in which the absurd might manifest itself in everyday life, but points out that these examples do not amount to a definition of the absurd, but merely

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<sup>40</sup> Thomas Nagel. *Mortal Questions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979, p. 13.

<sup>41</sup> Georges Duhamel. *La Pierre d’Horeb*. Paris: Mercure de France, 1926, p. 96.



constitute “une énumération des sentiments qui peuvent comporter de l’absurde” (*LMS*, p. 30). Hinchliffe (p. 36) summarises these circumstances as follows: people might suddenly become aware of the mechanical nature of their lives; they may also acquire an acute sense that time is passing or feel alone in an alien world; finally, they may feel a sense of exile from others or society.

After briefly discussing each of the emotional triggers for the absurd, in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, Camus attempts a further definition:

Je disais que le monde est absurde et j’allais trop vite. Ce monde en lui-même n’est pas raisonnable, c’est tout ce qu’on en peut dire. Mais ce qui est absurde, c’est la confrontation de cet irrationnel et de ce désir éperdu de clarté dont l’appel résonne au plus profond de l’homme. L’absurde dépend autant de l’homme que du monde (p. 39).

For Camus, therefore, the absurd initially manifests itself on an emotional level and arises out of the conflict between the inherent irrationality of the world and the desire in all human beings for clarity or meaning. Accordingly, it does not reside wholly in either the world or in human beings, but in the interplay of the two entities:

Sur le plan de l’intelligence, je puis donc dire que l’absurde n’est pas dans l’homme (si une pareille métaphore pouvait avoir un sens), ni dans le monde, mais dans leur présence commune (*LMS*, p. 50).

It is an individual’s perception of his or her world that gives birth to the absurd: “Dans l’expérience absurde, la souffrance est individuelle” (*HR*, p. 37). Thus, for Camus, the absurd is a creature of subjective experience.

In ‘Une religion’, one of the chapters for *Entretiens dans le tumulte* (1919), Duhamel notes the general sense of anxiety experienced by many of his countrymen after victory was assured in the

Great War: “Ils ont, plus ou moins, perdu la notion du bien et du mal, du beau et du laid, de l’intérêt personnel véritable. On dirait que le sens de la vie leur échappe” (p. 164). This is essentially a summary of the absurd, and gives weight to Braun’s assertion that the “first collective encounter with the absurd” (p. 31) coincided with the First World War:

The shock of mechanical warfare had been too dreadful ever to be forgotten. It meant not only four infernal years, but serious misgivings as to the humaneness and sanity of the world (Braun, p. 31).

Braun argues that the experience of the Great War mirrored Camus’ own experience with tuberculosis, but “it was not until the German occupation that Camus named that experience and officially introduced the absurd on the literary scene” (p. 33).

Well before the Great War, however, Duhamel had contemplated the meaninglessness of existence; his memoirs demonstrate a growing feeling of disharmony and anxiety. In *Inventaire de l’abîme*, his recollections of the period culminating in his seventeenth year, for example, Duhamel describes “la très incompréhensible et misérable humanité,”<sup>42</sup> and, in the subsequent instalment, *Biographie de mes fantômes*, he describes life as “ce monstrueux désordre.”<sup>43</sup>

At that time, Duhamel was about to commence his medical studies, and, despite an atmosphere charged with a sense of new beginnings, continuing bouts of illness contributed to his own ‘simple souci.’ He tells how he endlessly questions himself “sur le sens de ma vie” (*BF*, p. 79).

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<sup>42</sup> Georges Duhamel. *Inventaire de l’abîme*. Paris: Mercure de France, 1949, p. 45.

<sup>43</sup> Georges Duhamel. *Biographie de mes fantômes*. Paris: Paul Hartmann, 1944, p. 77.

Claire Hoch agrees, stating that “the young Georges Duhamel was not blessed with happiness and peace of mind.”<sup>44</sup>

Referring to the same memoirs by Duhamel, William Falls describes the sense of anxiety and estrangement felt by the young Duhamel:

La vie lui inflige des épreuves difficiles, dont quelques-unes sont de vrais supplices. Les premiers jours à l'école communale, notamment, et, de façon générale, les premiers contacts avec la vie hors de famille, l'effraient et le rendent malade. Le monde lui semble une jungle.<sup>45</sup>

Falls describes Duhamel's adolescence as “moins régulièrement anxieuse” (p. 47), but nonetheless “pas tout de même vraiment heureuse” (p. 47). Already, however, there are signs that the young Duhamel intends to resist this sense of alienation. As Falls suggests:

Pourtant il n'abdique pas. Sans doute n'a-t-il pas le choix; sans doute est-il charrié, comme beaucoup d'enfants, par la force des choses. Toujours est-il qu'il n'est pas submergé, qu'il *résiste* (our italics) et je crois bien qu'on n'expliquera cette résistance que si l'on tient compte d'une certaine fermeté qui pointe déjà chez le petit garçon, qui sera une des plus belles qualités de l'homme mûr (p. 43).

At this point, the young Duhamel is not far from manifesting this resistance, which takes the form of his retreat to Créteil with a group of like-minded young intellectuals and artists, an experience described in the third volume of his memoirs, *Le Temps de la recherche*. Financial difficulties, a lack of leadership and personality clashes would ultimately condemn the experiment, yet even as the artists enthusiastically embraced the beginning of the project, the young Duhamel continued to experience a sense of alienation and estrangement: “La vie s'installe, avec ses exigences, ses

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<sup>44</sup> Claire Hoch. ‘Georges Duhamel on the profession and role of the writer’. PhD thesis. University of Cincinnati, United States of America, 1970, p. 48.

<sup>45</sup> William F. Falls. *Le Message humain de Georges Duhamel*. Paris: Éditions Contemporaines, 1948, p. 42.

caprices, ses difficultés infinies, sa puissance obstinée de souillure et de destruction.”<sup>46</sup> In this work, Duhamel specifically refers to the twentieth century as “ce siècle absurde” (p. 154) and later on in the same work, he refers to “le triste univers des hommes” (p. 237).

### ***DEATH AS A SOURCE OF THE ABSURD***

Inextricably linked to feeling the passing of time is the attitude that human beings have towards death, “ce côté élémentaire et définitif de l’aventure” (*LMS*, p. 32), seen by Camus as the major source of the sense of the absurd in human beings. For Camus, the problem is that human beings cannot truly understand death because there can be no real experience of it until it is upon them. In ‘Le Vent à Djémila’, one of the short stories in *Noces* (1938), Camus notes: “Un jeune homme regarde le monde face à face. Il n’a pas eu le temps de polir l’idée de mort ou de néant dont pourtant il a mâché l’horreur.”<sup>47</sup> In *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (1942), Camus discounts the experience of the death of others as a teaching aid, calling the experience, “un succédané, une vue de l’esprit et nous n’en sommes jamais très convaincus” (p. 32). We are entitled to be a little sceptical of this statement in light of the fact that, in his novels, Camus uses the deaths of others as a catalyst for a more sophisticated appreciation of the absurd. This technique, which is also employed by Duhamel, will be the subject of further examination in chapter six.

In *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (1942), an awareness of the fact of death is an element of the intellectual process necessary for metaphysical revolt; in the same work, Camus describes it as “un affrontement perpétuel de l’homme et de sa propre obscurité” (p. 78). He would return to this

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<sup>46</sup> Georges Duhamel. *Le Temps de la recherche*. Paris: Paul Hartmann, 1947, p. 48.

<sup>47</sup> Albert Camus. *Noces/L’été*. Paris: Gallimard, 1959, p. 28.

concept in *L'Homme révolté* (1951), defining metaphysical revolt as “une longue protestation contre la mort, une accusation enragée de cette condition régie par la peine de mort généralisée” (p. 132).

When the fact of death has imprinted itself indelibly on the mind, says Camus, life is so at odds with the necessity of death as to be absurd. Death becomes, as Bruce Pratt puts it, “le scandale par excellence.”<sup>48</sup> It is “la double conscience de [son] désir de durée et [son] destin de mort” (*Noces*, p. 65), this “contrast between the richness of physical existence and the inevitability of death” (Cruikshank, *Albert Camus and the Literature of Revolt*, p. xi), which defines the intellectual appreciation of the absurd.

To highlight this apparent mutual exclusivity, Camus uses language of opposition and contrast. For example, in ‘Le Vent à Djémila’, the author describes “fleurs, sourires, désirs de femme” (*Noces*, p. 30) and realises that “toute mon horreur de mourir tient dans ma jalousie de vivre” (*Noces*, p. 30). In ‘L’Été à Alger’ he reaffirms: “Tout ici respire l’horreur de mourir dans un pays qui invite à la vie” (*Noces*, p. 45).

It was as a surgeon during the Great War that Duhamel experienced “le contact quotidien avec la mort” (Lafay, *Témoins d’un temps troublé*, p. xxiv). André Maurois suggests that it was at the Front that the “Duhamel que nous connaissons était né.”<sup>49</sup> Duhamel’s memoirs of this period, *La Pesée des âmes*, unequivocally bring him into alignment with the notion of the absurd as a conflict between the ‘désir de durée et [...] destin de mort’ that Camus was to develop in *Noces*:

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<sup>48</sup> Bruce Pratt. *L’Évangile selon Albert Camus*. Paris: Librairie José Corti, 1980, p. 104.

<sup>49</sup> André Maurois. *De Proust à Camus*. Paris: Librairie Académique Perrin, 1965, p. 184.

La condition humaine, qui tient tout entière dans cette lutte sourde entre la certitude d'un destin fini et l'espérance insensée d'une vie sans limites, semblait écrite en lettres de flamme sur les heures de ces jours-là.<sup>50</sup>

Long before Camus, Duhamel employed language and imagery of contrast to highlight his own sense of absurdity. For example, the idea that a fierce battle could take place on such a beautiful day is, for him, illogical and repugnant: “L'angoisse était revenue. Et pourtant, que de ciel bleu, que de soleil, que de belle et bonne tiédeur pour cette seconde bataille de la Marne!” (*PA*, p. 290).

After the Great War, the sense of general anxiety and meaninglessness that Duhamel demonstrated prior to 1914 becomes more intimately linked to the fact of death. In *Essai sur une renaissance dramatique* (1926), Duhamel's enjoyment of the theatre is initially compromised by continual thoughts about those who died during battle: “La voix des martyrs doit-elle être étouffée si tôt par celle de tous ces diseurs de rien?”<sup>51</sup>

His memoirs covering the two post-war periods show him thinking more about the inevitability of death and also contain a hint of Camus' notion of metaphysical revolt:

A la plupart de mes amitiés de jeunesse mon cœur est demeuré fidèle. Ce n'est pas un trait de vertu. Plutôt l'effet d'un besoin, la recherche éperdue d'un équilibre, le désir de traverser, de contrarier en quelque manière le sombre jeu de la mort.<sup>52</sup>

Similarly, in his journal covering the period after the Second World War, Duhamel struggles to identify the source of his general malaise. On 16 July 1949, he describes a walk with his son Jean before nightfall. A light rain refreshes the dry vegetation and there is a wind from the east. There

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<sup>50</sup> Georges Duhamel. *La Pesée des âmes*. Paris: Mercure de France, 1949, p. 165.

<sup>51</sup> Georges Duhamel. *Essai sur une renaissance dramatique*. Paris: Les Éditions Lapina, Collection “Les Panathénées”, 1926, p. 19.

<sup>52</sup> Georges Duhamel. *Les Espoirs et les épreuves*. Paris: Mercure de France, 1953, p. 154.

is seemingly no reason for Duhamel to feel sad. The Second World War is at an end, his family is intact and he is an author of repute, yet he confesses a “poignante tristesse.”<sup>53</sup>

In searching further for the root of his malaise, Duhamel lists a number of the feelings for the absurd identified by Camus in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (1942). For example, an impending summer deluge, which, ordinarily, “aurait suffi, peut-être, à me détendre, à m’élever, à m’inspirer quelque élan de l’âme,” (*LLA*, p. 326) fails to deliver for Duhamel. He also confesses to a sense of alienation from the familiar environment which surrounds his home: “Le paysage familier, dans cette lumière presque oubliée, a pris un aspect rare et dramatique” (p. 326). He also feels every bit his sixty-five years: “Je sens l’âge peser. La joie perd son goût. Les forces de la vie vont me trahir d’un moment à l’autre” (p. 326). He recalls the absurdity of war: “Les causes ne manquent pas, sans doute: je n’aime pas ce monde absurde et criminel. Les odeurs du sang, du désespoir, de la folie me sautent au nez cent fois le jour” (p. 326).

In whatever direction he turns, Duhamel feels off-balance and denied by his world: “De quelque côté que je me tourne, tout semble fait — hors de mon domaine — pour me contrarier ou m’offenser” (p. 326).

In concluding this journal entry for 16 July 1949, Duhamel specifically refers to another period (between 1922 and 1923), when he harboured the same desire “de ne plus vivre, de ne plus être, de n’avoir jamais été!” (*LLA*, p. 327). In his memoirs for the same period, *Les Espoirs et les épreuves*, we find this entry:

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<sup>53</sup> Georges Duhamel. *Le Livre de l’amertume*. Paris: Mercure de France, 1983, p. 326.

Pendant les deux ou trois années qui ont suivi la première guerre mondiale, j'ai connu d'indicibles mélancolies. Que veuillent me pardonner ceux dont le destin se trouvait, dès ce temps, lié au mien: j'ose avouer aujourd'hui que j'ai souhaité la mort (*LEE*, p. 32).

This is a remarkable statement from an author who, only four years earlier, in *La Possession du monde* (1919), had rebelled against the injustice of war by urging his reader to exhaust the possibilities offered up by the world in this life. These two examples of malaise (and perhaps depression), experienced within a reasonably short time after both wars, highlight the fact that in Duhamel, there resided an inclination towards indifference, even to that of his own death, and against which he had to remain vigilant. This is something he shared with Camus:

Il y a des heures où je ne crois pas pouvoir supporter plus longtemps la contradiction. Quand le ciel est froid et que rien ne nous soutient dans la nature...Ah! mieux vaut mourir peut-être.<sup>54</sup>

For all of these reasons, it is difficult to accept William Hart's assertion that "there is no trace of imbalance in the character of Duhamel [...]"<sup>55</sup>

After the Great War, the language of opposition and contrast in Duhamel's fictional works becomes sharper, more urgent. For example, in *Le Notaire du Havre* (1933) Laurent Pasquier describes "ce cruel discord entre le ciel et mon âme"<sup>56</sup> and in *Les Maîtres* (1937), he speaks of "ce monde infini de joies et de douleurs,"<sup>57</sup> as well as "mon existence dans sa grandeur et sa tristesse" (p. 179).

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<sup>54</sup> Albert Camus. *Carnets II: January 1942 – March 1951*. Paris: Gallimard, 1964, p. 183.

<sup>55</sup> William Hart. 'Georges Duhamel and Human Relationships, with Particular Reference to his Works of Fiction'. M. Phil. Thesis. London, United Kingdom, 1977, p. 168.

<sup>56</sup> Georges Duhamel. *Le Notaire du Havre*. Paris: Mercure de France, 1933, p. 219.

<sup>57</sup> Georges Duhamel. *Les Maîtres*. Paris: Mercure de France, 1937, p. 40.



As Rieux in Camus' *La Peste* will come to terms with the reality of the plague while contemplating the spring morning through his window, in *Fables de mon jardin* (1936), Duhamel uses the beauty of his own garden to highlight the paradox of the desire for life in the face of an inevitable death: "Si je n'avais pas de jardin, je pourrais oublier la mort, pendant une heure entière."<sup>58</sup> In *Le Voyage de Patrice Périot* (1950), Duhamel opens his novel with a visit by Périot to the grave of his wife. The flashy night clubs of the cemetery district with their blinking lights seem so out of place, when viewed in the context of the nearby graves, as to appear ridiculous, almost obscene: "Les cabarets de nuit s'éveillent tard, avec leurs lumières voilées et leurs odeurs d'eau-de-vie, dans l'estuaire même de la mort."<sup>59</sup>

There are thus two principal manifestations of the absurd for Camus, and which are evident in the life and works of Duhamel. The first, as we have seen, is a feeling for the absurd experienced on a purely emotional basis. This is the 'pourquoi' or 'simple souci'. The second arises when human beings truly understand that they are to die. As Herbert Hochberg states: "We seek to understand the world and cannot; we seek to avoid death and cannot. Just as the first conflict led [Camus] to speak of absurdity, so does the second. Death becomes a further sense of the absurd."<sup>60</sup> As Hochberg suggests, "in speaking of death as an enemy to be opposed, Camus can introduce a further notion — that of rebellion, for rebellion needs an antagonist. The *absurd*, in the earlier senses, does not provide it explicitly enough; death does" (p. 93).

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<sup>58</sup> Georges Duhamel. *Fables de mon jardin*. Paris: Mercure de France, 1961, p. 93.

<sup>59</sup> Georges Duhamel. *Le Voyage de Patrice Périot*. Paris: Mercure de France, 1950, p. 6.

<sup>60</sup> Herbert Hochberg. 'Albert Camus and the Ethic of Absurdity'. *Ethics*. Vol. 75, No. 2, (1965), p. 93. Retrieved 13 October 2010 from <http://www.jstor.org>.

This distinction is important, because as we will discover, the nature of one's response to the absurd depends on the level of understanding achieved. There is therefore "a distinction between men on the basis of knowledge" (Hochberg, p. 95), a distinction confirmed by Camus in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*:

La lassitude est à la fin des actes d'une vie machinale, mais elle inaugure en même temps le mouvement de la conscience. Elle l'éveille et elle provoque la suite. La suite, c'est le retour inconscient dans la chaîne, ou c'est l'éveil définitif. Au bout de l'éveil vient, avec le temps, la conséquence: suicide ou rétablissement (p. 29).

As we will see, in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (1942), Camus holds up Sisyphus and Don Juan as 'models' for a way of life following 'l'éveil définitif'. The conduct of Sisyphus, in courageously discharging a duty which he knows to be futile, epitomises the 'defiance' of the human condition. Don Juan is the leader of the 'quantitative' approach to life, which holds that in a world devoid of an absolute by which values might be judged, the consequences of all actions are equal, and, therefore, it is the quantity of life experiences that matters, rather than the quality.

Both Sisyphus and Don Juan are presented as being 'conscious': "Sisyphe, prolétaire des dieux, impuissant et révolté, connaît toute l'étendue de sa misérable condition" (*LMS*, p. 165). Similarly: "Don Juan sait et n'espère pas" (*LMS*, p. 100). Thus, in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, and, for that matter, *L'Homme révolté* (1951), metaphysical revolt is conditional upon 'l'éveil définitif'. For Camus, a course of conduct which follows a mere emotional understanding of the absurd, if it is not accompanied by an intimate understanding of death, can never amount to metaphysical revolt.

Hochberg suggests that the quantitative ethic carries with it the "seed of nihilism" (p. 93), of which he identifies two types in the thought of Camus: "One is the nihilism of "all is permitted," the rejection of all moral standards; the other is the nihilism of absolutists who permit all means in

the name of some absolute end” (p. 96). In siding with death, rather than opposing it, “nihilists of either kind cannot be rebels” (p. 96).

Anthony Rizzuto makes an important observation in relation to Camus and nihilism, noting both its collective and individual applications, an observation that will be important when we come to consider Salavin:

Camus isolates two nihilisms in Western history: “celui de l’individu et celui d’État.” The latter is characterized by totalitarianism, the concentration camp, and a strict adherence to the death penalty; the former stresses the abolition of one’s personal past since the past represents human ties, obliging us to recognize that the self has been preceded, that it has consequently evolved and not been created.<sup>61</sup>

Dr. Ali Gündoğan notes the indifference of the nihilists to certain fundamental values: “L’homme pensant qu’il n’est pas responsable de ses propres actes peut très bien abuser des valeurs si elles ne sont que de nature humaine ou sociale, ou bien, il peut se comporter de façon indifférente à ces valeurs.”<sup>62</sup>

As we will seek to demonstrate, for both authors, an emotional grasp of the absurd is sufficient to give birth to nihilism. Evidence from Camus’ *L’Étranger* and Duhamel’s *Vie et aventures de Salavin* will be adduced in support of that assertion. *A fortiori*, an intimate understanding of death may also lead to nihilism. The emperor in *Caligula* (1944) is the most obvious example.

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<sup>61</sup> Anthony Rizzuto. *Camus’ Imperial Vision*. Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1981, p. 96.

<sup>62</sup> Dr. Ali Osman Gündoğan. ‘De L’Absurde à la Morale de la Révolte’. University of Ankara. *Journal of the Faculty of Letters*. (2000), p. 32.

However, if the quantitative ethic contains the potential for nihilism, then it also contains the germ of morality. Morally ‘acceptable’ behaviour is not excluded by the quantitative ethic: “De même, si toutes les expériences sont indifférentes, celle du devoir est aussi légitime qu’une autre” (*LMS*, p. 96). In other words, Camus says that “il peut y avoir des responsables [mais] il n’y a pas de coupables” (*LMS*, p. 97). If, however, actions are to be judged by their consequences, the following assertion from Camus rings a little hollow: “Tout est permis ne signifie pas que rien n’est défendu” (*LMS*, p. 96). This ‘passive’ morality of *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* will be subsumed, in *L’Homme révolté*, by an ethic of positive values discovered in the course of revolt.

Hochberg summarises what he considers to be the three potential ‘responses’ to the absurd borne out in the works of Camus:

Recall the three basic grounds. The first was the necessity for preserving the truth of the absurd condition. It can lead us to look at Camus as a lonely but courageous bearer of the burden of life — as one who does one’s duty solely by living — in short, as Sisyphus. The second was the upholding of the joys of sensual life in the face of their deprecation by a transcendent absolute. Here one can look at Camus as a sort of happy pagan, shuttling between beach, bedroom, and bar, decrying moral codes, and rhapsodizing about the quantity and variety of experience. Finally, in the third, we find the rebel, the resolute opponent of death (p. 95).

By the ‘rebel’, Hochberg must be referring to the rebel of *L’Homme révolté*, because, as Camus suggests in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, Sisyphus and Don Juan are also rebels in their own right, having acquired all-important lucidity.

In fact, it is conceivable that Camus’ thought allows a fourth response, namely that of a Sisyphus devoid of lucidity. This is the man who, following an emotional awakening to the absurd, seeks out, as Albérès calls it, the “*second sens de notre vie*” (*Les Hommes traqués*, p. 128). This is the man whom Camus describes as follows in *L’Homme révolté*:

Il n'est pas d'être enfin qui, à partir d'un niveau élémentaire de conscience, ne s'épuise à chercher les formules ou les attitudes qui donneraient à son existence l'unité qui lui manque (p. 327).

Duhamel also describes these men in *Défense des Lettres* (1937): “Tous, qu'ils le sachent ou non, veulent une loi, une règle, une direction, une contrainte.”<sup>63</sup> Salavin is a good example of this fourth scenario in the works of Duhamel. After each failed attempt at achieving his ‘salut’, Salavin’s courageous but misguided recommitment to the task recalls the stoic defiance of Sisyphus, save for the missing element of lucidity.

Similarly, in *Vue de la terre promise* (1934), Laurent terminates his letter to Justin with a list of the things he considers might provide him with the sense of order that he feels is missing. Like Salavin, he considers sainthood (*VTP*, p. 217). Next, there is the possibility of “la rédemption du monde par la science ou par l’art, ou par je ne sais quoi!” (*VTP*, p. 218). In this way, Laurent confirms himself as initially searching for something in the nature of an absolute principle by which he can live his life. At this point in his life, like Salavin, Laurent is Sisyphus devoid of lucidity: “Il est triste, à vingt ans, d’être nu comme je suis, dépourvu comme je le suis. Pourtant, je ne manque pas de courage” (*VTP*, p. 218).

### ***THE DUAL ASPECT OF THE HUMAN CONDITION***

Given that human beings project themselves into their world both on the level of the body and that of the mind, then if the absurd is a function of subjective experience, we must first consider the interplay of these dual aspects of the human condition. After all, if human beings feel a lack of

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<sup>63</sup> Georges Duhamel. *Défense des Lettres — Biologie de mon métier*. Paris: Mercure de France, 1937, p. 122.

order and harmony within themselves, then, logically, that must diminish the prospects for happiness in their relationship with their natural world and with other people. As Rizutto suggests: “Dialogue first requires inner dialogue” (*Camus’ Imperial Vision*, p. 111).

Both Camus and Duhamel recognise the dual aspect of the human condition as incorporating the body and the intellect. However, while Camus remained an advocate throughout his life for the simple joys offered by a life lived through the body, Duhamel will be remembered primarily for his passionate belief in pursuits which stimulate the mind and nourish the soul, “le colloque sublime et familier que tout être poursuit avec la meilleure partie de soi-même” (*LPM*, p. 17). This was perhaps a natural choice for Duhamel, given his admiration for Pascal, who devoted himself “tout entier vers la détresse de l’âme humaine.”<sup>64</sup>

In their search for a sense of unity, both authors experiment with the interplay of the body and mind. As we shall see, in *L’Étranger* (1942), Meursault’s instinctive, corporeal existence is compromised during the trial process as he begins to reason and speculate. Similarly, in *Vie and aventures de Salavin*, Salavin’s body rarely affords him the luxury of a total withdrawal into the world of his thoughts and dreams.

### ***CAMUS AND A LIFE LIVED THROUGH THE BODY***

In *Noces* (1938), Camus emphasises life lived through the body — as Cruikshank puts it, the “joy of life in the flesh” (*Albert Camus and the Literature of Revolt*, p. 31). Emmanuel Roblès remembers that Camus “m’approuvait de bon cœur lorsque je lui affirmais qu’en définitive il

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<sup>64</sup> Georges Duhamel. *Les Confessions sans pénitence*. Paris: Plon, 1941, p. 151.

n’existait que deux grandes joies au monde: être couché sur une femme et nager dans une eau claire.”<sup>65</sup> The following citation, from ‘Noces à Tipasa’ (1938), is typical of those found in the collection:

Le visage mouillé de sueur, mais le corps frais dans la légère toile qui nous habille, nous étalons tous l’heureuse lassitude d’un jour de noces avec le monde (*Noces*, p. 17).

Camus’ emphasis here is on the “double vérité du corps et de l’instant” (*Noces*, p. 59), and, as Rosemarie Jones puts it, “a sense of being part of the natural world through the body.”<sup>66</sup>

In his notebooks of the time, Camus wrote: “Le monde est beau et tout est là. Sa grande vérité que patiemment il enseigne, c’est que l’esprit n’est rien ni le cœur même.”<sup>67</sup> ‘Noces à Tipasa’ questions whether the body alone is capable of delivering happiness and emphatically responds in the affirmative. Braun refers to *Noces* as “a pantheistic experience of nothingness and desire” (p. 23), and concludes that this, “not revolt, is Camus’s initial experience” (p. 23). Bonnier agrees, describing “la première démarche, qui est horizontale: il aborde Tipasa avec son corps seulement.”<sup>68</sup> Roger Quilliot, however, notices the theme of rebellion in *Noces*, referring to “l’insurrection de la chair contre le destin.”<sup>69</sup>

If ‘Noces à Tipasa’ was viewed in isolation, then perhaps one could agree with Braun. However, in the same collection, we find ‘Le vent à Djémila’, which, as we have seen, creates in Camus an

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<sup>65</sup> Emmanuel Roblès. ‘La Marque du soleil et de la misère’. *Camus*. Paris: Librairie Hachette. (1964), p. 62.

<sup>66</sup> Rosemarie Jones. *L’Étranger and La Chute*. London: Grant and Cutler, 1980, p. 13.

<sup>67</sup> Albert Camus. *Carnets I: May 1935 – February 1942*. Paris: Gallimard, 1962, p. 74.

<sup>68</sup> Henry Bonnier. *Albert Camus ou la force d’être*. Paris: Vitte, 1959, p. 41.

<sup>69</sup> Roger Quilliot. *La mer et les prisons: Essai sur Albert Camus*. Paris: Gallimard, 1956, p. 47.

urgent awareness of the relative proximity of his own death. There is certainly evidence of metaphysical revolt here:

Si je refuse obstinément tous les «plus tard» du monde, c'est qu'il s'agit aussi bien de ne pas renoncer à ma richesse présente. Il ne me plaît pas de croire que la mort ouvre sur une autre vie. Elle est pour moi une porte fermée (*Noces*, p. 27).

As Quilliot confirms: “Ce que Tipasa est à la vie, Djémila l'est à la mort” (p. 53).

In developing the absurd in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (1942), Camus reinforces the sentiment expressed in Tipasa: “Car le chemin de la lutte me fait rencontrer la chair. Même humiliée, la chair est ma seule certitude. Je ne puis vivre que d'elle” (p. 120). Rizzuto notes: “Whenever Camus stresses the participatory nature of the self, as he does in *Noces* and *Le Mythe*, he exalts the body, theatre of the physical” (*Camus' Imperial Vision*, p. 40).

### ***DUHAMEL AND 'LA VIE INTÉRIEURE'***

In the early pages of *La Possession du monde* (1919), Duhamel makes it clear that for him, happiness resides in the development of “la vie intérieure” (p. 14). However, this is not the first time that he employs this phrase. There is a reference to it in *La Lumière*, first performed in 1911 in Paris. In this play, Bernard, blind from birth, charges himself with the task of delivering Blanche from her world of indifference and sadness. As he explains to his father Jérôme: “Il faut seulement chercher, et l'arracher à cette existence solitaire [...] Il faut la divertir de sa vie intérieure.”<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Georges Duhamel. *La Lumière*. Paris: Mercure de France, 1911, p. 73.



If, for Blanche, an overly-sensitive nature leads her away from the possession of her world, Duhamel makes it clear that it is the cultivation of this same interior life that will form the path towards happiness. Bernard explains: “Ah! les hommes qui voient, savent-ils plus que moi ce qu’ils font et ce qu’ils veulent?” (p. 89). Bernard’s task is to restore the light to Blanche’s world: not the natural light of the world, rather that which burns within him:

Tu es triste, tu es triste...alors, viens, je vais te montrer le soleil. C’est la gloire et la nourriture de tous, même de ceux qui n’ont pas d’yeux. Il est encore ici, je le sens autour de nous, je le sens entre nous (p. 89).

In describing this inner life in *La Possession du monde* (1919), Duhamel includes references to ‘l’intelligence’, ‘cœur’ and ‘âme’. Thus, when Duhamel refers to ‘la vie intérieure’ he means to focus on the emotional and intellectual development of human beings.

In the same work, Duhamel compares the durable happiness of ‘la vie intérieure’, with “le culte des réalités immédiates” (p. 120). However, many of the joys described by Camus in *Noces* (1938) would fall into this category, such as the pleasure of diving into the ocean or feeling the breeze against skin tanned by the sun and salted by the sea. In fact, Duhamel’s works are littered with examples of precisely the same sort of bodily pleasures described by Camus.

In *Biographie de mes fantômes*, Duhamel describes his first journey through the Auvergne on foot with his friend Alexandre: “De ce voyage date, pour moi, la véritable et parfaite communion avec la nature, avec les hommes simples, avec les bêtes” (p. 38). In the same volume, he describes the simple pleasure, acquired through the senses, of savouring the odour of filtered coffee:

Je respirais avec plaisir les vapeurs du café que mon hôte préparait dans des filtres individuels: la pauvreté de ce temps-là ressemblait étrangement au grand luxe d’aujourd’hui” (p. 159).

Similarly, the scent of wild jasmine “me réveillait, la nuit, par son odeur si suave et si puissante qu’elle a parfumé toute ma vie” (p. 225).

After the Great War, Duhamel’s works continue this theme. In *Scènes de la vie future* (1930), those things that immediately appeal to the senses are assigned an almost magical quality by him and gathered together under the banner of “la joie de vivre.”<sup>71</sup> In *Fables de mon jardin* (1936), he once more focuses on olfactory pleasures such as “l’odeur des champignons à l’extrême point du matin [...]” (p. 167).

Therefore, notwithstanding his comments in *La Possession du monde* about the difference between ‘jouissance’ and true joy, Duhamel finds that gratuitous, sensuous joy is capable of delivering happiness. The same work offers us the following passage, which could easily have come directly from ‘Noces à Tipasa’ (1938) and prefigures the ‘tendre indifférence’ of the universe that will infiltrate the final pages of *L’Étranger*:

Rappelle-toi cette nuit où nous sommes demeurés tous deux étendus dans les champs, face à un ciel ruisselant de clarté laiteuse. Tu ne m’as rien dit, mais j’ai compris que, ce soir-là, tu possédais jusqu’à l’ivresse une idée terrible, immense, celle de l’infini. Grâce à ton silence, j’ai partagé avec toi cette écrasante richesse (*LPM*, p. 194).

Almost thirty years later, Camus’ description of the nocturnal swim enjoyed by Rieux and Tarrou in *La Peste* (1947), echoes Duhamel’s sentiments in *La Possession du monde*:

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<sup>71</sup> Georges Duhamel. *Scènes de la vie future*. Paris: Mercure de France, 1930, p. 96.

Rieux se mit sur le dos et se tint immobile, face au ciel renversé, plein de lune et d'étoiles. Il respira longuement. Puis il perçut de plus en plus distinctement un bruit d'eau battue, étrangement clair dans le silence et la solitude de la nuit. Tarrou se rapprochait, on entendit bientôt sa respiration. Rieux se retourna, se mit au niveau de son ami, et nagea dans le même rythme. Tarrou avançait avec plus de puissance que lui et il dut précipiter son allure. Pendant quelques minutes, ils avancèrent avec la même cadence et la même vigueur, solitaires, loin du monde, libérés enfin de la ville et de la peste.<sup>72</sup>

Michel Dyé has also noticed this link: “Comme Albert Camus, le poète de *La Possession du monde* a su célébrer les noces de l’homme avec l’univers et nous a dépeint, plus de vingt ans avant le romancier de *La Peste*, la grâce de la communion sous un ciel nocturne.”<sup>73</sup>

Perhaps the key to understanding where Duhamel differs from Camus in respect to the enjoyment of simple pleasures lies in the following passage, taken from *Inventaire de l’abîme*:

Je me suis arrêté sous un pommier. Une brise enchantée jouait entre les branches. Les alouettes célébraient, dans l’altitude, les *noces* (our italics) du ciel et de la terre. Je suis resté là, couché dans l’herbe, pendant une éternité. Je ne sentais plus mon corps. Je n’avais plus de corps. Mon âme planait entre les mondes (p. 32).

Whilst the language of the first half of this citation could have been taken straight from ‘Noces à Tipasa’ or *La Mort heureuse* (1938), Camus may have concluded such a passage with the word ‘éternité’, for he accepted joys acquired through the body at face value and rarely attempted to look for a greater meaning in them; one notable exception occurs, however, in ‘Noces à Tipasa’: “J’ouvre les yeux et mon cœur à la grandeur insoutenable de ce ciel gorgé de chaleur” (*Noces*, p. 14). In general though, as Cruikshank tells us, speaking of Camus:

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<sup>72</sup> Albert Camus. *La Peste*. Paris: Gallimard, 1947, p. 232.

<sup>73</sup> Michel Dyé. ‘*La Possession du monde* ou la Quête du bonheur selon Georges Duhamel’. *L’Humanisme de Georges Duhamel*. Ed. Richard J. Bourcier. Scranton: Ridge Row Press, (1992), p. 162.

The searing beauty of Algeria [...] teaches no spiritual lessons. It gives rich indulgence to the senses but has nothing to give to those who seek from it food for the soul or comfort for the mind (*Albert Camus and the Literature of Revolt*, p. 33).

### ***DUHAMEL AND THE BODY***

In *Les Espoirs et les épreuves*, Duhamel summarises the different levels that made up his life in 1921. The first and lowest level is that of the “la carcasse” (p. 104), which he describes as “exigeante” (p. 105). He then describes the various other levels, such as the family and that of the citizen, his relations with other people, the administrative level, his travels, his articles and secondary writings, his primary works such as his novels, and, finally, the last stage, that of the soul: “C’est le réduit secret, l’heure du milieu de la nuit, l’angle d’ombre et de silence où l’homme reprend, chaque jour, le dialogue avec son âme” (p. 107).

Thus, even though Duhamel accepts, albeit begrudgingly, that the body has a role to play, his primary concerns are the nourishment of the soul and pursuits of the mind. The following quotation from his memoirs of the years following the Great War effectively summarises Duhamel’s position and probably explains why, in *Nouvelles du sombre empire* (1960), Don Juan was assigned a place in hell’s museum. The last line also suggests the metaphysical revolt of *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*:

Une vie toute donnée à l’assouvissement des besoins élémentaires, une vie qui ne serait pas soutenue, orientée, orchestrée par quelque grand devoir, quelque grande pensée, quelque grande passion, quelque grande espérance, une vie que ne dominerait point l’appétit de la recherche et le désir de la trouvaille, une vie telle, je pense qu’elle ne mériterait même pas les soucis de la carcasse, même pas l’effort nécessaire pour résister, chaque minute, à l’offensive du néant (*LEE*, p. 8).

Therefore, Duhamel generally prefers to assess the effect on the soul of the body’s physical joy or suffering. In *Le Combat* (1913), Duhamel highlights that relationship for Gérard, who believes he

is dying: “Je sens mon âme intacte et forte, mais, parce que la chair trahit, l’âme, bientôt, ne sera plus qu’une ténèbre dénouée.”<sup>74</sup> As Santelli notes, Duhamel “s’attarde moins, en effet, à décrire la douleur de la chair que la répercussion de cette douleur sur l’âme” (*Adieu à Georges Duhamel*, p. 133). Marc Blancpain agrees and considers that Duhamel’s war writings went far beyond the mere recounting of bodily injury: “Il atteint l’âme, l’âme que l’atroce souffrance du corps accable, humilie aussi et, parfois, *sublime*.”<sup>75</sup>

Duhamel also experiments with the reverse viewpoint, namely the effect on the body of the workings of the mind. As Knapp suggests: “When the mind-all-powerful is obsessed by some fear or anguish, it can play havoc with the rest of the body” (p. 88). This is the predominant theme of Duhamel’s *La Nuit d’orage* (1927). Here, François Cros and his wife Élisabeth are consumed by the belief that an object they possess is a ‘porte malheur’ and is responsible for a mystery illness experienced by Élisabeth and for which the doctors can offer her no cure.

Despite the role played by the body, it is indisputable that, for Duhamel, the path to a durable happiness lies in the nurturing of the heart or the soul: “N’oublions pas que le bonheur est notre unique but. Le bonheur est une chose de l’âme, avant tout” (*LPM*, p. 34). As Michel Dyé concludes in relation to Duhamel, “l’âme lui semblait particulièrement apte à donner la paix à laquelle nous aspirons.”<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Georges Duhamel. *Le Combat*. Paris: Mercure de France, 1913, p. 197.

<sup>75</sup> Marc Blancpain. ‘Georges Duhamel et la guerre’. *Les Cahiers de l’Abbaye de Créteil*. December (1991), p. 22.

<sup>76</sup> Michel Dyé. ‘Les Leçons de Georges Duhamel’. *Les Cahiers de l’Abbaye de Créteil*. December (2001), p. 97.

### ***CAMUS AND THE REALM OF THE MIND***

As Meursault will demonstrate in *L'Étranger*, even the most passionate life lived entirely in the flesh may eventually be challenged by the intellect. In describing the problem, Camus uses the terms 'esprit', 'pensée' and 'âme'. For example, in *La Mort heureuse* (1938), Zagreus suggests to Meursault that: "Un homme se juge toujours à l'équilibre qu'il sait apporter entre les besoins de son corps et les exigences de son esprit."<sup>77</sup> In the first volume of his notebooks, he restates the problem, using the term 'pensée' (*Carnets I*, p. 128). Yet, in *Noces*, he also talks about the soul: "L'immortalité de l'âme, il est vrai, préoccupe beaucoup de bons esprits" (p. 55). It is clear that when Camus talks about the metaphysical component of human existence, like Duhamel, he conceives of the emotional and intellectual development of human beings.

### ***THE IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL***

Neither Camus nor Duhamel subscribe to the school of thought which sees the soul as an entity which survives the body after death. For Camus:

L'immortalité de l'âme, il est vrai, préoccupe beaucoup de bons esprits. Mais c'est qu'ils refusent, avant d'en avoir épuisé la sève, la seule vérité qui leur soit donnée et qui est le corps (*Noces*, p. 55).

Yvan Comeau points out that Duhamel held a similar belief: "Il n'y a pas d'immortalité de l'âme pour Duhamel,"<sup>78</sup> a view echoed by Duhamel's characters. In *Cri des profondeurs* (1951), Zamian

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<sup>77</sup> Albert Camus. *La Mort heureuse*. Paris: Gallimard, 1971, p. 69.

<sup>78</sup> Yvan Comeau. *Georges Duhamel et La Possession du Monde — jusqu'à la Chronique des Pasquier*. Montréal: Lidec, 1970, p. 104.

remarks: “Moi, je ne crois pas à l’immortalité de l’âme, mais je crois à son existence. L’âme est, par essence, ce qui vit, souffre, jouit et meurt. L’éternel est ce qui dure, impassible...”<sup>79</sup>

In *La Nuit de la Saint-Jean* (1935), Renaud Censier vainly clings to a hope, which he recognises as “une chose absurde,”<sup>80</sup> for the immortality of his soul: “Je voudrais, bien sûr, que mon âme fût immortelle” (p. 47). He ultimately accepts, however, that such a hope is something “en laquelle je ne peux croire” (p. 155). This refusal to accept the immortality of the soul is a feature of both authors and unites them as humanists.

### ***UNITY OF BODY AND SOUL***

In the first volume of his notebooks, which describes the period from 1935 to 1942, Camus identifies what he considers to be the fundamental impediment to unity of mind and body: “La pensée est toujours en avant. Elle voit trop loin, plus loin que le corps qui est dans le présent. Supprimer l’espérance, c’est ramener la pensée au corps” (*Carnets I*, p. 128). When Camus talks of ‘l’espérance’, he means a hope for an immortal soul, or faith in some grand idea that might transcend one’s life and give it the unity it lacks:

L’esquive mortelle, qui fait le troisième thème de cet essai, c’est l’espoir. Espoir d’une autre vie qu’il faut «mériter», ou tricherie de ceux qui vivent non pour la vie elle-même, mais pour quelque grande idée qui la dépasse, la sublime, lui donne un sens et la trahit (p. 23).

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<sup>79</sup> Georges Duhamel. *Cri des profondeurs*. Paris: Mercure de France, 1951, p. 116.

<sup>80</sup> Georges Duhamel. *La Nuit de la Saint-Jean*. Paris: Mercure de France, 1935, p. 48.

In his notebooks, Camus explains the use of the metaphor of the plague in two phases. In the first, when the plague is still developing, the townsfolk of Oran go about their daily business with hope in the state of things to come:

Les séparés s'aperçoivent qu'en réalité ils n'ont jamais cessé, dans la première phase, d'espérer quelque chose: que les lettres arriveraient, que La Peste cesserait, que l'absent se glisserait dans la ville. C'est seulement dans la deuxième phase qu'ils n'espèrent plus (*Carnets II*, p. 74).

Camus' second phase begins when the townspeople acquire an urgent, intimate knowledge of their imminent demise: "La deuxième phase commença réellement quand ils ne purent penser qu'en termes pesteux" (*Carnets II*, p. 71). Thus, for *La Peste*, the abandonment of hope is linked to the 'paroxysm' of which Camus was so fond, the moment of absolute lucidity so necessary for an ethical revolt. This will be the same hope that Sisyphus abandons each time he watches his rock roll to the bottom of the mountain.

When Camus talks of hope, he is really asking his reader to forget the future and to focus on the present, which will bring the mind back into unity with the body: "Leur vie leur paraissait maintenant former un tout. C'est alors qu'ils y adhéraient avec une nouvelle force. Ainsi La Peste leur restituait l'unité" (*Carnets II*, p.71). Commenting on *Lettres à un ami allemand*, written between 1943/44, and published in 1948, Annick Jauer highlights the irony that abandonment of hope in turn gives rise to a hope for what may be achieved in the here and now:

C'est paradoxalement en acceptant pleinement ce fardeau d'une condition humaine désespérante que l'homme peut entrevoir des signes d'espoir: «c'est pourquoi l'espoir ne me quitte pas».<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Annick Jauer. 'Absurde et révolte dans les *Lettres à un ami allemand*'. *Albert Camus: la Révolte*. Ed. Lionel Dubois. Poitiers: Les Éditions du Pont-Neuf, (2001), p. 208.



In describing Duhamel's search for "notre salut *terrestre*" (Ouy, p. 105), Ouy notes the same abandonment of hope in *La Possession du monde*: "Mais ce sur quoi il nous faut encore insister avant de passer à d'autres objets, c'est *l'importance pathétique et pour ainsi dire centrale de l'abandon de tout espoir de vie future*" (Ouy, p. 106).

### ***AN INSTINCTIVE VERSUS AN INTELLECTUAL APPROACH***

For both Camus and Duhamel, in the absence of lucidity, the union of body and mind is impossible, for they both recognise the problem summarised by Rosemarie Jones:

The problem is that if one lives in the body, instinctively, that can only be an ephemeral paradise: the mind will awaken. But if one tries to live only in the mind, one risks not only the possible distortion of a purely intellectual view, one is also exposed to the *hasard* of physical demands (p. 36).

Meursault in *L'Étranger* (1942) might be said to illustrate the dangers inherent in focusing on a purely corporeal existence, whilst Salavin exemplifies the risks associated with a life lived primarily in the mind.

Camus was certainly aware of the potential shortcomings of a life lived entirely in the flesh, as Cruikshank confirms: "Camus realizes for instance that such joy can only be experienced for a short time within the life-span of each individual" (*Albert Camus and the Literature of Revolt*, p. 31). Patrick McCarthy believes that Camus' fusion with the desert wind in *Noces*:

is a deprivation as well as an ecstasy because man loses his individual character. Camus feels, however, that this is a small price to pay for the anonymous pantheistic upsurge.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Patrick McCarthy. *Camus — A Critical Study of his Life and Work*. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1982, p. 137.

Jones goes a little further, suggesting that in *Noces*, Camus simply ignored the ability of human beings to think and reason: “The collection of essays [...] shows a resolute turning-away from problems posed by the intellect” (p. 13).

### ***MEURSAULT AND THE AWAKENING OF THE MIND***

Citing an interview with Camus by Gaëtan Picon which appeared in *Le Littéraire* on the 10<sup>th</sup> August 1946, Jones notes Camus’ own comments on *L’Étranger*:

Ce que je vois surtout dans mon roman, c’est la présence physique, l’expérience charnelle que les critiques n’ont pas vue: une terre, un ciel, un homme façonné par cette terre et ce ciel (Jones, p. 14).

Notwithstanding this comment, there is no doubt that *L’Étranger* sees Camus exploring the role played by the intellect. As Jones observes: “Meursault’s story is that of a man who had lived happily on an instinctive, spontaneous level and who finds that he can no longer ignore the demands of the mind” (p. 35).

As Rizzuto notes, living on such a basic, spontaneous level is not without risk: “*Left to its own devices* (our italics), the body can no longer be trusted” (*Camus’ Imperial Vision*, p. 23). Jones also observes that as Meursault is swept up in the judicial process which society puts in place to determine his fate, “he is in fact imagining, speculating, reasoning: precisely those activities which he had previously rejected” (p. 35). This view is supported by Rizzuto, who argues that in prison, Meursault’s “life, in fact, moves away from his body into his mind” (*Camus’ Imperial Vision*, p. 23).

Most critics agree, however, that Camus never really abandons the body as the vehicle most suited to delivering happiness. Jones explains:

Meursault's trajectory [...] illuminates the necessity for granting a limited place to reason although reason can never give access to the unity and clarity man continues to desire. That can only be glimpsed through intuitive, corporeal knowledge (p. 19).

Braun concurs: "*Noces* and *L'Envers* are the testimony of the young man in him, a homage to the senses and a probing into the metaphysics of mortal flesh. This testimony was to be infinitely enlarged, but never revoked" (p. 30).

### ***SALAVIN AND THE 'HASARD' OF PHYSICAL DEMANDS***

As Meursault will demonstrate the problems associated with a life lived predominantly in the flesh, twenty years earlier, Salavin exemplified the difficulties inherent in a life lived exclusively in the mind. Brian Fitch identifies how Salavin's body gets in the way:

Son corps le gêne, car sa conscience de ce corps lui rappelle sans cesse qu'il ne pourra jamais s'échapper entièrement du monde où se meuvent les autres hommes et où ses susceptibilités seront constamment à vif. Son corps sera toujours là pour le trahir.<sup>83</sup>

Perhaps this statement might go some way to explaining why Salavin reaches out for Sureau's ear early in *Confession de minuit* (1920). It is true that immediately prior to the act, Salavin feels his body tighten, as if it is an entity independent from his will:

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<sup>83</sup> Brian T. Fitch. 'Portrait d'un aliéné: Salavin de Duhamel et quelques parallèles dans la littérature contemporaine. *Bulletin des Jeunes Romanistes*. (1961), p. 35.

Je sentais tous mes muscles qui se guindaient, chacun dans une posture à faire tort aux autres, et j'avais la curieuse impression de composer une énorme grimace, non seulement avec ma figure, mais avec mon torse, mon ventre, mes membres, enfin avec toute la bête.<sup>84</sup>

The event itself is explained by Salavin:

J'avais d'abord été scandalisé par ce besoin *de ma main* (our italics) de toucher l'oreille de M. Sureau. Graduellement, je sentis que mon *esprit* (our italics) acquiesçait (*CM*, p. 14).

Salavin's body, in the form of his hand, is the principal motivator in the act, only to be joined later by the mind. There is therefore in Salavin, as Bonnier notices in Meursault, this same "léger décalage entre ses gestes et son cerveau, une sorte de dédoublement imperceptible dans lesquels ses sens précèdent sa conscience" (Bonnier, p. 110).

Meursault's body will also betray him on the white hot sands of the Algerian beach at midday: "Tout mon être s'est tendu et j'ai crispé ma main sur le revolver."<sup>85</sup> However, unlike Salavin, Meursault's mind never at any time joins in the process, at least before the event. Meursault feels only the heat of the sun and the beading of his sweat.

In general, it is Salavin's overwhelming preference for 'la vie intérieure' which results in the 'distortion of a purely intellectual view' and the 'hasard of physical demands' identified by Jones. Fitch affirms Salavin's approach: "Tout en préférant cette vie délimitée par les confins de son propre esprit, il n'est pas sans connaître les tourments d'une pensée qui lui refuse tout repos" (Fitch, p. 36).

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<sup>84</sup> Georges Duhamel. *Confession de minuit*. Paris: Mercure de France, 1925, p. 12.

<sup>85</sup> Albert Camus. *L'Étranger*. Paris: Gallimard, 1942, p. 95.

Such is Salavin's preference for the world of his mind, that he begins to be unable to differentiate between what is imagined and what is real. Comeau suggests that Salavin "en vient à juger ses pensées intimes et involontaires au même titre que des actes extérieurs posés délibérément" (p. 168). Evidence of this can be found in *Confession de minuit* when Salavin drops in to see his friend Octave Lanoue. Octave is not present and Salavin is met by Lanoue's wife, Marie. Salavin imagines a carnal episode with Marie and flees as though the act has actually occurred. Later he chides himself for having "souillé Marthe" (p. 140). Similarly, he imagines the death of his mother and upon returning to the apartment he shares with her, sincerely believes that she may be dead: "J'allais, en arrivant à la maison, apprendre que ma mère venait de mourir subitement" (p. 74).

Salavin's awareness of the power of his mind eventually gives rise to the ultimate distortion: the mind substituting its own reality for that which it so despises. In 'Nouvelle rencontre de Salavin', one of the short stories for *Les Hommes abandonnés* (1921), in a dream, Salavin wields the power of God by willing the death of his workmate, Gigon. He thinks about the possibilities of assuming Gigon's place at work when Gigon falls ill: "Une grippe, voilà qui tourne facilement à la pneumonie."<sup>86</sup> When Salavin arrives at work to discover that Gigon has in fact died from pneumonia, he then seeks to revive him again by the sheer force of his will, only to find the mind unwilling to join in with the proposed resurrection: "Il est facile à un Salavin de tuer Gigon, mais que Dieu lui-même ne parviendrait pas à le ressusciter" (*LHA*, p. 192). In vain, Salavin implores his body to assist with the purging of evil thoughts. In something resembling religious penance,

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<sup>86</sup> Georges Duhamel. *Les Hommes abandonnés*. Paris: Mercure de France, 1921, p. 183.

Salavin resolves: “Chaque fois que Gigon me traversera l’esprit, je me donnerai un coup d’épingle sur le dos de la main” (*LHA*, p. 194).

Once more, he visits the flat of his friend Lanoue and there, as in *Confession de minuit*, he finds himself alone with Marie. Salavin begins to become aware of the presence of his body, which up until that point, had been completely overshadowed by the overwhelming power of his mind. Aroused once more by Marie, Salavin’s body now becomes the major focus: “Il était comme délivré de son esprit. Seule, la vie de son corps l’animait, seule s’agitait en lui quelque chose qui était comme la pensée de son corps” (*LHA*, p. 201).

Salavin’s sudden descent into the realm of his body has achieved two purposes. Firstly, it has taken him, albeit temporarily, out of the all-powerful world of the mind and has thus acted as a counter-balance to the mind’s murderous intent. However, now he must roll the dice with Jones’ ‘hasard of physical demands’ and often, a retreat into the real world of men and women sees Salavin completely incapable of acting reasonably. Alone with Marie, and, after a silence which ensues whilst she busies herself knitting, Salavin walks up behind her and, as in the episode in *Confession de minuit* in which he touches Sureau’s ear, bends down towards her “jusqu’à ce que ses joues fussent au contact des petites boucles” (*LHA*, p. 205).

Salavin’s dream continues. At that moment, Marie turns around and their lips meet. Salavin’s body has taken over and all power of thought has disappeared: “Ce matin il m’a suffi de songer à une chose, et elle est arrivée. Ce soir, ce n’est pas même moi qui ai pensé, c’est moins que moi: mes muscles, mes reins, que sais-je?” (*LHA*, p. 205). He flees and returns to the streets where, once more, he is “seul dans l’univers chaotique de son âme” (*LHA*, p. 207). Adopting Rizzuto’s

language, ‘left to its own devices’, Salavin’s mind fails him in the same way as will Meursault’s body. Fitch summarises the fundamental differences between the two absurd heroes:

Tant par son introspection que par la harcelante et déconcertante conscience de son existence corporelle, le personnage de Duhamel se rapproche du héros de la *Nausée* et s’éloigne de celui de *L’Étranger* (Fitch, p. 36).<sup>87</sup>

In the same way that the early Camus is prepared to assign some limited role to reason in a life lived predominantly through the body, Duhamel is also prepared to concede that the body has a limited role to play in support of the nourishment of the inner life. As Salavin demonstrates, the body can restore a sense of ‘reality’ to a life lived exclusively through the mind. Further, given that both authors reject any concept of the immortality of the soul, care must be taken to ensure that the body, as a pure vehicle, allows the soul to achieve full expression in life. In this sense, Duhamel often compares the human body to a machine. In his memoirs he talks about the “mécanique humaine” (*BF*, p. 12).

As a machine, the body requires maintenance, and this theme is evident in many of Duhamel’s works. *Le Désert de Bièvres* (1937) recalls Duhamel’s own experiment in withdrawing to l’Abbaye de Créteil in 1905 and 1906. One of the participants, Sénac, expresses his frustration at having to sustain his body as well as his mind:

C’est humiliant! Nous sommes des travailleurs de l’esprit; mieux encore, nous sommes des esprits, et cependant, il nous faut penser sans cesse à notre subsistance matérielle, à notre nourriture, comme des animaux. Quelle humiliation.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> In *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, Camus also comments indirectly on Sartre’s *La Nausée*: “Ce malaise devant l’inhumanité de l’homme même, cette incalculable chute devant l’image de ce que nous sommes, cette «nausée» comme l’appelle un auteur de nos jours, c’est aussi l’absurde” (*LMS*, p. 31).

<sup>88</sup> Georges Duhamel. *Le Désert de Bièvres*. Paris: Mercure de France, 1937, p. 169.

Patrice Périot echoes those sentiments: “Ce n’est pas amusant d’avoir à prendre soin, chaque matin, de cette carcasse exigeante” (*VPP*, p. 80).

In this chapter, we have demonstrated considerable similarities, as well as some differences, between Meursault and Salavin. At least until late in their respective lives, neither is capable of achieving and sustaining any unity of body and mind. Feeling a sense of disintegration within themselves, a feeling for the absurd will come easily to each of them, as we will seek to demonstrate in the following chapter.



## ***CHAPTER II: A FEELING FOR THE ABSURD***

The broad scope of this topic suggests that it be examined over the course of two chapters. This chapter examines in each author, a feeling for the absurd which arises out of an individual's perception of himself and/or the world. Chapter three will consider how the absurd arises out of a sense of exile or separation from other human beings.

### ***THE MECHANICAL NATURE OF LIFE***

The passage most often cited in support of an emotional awakening to the absurd comes from *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (1942):

Lever, tramway, quatre heures de bureau ou d'usine, repas, tramway, quatre heures de travail, repas, sommeil et lundi mardi mercredi jeudi vendredi et samedi sur le même rythme, cette route se suit aisément la plupart du temps. Un jour seulement le «pourquoi» s'élève et tout commence dans cette lassitude teintée d'étonnement (p. 29).

The mechanical nature and deadening routine of the lives of many people is a favourite theme for Camus. He uses it in a positive way to enable his characters and his readers to become aware of the absurd. However, the repetitive nature of life can also evidence 'le retour inconscient dans la chaîne'. In this chapter, we will consider the first of these applications.

Camus often has his characters experience a feeling for the absurd suddenly and without warning, in the midst of a life dulled by routine. It can affect the young and old alike although clearly, the

sooner the better, as one is “vieux pour jamais.”<sup>89</sup> In his notebooks, Camus describes “un homme qui a cherché la vie là où on la met ordinairement (mariage, situation, etc.) et qui s’aperçoit d’un coup, en lisant un catalogue de mode, combien il a été étranger à sa vie” (*Carnets I*, p. 61). Similarly, in ‘L’Ironie’, one of the short stories for *L’Envers et l’endroit* (1937), Camus portrays an old man suddenly affected by a sense of the absurd after a long life of either clinging to habits at home or going for long walks in the street: “Soudain, il découvre ceci que demain sera semblable, et après-demain, tous les autres jours. Et cette irrémédiable découverte l’écrase” (*EE*, p. 48).

In *La Possession du monde* (1919), Duhamel describes his encounter on a train with a young surgeon on the road to success, a man consumed by his work, who throws himself each morning “dans la bousculade des affaires” (p. 31). Almost breathless with fatigue, the young man talks to Duhamel about his work habits and routine. That evening on the train, the young doctor is struck by the simple pleasure derived by Duhamel from observing some young pines by the side of the tracks. Duhamel’s travelling companion then undergoes an abrupt awakening similar to that described by Camus over twenty years later in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*: “À travers la fatigue et les angoisses de sa besogne, à travers le tintement des recettes additionées, il percevait soudain son erreur et sa pauvreté” (p. 32). The young doctor realises with a start that he has never paid attention to such simple pleasures and to date has subscribed to the life expected of him by society.

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<sup>89</sup> Albert Camus. *L’Envers et l’endroit*. Paris: Gallimard, 1958, p. 48.

In *Le Voyage de Patrice Périot* (1950), Duhamel tells the story of a learned scholar and scientist, who, motivated entirely by good faith and compassion for his fellow man, devotes his life to the betterment of society. Unfortunately, his celebrity means that his support for one political cause or another is highly prized, and soon, political and social demands see him neglecting his work, his family and himself. As demands on his time intensify, Périot finds relief only in the occasional retreat to his country home.

The turning point of the novel is the suicide of Périot's son Hervé. This is the catalyst for a greater intellectual process, which sees Périot concluding that the world is devoid of hope, order and meaning. Even before the death of Hervé, however, Périot notices his days increasingly dominated by a routine which recalls that described by Camus eight years earlier. Duhamel's description suggests that, by this time, he may have read *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (1942):

Tous les jours la même chose. Tous les jours se laver, se raser, se nourrir. Je commence à trouver cela monotone. Ce n'est pas amusant d'avoir à prendre soin, chaque matin, de cette carcasse exigeante (*VPP*, p. 80).

These comments immediately follow a statement from Périot which reveals a feeling for the absurd, used in the classical Camusian sense, that is of a conflict between the desire for life in the face of an inevitable demise. Walking in the garden of his country home, Périot contemplates his trees: "Les enfants, les jeunes gens ne savent pas que les arbres meurent. Il faut vieillir, avancer dans la course, pour saisir cette solidarité de tous les êtres vivants entre eux" (p. 79). Périot's feeling for the absurd arises in part out of a sudden acknowledgment of a routine that up to this point had remained inconspicuous and which manifests itself as a feeling of revulsion for an inevitable demise.

On a first reading of *L'Étranger*, it is difficult to find evidence in Meursault of the 'simple souci' of *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*. As John Atherton suggests: "Even his "thoughts" do not add up to "thinking," but remain isolated impressions of the moment that he observes from a distance."<sup>90</sup> This is a function of the technique employed by Camus, where "narration is reduced to instant-long notations as if the frames of a movie film had been run through slowly enough for the cuts between frames to appear" (Atherton, p. 913).

From time to time, however, Meursault reveals a little more of himself in what Atherton describes as "lapses that afford glimpses of Meursault as a more fully rounded human being" (p. 913). It is during these lapses that one gains an impression of Meursault as more than the automaton that he first appears. It seems that Meursault 'feels' something but is not sure what it is. As John Fletcher points out, from the beginning of the work, Meursault demonstrates an attitude of equivalence to all things with an air of fatality, as if nothing really matters:

Meursault wonders, in the morgue, whether he should smoke, and reflects that it is of no importance what he decides. A little later, at the funeral, the nurse states that if one walks too slowly, one risks sunstroke, if too quickly, a chill — whereat Meursault comments, 'il n'y avait pas d'issue'.<sup>91</sup>

Fletcher continues:

Although he 'knows' that he is moving towards disaster ('je savais que c'était stupide'), this knowledge cannot prevent the ineluctable functioning of the mechanism. The famous 'coups sur la porte du malheur' are the signal that the point of no return has been reached, but there have been previous warnings. Once he has 'détruit l'équilibre du jour' he is left 'sans défense' against the machination of a vindictive destiny (p. 167).

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<sup>90</sup> John Atherton. 'Americans in Paris'. *A New History of French Literature*. Ed. Denis Hollier. Harvard: Harvard University Press, (1989), p. 913.

<sup>91</sup> John Fletcher. 'Interpreting *L'Étranger*'. *The French Review*. (1970), p. 165.

This knowledge is a function of a feeling, rather than an understanding. As Bonnier suggests, “il est incontestable qu’au lieu d’expliquer et de résoudre, Meursault éprouve et décrit” (p. 108). Similarly, Hinchliffe explains in relation to Meursault: “Meursault shows the indifference of an absurd hero without the hero’s consciousness of absurdity [...]” (p. 40). It is almost as if Meursault has reflected on the meaninglessness of existence *before* the beginning of the work. Pratt agrees: “Dans notre étude [...], nous soutiendrons que Meursault comprend l’absurdité de la vie dès les premières pages du roman [...]” (p. 64).

As Bob Plant suggests of Camus:

More precisely, he notes that, despite the certainty of death, for the most part we live ‘as if no-one “knew”’ about our inevitable, fatal ‘destiny’ and its cosmic ‘uselessness’. Without the traditional assurances of religion, ‘man feels alien, a stranger’.<sup>92</sup>

This quotation accurately sums up Meursault’s conduct in part one of *L’Étranger*. Although he feels something sufficient to cause him to reflect about the relative value of his acts, he is not truly conscious of his inevitable death: “Finalement, c’est par les sens que la vie s’éprouve et s’affirme” (Pratt, p. 75). There is, however, present in Meursault’s quantitative approach to life, Hochberg’s ‘seed of nihilism’ which will germinate with the murder of the Arab.

Even in the moments before he kills the Arab, Meursault cannot make a value judgment: “Rester ici ou partir, cela revenait au même” (*L’Étranger*, p. 91). Meursault’s level of awareness in part one never reaches the state of lucidity which he ultimately achieves as he waits for death in his cell. If, in part one, Meursault ‘knows’ something, then it is something less than a lucid

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<sup>92</sup> Bob Plant. ‘Absurdity, Incongruity and Laughter’. *Philosophy*. (2009), p. 116.

appreciation of the fact of his ultimate death: “Il vit en doublure sans que jamais la prise de conscience réuississe à coller à l’écran” (Bonnier, p. 112). It is a feeling for the absurd.

Closer scrutiny of *L’Étranger* demonstrates that Meursault is himself dependant on routine. For example, he eats most days at Céleste’s restaurant, “comme d’habitude” (*L’Étranger*, p. 10), he hates to lose his Sundays to other tasks and, like Jacques’ mother in *Le Premier Homme* (1960), he often takes his meals at the window and watches the passers-by in the street. Further, Meursault accepts the ease with which one might become entrenched in a routine. For example, he finds in reliance on habit and routine, an explanation for both his mother’s initial reluctance to enter the old-age home and then her subsequent unwillingness to leave:

Dans les premiers jours où elle était à l’asile, elle pleurait souvent. Mais c’était à cause de l’habitude. Au bout de quelques mois, elle aurait pleuré si on l’avait retirée de l’asile. Toujours à cause de l’habitude (*L’Étranger*, p. 12).

In particular, there is one reference in *L’Étranger* which suggests that, after the death of his mother, Meursault becomes aware of his own routine in a negative way: “J’ai pensé que c’était toujours un dimanche de tiré, que maman était maintenant enterrée, que j’allais reprendre mon travail et que, somme toute, il n’y avait rien de changé” (*L’Étranger*, p. 41). Might this be the beginnings of Meursault’s own ‘retour inconscient dans la chaîne’? As André Maurois suggests: “Bref il est l’homme absurde avant la révolte, c’est-à-dire semblable à tous les hommes, englué dans le quotidien qu’il voit à peine” (p. 332).

Salavin also *feels* something is not right — which he must have in order to reach out for Sureau’s ear. Like Meursault, Salavin succumbs to an act which seems outside his control. As Dodd suggests, Salavin’s reaching out for Sureau represents his “submission to a force beyond his

control; he knows the action is ‘idiot’ but acts despite himself” (Dodd, p. 54). Meursault will never at any time reach the heightened state of awareness that accompanies the knowledge of his imminent death. Neither does Salavin.

In the context of routine, Fitch notes similarities between Salavin and Meursault. Speaking of the former, he comments: “D’ailleurs, lui aussi se trouve pris dans l’engrenage d’une routine quotidienne imposée par l’habitude” (p. 33). Louis Guespin agrees: “Il y a en Salavin un être qui se contente de la jouissance médiocre de l’instant. Encore, ici, on pense à Meursault, le héros de Camus et à ses plaisirs dérisoires.”<sup>93</sup>

Indeed, one does not have to look far in *Confession de minuit* to find evidence of this routine, one which precedes the ear incident with Sureau:

Pendant treize ans j’avais, chaque matin, disposé de vingt minutes environ pour veiller à la propreté de mon corps, et je vous assure que ces vingt minutes étaient bien occupés. Je suivais un ordre, toujours la même: les mains, le visage, les pieds, etc. La vie était facile, je n’avais qu’à obéir à mes habitudes (p. 56).

Further, Salavin describes his office environment and in particular, the practice which requires him to report to the office of his supervisor M. Jacob when the bell rings three times. When making his way to the office of M. Sureau, Salavin must walk beyond the typing pool where “il y a des hommes qui sont enfoncés jusqu’au torse dans des bureaux américains compliqués comme des machines” (p. 11).

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<sup>93</sup> Louis Guespin, ed. *Georges Duhamel: Salavin*. Paris: Dider, 1972, p. 26.

Brought before his supervisor and out of the controlled environment of his office, Salavin immediately feels a sense of discomfort and alienation: “Mon métier était de corriger les textes et non de me tenir debout devant un prince de l’industrie” (p. 12). Robbed of his routine and uncomfortable amidst the hum and whir of the office machines, Salavin inexplicably reaches out and touches the ear of his supervisor, an act as gratuitous and absurd as that which will be perpetrated by Meursault in 1942:

Comme Meursault tue un Arabe sans savoir pourquoi, entraîné par un vertige et par les forces des choses, Salavin entre dans la Fatalité par un acte gratuit: il touche l’oreille du grand patron qui l’a convoqué dans son bureau (Albérès, *Les Hommes traqués*, p. 192).

### ***THE PASSING OF TIME***

Time was always seen by Camus as a destructive force, propelling men and women towards an inevitable death. He summarises the problem in the first edition of his notebooks, recalling Périot’s lament:

Si le temps coule si vite, c’est qu’on n’y répand pas de points de repères. Ainsi de la lune au zénith et à l’horizon. C’est pourquoi ces années de jeunesse sont si longues parce que si pleines, années de vieillesse si courtes parce que déjà constituées (*Carnets I*, p. 31).

McCarthy describes Camus as a “writer whose work is dominated by a few intense images of childhood” (p. 10). For Camus, a feeling for the absurd springs from what Peter Dunwoodie describes as the “daydream of lost youth,”<sup>94</sup> evident in such works as ‘La Femme adultère’, one of the short stories collected in *L’Exil et le royaume* (1957). Rizzuto prefers to speak of it as a sense of nostalgia for times past:

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<sup>94</sup> Peter Dunwoodie. *L’Envers et l’endroit and l’Exil et le royaume*. London: Grant and Cutler Ltd, 1985, p. 32.



Nostalgia corresponds to a man's brief union with the world. Camus, however, is not sure whether the separation of man and Nature goes back to the beginning of time, his intimacy little more than a spun illusion, or whether that unity did once exist but [is] now, in his own words, a paradise lost (*Camus' Imperial Vision*, p. 36).

The concept of the lost paradise stems primarily from 'Entre Oui et non', one of the short stories contained in *L'Envers et l'endroit* (1937). Here, Camus contrasts the 'Oui'— namely the simple life of a poor boy in Algeria, with the 'Non' — the life of the adult weighed down by years of doing what society expects of him. For the young boy: "Le ciel lui-même et la nuit pleine d'étoiles semblent des biens naturels" (*EE*, p. 63). The child disappears into the whirlpool of life to emerge a man who, like the young surgeon travelling with Duhamel on the train, realises suddenly that his error lies in doing precisely that which society expects of him. Such an error sees him propelled towards old age:

L'enfant a fait ses devoirs. Il est aujourd'hui dans un café sordide. Il est maintenant un homme. N'est-ce pas cela qui compte? Il faut bien croire que non, puisque faire ses devoirs et accepter d'être un homme conduit seulement à être vieux (*EE*, p. 67).

Camus revisits this theme in the semi-autobiographical *Le Premier Homme* (1960). Inspired by his professor M. Bernard, the young Jacques epitomises youthful enthusiasm and energy in his quest for knowledge and discovery: "Pour la première fois, ils sentaient qu'ils existaient et qu'ils étaient l'objet de la plus haute considération; on les jugeait dignes de découvrir le monde."<sup>95</sup> Years later, an adult Jacques, now living and working in France, experiences "le sentiment soudain terrible que le temps de la jeunesse s'enfuyait" (p. 305). Jacques is aided in this process by the sudden discovery that he is now older than his father at the time of his father's death,

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<sup>95</sup> Albert Camus. *Le Premier Homme*. Paris: Gallimard, 1994, p. 164.

something that also occurred to Camus. As Pierre-Louis Rey explains in relation to this incident, for Camus: “Sa conception du temps en a été bouleversée.”<sup>96</sup>

McCarthy agrees that Camus was personally affected by a sense of the quickening of time. In support, he cites ‘Retour à Tipasa’, published in 1954 as part of the collection of essays entitled *L’Été*: “There can be no return, Camus knows, to the harmony which he felt as a youth when he swam near the Roman ruins. Yet Tipasa retains a joy which can still refresh the forty-year-old writer” (McCarthy, p. 274).

Like other authors of his era, Duhamel was also aware of the “lourdes chaînes temporelles (*PF*, p. 46) of the human condition. In *Géographie cordiale de l’Europe* (1931), he describes “notre richesse la plus mystérieuse: le temps.”<sup>97</sup>

In his memoirs, Duhamel declares: “Je ne voudrais, pour rien au monde, revivre mes années d’enfance” (*IA*, p. 52). This statement is inconsistent with the ample evidence of nostalgia for a lost youth in his works, a nostalgia which is noticed by Louis Barjon:

On rencontre partout dans l’œuvre de Duhamel, se profilant sur l’horizon du rêve, l’une ou l’autre de ces demeures miraculeuses, paradis perdus d’où l’homme est exclus, mais qui ne laissent pas d’exercer sur le cœur une invincible attirance.<sup>98</sup>

In this context, Barjon refers specifically to Suzanne Pasquier, the portrait of whom we will examine shortly.

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<sup>96</sup> Pierre-Louis Rey. *Camus, L’Homme révolté*. Paris: Gallimard, 2006, p. 13.

<sup>97</sup> Georges Duhamel. *Géographie cordiale de l’Europe*. Paris: Mercure de France, 1931, p. 67.

<sup>98</sup> Louis Barjon. *Monde d’écrivains, destinées d’hommes*. Paris: Castermann, 1960, p. 112.

In *La Possession du monde* (1919), Duhamel compares his son's uninhibited joy of discovery of his world with the convention and routine that lie in wait for the adolescent: "Une série de conventions est imposée à l'adolescent; il cesse de découvrir et d'éprouver les objets du monde" (p. 98). As Comeau notes: "Les perceptions de cet enfant se font encore de façon brute et vitale, sans mots pour les codifier et les appauvrir, sans conventions pour les cataloguer et les fausser" (p. 107). This state, which Comeau describes as one of "naïveté et de fraîcheur devant le réel" (p. 107) prefigures the 'oui' of 'Entre Oui et Non' and the 'dénouement', which Camus will define in his notebooks as "cette entente amoureuse de la terre et de l'homme délivré de l'humain" (*Carnets I*, p. 75).

In *Inventaire de l'abîme*, Duhamel remarks on the ability of young people to live purely for the moment: "Mais les enfants n'ont pas un sentiment aigu des saisons, de la fuite du temps. Ils vivent avec intensité dans un présent sans mesure" (p. 98). In *Biographie de mes fantômes*, Duhamel confesses that as he grows older, his own sense of time passing becomes sharper, more acute. For example, he notices in himself that the time spent enjoying a recently completed work diminishes with age, and this is accompanied by a growing awareness that his remaining years, as Camus will describe in his notebooks, are 'déjà constituées':

Autrefois, quand je venais d'achever un ouvrage de quelque importance, je me trouvais soulagé pour longtemps [...] Le poison magique, aujourd'hui, me calme pour une heure ou deux. Mon livre achevé, je commence tout aussitôt à rêver du livre suivant. Cela tient sans doute aussi à ce que je m'achemine vers ma fin. A mille signes je comprends que je dois me hâter pour dire au moins une part de ce que j'ai à dire (*BF*, p. 18).

In the same volume of his memoirs, Duhamel speaks about his friends and fellow students at the faculty of medicine in his twentieth year, conveying a similar sentiment of nostalgia for a lost youth:

L'an dernier encore, ils avaient l'air de collégiens heureux, d'enfants gâtés, d'écoliers insouciantes. Ils montrent désormais des visages crispés, des regards avides. Ils serrent les mâchoires. Les voilà soudain aux prises avec les difficultés de la profession (*BF*, p. 79).

He notes how the students are swept up into the whirlwind of life: "Ils [...] deviennent aussitôt des hommes. Tous les visages, en quelques semaines, vieillissent de plusieurs années. La lutte pour la vie commence" (*BF*, p. 80).

This is also the theme of *La Pierre d'Horeb* (1926), which records Antoine Ressayeur's awakening to a world that seemingly denies him at every turn. As he enters medical school, Antoine is almost a Jean-Baptiste Clamence type, one whose "existence est, aujourd'hui, presque délivrée de soucis personnels" (p. 81). Antoine feels he has no need for any meaningful human relationships and treats others as objects, particularly women: "Toute femme était donc, dans mes pensées, évaluée à raison de ses capacités sensuelles" (p. 103). Antoine's 'fall' is precipitated, in part, by a sense of the brevity of life, as he studies the corpse of a young man: "Il y a six mois, trois mois, moins peut-être, pensais-je, celui-là riait, pleurait, chantait, s'agitait comme nous" (p. 148).

In *La Pesée des Âmes*, Duhamel describes laying eyes for the first time on his newborn son after returning from the Front on leave: "Que l'enfant était grand, déjà! J'allais commencer de sentir la vie couler entre mes mains comme le sable et comme l'eau" (*PA*, p. 249).

In 'La Chambre de l'horloge', part of *Les Hommes abandonnés* (1921), the inhabitants of an old-age home are unable to separate themselves from the march towards death, as they are confronted each morning with a huge clock at the front of their building: "Ainsi triomphait, dès la façade, l'emblème du temps qui anéantit toute ambition" (*LHA*, p. 281). Instead, they are slaves to an

entrenched routine, attracted each morning at the same hour to the kitchen “dès le saut du lit, par l’odeur du café, comme les mouches par la lumière” (*LHA*, p. 281).

Salavin also experiences this feeling as the cycle progresses. Dodd notices his physical decline, suggesting, that from *Le Club des Lyonnais* (1929):

the passing of time is to become an increasingly important factor in the two final volumes of the Cycle. His own appearance, that of his wife and mother, the increasing dinginess of his home are constant reminders of it. He refers frequently to his own age in this novel: he is now over forty and well aware that, at that age, most men have settled down, accepted themselves and their lives with the “tendre écœurement” which disgusts Salavin and of which he himself is incapable. This awareness leads to a greater sense of urgency in his search for the justification of his existence (p. 134).

In *Querelles de famille* (1932), Duhamel tells the story of Grégoire, who becomes increasingly frustrated with a noise or problem in his motor vehicle, only for it to disappear the moment he takes it to the mechanic. His vehicle garaged, Grégoire recalls the wonder of his youth: “Grégoire mâche un brin d’herbe et respire le parfum de toutes les fleurs. Il chemine dans un rêve étrange qui lui rappelle son enfance comme une autre vie.”<sup>99</sup> Is this phenomenon not the very same as that of the ‘dénouement’ described by Camus five years later in *L’Envers et l’endroit* as “cette liberté qui disparaît dès que commence l’excès des biens” (*EE*, p. 181)?

In *Vue de la terre promise* (1934), Laurent mournfully declares: “Nous ne serons plus jamais heureux comme au temps de notre enfance” (p. 151). Later, in *Le Combat contre les ombres* (1939), Laurent turns thirty-three and, although aware of the many years that potentially stretch

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<sup>99</sup> Georges Duhamel. *Querelles de famille*. Paris: Mercure de France, 1932, p. 108.

before him, he quite suddenly experiences, on an emotional level, the same sensation of time quickening that Camus will describe in his notebook:

C'est un immense champ de vie qui reste à labourer. Et, pourtant, que signifie l'étonnant changement de rythme qui, depuis près d'un lustre, brouille toute supputation? Il semble que les années se mettent à tourner bien plus vite que naguère et que jadis.<sup>100</sup>

As Alicia Sánchez-Huet Olcina suggests of Laurent: “Pour l'adolescent, lecteur de Baudelaire, l'idéal devient une nostalgie d'innocence, souvenir du paradis de l'enfance.”<sup>101</sup> Lidia Anoll agrees, describing Laurent's quest in *Le Désert de Bièvres* (1937), as one motivated by nostalgia for a poor, unencumbered youth:

La recherche de ces oasis de pauvreté presque idylliques qui ont pour nous, hommes de XX<sup>e</sup> siècle, l'attrait des contes de fées de notre enfance, n'est-ce pas le refus de ce monde matérialiste qui étouffe l'homme?<sup>102</sup>

A further example can be found in the fourth instalment of *La Chronique des Pasquier, La Nuit de la Saint-Jean* (1935). Here, Duhamel highlights the overwhelming feelings of despair and hopelessness encountered by Renaud Censier, Laurent's mentor and superior. During his meeting with good friend L'abbé Châtellier, Censier demonstrates evidence of his own 'simple souci', declaring: “J'ai manqué ma vie, Guillaume. Non pas la vie du savant: celle de l'homme, la vie de l'homme” (p. 45).

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<sup>100</sup> Georges Duhamel. *Le Combat contre les ombres*. Paris: Mercure de France, 1939, p. 12.

<sup>101</sup> Alicia Sánchez-Huet Olcina. 'L'Adolescence de Laurent Pasquier dans *La Chronique des Pasquier*'. *Les Cahiers de l'Abbaye de Créteil*. December (1984), p. 89.

<sup>102</sup> Lidia Anoll. 'La Question de l'argent dans *La Chronique des Pasquier*'. *Les Cahiers de l'Abbaye de Créteil*. December (1984), p. 125.

Looking to live as a man, Renaud Censier confesses an attraction to his young assistant Laure, who “ressemblait à l’image fragile et menacée de l’immortelle jeunesse” (p. 53). Indeed, his unhappiness has only really manifested itself in the few months that he has known his beautiful assistant. Before Laure, Renaud was “assoupi dans un bonheur profond: mon travail, la science, la paix et quoi encore? ma carrière. Vraiment, c’était trop beau” (p. 84).<sup>103</sup> With Laure as his catalyst, Censier clearly experiences the absurd on an emotional level. His confession to Laure reminds us of the fundamental nature of Camus’ absurd as a conflict between the desire for life in the face of an inevitable death: “Vous êtes la jeunesse même, et vous m’apportez l’avertissement de la mort” (p. 84).

In Duhamel’s *Suzanne et les jeunes hommes* (1941), Suzanne’s own emotional response to the absurd follows her withdrawal from Paris to Nesles where she remains for a couple of months in the company of the Baudoin family, who live unsophisticated but full lives in complete harmony with nature. Unfortunately, she cannot resist the temptation of the theatre and is lured back to Paris by troupe leader Vidame with the promise of a new role. Once returned to find that nothing has changed, Suzanne experiences a sense of nostalgia for her former life in the country. Suzanne:

entrevit soudain, le temps d’un éclair, l’image de la colline heureuse, l’image de la maison de Nesles. C’était une image précise, légère et translucide, une image en train de se dissoudre dans un liquide corrosif.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>103</sup>This statement by Censier recalls a similar offering by Meursault in *L’Étranger* (1942), who really only comes to understand the fact of his imprisonment after the visit of his young lover, Marie: “En réalité, je n’étais pas réellement en prison les premiers jours: j’attendais vaguement quelque événement nouveau. C’est seulement après la première et la seule visite de Marie que tout a commencé” (*L’Étranger*, p. 113).

<sup>104</sup> Georges Duhamel. *Suzanne et les jeunes hommes*. Paris: Mercure de France, 1941, p. 332.

In Duhamel's *La Passion de Joseph Pasquier* (1945), things start to unravel for ruthless businessman Joseph soon after a visit with his brother Laurent to the grave of their father. On this occasion, he remarks:

Regarde, Laurent! Notre place est marquée là. Un jour, notre nom sera gravé sur cette plaque de marbre. Un jour futur, qui, je l'espère, est encore bien lointain, nous reposerons, toi et moi, Laurent, à côté de ce grand honnête homme...<sup>105</sup>

Soon afterwards, speaking out of character, Joseph confesses to his mistress Miotte, a need to be loved: “Moi, pour donner toute ma mesure, moi, j'ai besoin d'être aimé” (p. 152). He begins to doubt himself and makes some comments at odds with the bold and ruthless demeanour with which he had conducted his business affairs to date: “Je ne suis pas superstitieux... Non, non, pour ça, je ne suis pas superstitieux, mais...” (p. 154). The manner in which he handles his Mexican oil interest is also foreign to him: “Son désir de liquider l'affaire à tout prix et au plus vite. Cette hâte, il ne la comprenait pas lui-même” (p. 177).

Joseph finds it hard to identify this phenomenon, which sees him leaning towards more humanist pursuits beyond the primary urge to generate wealth: “Sûrement, il y a quelque chose de nouveau dans ma carcasse. Je n'ai jamais éprouvé ce que j'éprouve aujourd'hui” (p. 178). For Joseph, this crisis is something more than a failed business venture. It is a feeling that has been with him since the visit with Laurent to the cemetery, a feeling of time passing: “Un homme de cinquante et un ans commence à connaître sa complexion” (p. 197). Like Censier, Joseph feels that he may have wasted his life: “Il avait surtout le sentiment que ces choses auxquelles il avait donné sa vie, pourraient soudain cesser de lui plaire et de l'amuser” (p. 193).

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<sup>105</sup> Georges Duhamel. *La Passion de Joseph Pasquier*. Paris: Mercure de France, 1945, p. 126.



Prior to his awakening, Joseph's only interest is money: "Je ne crois pas au goût. L'argent, dame, c'est autre chose. Jusqu'à nouvel ordre, un louis d'or, c'est un louis d'or."<sup>106</sup> After feeling his life slipping away, Joseph's description changes. Suddenly, as is the case with his own life, money is not indestructible: "L'argent n'est pas immortel. L'argent meurt, comme tout. L'argent meurt pour un rien. Et il faut toujours l'empêcher de mourir" (*PJP*, p. 133). He feels that his routine has become compromised: "Contrairement à ses habitudes, il s'était mis au lit sans avoir été rendre visite à la cave secrète" (*PJP*, p. 193). Not even his riches can give him pleasure, and the things that Joseph thought were important to him start to fade away into the background: "Toutes ces chères choses qu'il considérait comme la substance de sa chair, tout cela ne lui inspirait plus, pour l'instant, qu'un dégoût insurmontable" (*PJP*, p. 204). This mirrors the conduct of the people of Oran after the onset of *La Peste* (1947), where "personne ne s'occupait plus de la qualité des vêtements ou des aliments qu'on achetait. On acceptait tout en bloc" (*La Peste*, p. 169).

Even Joseph's prized driving skills desert him. On the way back to Paris from Montredon, he knocks over a cyclist: "Les réflexes, maintenant!" (*PJP*, p. 204). Then he thinks himself strangely weak and easily tired, imagining that: "Il finirait par crever d'hydropisie, seul, dans un coin. Car il crèverait tout seul, comme un vieux loup malade" (*PJP*, p. 229). He has trouble sleeping: "Petit à petit, le thème de l'éternité reprenait possession de cette âme ravagée" (*PJP*, p. 231). Late in the work, Joseph's son throws himself from the window and although it is suggested that he will recover, Joseph "commence à comprendre maintenant que sa richesse cache la plus grande des pauvretés" (Comeau, p. 257).

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<sup>106</sup> Georges Duhamel. *Cécile parmi nous*. Paris: Mercure de France, 1938, p. 171.

For both Duhamel and Camus, the ‘non’ is comprised of the norms and expectations of society and an indifference born from the pursuit of wealth. In the same way as Camus sought to rediscover “ce désir tumultueux qui me prend de retrouver le cœur impatient que j’avais à 20 ans,”<sup>107</sup> Duhamel and his characters are clearly affected by a sense of nostalgia for a paradise lost, searching for ways to rediscover, as Duhamel himself confesses, “l’exaltation de mes jeunes ans” (*PA*, p. 268).

Mnasser ben Ismaïl, of Duhamel’s *Le Prince Jaffar* (1924), is one character who is able to escape the ravages of time:

Demain matin, un soleil tout neuf se lèvera sur les sables du grand chott. Mnasser se réveillera sans profession, sans souvenir, sans soucis, comme un adolescent à la fleur de son règne.<sup>108</sup>

For Mnasser, life is a series of present moments: “Puisque maintenant ce sera la nuit, Mnasser va s’établir marchand de bougies” (p. 19). Similarly, the villagers seem deprived of any memory and each day is lived as a separate, independent entity: “La nuit vient, en effet. Les hommes et les femmes du village constatent avec étonnement qu’il faudra bientôt se procurer des bougies, puisque le soleil s’en va” (p. 19). This is Camus’ ‘Oui’ preserved beyond adolescence.

What is it that allows Mnasser to escape the ravages of time? Certainly, the way in which he lives his life bears a close resemblance to the disinterested, corporeal existence advocated by Camus in ‘Noces à Tipasa’ (1938) and which Meursault will practise in *L’Étranger* (1942). For example: “Mnasser tire son capuchon sur son visage et goûte un sommeil ensoleillé, plus sain et plus

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<sup>107</sup> Albert Camus. *Journaux de voyage*. Paris: Gallimard, 1978, p. 51.

<sup>108</sup> Georges Duhamel. *Le Prince Jaffar*. Paris: Mercure de France, 1924, p. 20.

nourissant que le sommeil nocturne” (*LPJ*, p. 19). The role of the intellect seems to have been excluded here by Duhamel; Mnasser lives an instinctive existence devoid of any sense of social custom. In the same way that Meursault will eat when he is hungry: “S’il y a, d’aventure, quelque chose à manger, Mnasser mange” (p. 19).

In another chapter for *Le Prince Jaffar* entitled ‘Qui contient les confidences de l’ingénieur Joubertin’, Duhamel describes phosphate mines in the desert. Again, there is no past here. The bleak, harsh landscape of sun, wind and sand has seen to that. Everything here has been stripped bare. As ‘Le Vent à Djémila’ in *Noces* (1938) will wear down Camus until he is “usé jusqu’à l’âme” (*Noces*, p. 25), the ‘vent de sable’ in this work by Duhamel “est un terrible destructeur. S’il soufflait longtemps, il userait jusqu’au courage des hommes” (*LPJ*, p. 181). Here, everything begins from point zero: “Il faut un certain degré d’humidité pour que le souvenir vive et fructifie. Cet aride pays porte en soi un merveilleux principe d’oubli. Les choses y oublient leurs histoires et les hommes leurs expériences” (*LPJ*, p. 182).

Another example from *Le Prince Jaffar* is ‘Qui est le récit du colon Philippe’. Philippe compares his many roles of “postier, maire, vétérinaire et juge” (p. 107), with the simple, unencumbered lives of the North African children, noting almost jealously that “les pauvres n’ont guère que leurs corps pour s’amuser” (p. 116). Yet Philippe is closer to the children than he thinks, and perhaps Duhamel sees in this primitive, agricultural environment, the keys to a possible return to a state of relative innocence: “Je n’oublie pas la France; mais je ne la comprends plus toujours. Je suis trop près du sol élémentaire, trop mêlé aux hommes primitifs” (p. 117).

In *Géographie cordiale de l'Europe* (1931), Duhamel tells us that he based this story of Philippe on a man he had met in Tunisia in 1923, and with whom he had spent some time. During this visit, explains Duhamel: “On éprouvait le sentiment réconfortant de vivre encore tout près de la terre nourrice et de jouir de ses dons délectables et variés” (p. 54).

These examples from *Le Prince Jaffar* prefigure the “entente amoureuse de la terre et de l’homme délivré de l’humain” that Camus will note in his *Carnets I* (p. 75). In fact, most of these characters, especially Mnasser, seem immune from the absurd; each day is like a new beginning. As Santelli suggests: “Ils recréent chaque jour l’univers comme s’ils étaient des dieux.”<sup>109</sup> They are like Nagel’s mouse, who “lacks the capacities for self-consciousness and self-transcendence that would enable him to see that he is only a mouse” (Nagel, p. 21).

In fact, Nagel speculates whether one might be able to avoid absurdity by refusing to take “the backward step” (Nagel, p. 19) of judging ourselves. He suggests that one could never wilfully refuse such a step, for one would have to be aware of what was being refused in the first place: “The only way to avoid the relevant self-consciousness would be either never to attain it or to forget it — neither of which can be achieved by the will” (Nagel, p. 21).

Mnasser gives the impression of never having been confronted by self-awareness. He lives in a perennial child-like state. If one can remain a mouse, absurdity may be conquered. Inevitably, most people will, at some stage, begin to ruminate about their position in the world, and from this point on, the demands of the intellect are difficult to ignore, as Meursault will demonstrate.

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<sup>109</sup> César Santelli. *Georges Duhamel, l’homme, l’œuvre*. Paris: Bordas, 1947, p. 163.

### ***ILL HEALTH***

For both Duhamel and Camus, ill health could also be a catalyst for an awareness of the absurd.

Of Camus' tuberculosis, McCarthy argues that Camus' close friend and mentor Jean Grenier:

brought to Camus the revelation that the amputation, which he had felt during his illness and in the silence of his home, was an important experience. It was the mark of man's condition, as was the desire to remedy it through some sort of oneness (McCarthy, p. 33).

Sartre agrees: "Camus, a vingt ans, brusquement frappé d'un mal qui bouleversait sa vie, a découvert l'absurde — imbécile négation de l'homme."<sup>110</sup>

Camus incorporates this experience in works such as *La Chute* (1956). Clamence's 'fall' commences well before the crucial episode in which the young woman throws herself from the bridge:

J'eus aussi, à ce moment, quelques misères de santé [...] La vie me devenait moins facile: quand le corps est triste, le cœur languit [...] Oui, je crois bien que c'est alors que tout commença.<sup>111</sup>

Jones suggests that these health problems contribute to the sense in Clamence of the nostalgia for a lost youth: "Clamence realizes that physical decline is accompanied by regret and burning memories; nostalgia for youth continues to haunt him" (p. 50). Highlighting the sense of a paradise lost, Jones adds: "In the course of the book there seems to be a clear fall from youth and health, accentuated towards the end" (p. 51).

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<sup>110</sup> Jean Paul Sartre. *Albert Camus*. Liège: Éditions Dynamo, 1960, p. 8.

<sup>111</sup> Albert Camus. *La Chute*. Paris: Gallimard, 1956, p. 48.

Duhamel's health problems began early in his life. In *Inventaire de l'abîme*, he describes having to lie on a hard bed to solve some perceived problem with his spine and throughout his life, he visited "les spécialistes du nez, de la gorge et des oreilles, que je n'ai d'ailleurs cessé de fréquenter depuis" (p. 44). In *Biographie de mes fantômes*, he describes how his health problems came to a head in his twentieth year, a year in which he describes "graves troubles de santé" (p. 94), coupled with a sense of separation from many of his friends who joined the military (from which Duhamel was exempted as a consequence of his health).

Referring to these first two volumes of Duhamel's memoirs, Falls describes how these periods of illness contributed to Duhamel's own 'simple souci':

Le petit visage, émergeant à peine de la pénombre du temps passé, se fait remarquer surtout par sa constante inquiétude, à laquelle, du reste, la mauvaise santé de l'enfant n'est sans doute pas étrangère. Il y a bien, de ci de là, quelques bons moments où la douleur s'apaise et la crainte fait place à la confiance, mais ils ne sont pas nombreux (p. 41).

Duhamel's letter to Martin du Gard of 28 April 1948 suggests that Duhamel's own health problems, like those that will later affect Clamence, contributed to a growing sense of awareness of the passing of time: "Qui donc est assuré de ne pas devenir, un jour, un vieux bonhomme malade et dévoré par le regret et la hargne?" (Lafay, *Témoins d'un temps troublé*, p. 385).

Ill health is included by Lafay as a catalyst by which Duhamel and Martin du Gard acquire a feeling for the absurd:

Les épreuves personnelles: la perte d'êtres chers, la maladie avivèrent par la suite chez Roger Martin du Gard et Duhamel le *sentiment* (our italics) tragique de l'absurdité de la vie, de la vanité de l'art, de la solitude (Lafay, *Témoins d'un temps troublé*, p. LII).

In reaching his conclusion that the absurd is primarily a function of the twentieth century, Albérès also refers to the catalyst of ill health: “Si beaucoup d’écrivains sont des malades c’est que quelque maladie personnelle leur a permis de sentir avant les autres la maladie de leur siècle.” (*Les Hommes traqués*, p. 114).

### ***ALONE IN AN ALIEN WORLD***

In *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, Camus explains the dilemma which would ultimately confront Meursault in his quest for a life lived in harmony with the natural world:

Si j’étais arbre parmi les arbres, chat parmi les animaux, cette vie aurait un sens ou plutôt ce problème n’en aurait point car je ferais partie de ce monde. Je serais ce monde ... (p 76).

Using very similar language, Duhamel’s Salavin jealously contemplates a tree in his beloved ‘Jardin des plantes’ which “puise et ne prend que le nécessaire. Il dédaigne le reste. Il se choisit dans le chaos. Moi, je ne sais pas choisir” (*CM*, p. 139).

This is the dilemma which simply does not occur to the Camus of ‘Noces à Tipasa’ (1938) or Mnasser of Duhamel’s *Le Prince Jaffar* (1924). Put simply, man’s ‘malentendu’, as Albérès calls it, stems from the fact that he is born with an ability to think and reason, whereas “l’arbre n’a pas d’yeux pour voir ni de cœur pour sentir, ni d’esprit pour penser” (*Les Hommes traqués*, p. 33). It is the realm of the mind which is the significant impediment to unity with the natural world, because, as Cruikshank notes: “We can only seek pleasure from nature because we are human, not vegetal, and consciousness of our humanity involves consciousness of our mortality” (*Albert Camus and the Literature of Revolt*, p. 34).

François Bousquet sums up the problem succinctly and, in so doing, recalls the lost paradise or ‘dénouement’ evident in the works of both Duhamel and Camus:

Ce monde est beau, il est harmonieux et transparent: c’est qu’il est simple. Simple comme la roche et la mer, le soleil et le vent. Simple aussi comme l’animal en son innocence. Mais l’homme, conscient et libre, a perdu ce paradis de la simplicité, et en lui se dispersent et se contrarient divisions et désirs sans objet et pensées de néant.<sup>112</sup>

### ***CAMUS AND THE NATURAL WORLD***

There is little evidence in ‘Noces à Tipasa’ (1938) of the dilemma identified by Cruikshank: “Dans un sens, c’est bien ma vie que je joue ici, une vie à goût de pierre chaude, pleine de soupirs de la mer et des cigales qui commencent à chanter maintenant” (*Noces*, p. 15) For the Camus of ‘Noces à Tipasa’, this sense of unity with the natural world can only be achieved by excluding the intellect, and, at least in his earlier works, other people. At Tipasa, there is, as Bonnier suggests: “Nul abri pour l’esprit, nul refuge où l’âme puisse reposer, rien que cette lumière dure qui brûle et l’âme et l’esprit” (Bonnier, p. 36).

With respect to the role played by others in such a stark environment, Braun sums up Camus’ position as follows: “Camus’s initial experience is not of a rift between man and the world, but of a tender understanding between ‘nature without men’ and ‘man delivered from the human’” (p. 23). In such a state, the world stops and time slows. As Bonnier notes: “Dans ce monde fermé qui s’offre tout à coup, la seule minute prend allure de siècle, la vie de l’homme se suspend. Au plein midi, le sang cesse de battre, dit-on” (p. 50).

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<sup>112</sup> François Bousquet. *Camus le Méditerranéen, Camus l’Ancien*. Québec: Éditions Naaman, 1977, p. 31.



However, Camus would soon have to concede the impossibility of maintaining such a communion. As Bonnier notes, even as Camus was concluding the essays for *Noces*, Germany occupied the Rhineland and civil war broke out in Spain. As Bonnier suggests: “C’est assez dire que ces joies solaires ne sont pas pures de toute inquiétude” (Bonnier, p. 42). In fact, in ‘Le vent à Djémila’, which appears in the same collection, the body erodes away, leaving Camus with his ‘prise de conscience’. Suddenly, he cannot enjoy the moment suspended in time because of the glaring certainty of his own death: “Oui, je suis présent. Et ce qui me frappe à ce moment, c’est que je ne peux aller plus loin” (*Noces*, p. 26).

### ***DUHAMEL AND THE NATURAL WORLD***

Duhamel’s experiences of the Mediterranean also left him with a sublime feeling of unity. In or about 1910, he suffered a bout of bronchitis and spent two weeks convalescing on the Côte d’azur. There he undertook long, solitary walks in the mountains: “J’ai bon souvenir d’une longue promenade que je fis seul, dans la montagne, au-dessus de Menton, parmi les citronniers et les oliviers” (*BF*, p. 192).

In *Le Combat* (1913), Hubert is a medical practitioner who is called upon to assist the ailing Gérard. Hubert’s prescription for Gérard’s recovery takes no account of human learning and medicine, but rather focuses primarily on Gérard’s individual communion with the natural world, free of men and their knowledge: “La certitude du soleil dans une heure de promenade vaut mieux que toutes mes paroles” (p. 70).

Indeed, certain parts of *La Possession du monde* (1919) prefigure the “anonymous pantheistic upsurge” (McCarthy, p. 137) of *Noces*. In the chapter headed ‘La recherche de la grâce’, Duhamel

notices in himself and others, a mysterious, unidentified feeling of overwhelming peace and unity that comes on suddenly and often without a catalyst: “Elle [la grâce] éclate soudain, sans raison...” (p. 178). Most illustrations of this feeling of grace have their origins in the natural world, the mere observation of an osier bed, for example. Here, Duhamel questions whether any man might not have “senti l’absolution des erreurs de l’univers et l’adoucissement des siennes en contemplant cette petite oseraie” (p. 175). Alternatively, it could be brought on as a result of “le bruit des feuilles de l’arrière saison qui crépitent encore aux branches d’un chêne” (p. 183).

Marguerite Borderie suggests that ‘La recherche de la grâce’ “est une douce et pressante sollicitation à s’abandonner aux appels innombrables du monde, et renferme d’adorables pages d’un sentiment délicat de la nature.”<sup>113</sup>

However, this sense of harmony and wellbeing is not confined to experiences of the natural world, for Duhamel explains that he has been “sauvé par la bâche d’une humble voiture de livraison” (*LPM*, p. 176).

It is a powerful tonic indeed, for the human being who possesses it “jouit d’une communion profonde, délicate, non seulement avec les choses du monde qui nous sont perceptibles, mais surtout avec celles qui nous sont inconnues” (*LPM*, p. 179). Yet, the feeling is lost as easily as it is won: “Il arrive que la grâce déserte le cœur, sans raison” (*LPM*, p. 180).

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<sup>113</sup> Marguerite Borderie. ‘La Possession du monde’. *Duhamel et nous*. Paris: Bloud & Gay, (2000), p. 67.

In his *Journaux de Voyage*, Camus records a twilight encounter with a school of porpoises: “Et à l’heure du plus grand apaisement des centaines de marsouins surgissent des eaux, caracolent un moment, et fuient vers l’horizon sans hommes” (p. 64).

Much earlier, in *Les Sept Dernières Plaies* (1928), Duhamel expressed very similar sentiments in describing a place:

Tout au fond de mon âme, je pensais à une île entourée de mers inviolables; je pensais à une île incendiée de soleil, avec des golfes déserts, des solitudes incandescentes et des palmiers dont les fruits, à jamais, mûrissent et pourissent en liberté, loin des hommes, loin des éternels hommes.<sup>114</sup>

In the works of Duhamel, perhaps the best example of this theme of an uncomplicated communion with the natural world, is ‘L’Épave’, one of the short stories in *Les Hommes abandonnés* (1921). Duhamel examines how the previously uncomplicated life of the villagers is compromised by a shipwreck near the village of Bidart, on the south coast of France.

Prior to the wreck, the men and women of the village live a poor life, but one in complete harmony with their natural environment:

Mais le vent, la mer haletante, le soleil semblable à un brandon, le lent et invincible hérissément des herbes appelées par le printemps, tout cela laissait le village en proie à une paix profonde, car le cœur des hommes était serein (*LHA*, p. 79).

This peace and tranquility will be compromised by the shipwreck that throws up boxes of sardines onto the shore. When confronted by temptation, no-one, not even the religious Mlle Ipoutcha, thinks about the victims, but rather only themselves: “Elle demeura plusieurs minutes à l’écart, en

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<sup>114</sup> Georges Duhamel. *Les Sept Dernières Plaies*. Paris: Mercure de France, 1928, p. 182.

proie à un malaise exquis et violent qui était la tentation” (*LHA*, p. 95). There is no concept of solidarity and fraternity here. Duhamel’s Bidart is Camus’ Tipasa, compromised by the world of men and their weaknesses.

The ability to experience a world devoid of people, even for a short time, often leaves both Duhamel and Camus with a feeling of harmony. The first volume of Camus’ notebooks contains a prime example, in which Camus, like Rieux in *La Peste* (1947), contemplates the garden on the other side of the window, as though it belongs to a different world altogether:

Tout à l’heure, d’autres choses et les hommes me reprendront. Mais laissez-moi découper cette minute dans l’étoffe du temps, comme d’autres laissent une fleur entre les pages (*Carnets I*, p. 21).

Similarly, in *Biographie de mes fantômes* (1944), Duhamel describes the soothing powers of his garden: “C’est le jardin qui reconforte, malgré ses cruautés, parce qu’il impose un ordre et souvent une harmonie” (*BF*, p. 124).

In *La Possession du monde* (1919), Duhamel gives another practical example from his time at the Front. Here, he refers to the surgeon whom he previously met on the train. Having learnt from Duhamel, the young doctor at the Front stares off into space for a moment before resuming his work, seemingly refreshed. When questioned by Duhamel, the young man replies: “Je me repose avec cette petite touffe de verdure qu’il y a là-bas: elle me rafraîchit bien” (*LPM*, p. 32).

### ***CAMUS AND MAN’S RIFT WITH NATURE***

Commenting specifically in relation to *Noces* (1938), Braun recognises the source of the dilemma that would confront Meursault in *L’Étranger*:

Absurdity, as Camus was to explain later, is the result of a discrepancy: life is not absurd in itself, it only appears so to man. The nature of the discrepancy has to be carefully understood. There is no rift between man and nature — at any rate, not in *Noces* (Braun, p. 26).

The key word in this citation is ‘appears’, for it is the process of man’s interpretation of his environment that brings about the rift and subsequent feeling for the absurd.

### ‘TÉMOIGNAGE’

In a barbed letter dated 2 June 1953 to the director of *Témoins*, Duhamel claims ownership of the expression ‘littérature de témoignage’:

L’expression «littérature de témoignage», qui semble orienter votre premier fascicule, c’est moi qui l’a lancée, en 1920, dans une conférence prononcée à La Maison des Amis des Livres chez Adrienne Monnier. Je venais de publier deux livres: *Vie des martyrs* et *Civilisation* qui avaient retenu l’attention des gens attentifs...<sup>115</sup>

In ‘Noces à Tipasa’, Camus also uses the term ‘témoignage’ and draws a distinction between such ‘témoignage’ and true works of art: “Il y a un temps pour vivre et un temps pour témoigner de vivre. Il y a aussi un temps pour créer, ce qui est moins naturel” (*Noces*, p. 18). The work of art, which was to become one of the purest manifestations of revolt in *L’Homme révolté*, is subordinated in *Noces*, firstly to a simple appreciation of nature, and secondly, to pure accounts and observations of it. This conception of the work of art is retained for *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, which, as R. B. Leal explains, stresses “art as a reproduction or re-presentation of reality.”<sup>116</sup> Leal also suggests that in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*: “Any stylization or ordering of reality is frowned upon

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<sup>115</sup> *Lettre de Georges Duhamel*. 1953. Retrieved 25 August 2010 from <http://www.la-presse-anarchiste.net/spip.php?article351>.

<sup>116</sup> R. B. Leal. ‘Albert Camus and the Significance of Art’. *Australian Journal of French Studies*. January-April (1966), p. 72.

in that it falsifies one of the given facts of the absurd, namely the irrational or the unsatisfying lack of unity that man finds in the world” (p. 70).

Interestingly, however, Leal notes the “careful style of *L’Etranger*” (p. 70) which “heightens the sense of the absurd created by the character of Meursault” (p. 70), and concludes: “The story has a certain unity that goes beyond the theory of art presented in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*” (p. 71). These comments could equally be applied to *Noces* (1938), for in passages such as that which follow, it is difficult to delineate any real distinction between ‘témoignage’ and stylization: “J’ouvre les yeux et mon cœur à la grandeur insoutenable de ce ciel gorgé de chaleur” (*Noces*, p. 14).

Ironically, this act of ‘témoignage’ was to be the very thing that subsequently led Camus to call into question the initial experience of *Noces*. In seeking to fully understand and describe the natural world, he realized that the distinction between a pure accounting and a work of art had become blurred. Anthony Rizzuto sums up the position eloquently:

The meanings Camus thought he discovered in Nature were thrust upon Nature; what had been the sign and proof of the self’s powers of observations were in fact the intolerable evidence of its weakness. When Camus adds “Le monde nous échappe puisqu’il redevient lui-même” (E, 108), he realizes that the possession of landscapes was possible because the lyricist saw Nature in terms of images, in other words in terms of his own desires (*Camus’ Imperial Vision*, p. 36).

As Cruikshank suggests, Camus realises that: “What gives him satisfaction is not the spiritualization of the landscape but a feeling of correspondence between this landscape and his own mood” (*Albert Camus and the Literature of Revolt*, p. 33). Bonnier agrees:

En tant que tels, les lieux ne possèdent aucune personnalité propre. Toute l’harmonie existentielle dont nous les croyons dotés naît seulement du rapport souvent parfait que nous établissons, de façon parfois inconsciente, entre eux et nous (p. 38).

When Camus' observer looks at another human being, he sees a whole, whereas the life of the observer seems dispersed, fragmented. In truth the life of the person being observed is not whole, for it is subject to the same weaknesses, foibles and manias that belong to the observer. We will consider this aspect of 'dispersion' in more detail shortly. In observing his natural world, Camus also sees a whole, but unlike another person, the natural world "resists any attempts on man's part to appropriate it" (Jones, p. 14). As Bonnier notes in relation to Camus: "Les lieux sont ce qu'ils sont. Tout l'intérêt qu'ils présentent provient moins de leur présence que de la résistance qu'ils opposent à l'homme" (p. 38).

Duhamel is of the same view: "La nature n'a vraiment qu'un sens et nous en avons plusieurs."<sup>117</sup> Duhamel also recognises that, in viewing the natural world, the viewer places his own interpretation on what he sees. In *La Possession du monde* (1919), he notes that when walking through the countryside: "La façon dont tu acceptes et dont tu interprètes cette image porte la marque de ta personnalité" (p. 125).

In the works of Duhamel, the universe is oblivious to any attempt to ascribe to it any pre-conceived order or meaning. In *Vue de la terre promise* (1934), Duhamel invests Laurent with a sense of distress at the lack of order and balance in the natural world. Laurent finds the normal planetary movement "rassurant. C'est un ordre, quelque chose qui met l'esprit en repos" (p. 57). However, his discovery that Uranus turns in the opposite direction leaves him feeling bewildered and exiled:

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<sup>117</sup> Georges Duhamel. *Remarques sur les mémoires imaginaires*. Paris: Mercure de France, 1933, p. 29.

On a découvert une planète qui s'appelle Uranus et qui tourne à contresens. Et tous ses satellites aussi tournent à contresens. Ah! Je vous affirme, Hélène, quand je songe à cela, j'ai vraiment envie de mourir (p. 57).

The same volume sees Laurent confessing a feeling for the absurd, once more a function of the clash between perception and reality: “Je suis triste à mourir. Tout est laid. Tout est ridicule. Tout est bas, désespérément. Et je n'ai pas encore vingt ans. J'ai rêvé d'une vie belle et noble. Je languis parmi les querelles, je patauge dans la sottise” (p. 150).

Bonnier suggests that when Camus' mood and desire is balanced with the natural world, the latter assumes a personality, as might another human being. However, the instantaneous satisfaction of this desire destroys any enduring bond and the earth soon returns to stone and soil. Speaking of Tipasa, Bonnier suggests:

Tant que le désir la soutient, cette bourgade est aussi présente et originale aux yeux de Camus qu'une personne humaine; mais, comme elle comble le désir dans le temps qu'elle le fait naître, elle détruit cette tension vivifiante et retourne à sa condition minérale (p. 53).

It is therefore not surprising that from time to time, we find Camus attributing human characteristics to his world. For example, in *La Mort heureuse* (1938): “Le monde, ici, devenait personnage” (p. 131), and the night is “comme le repos et la pensée du monde” (p. 147).

In a similar manner, Duhamel also regularly invests his natural world with human qualities. For example, as he prepares to write *La Nuit d'Orage* (1927), he describes how, in the moments preceding the storm, the flowers surrounding his house “semblaient misérables et désarmées,”<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Georges Duhamel. *La Nuit d'orage*. Paris: Mercure de France, 1927, p. 10.



and how during the tempest, “les arbres se courbaient, tels des esclaves enchaînés” (p. 10). In describing the natural world in this way, Duhamel felt a sense of correspondence between his mood and the natural world: “Je sens que la nature, soumise, résignée, se recueille dans sa misère” (p. 11).

Salavin also feels this correspondence between his mood and his environment. When he is sad, his surroundings take on a melancholy air, even the light: “Par la porte demeurée entr’ouverte entrait un peu de clarté mélancolique” (*CM*, p. 81). Conversely, after sending off his application to work with the notary and having experienced a feeling of contentment, the light which penetrates the ‘bibliothèque Sainte-Genève’ is of a quality “sereine et spirituelle qui chante sur les pages” (*CM*, p. 85).

However, an inability to accept the real world *per se* sees Salavin incapable of finding a natural balance with his environment. Comeau sums up his situation perfectly:

Salavin, qui vit coupé du monde des hommes, devrait pouvoir trouver réconfort auprès du monde des choses. Il en est cependant incapable, car il se laisse trop absorber par le tumulte de sa vie intérieure et ne voit les choses qu’à travers le prisme déformant de ses états d’âme (Comeau, p. 166).

A good example of this occurs on the day of his termination, as he meanders home through the streets. On such a tumultuous day, even his favourite haunt of the pont d’Austerlitz “ne me fit aucun bien” (*CM*, p. 22). Similarly: “L’allée des platanes fut un échec complet” (*CM*, p. 22), even though “c’est un endroit où je suis presque toujours heureux” (*CM*, p. 22).

A sense of isolation in a foreign world awaits those protagonists who feel at odds with their surroundings. As Camus says in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (1942):

S’apercevoir que le monde est «épais», entrevoir à quel point une pierre est étrangère, nous est irréductible, avec quelle intensité la nature, un paysage peut nous nier. Au fond de toute beauté gît quelque chose d’inhumain et ces collines, la douceur du ciel, ces dessins d’arbres, voici qu’à la minute même, ils perdent le sens illusoire dont nous les revêtions, désormais plus lointains qu’un paradis perdu (p. 30).

This is the same sense of estrangement experienced by Roquentin in Sartre’s *La Nausée* (1938):

“La racine du marronnier s’enfonçait dans la terre, juste au-dessous de mon banc. Je ne me rappelais plus que c’était une racine. Les mots s’étaient évanouis et, avec eux, la signification des choses [...]”<sup>119</sup> It is also that experienced years earlier by Salavin as he contemplates a tree in the

Jardin des Plantes:

Je regardais son tronc noueux, sa ramure innombrable, ses grosses racines qui, par places, émergeaient avant la plongée définitive, comme des échines de dauphins, et je pensais:

Lui, il sait choisir [...] (*CM*, p. 139).

When the experience of nature does not match the changeable mood of their observers, Duhamel and Camus see the natural world as rigid and aloof, even hostile. On a personal level, Duhamel felt oddly out of place during his travels to Greece in 1928. His *Images de la Grèce* (1928) is infused with a strong sense of nostalgia for his homeland, which contaminates his enjoyment of the Greek countryside:

Pour sentir le triste et doux ciel de notre Ile de France me cracher au visage, pour voir une prairie bleue, transie, se résigner sous l’averse, que ne donnerais-je pas, aujourd’hui? Presque toutes les idées dont fut nourrie mon enfance, les belles fables qui, si longtemps, ont tourmenté, puis hanté, puis enchanté mes loisirs, est-il possible qu’elles aient pris leur source en ce pays calciné?<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre. *La Nausée*. Paris: Gallimard, 1938, p. 181.

<sup>120</sup> Georges Duhamel. *Images de la Grèce*. Paris: Editions du Sablier, 1928, p. 17.

Struck by the heat of the sun and with ever-present illness sapping his strength, Duhamel finds no pleasure in a visit to Delphes: “Est-ce le sirroco, la fièvre? Ou quoi? Delphes me fait horreur” (p. 25). As Meursault will yearn for the Arab’s refuge of the shaded stream in *L’Étranger* (1942), Duhamel jealously contemplates herbs moving softly with the current at the foot of a mountain, taking refuge from the fiery heat of the day:

Avec envie, je contemple une herbe à demi-noyée qui se courbe, se redresse, et se courbe encore au gré du courant. Elle est duveteuse, fleurie de menu, parfumée. Elle ressemble — est il possible? — à la douce menthe de chez nous. Elle est dans l’eau jusqu’aux aisselles. Comme elle doit être heureuse de se rafraîchir ainsi, sous l’haleine, sous le feu de la montagne en délire (*IG*, p. 23).

Similarly, Duhamel felt a sense of dislocation from his own routine during his visit to Japan in 1952: “Je ne sais si beaucoup de personnes ont éprouvé ce qu’il m’est arrivé d’éprouver moi-même, pourtant je n’écrivais pas comme j’écris chez moi; mes rites de pensées devaient être reconquis au prix d’une âpre concentration d’esprit.”<sup>121</sup>

Conversely, Duhamel (and his companion Charles Vildrac) felt completely at ease in Prague, a journey described by Duhamel in ‘Jeunesse d’une République’ (1921), one of the chapters for *Délibérations* (1925). In Prague, Duhamel admires the National theatre (where, incidentally, *La Lumière* is well received), the food and a city “chargé d’intellectualité.”<sup>122</sup> It is clear that Duhamel is at home in Prague. When his mood matches that of his environment, Duhamel is content: “Dans ce pays dont la langue nous est totalement étrangère, nous ne sommes pas dépaysés” (p. 88).

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<sup>121</sup> Georges Duhamel. *Le Japon entre la tradition et l’avenir*. Paris: Mercure de France, 1953, p. 44.

<sup>122</sup> Georges Duhamel. *Délibérations*. Paris: Les Cahiers de Paris, 1925, p. 88.

In Duhamel's 'Le Sacrifice', one of the short stories for *Vie des Martyrs* (1918), the injured gaze out upon the countryside. "C'était une des belles journées de l'été 1915, une de ces journées où l'indifférence souveraine de la nature fait plus cruellement sentir le fardeau de la guerre."<sup>123</sup> In *La Pesée des âmes*, Duhamel notes the apathy of the natural world with regard to the rules and procedures of the military machine: "Le soleil de la Vesle se moquait de l'autorité" (p. 164).

In Duhamel's 'Une expédition', one of the short stories for *Les Hommes abandonnés* (1921), a group is charged with investigating a murder. As the men approach the crime scene, the narrator remarks upon the apparent indifference of the natural world:

De temps à autre, et malgré la gravité du moment, je glissais hors de l'événement, j'échappais aux circonstances, et, pendant une seconde entière, j'apercevais l'horizon boisé, la vallée ruisselante de chaleur, les pâturages avec leurs troupeaux minuscules [...]. (*LHA*, p. 241).

Camus' *La Mort heureuse* (1938) bears obvious similarities to 'La Mort dans l'âme', one of the short stories for *L'Envers et l'endroit* (1937). Thrust into the alien world of Prague, the principal character of 'La Mort dans l'âme' immediately feels a sense of isolation and exile. Feeling a loss of equilibrium, he craves routine and firstly seeks out a restaurant even though he acknowledges he is not hungry. He leaves the restaurant and walks through the old city but that brings him no respite. On the contrary, he feels a growing sense of dislocation and admits to being "incapable de rester plus longtemps en face de moi-même" (*EE*, p. 85). Finally, he confesses to the classic symptom of the absurd — a "grand désaccord [...] entre lui et les choses" (*EE*, p. 88).

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<sup>123</sup> Georges Duhamel. *Vie des martyrs*. Paris: Mercure de France, 1917, p. 139.

Interestingly, Duhamel had recorded the same thought in almost identical terms in *La Possession du monde* (1919): “Il y a, sans nul doute, une curiosité qui est une faiblesse et une lâcheté. C’est celle des gens qui n’osent pas demeurer seuls, une seconde, en face d’eux-mêmes” (p. 59). Both of these quotations recall the well-known Pascalian concept of ‘divertissement’: “J’ai découvert que tout le malheur des hommes vient d’une seule chose, qui est de ne savoir pas demeurer en repos, dans une chambre.”<sup>124</sup>

In relation to *L’Étranger* (1942), Jones notes: “Meursault is intensely aware of the natural world, but aware at the same time of its indifference towards whatever he or Raymond might choose to do” (p. 23). On the day of his mother’s funeral, Meursault describes how “le soleil débordant qui faisait tressaillir le paysage le rendait inhumain et déprimant” (*L’Étranger*, p. 27). In fact, Meursault specifically recalls his experience that day just before he shoots the Arab: “C’était le même soleil que le jour où j’avais enterré maman” (p. 94). Nature, in the form of the sun, becomes complicit in the shooting. As a result of the shadows cast across the Arab’s face, “il avait l’air de rire” (p. 94), and, as we have seen at the point of the shooting, the sun and heat are directly involved in tightening Meursault’s hand around the trigger.

It should also be noted that the murder takes place after Meursault has eaten a full lunch and drunk a little too much wine. When the men leave Masson’s shack, it is eleven-thirty in the morning and the strength of the sun is reaching its peak. Meursault is tired and does not feel like walking in the sun (p. 85). When he finally discovers the Arab relaxing in the shade of the stream behind the rocks, he envies him: “Je pensais à la source fraîche derrière le rocher. J’avais envie de

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<sup>124</sup> Pascal. *Pensées*. Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1976, p. 86.

retrouver le murmure de son eau, envie de fuir le soleil, l'effort et les pleurs de femme, envie enfin de retrouver l'ombre et son repos" (p. 92). As Morvan Lebesque notes, Meursault's drowsy fatigue is completely at odds with "l'inhumanité du Soleil,"<sup>125</sup> and, as a result, nature becomes hostile and ultimately, a party to murder.

In the period between 1952 and 1955, Camus wrote six stories which were first collected and published in 1957 under the heading *L'Exil et le royaume*. Of the theme of exile, Dunwoodie comments as follows: "Exile is both man's existential dilemma and a symbol with an important social and political content: focused sometimes on the relations between the hero and a racially alien world" (p. 72).

The first of the stories, 'La Femme adultère', exemplifies this relationship while at the same time reinforcing the theme of a lost paradise of youth. Here Camus sends his heroine, Janine, on a journey to the sands of the Algerian desert where Dunwoodie notes that "her uneasiness is first aroused by the outside world, the hostile, inhospitable world of the Algerian south" (p. 32). Thrust into a world where everything, including the surprisingly cold air, is nothing as she had imagined it to be, Janine feels the absurd, which forms the point of departure for self-discovery.

At the outset, we learn that Janine has lived a life of mediocrity for some twenty-five years, creating "un nœud que les années, l'habitude et l'ennui avaient serré."<sup>126</sup> She has no real relationship with her husband Marcel. A sedentary life has left her overweight and she recalls, with nostalgia the physical beauty of her youth. Not long after her arrival at the oasis hotel, she

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<sup>125</sup> Morvan Lebesque. 'La Passion pour la scène'. *Camus*. Paris: Librairie Hachette, (1964), p. 171.

<sup>126</sup> Albert Camus, *L'Exil et le royaume*. Paris: Gallimard, 1957, p. 27.

begins to experience her own 'simple souci'. She feels generally "mal à l'aise" (p. 21), although she knows not why: "Elle attendait, mais elle ne savait quoi. Elle sentait seulement sa solitude. Et le froid qui la pénétrait, et un poids plus lourd à l'endroit du cœur" (p. 19).

Uncomfortable in these strange surroundings, Janine conjures up a world of dreams, which she clearly prefers to reality: "Elle rêvait en vérité, presque sourde aux bruits qui montaient de la rue avec des éclats de la voix de Marcel" (p. 18). With the strengthening of the wind, "elle imaginait, derrière les murs, une mer de palmiers droits et flexibles, moutonnant dans la tempête" (p. 19). The world she prefers, and which her sense of isolation and interruption of her routine has given her, is the one in which "elle rêvait aux palmiers droits et flexibles, et à la jeune fille qu'elle avait été" (p. 20).

Accepting the recommendation of the hotel proprietor, she climbs to the top of the old fort that dominates the oasis. Here, she is again infiltrated by this strange malaise, as if "quelque chose l'attendait qu'elle avait ignoré jusqu'à ce jour et qui pourtant n'avait cessé de lui manquer" (p. 26). It is this dream state, complete with a growing sense of a lost paradise of youth, that enables her to experience the same sense of 'dénuement' as the protagonist in 'Entre oui et non'. In such a state, the views from the top of the old fort are savoured by Janine with "a new state of desire and awareness" (Dunwoodie, p. 35).

Even so, Janine's experience in 'La Femme adultère' is a purely emotional one. Camus does not take Janine further into a more intellectual appreciation of the moment and in fact, points out that her experience really came about by accident: "Au cœur d'une femme que le hasard seul amenait là, un nœud que les années, l'habitude et l'ennui avaient serré, se dénouait lentement" (*ER*, p. 27).

Dunwoodie agrees, noting that Janine “has none of the lucidity of the absurd hero. The actual discovery is, in fact, presented as the result of chance” (p. 38).

This is of course one of Camus’ later works. Very early on in his writing career, Duhamel’s works offered many examples of protagonists feeling a sense of isolation in a strange world. In the first of his plays, *La Lumière* (1920), Duhamel portrays a sensitive young woman, Blanche, who shrinks away from all that her world has to offer. Initially, Blanche is the antithesis of the passionate girl that Camus’ Janine might have been in her youth. Turning her back on her world of light and sunshine, she finds herself yearning for the dark, sombre world inhabited by Bernard, blind from birth: “C’est que vous êtes riche, Bernard” (p. 62). Blanche conceives only of a world that continually imposes itself on her and seeks to dupe her at every turn:

La nature a voulu s’imposer à nous de toutes façons, et elle a placé dans notre tête quelque chose de fulgurant et de terrible; c’est la clarté de nos yeux. Eh bien! c’est un perpétuel mirage et un jeu perpétuel qui empêche notre âme de se recueillir en soi (p. 63).

When Blanche’s sensitive demeanour is combined with her own physical frailty, she feels a stranger in her own world:

J’ai des yeux fragiles et faibles; ils sont toujours fatigués, ils me font toujours mal; ils m’imposent toute la journée une jouissance cruelle qui demeure comme au-dessus de mes forces. J’ai peur du soleil et je ne sais pas toujours si je l’aime (p. 64).

As Comeau suggests: “S’il était possible de définir d’un seul mot le Salavin de la *Confession de minuit*, c’est au terme ‘aliéné’ qu’il faudrait recourir” (p. 163). There are two main episodes in which Salavin experiences this sense of alienation and they appear in the first and last volumes of the series. The first, as we have seen, involves Salavin’s reaching out for Sureau’s ear. The second



occurs in the last instalment, *Tel qu'en lui-même* (1932), and mirrors Janine's experience in *La Femme adultère* (1957).

This is how Salavin explains his desire to touch the ear of M. Sureau in *Confession de minuit*:

Pour mille raisons que j'entrevois confusément, il me devenait nécessaire de toucher l'oreille de M. Sureau, de me prouver à moi-même que cette oreille n'était pas une chose interdite, inexistante, imaginaire, que ce n'était que de la chair humaine, comme ma propre oreille (p. 14).

The 'mille raisons' of which Salavin speaks are not readily apparent. We seek to demonstrate that despite the difference in the amount of force offered by Salavin and Meursault, their acts are a response to a feeling for the absurd brought on in part by a sense of alienation from their environment.

While both Salavin and, later, Meursault understand that something significant has happened, neither can apparently understand how their 'crimes' have offended the highly ordered laws of society. In fact, the immediate reactions of both Salavin and Meursault are strikingly similar. Compared with Meursault's murder, Salavin's act is relatively mild, yet he has the feeling that something significant has occurred: "J'avais l'impression d'avoir fait une chose monstrueuse" (*CM*, p. 14). Meursault believes that he had "détruit l'équilibre du jour [...]" (*L'Étranger*, p. 95). Further, Salavin notes that "l'affaire Sureau marque le début de mes malheurs" (*CM*, p. 16), and Meursault acknowledges, immediately after depositing four more bullets in the motionless body of the Arab, that these were "comme quatre coups brefs que je frappais sur la porte du malheur" (*L'Étranger*, p. 95).

Martial Bourgeon suggests that Salavin “est bien un malade,”<sup>127</sup> something which Duhamel himself denies (*SV*, p. 30). Lafay suggests that Salavin’s act is certainly not that of a madman or social misfit, but rather that of a man feeling isolated in, or betrayed by, an alien world increasingly dominated by machines:

Le geste de Salavin [...] n’est pas celui d’un malade, mais d’un être sain dans un monde atteint par la maladie moderne: celle que génère une société industrielle dominée par l’économie et la technique (*A la rencontre de Salavin*, p. 126).

Comeau agrees, suggesting that from *Confession de minuit* onwards, Duhamel’s literary career “prendra maintenant l’aspect d’une lutte sans trêve menée contre les forces d’aliénation de la civilisation moderne” (p. 119). In fact, this theme is readily apparent in the earlier work of *La Possession du monde* (1919), where Duhamel chastises the human race for turning its technological prowess towards the invention of machines which wreak destruction and death. Such a world is completely alien to Duhamel: “Le monde semble de plus en plus détourné de son sens, c’est-à-dire du sens humain, le seul pour nous” (p. 93).

The description of Salavin’s work environment supports Lafay’s argument. For example, when asked to make his way to the office of M. Sureau, Salavin must walk beyond “des bureaux américains” (*CM*, p. 11) and “une grande salle où les dactylographes pianotent comme des aliénées” (*CM*, p. 11). Salavin describes his office as possessing “rien de comparable avec le paradis terrestre” (*CM*, p. 11). In such an environment as Salavin finds himself, says Lafay: “L’homme est contaminé par la machine, réduit à l’état de chose, d’animal, ou d’insecte” (*A la rencontre de Salavin*, p. 126). In such a world, an absurd world: “Le sujet aliéné est absorbé par

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<sup>127</sup> Martial Bourgeon. ‘Georges Duhamel ou l’Autobiographie romancée’. *La Revue Mondiale*. January/February (1928), p. 79.

son existence aliénée” (*A la rencontre de Salavin*, p. 126). Comeau agrees, noting that “l’aliénation de Salavin se révèle de prime abord dans les motivations de l’acte absurde qui marque le commencement de ses déboires” (p. 164).

Could Salavin’s act be explained on this basis alone? Perhaps, yet Salavin himself cannot pinpoint any one explanation for his act. His ‘mille raisons’ confirm his alienation in a much broader sense, one of dislocation from society as a whole. There is merit in what Marc Blancpain has to say in this regard: “L’oreille de son patron que Salavin, invinciblement, a touché du bout du doigt, c’est cette société même.”<sup>128</sup> Paul Renard agrees, pointing to Salavin’s observations of his work colleagues: “L’absurdité ne caractérise pas seulement le travail, mais aussi tous les êtres humains.”<sup>129</sup>

Just before he is asked by M. Jacob to make the journey to Sureau’s office, Salavin describes Jacob’s telephone discussion with an unknown caller:

C’est toujours étonnant un bonhomme qui cause avec le néant, et qui lui sourit, qui lui fait des grâces, un bonhomme qui, tout à coup, regarde fixement la peinture chocolat, sur le mur, comme s’il voyait quelque chose d’étonnant (*CM*, p. 9).

Tonnet-Lacroix cites this passage in support of the suggestion that Salavin’s exterior world “lui apparaît parfois comme un décor irréel, absurde...” (p. 168). Interestingly, Camus would describe a similar scenario over fifteen years later in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (1942), when defining one aspect of the absurd as “cette incalculable chute devant l’image de ce que nous sommes” (p. 31):

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<sup>128</sup> Marc Blancpain. ‘Georges Duhamel et l’Europe’. *Les Cahiers de l’Abbaye de Créteil*. December (1991), p. 36.

<sup>129</sup> Paul Renard. ‘L’Oreille de M. Sureau (premier chapitre de *Confession de minuit*)’. *Roman 20/50*. December (2002), p. 76.

“Un homme parle au téléphone derrière une cloison vitrée; on ne l’entend pas, mais on voit sa mimique sans portée: on se demande pourquoi il vit” (p. 31). Whilst there is no direct evidence that Camus was influenced by this description in *Confession de minuit*, it is highly probable that he would have read it, and the similarity between the two descriptions is striking.

As, later, Meursault’s value judgments would dissolve, Salavin considers that the act of touching Sureau’s ear is as natural and innocent as if Sureau’s son had brushed an arm across the neck of his father during playtime. As Désiré Dénuît confirms: “Salavin avoue n’être jamais dans son état normal, mais il prétend que l’idée de toucher l’oreille de son patron, pour saugrenue qu’elle soit, demeure naturelle.”<sup>130</sup>

Salavin’s act is surely that of someone who would later be called an absurd man, of someone “en rupture avec le monde réel” (Comeau, p. 164). After his dismissal, Salavin’s value judgments continue to erode: “Je comprenais que je devais être défiguré par le sommeil; je me sentais les traits épais, bouffis, les yeux pochés, les cheveux secs et emmêlés; mais tout m’était égal” (*CM*, p. 56). We agree with Dodd’s conclusion, which is that the touching of Sureau’s ear is “essentially, a gesture of revolt” (p. 200), albeit a revolt which is not preceded by lucidity.

Patrice Charrier describes Salavin’s act as a:

geste absurde et incompréhensible pour lui-même, comme le sera vingt ans plus tard le geste meurtrier de Meursault dans *L’Étranger* de Camus [...] Duhamel est donc aussi un précurseur de ce qu’on appellera la littérature de l’absurde représentée par Sartre et Camus.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Désiré Dénuît. *Georges Duhamel*. Paris: Les Editions de Belgique, 1933, p. 138.

<sup>131</sup> Patrice Charrier. ‘Georges Duhamel, précurseur de l’écologie’. *Les Cahiers de l’Abbaye de Créteil*.

Albérès is of the same view:

Le très simple Salavin de Duhamel ne suit-il pas, du *Journal de Salavin* et de *La Confession de minuit* jusqu'à *Tel qu'en lui-même*, la même évolution qui mène Meursault de *L'Étranger* chez Camus à devenir le docteur Rieux de *La Peste*? Il y a chez Salavin le même acte absurde (toucher l'oreille du directeur) que chez Meursault (tirer sur l'Arabe) (*Les Hommes traqués*, p. 11).

In the fifth and final instalment of the *Salavin* series, *Tel qu'en lui-même* (1932), Duhamel places his hero in Tunisia, where he has come to operate a phonograph store for a large Parisian enterprise. We have previously commented on Salavin's routine in Paris, one which is exemplified in *Journal de Salavin* (1927): "Je me lève à sept heures et demie, ponctuellement, vingt minutes après Marguerite qui prépare mon déjeuner."<sup>132</sup> As the cold night of the desert strips away years of entrenched routine for Janine in 'La Femme adultère' (1957), and the foreign world of Prague would later make Meursault uncomfortable in *La Mort heureuse* (1938), so too, as Michel Dyé suggests, Duhamel's last volume in the *Salavin* series "recèle tout un monde côtoyé quotidiennement par Salavin."<sup>133</sup>

In *Tel qu'en lui-même* (1932), the North African setting and Salavin's relationship with his wife bear obvious similarities to 'La Femme adultère', but a first reading of both works might suggest that the parallels end there. Indeed, Camus' later work might seem philosophically more simple. For example, Janine travels to North Africa with nothing more on her mind than accompanying

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December (2008), p. 114.

<sup>132</sup> Georges Duhamel. *Journal de Salavin*. Paris: Mercure de France, 1927, p. 28.

<sup>133</sup> Michel Dyé. 'Exotisme et peinture du monde colonial dans *Tel qu'en lui-même*'. *Les Cahiers de l'Abbaye de Créteil*. December (1997), p. 120.

her husband on business, whereas we know that Salavin has voyaged from Paris to Tunisia as a result of a conscious choice to “recommencer sa vie.”<sup>134</sup>

Further, when confronted by an alien environment, Janine recalls her previous life with nostalgia, revelling in the memory of her youth and beauty. Salavin, however, at least for the majority of the work, recalls nothing of his youth or former life in Paris with fond affection. He has purposely come to Tunisia to escape his perceived mediocrity and to reinvent himself. Comeau describes him as “un Salavin qui semble avoir rompu avec tout ce qui l’enfermait dans son ancien personnage” (p. 177).

However, like ‘La Femme adultère’, *Tel qu’en lui-même* is essentially a story of self-rediscovery in the face of a completely alien environment and in that sense, it warrants further scrutiny.

Salavin agrees, albeit tersely, with the statement of his travelling companion Dargoult to the effect that his voyage to Tunis is the result of “le besoin de renouvellement” (*TQM*, p. 47). So overwhelming is Salavin’s desire to escape his past and, as Dyé suggests, “amorcer sa révolution personnelle” (*Exotisme et peinture du monde colonial dans Tel qu’en lui-même*, p. 117), he adopts an alias of Simon Chavegrand. Arriving in Tunis, where “la vie européenne et la vie indigène s’affrontent là dans le tumulte” (*TQM*, p. 60), Salavin discovers that nothing is as he imagined it might be and experiences the same sense of dislocation as will Camus’ Janine. In conveying this sense of imbalance, Duhamel uses very similar language to that adopted later by Camus. For

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<sup>134</sup> Georges Duhamel. *Tel qu’en lui-même*. Paris: Mercure de France, 1932, p. 215.

Janine: “Rien ne se ressemblait à ce qu’elle avait attendu [....]” (*ER*, p. 19). As the cold will surprise Janine, Salavin is struck by the heat of summer:

La brûlure du soleil, ce n’est pas ainsi que le rêveur l’avait rêvée. Dans l’imagination de l’étranger, de l’homme du Nord, la chaleur n’était qu’un mot, un mot que l’été français n’avait point nourri (*TQM*, p. 187).

As he undergoes the same process as will Janine, Salavin falls prey to conflicting emotions, brought on by his unfamiliar environment. We see him oscillating between feelings of excitement and isolation. Soon after arriving in Tunis, Salavin confides in Dargoult: “Je ne me suis jamais senti si jeune. Il me semble que je commence de vivre” (*TQM*, p. 62). Yet as Salavin goes about his business in the new world, he experiences a growing sense of separation and exile in “cet univers étranger” (Dyé, *Exotisme et peinture du monde colonial dans Tel qu’en lui-même*, p. 120):

Il ouvrit la fenêtre et, pendant quelques minutes, contempla la mouvement de la rue, les vendeurs ambulants qui passaient, une grappe de poulets à l’épaule ou, sur la pointe des ongles, un plateau chargé de sucreries aux couleurs chimiques, le traiteur qui fabriquait des saucisses en refoulant, avec le pouce, du hachis dans un boyau opalin, toute cette petite vie ingénue et misérable. Enfin, Chavegrand eut un frisson et referma la fenêtre (*TQM*, p. 102)

Tunis reinforces in Salavin the inherent contradiction of the absurd. Here, as in *Journal de Salavin* (1927), he is consumed by the desire to reinvent himself as a hero, a saint. Firstly, he offers himself as an aid in a nearby colony afflicted by the plague and then he offers his blood for a transfusion to help save a poor Arab with an unsavoury past. Both projects end in failure. All four of the men infected by the plague die and, despite an initial promising outlook, the poor Arab also succumbs. After the Arab’s death, Salavin spends an hour at the bedside of the deceased “à rêvasser, à réfléchir” (*TQM*, p. 168), perhaps the genesis of a more sophisticated understanding of the absurd in Salavin.

The failure of his saintly acts also reinforces in Salavin his sense of alienation and he begins to yearn for his old life in Paris, even though it was the life he had initially sought to escape. He confides in Dargoult: “Cette ville ne me plaît pas. Connaissez-vous le quartier du Panthéon, à Paris? Il paraît que c’est un quartier très curieux, et même très beau” (*TQM*, p. 185). Salavin loses weight and begins to physically resemble the man he was in Paris.

His alias is compromised through a chance meeting with Aufrère, whom he had met in *Le Club des Lyonnais* (1929) and involuntarily, he responds when Dargoult’s wife calls out her husband’s name ‘Louis’ in the darkness. Finally, Salavin accepts “à n’être que ce que l’on est” (*TQM*, p. 184), and returns to Paris where he dies content in the arms of his wife. In the same way that Algeria will enable Janine to rediscover the passion of her youth, Tunis assists Salavin to rediscover his true identity and finally abandon the desire for personal revolution. These last pages of *Tel qu’en lui-même* (1932) will be relevant when we come to consider the question of Camusian revolt in the works of Duhamel.

In *Les Compagnons de l’Apocalypse* (1956), Duhamel once more takes up the theme of modern man losing his way in a world dehumanised by machines and progress. After losing his wife and child in bombings during the Second World War, Dan Levoyer spends some four years in a German prison camp. After the war, Dan receives a large inheritance from the estate of an aunt and assumes a pseudonym, Dan ‘Travel’. He takes on some ‘compagnons’ and together, they travel from town to town highlighting the dangers of a world menaced by progress and, in particular, nuclear war.



It is clear that Duhamel, like most people in the 1950's, considered such a threat as a serious one. In 1957, he published *Problèmes de l'heure*, in which he speaks at length about the dangers inherent in the rapid, unchecked progress of technology. He could be Dan Levoyer when he describes such a world as absurd, in *Problèmes de l'heure*:

La désintégration de l'atome, le destin des engins préparés en vue du troisième conflit mondial et dont nous ne savons même pas s'ils pourraient, en cas de solution pacifique, être détruits sans un éclatement susceptible de modifier toutes les conditions de la vie à la surface de la planète, autant de problèmes absurdes et insolubles dont la pensée hante les veilles de l'observateur vigilant.<sup>135</sup>

In *Les Compagnons de l'Apocalypse*, Dan wins over his listeners by making them realise their own feelings for the absurd in a world menaced by technology:

Il en est peut-être, parmi vous, que les idées modernes ont plongés dans une sorte de désespoir dont ils n'ont même pas une conscience exacte. Ils sont tristes; ils souffrent, et ils ne savent pas quelle est la cause de leur affliction.<sup>136</sup>

As they listen to Dan speak, the attendees experience a nostalgia for times past, recognising “maints souvenirs de leur jeunesse, de leurs épreuves, peut-être même d'anciens bonheurs flétris [...]” (p. 51).

In *Nouvelles du sombre empire* (1960), written towards the end of Duhamel's career, Thomas Lestrangier writes a series of notes in which he describes in great detail, his version of hell, complete with burning cinders, bitumen and a smoky sky. The notes are written in a sleep-deprived period of three days which immediately precede a suicide attempt by Thomas. These

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<sup>135</sup> Georges Duhamel. *Problèmes de l'heure*. Paris: Mercure de France, 1957, p. 7.

<sup>136</sup> Georges Duhamel. *Les Compagnons de l'Apocalypse*. Paris: Mercure de France, 1956, p. 49.

descriptions are supplemented in the story by Thomas' own letters, written in hell and transported to his wife Thilde by a stranger, Bernadoni, apparently a messenger from God.

There are some references in this story that immediately bring to mind the work of Camus. Perhaps the most obvious is the theme of suicide, explored by Camus in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (1942), in which he proposes, but ultimately rejects, suicide as a potential solution for the absurd. Presumably, Duhamel agrees with this view, given his description of Thomas' suicide in the work: "Vous avez tué l'homme que vous deviez respecter entre tous. Je le sais. Je sais tout. Vous vous êtes tué vous-même. C'est la moins pardonnable des fautes."<sup>137</sup> Angels Santa d'Usall confirms this view. After noting the many protagonists in the works of Duhamel who commit suicide, or are tempted by suicide, she suggests: "Malgré tous ces exemples, le suicide ne reçoit pas l'approbation de Duhamel."<sup>138</sup>

There are other obvious similarities between *Nouvelles du sombre empire* and the work of Camus. For example, the surname of the hero, *Lestrangier*, reminds us of the title of Camus' work *L'Étranger* (1942) and justifies an inference that Duhamel also regarded his hero as a stranger to himself and his world. There are also numerous references to the legend of Sisyphus, and it would be reasonable to conclude that Duhamel read *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* and may have had it in mind when creating this work. In Thomas Lestrangier's hell, the demons allow Sisyphus to construct an electric motor to transport his rock to the top of the mountain. In typical Duhamel style, Sisyphus spends all his time worrying about "une panne de courant ou un court-circuit" (*NSE*, p. 127) and

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<sup>137</sup> Georges Duhamel. *Nouvelles du sombre empire*. Paris: Mercure de France, 1960, p. 109.

<sup>138</sup> Angels Santa d'Usall. 'L'Imagination scientifique de Georges Duhamel'. *Les Cahiers de l'Abbaye de Créteil*. December (1986), p. 62.

ultimately Sisyphus “n’en a tiré aucun soulagement” (*NSE*, p. 126). Once more, Duhamel attacks an overreliance on machines: “Toutes les découvertes de la science montrent ici leur vraie nature: elles ont l’air de soulager les êtres qui les appliquent; mais elles leur donnent de nouveaux et très cruels soucis” (*NSE*, p. 127).

In lieu of watching his rock fall to the bottom of the mountain, Sisyphus is now concerned about the integrity of his machine: “Sisyphes reste en observation sous l’énorme pierre depuis des années et des siècles” (*NSE*, p. 127). Given that the demons have allowed Sisyphus to construct his machine, presumably they consider the new torment to be worse than the former. The “lonely but courageous bearer of the burden of life” (Hochberg, p. 95), is now wracked by anxiety.

There is also a reference to Don Juan Tenorio, the famous Spanish lover who features prominently in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*. Don Juan protests to the demons that qualities of fidelity and virtue are easily obtained and is promptly allocated a special place in hell’s museum “comme un monstre exceptionnel” (*NSE*, p. 130). This is an outcome consistent with Duhamel’s own attitude towards Don Juan noted in our introduction.

There can be no more alien an environment than that described initially by Thomas. For example, he finds himself in:

un vallon totalement dénudé, semblable à ceux que l’on voit aux paysages volcaniques. Je ne sentais pas de vent, mais au-dessus de moi couraient, emmêlés tous ensemble, des nuages couleur de rouille (*NSE*, p. 46).

Hell is a place where all visibility is “compromise par l’éternelle vapeur rousse et orageuse” (*NSE*, p. 48). Many of the torments put in place by the demons resemble those that Thomas knew in his

earthly life, such as endless bureaucracy and money which becomes worthless in a neighbouring district.

Thomas' alien environment brings on a feeling for the absurd. He describes his life in hell in these terms: "Ce qui exprime l'angoisse de ma vie présente, c'est que je ne sais plus jamais ce que je dois faire" (*NSE*, p. 107). He complains of a lack of order and harmony in his life: "C'est en vain que je cherche la paix de l'esprit, l'équilibre, la sérénité. J'ai lieu de croire, à chaque minute, que le désordre est le maître du monde" (*NSE*, p. 110). The longer Thomas languishes in hell, the closer he comes to aligning his previous, earthly life with his present condition, which he describes as "ce monde incohérent" (*NSE*, p. 12) and "cette condition indéterminée, dérisoire et vraiment offensante" (*NSE*, p. 13).

As Thomas's experience of the absurd develops, value judgments become redundant. As he is forced by hell's guardians to remove his clothes and await processing with many others, everything assumes an equal value. Recalling Camus' description of the people of Oran in *La Peste*, Thomas says: "Nous étions tous nus et trop soucieux pour nous occuper de la nudité des autres, assez dépourvus quand même pour souffrir de notre propre nudité" (*NSE*, p. 36).

From this position, Thomas can see what his life on earth could have been and, like Camus' Janine, he looks back on his former life with nostalgia. For example, he recalls with pleasure, the simple act of walking with his wife and daughter in the twilight: "Quelle adorable minute!" (*NSE*, p. 17). The memory of his daughter Thérèse is enough to instill in Thomas, a sense of the very contradiction that defines the absurd: "Que je pense à la ligne de son col et je perçois un défi à l'horrible condition humaine" (*NSE*, p. 15).

The suggestion here is that Thomas had previously taken these simple pleasures for granted, something that also occurs to Salavin and Meursault. As Bettina Knapp suggests in relation to Duhamel: “Though there is much to correct in the world, there is still no greater experience than life itself — and everyone must become aware of this incredibly marvellous gift allotted to men — before it is too late” (p. 172). Confronted with an alien and hostile environment in which all good thoughts and deeds are punished swiftly and painfully, Thomas looks back to assess “le compte de mes actes et de mes pensées” (*NSE*, p.12). As Meursault had been able to see at last, when imprisoned and awaiting execution in *L’Étranger* (1942), “that to exist is happiness,”<sup>139</sup> so too Thomas Lestrangier realises: “Les hommes de la Terre ne connaissent pas leur bonheur” (*NSE*, p. 152).

Essentially, this is the same theme of *Souvenirs de la vie du Paradis* (1946). In heaven, Sébastien Maillebois experiences a sense of nostalgia for his earthly life: “Ne parle pas de la Terre, ne parle pas du vent de mon pays, ne parle pas de la musique des peupliers, car j’aurais peut-être grand peine à m’empêcher de pleurer.”<sup>140</sup>

In this chapter, we have noted the various bases upon which the absurd might initially be felt by the protagonists of both Duhamel and Camus. In particular, we noted how Meursault and Salavin feel a sense of dislocation from their environment, and how later in Duhamel’s career, we can perhaps see a reverse influence of *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* on Duhamel.

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<sup>139</sup> Germaine Brée. *Albert Camus*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1964, p. 19.

<sup>140</sup> Georges Duhamel. *Souvenirs de la vie du Paradis*. Paris: Mercure de France, 1946, p. 81.

As Camus cannot find unity with a world which resists interpretation, he will next explore social interaction. This quest, which will be the subject of the following chapter, is succinctly summarised by Rizzuto:

Objectively, therefore, a man cannot simultaneously comprehend the world and preserve it. If he cannot preserve it, he loses his base of power. For compensation he turns to the social problems he knows he can solve pragmatically. The question then immediately arises whether the self's desire for unity, or permanence, can be satisfied in this way, whether the human community will be as receptive or as hostile to a liberator's ambitions (*Camus' Imperial Vision*, p. 36).

### **CHAPTER III: EXILE FROM SOCIETY**

There can be no doubt that Camus' own experiences contributed to a largely pessimistic view about human relationships prior to the Second World War. McCarthy points to the artistic differences between members of the Théâtre du Travail in 1936 and 1937 as well as Camus' involvement with *Combat* in 1944:

Bénisti, who visited him in October, says that Camus was already sick of *Combat*. Camus knew that liberation fraternity was not as real as the Algerian sun or the Belcourt streets (p. 202).

*Combat* failed in 1947, despite a group of people sharing a common goal. McCarthy continues: “*Combat* was no longer irreverent. The political disputes overlapped with personal dislikes” (p. 221).

The ruptures that Camus experienced within the theatre and the newsroom recall those experienced by Duhamel and the other residents of l'Abbaye de Créteil in 1906 and 1907, recorded in factual form in his memoirs, *Le Temps de la recherche*, and in fictional form in *Le Désert de Bièvres* (1937). Comeau suggests that it was Duhamel's good friend Charles Vildrac “qui imagina une formule de salut et se mit à rêver tout haut d'une maison communautaire qui réunirait artistes et poètes sous un même toit” (p. 37). Whilst the experiment began well, Duhamel records in his memoirs that the participants “ne tardâmes pas à éprouver les maux de cette vie en commun que nous avions tant souhaitée” (*TR*, p. 77), and not long afterwards, “les discords grondaient dans l'ombre” (*TR*, p. 79).

The participants had undertaken the adventure partly because of an unsatisfying home life in Paris and in this, Duhamel was no different. As he explains: “Nous comprîmes donc bientôt que nous n’avions quitté nos familles que pour en composer une autre” (*TR*, p. 78). According to Duhamel, one of the principal reasons for the failure of the experiment was, ironically, the absence of a paternal figure: “Ce qui manquaient, dans notre thélème, c’était ce regard magistral et paternel dont nous avons voulu précisément nous affranchir” (*TR*, p. 80). Financial difficulties also plagued the group, for it relied on the meagre income generated by works printed on an old, restored printing press.

Whatever the cause of the rupture, there can be no doubt that the experience left a significant imprint on Duhamel in terms of his relationships with others: “Nos querelles de l’Abbaye, qui nous ont tous déchirés, me laissaient parfois pantelant et d’étonnement et de tristesse” (*TR*, p. 82). In fact, the failure of the project and break-up of the group so affected Duhamel that in his memoirs he refers to “la plus sévère des épreuves, celle de la vie en commun” (*TR*, p. 36).

The crux of the problem for Duhamel was that if men of intelligence, good faith and creativity could not live together, then there was little hope for the rest of society. This is the problem that confronts Justin in *Cécile parmi nous* (1938). As Keating suggests, Justin:

felt deeply that if men of supposed intelligence and good will, like himself and his friends, were incapable of getting along together in a free association, then a meeting of minds in the less ideal world of everyday living would thereby be proved impossible (p. 111).

### ***A FIERCE INDIVIDUALISM***

The failure of these projects for Duhamel and Camus reinforced the belief of each in the individual. Braun comments on the strong sense of individual freedom conveyed in *Noces* (1938):



Camus is a convinced individualist. For this individuality, from which man should detach himself in order to unite with the rhythm of life and nature, may not be trampled upon by other individuals or by groups that would inevitably substitute their own purposes for his. Metaphysical freedom is essential to Camus. Any attempt to bring salvation to others must end, according to Camus, in fanaticism. It is for each man to choose his way (p. 28).

However, a second reading of ‘Noces à Tipasa’ confirms that others are not completely excluded from the experience. Indeed, in this depiction of a day-trip to the Roman ruins at Tipasa on the Algerian coast, Camus oscillates between the use of ‘nous’ and ‘moi’ in describing his experiences, the reason for which is initially difficult to discern. For example, he begins the story with: “Nous arrivons par le village” (*Noces*, p. 11), and: “Nous entrons dans un monde jaune et bleu” (*Noces*, p. 11). From each window of the Basilique Sainte-Salsa, “c’est la mélodie du monde qui parvient jusqu’à nous” (*Noces*, p. 14).

It seems, however, that when the narrative moves from the promise of things to come to the actual experience, Camus shifts his emphasis to the individual: “J’ouvre les yeux et mon cœur à la grandeur insoutenable de ce ciel gorgé de chaleur” (*Noces*, p. 14). Further: “Ici même, je sais que jamais je ne m’approcherai assez du monde. Il me faut être nu et puis plonger dans la mer” (*Noces*, p. 15). Interestingly, Camus reverts to ‘nous’ in one of the passages most often cited in the work; one which describes the serene withdrawal of the group to a shady café as the midday sun reigns supreme, and to which we have already referred: “Le visage mouillé de sueur, mais le corps frais dans la légère toile qui nous habille, nous étalons tous l’heureuse lassitude d’un jour de noces avec le monde” (*Noces*, p. 17).

This love of life must, if the narrator is to be truly content, be capable of being shared with those close to him: “Pour moi, je ne cherche pas à y être seul. J’y suis souvent allé avec ceux que

j'aimais et je lisais sur leurs traits le clair sourire qu'y prenait le visage de l'amour" (*Noces*, p. 13). These passages demonstrate a desire to engage others in the pursuit of oneness and therefore, although one can accept Braun's description of "the purely sensuous character of his early inspirations" (p. 29), such descriptions are not necessarily inconsistent, as Braun suggests, with "the prevailing image of Camus as 'the last of the humanists'" (p. 29).

At its highest point, however, *Noces* probably represents a desire in Camus, similar to that of Duhamel and the experiment at Créteil, to share his dream of unity with an elite group, including those closest to him, 'ceux que j'aimais'. It may be that Braun is right when he suggests that Camus' early works do not mention "active kindness or charity" (p. 28).

In *Le Temps de la recherche* (1947), Duhamel describes the shift in his focus after the failure of Créteil; this fierce defence of the individual would be a constant theme for the remainder of his career: "Il s'agit, cette fois, ô paradoxalement, de créer une thélème individuelle" (p. 144). Comeau comments on this failure and in doing so, highlights Duhamel's own feeling of alienation from the mainstream:

Cette affirmation de la personne n'a tout de même pas seulement des mauvais côtés, il s'en faut. C'est elle qui, chez les écrivains du groupe, a fait naître l'ambition de faire œuvre vraiment originale; c'est elle qui les a fait se sentir étrangers dans un monde conformiste (p. 48).

In Duhamel's *Dans l'ombre des statues* (1912), Robert Bailly finds it difficult to break free from the highly structured world that surrounded his father (a famous writer, now deceased). Robert wants for nothing and everything in his life follows a routine. Even the domestic Eloi tells a

would-be visitor: “Mais, cher Monsieur, Monsieur Robert Bailly ne s’occupe de rien.”<sup>141</sup> Robert has ‘written’ three books of his own, but even they were dictated by his father. When Robert is finally revealed as the son of another man, he confesses to having been aware, in his former life, of a strange, unidentified feeling which suggests the absurd: “Ce matin encore, j’étais résigné, effacé, et quelqu’un est venu qui m’a dévoilé la cause de cette grande fatigue et de cette envie de mourir que j’éprouvais sans cesse” (p. 171).

Ironically, one of the main themes of the play is enunciated by Mostier and Eloi when they attempt to provide a magazine with a suitable dedication for the eminent writer. Mostier suggests that it is absolutely essential to use the words: “Nécessité d’une morale individuelle...,” while Eloi adds: “Insuffisance des morales collectives...” (p. 122).

The sugary, humanist aspirations of *La Possession du monde* (1919) did nothing to quell Duhamel’s belief in the individual. The years following the Great War only served to sharpen his convictions: “Toutes les querelles qui divisaient le monde à propos des traités de paix me confirmaient dans cette certitude qu’il fallait amender l’individu, tout d’abord” (*LEE*, p. 46). The gap between the individual and society is widening: “Il fallait, à tout prix, se détourner de la collectivité, se consacrer à l’individu, l’instruire, le former, l’exaucer, le mettre à même de donner sa mesure” (*LEE*, p. 47). Duhamel reserves most of his ire for the rise of the state, particularly that which he experienced during his trip to America in 1928. His descriptions in his memoirs recall Salavin’s sense of exile in a world increasingly consumed by mechanisation:

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<sup>141</sup> Georges Duhamel. *Dans l’ombre des statues*. Paris: Nouvelle Revue Française, 1920, p. 17.

Une civilisation de masse, un communisme américain, plus affirmé somme toute que l'autre et plus sûr de ses méthodes, plus sûr aussi de son empire. Je compris que l'homme devait se débrouiller seul dans la maison désertée, sans âme, avec ses machines mercenaires (*LEE*, p. 273).

Similarly, in *Paroles de médecin* (1946), Duhamel criticises the increasing interference by the state in the field of medicine, which Duhamel believes puts at risk “l'indépendance qui est son caractère essentiel.”<sup>142</sup>

### ***REJECTION OF COMMUNISM***

Both Duhamel and Camus ultimately express a strong distaste for the Communist movement, although, tempted by indifference, Camus was for a short time seduced by “the PC’s absolute nihilism” (McCarthy, p. 76). Despite this, he was never “a very orthodox Communist and he was too much of an outsider to accept party dictates for long” (McCarthy, p. 993).

Similarly, Comeau confirms the staunch protection of the individual as the reason which prevented Duhamel from subscribing to the Communist philosophy: “Les communistes, qui prétendent régénérer la société, ne peuvent rien pour l'individu” (p. 154). Salavin’s experiment with the Communist movement in *Le Club des Lyonnais* (1929) ultimately does not give him the salvation or unity that he seeks.

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<sup>142</sup> Georges Duhamel. *Paroles de médecin*. Monaco: Éditions du Rocher, 1946, p. 24.

### ***AN INDIVIDUAL'S PERCEPTION OF THE ABSURD***

Beginning with *L'Envers et l'endroit* (1937), Camus' pre-war works abound with examples of enigmatic, self-absorbed individuals who feel a sense of dislocation and alienation from society. In 'Entre oui et non', a successful, young man sits in a café and compares the lost paradise of his youth with an adult life lived in accordance with society's expectations: "Oui, tout est simple. Ce sont les hommes qui compliquent les choses" (p. 76).

In *La Mort heureuse* (1938), Mersault leaves 'la maison devant le monde' because of a fear he might be loved.

For Meursault in *L'Étranger*, simple pleasures, such as washing his hands and drying them on a clean hand towel, are rendered meaningless by others: "Le soir, j'y trouve moins de plaisir parce que la serviette roulante qu'on utilise est tout à fait humide" (p. 43). Even Meursault's lover Marie instills within him a sense of revulsion from time to time: "Marie, et ses avant-bras étaient très blancs sous les poils noirs. J'en étais un peu dégoûté" (p. 78).

After rejecting any concept of an immortal soul, Caligula turns resolutely away from the world of men and women: "Les vivants ne suffisent pas à peupler l'univers et à chasser l'ennui. Quand vous êtes tous là, vous me faites sentir un vide sans mesure où je ne peux regarder."<sup>143</sup>

In *Le Malentendu* (1944), Marthe's murderous crusade resembles that of Caligula. As Cruikshank explains: "The awareness of solitude shown by Martha is another aspect of her *feeling* (our italics)

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<sup>143</sup> Albert Camus. *Le Malentendu/Caligula*. Paris: Gallimard, 1958, p. 219.

for the absurd. In fact, *Le Malentendu* is very much a drama of human separation and exile” (*Albert Camus and the Literature of Revolt*, p. 203).

Camus experienced his own sense of isolation from his mother in his life, something which he explored in other works including *L'Étranger* and *La Peste*. In *Le Malentendu*, Marthe asks her mother: “Que ferais-je sans vous à mes côtés, que deviendrais-je loin de vous?” (p. 49) After discovering that they have killed their estranged son and brother Jan, Marthe’s mother commits suicide, something which only serves to sharpen Marthe’s sense of isolation. Her mother’s rejection of her during life and her subsequent suicide means that: “Je l’ai perdue deux fois” (p. 91).

Marthe’s sense of solitude clearly reinforces her sense of the absurd and she knows only one solution. She urges Jan’s wife Maria to reduce herself to a stone-like state, to become like Nagel’s mouse, part of the world, and thus avoid the problem posed by the intellect:

Priez votre Dieu qu’il vous fasse semblable à la pierre. C’est le bonheur qu’il prend pour lui, c’est le seul vrai bonheur. Faites comme lui, rendez-vous sourde à tous les cris, rejoignez la pierre pendant qu’il en est temps (p. 94).

In Duhamel’s *La Pierre d’Horeb* (1926), Antoine Ressayguier also feels the absurd in part as a result of his inability to relate on any reasonable level to other human beings, whom he mostly regards as objects. He hardly knows his father and makes excuses for not catching up. For Antoine, “les autres me paraissaient à peu près dépourvues d’existence, moins réelles que les images [...]” (p. 104). When his cool Don-Juan like façade is ruptured by Daria, Antoine feels alone and exiled in his own world:

Que j'étais seul! En serait-il ainsi de toute ma vie? Des compagnons de hasard, des étrangers, et ce père, plus lointain que les étrangers, ce père qui ne m'avait jamais regardé, jamais entendu (p. 229).

Having rejected the gentle Anne Souvestre, Antoine is in turn rejected by Daria Herenstein, which leads to Antoine's own Clamence-like 'fall' from the image he had of himself: "Je sentais décroître, en moi, ce sentiment d'invulnérabilité qui est le principe essentiel de l'audace" (p. 259).

In *Confession de minuit* (1920), Salavin feels a strong sense of separation from others, even from friends and family. In the same way that Meursault will be unable to accept any responsibility for the Arab's murder, Salavin fails to understand how his dismissal could in any way be attributable to his own acts. In seeking to avoid responsibility and blame his mother, Salavin could be said to be guilty of Sartre's "mauvaise foi."<sup>144</sup>

Immediately following his touching his employer's ear, he talks about the "détresse morale dans laquelle je patauge depuis cette époque" (p. 16), but even so, any notion of personal responsibility is initially absent from him. In fact, as he wanders through the streets on his way home from the office, he blames his mother in advance: "Car somme toute, je suis la victime dans cette affaire" (p. 23). He reflects on his mother's refusal to allow him to originally pursue a professed love of science and chemistry: "J'arrivais graduellement à la conclusion que ma mère était la seule personne responsable de mon infortune" (p. 23). He also blames Lanoue and his wife for his steady decline at dinner and is jealous of their happiness which appears inversely proportional to his own.

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<sup>144</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre. *L'Être et le néant*. Paris: Gallimard, 1943, p. 81.

In the same way that Meursault's social life will be subservient to an instinctive life lived primarily through the body, so too Salavin sacrifices his own social life for a life lived almost exclusively in the mind. As Fitch suggests: "La raison pour laquelle Salavin ne s'intéresse qu'à ce qui se passe dans son esprit, c'est qu'il croit que là, et non pas dans sa vie sociale, se trouve la clef de son être intime et de son identité" (p. 37).

When *La Mort heureuse* (1938) and Duhamel's *Tel qu'en lui-même* (1932) are examined in the context of the theme of exile, their resemblance is noteworthy. For example, during the first evening of his exile in Prague, Mersault immediately "sentait le gonflement sourd et mystérieux de la vie qui s'y écoulait" (*LMH*, p. 98). Mersault becomes acutely, almost intimately aware of the existence of those living behind the walls of the houses that front the street:

C'était comme si toutes les voix de la rue, toute la vie inconnue de l'autre côté des maisons, les bruits des hommes qui ont une adresse, une famille, des dissentiments avec un oncle, des préférences à table, une maladie chronique, le fourmillement des êtres dont chacun avait sa personnalité, comme de grands battements pour toujours séparés du cœur monstrueux de la foule, s'infiltraient dans le passage et montaient tout le long de la cour pour éclater comme des bulles dans la chambre de Mersault (*LMH*, p. 98).

Six years earlier, Salavin describes the same experience in a similar fashion as he waits in Marseille before boarding the boat for Tunis:

Au ras du sol écumait une marée humaine, confuse, à la fois puissante et misérable, joyeuse et rampante, hérivée de rires, de plaintes, de tendresses et d'injures comme d'une frondaison monstrueuse, et qui, dans cette soirée finissante, exhalait toutes sortes d'odeurs plus enivrantes que l'appétit, l'assouvissement et le remords (*TQM*, p. 50).

Salavin ventures out into "ce hourvari" (*TQM*, p. 51). Similarly, Mersault will encounter "une foule nombreuse" (*LMH*, p. 99) on the streets of Prague. There he attempts to retrieve a sense of "le jeu délicat et tendre de la vie" (*LMH*, p. 99) by making eye contact with the women who pass



him by in the street. Ultimately, both Salavin and Mersault are unsuccessful in establishing any sort of bond with the strangers around them and feel more and more the solitude that envelops them.

As far as Salavin is concerned: “De l’épaule, du pied, de la hanche et du ventre, hommes et femmes heurtaient et repoussaient l’étranger, le promeneur perdu” (*TQM*, p. 51). Mersault will say: “Les gens en bonne santé ont une manière d’art naturel pour éviter les regards fiévreux” (*LMH*, p. 99).

The experiment of venturing into the street ends badly for both characters. „As Salavin “longeait des murailles de caisses, des colonnades de barils, des choses sans nom, sans forme, détritues et balayures de ténèbres” (*TQM*, p. 51), so too Mersault will discover a “grand désaccord [...] entre lui et les choses” (*EE*, p. 88).

Wandering aimlessly about the docks, Salavin hears the ocean and his perception of it mirrors Camus’ own fascination for the sea as the pure embodiment of the absurd, at once “appel de vie et invitation à la mort” (*Journaux de voyage*, p. 58). For example, Salavin initially hears the ‘call to life’ of the sea, perhaps the promise of his new beginning in North Africa, the place of light and life for Camus:

Il entendit bientôt, sur sa gauche, la voix de la mer, un halètement court, avec des détonations étouffées et, plus loin, plus haut, à mi-chemin du ciel et des profondeurs, un murmure illimité, ineffable, poignant, propagé de vague en vague, de goutte en goutte, à travers l’étendue nocturne, depuis le fond de l’éternité (*TQM*, p. 52).

Continuing his walk through the docks, Salavin glimpses the ocean once more, but this time, he encounters an ‘invitation à la mort’ in the form of “une eau calme, huileuse, presque morte” (*TQM*, p. 53). There, he is reproached by a waterfront worker and scurries off back into the night.

Salavin’s exile and subsequent sense of solitude stem from his preference for the world of his thoughts and dreams. The real world, with its contradictions, disappointments and others, never delivers the sense of peace and unity that he experiences when left alone with his thoughts. His alienation from others is in part attributable to this penchant for this inner world, a desire confirmed by Fitch:

En fait, le héros de Duhamel constitue la preuve même du fait que «notre vie involontaire (...) dominerait (notre vie volontaire) sans un effort constant»; d’où (comme nous le verrons par la suite) l’aliénation qui est à la base de toute sa vie (p. 34).

Good examples of Salavin’s preference for his imaginary life can be found in ‘Nouvelle rencontre de Salavin’, a story for *Les Hommes abandonnés* (1921). Here, Salavin’s imagination operates on many levels, from the simple act of smoking a cigarette — “Il alluma une cigarette; elle était âcre, piquante; elle ne ressemblait pas du tout à la cigarette qu’une seconde plus tôt il avait fumée en imagination” (*LHA*, p. 212), through to actively seeking out ways to start again — “Pour la millième fois, il reconstruisait sa vie; il imaginait des destinées fabuleuses” (p. 181).

However, as Fitch suggests, this escape into the world of his thoughts is not the result of a conscious decision by Salavin. Rather, as it will for Janine in Camus’ *La Femme adultère* (1957), it seems to occur haphazardly and quite independently of his will: “Mais en fait, son entrée dans cet autre univers est loin d’être toujours l’objet d’un choix conscient de sa part” (Fitch, p. 35). These examples demonstrate that in addition to the alien worlds of the offices of Socque et Bureau

and of Tunis, Salavin battles another alien world in the form of the clash between his imagination and his experience.

*Journal de Salavin* (1927) contains perhaps the best example of the sense of alienation produced when Salavin's imagination and reality collide. In this instalment, he resolves to become a saint and records his saintly episodes in a diary. Finding himself a patron in a cinema which has caught fire, he imagines himself a natural leader, guiding his fellow patrons to safety. The reality of the situation is starkly different and instead of becoming the hero, he flees the cinema a coward: "Le lendemain, j'ouvris le journal comme peut faire un malfaiteur qui craint d'y trouver son portrait" (*JS*, p. 183).

The hero that Salavin imagines himself to be is a complete stranger to the impotent coward of the everyday, and, just as Marthe of *Le Malentendu* will urge Maria's God to turn her into stone, so too Salavin makes a plea to be reinvented as a hero who acts instinctively as might a beast: "Ah! Dieu, si tu existes, fais-moi revivre, quelque jour, dans la peau d'un homme courageux, courageux à la façon des bêtes, courageux d'instinct comme lâche me voici d'instinct" (*JS*, p. 183).

The desire to reduce himself to this state confirms that a feeling for the absurd resides in Salavin: "Tel je suis, et, tel je ne m'accepte pas. Je ne prends pas mon parti d'être Salavin pour l'éternité. Il faut que l'on m'aide et que ça change" (*JS*, p. 184). As Albérès explains: "L'étranger qui pénètre en nous, et change le sens de toutes choses, telle est l'image intérieure du double cauchemar qui, en rendant le monde «absurde», a circonvenu en même temps la conscience" (*Les Hommes traqués*, p. 100).

Salavin's sense of imbalance before the real world is the root of his 'simple souci'. For example, in *Journal de Salavin*, he becomes increasingly reliant on periods of solitude and, as Knapp explains, he:

can no longer respond to the feelings of his friends. He suddenly becomes terribly aware of the fact that they share no common denominator. This feeling of "separateness" grows, and as it does the tone of Salavin's conversation changes. It becomes tinged with irony and cruelty (p. 65).

His need for solitude leads him to take a room away from the home he shares with his mother and Marguerite. He is now totally withdrawn from society, even from those closest to him. His emotions are misplaced and he no longer has any control over them. He cries when leaving Marguerite to take up his new room but cannot understand why: "Je devrais être heureux, soulagé, libre" (*JS*, p. 133). He begins to question why he took the room in the first place and concedes a certain happiness at home with his family: "Je me demande, certains jours, ce que je fais dans cette chambre, à quel rêve j'ai sacrifié les bribes de mon bonheur domestique et ma paix" (*JS*, p. 174). As Marthe will later appreciate in *Le Malentendu* (1944), Salavin experiences a growing sense of exile from those that love him. As Marthe will kill her brother and drive her mother to suicide, Salavin emotionally kills off his mother and Marguerite.

Not long after the incident at the cinema, Salavin witnesses the drowning of two men in the Seine (*JS*, p. 218). Although not a strong swimmer, Salavin considers jumping into the freezing water with them. Far from being motivated by a desire to help the two men, Salavin is tempted by suicide:

Je ne sais quelle envie m'a saisi de me jeter aussi, non pour sauver qui que ce fût: je ne suis pas capable de nager trois brasses, mais pour faire comme les deux autres (*JS*, p. 219).

Salavin's cowardice in the burning theatre and on the banks of the Seine foreshadows the beginning of Clamence's 'fall' in Camus' *La Chute* (1956). Walking home across a bridge at one o'clock one cold, dark Parisian morning, Clamence hears the sound of a body hitting water, then a scream, and discovers that a woman has flung herself into the icy Seine below. Unwilling to attempt a rescue, Clamence walks on into the night.

For his part, Salavin feels guilty, but knows that he will be able to wipe the event from his memory:

Je suis triste parce que je sais que j'oublierai tout cela, comme le reste, qu'un jour viendra où je ne penserai plus à mes deux noyés, sinon avec un calme parfait. J'oublierai tout. Je m'oublierai moi-même un jour, heureusement (*JS*, p. 221).

Similarly, Clamence will struggle with a feeling of guilt, but simply seeks to forget the event: "Ni le lendemain, ni les jours qui suivirent, je n'ai lu les journaux" (p. 76). Michel Martinez has noticed this link, commenting on "la noyade des deux jeunes gens sous les yeux de Salavin, très proche d'une scène fondamentale dans *La Chute*."<sup>145</sup> We suggest that it is stronger than a link. There can be little doubt that Camus was influenced by Duhamel's Salavin.

Without naming Salavin, Braun suggests that Clamence suffers from the same divorce between imagination and reality:

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<sup>145</sup> Michel Martinez. 'La Sainteté sans Dieu dans les Salavin'. *Les Cahiers de l'Abbaye de Créteil*. December (1984), p. 67.

Why did he not help her? It was not even necessary to dive into the icy black river. He could have pressed the alarm signal. But he remained frozen. Literally speaking, he lost himself, as well as his sense of external reality, just as Meursault did when he shot the Arab. Was it not a sign that he lived in a fictitious world, and experienced the fatal impotence of nightmares when faced with the real world in which people despair and die, and real bullets come out of real revolvers? (p. 209).

Jones agrees, pointing to the fact that prior to the woman's suicide, Clamence's life coincided perfectly with his own manufactured image of himself:

The state of innocence is the state prior to his fall, in which he coincided perfectly with his life, and from which judgement was absent: a state of unity. Guilt, conversely, is a state of discord, dissonance, duality, upon which judgement sets the seal by pronouncing and rendering it irreparable. Through this reflection and his experience man falls into consciousness of the state of estrangement (p. 54).

Another interesting study of both authors in the context of the theme of exile is to compare Meursault of *L'Étranger* (1942) with Fortuné Laudrel, from Duhamel's 'Le Voiturier', another of the short stories in *Les Hommes abandonnés* (1921). The subject matter for both works is very similar indeed.

Douglas Alden succinctly summarises that of *L'Étranger*:

Everyone has had a chance to read his novel, *L'Étranger* which tells the life of a man who *feels* (our italics), rather than understands, the absurdity of existence but who realizes, after he has been condemned for a crime which he committed spontaneously, that his own existence does mean something to him after all.<sup>146</sup>

As we know, Meursault's conviction is ultimately secured by his refusal to accept the rules and customs of society. The prosecutor "a déclaré que je n'avais rien à faire avec une société dont je

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<sup>146</sup> Douglas W. Alden. 'French Literature since the Liberation'. *The French Review*. Vol. 20, No. 4. February (1947), p. 274.

méconnaissais les règles” (*L’Étranger*, p. 157). What is more, Meursault does not seek to defend himself, saying only: “Je n’avais pas eu l’intention de tuer l’Arabe” (p. 158), and “que c’était à cause du soleil” (p. 158).

Social rules might have demanded that Meursault observe a respectful period of mourning for his mother, before going to see a comedy film. Similarly, when asked by Marie if he loves her, instead of telling her what she obviously wants to hear (as most might be tempted to do), Meursault is blunt and to the point: “Je lui ai répondu que cela ne voulait rien dire, mais il me semblait que non” (p. 59). Convention might have demanded that Meursault avoid Raymond because he was not well liked in the quartier, but that is of no concern to Meursault: “D’ailleurs, je n’ai aucune raison de ne pas lui parler” (p. 47). Whilst others might reasonably feel revulsion at Raymond’s desire for a violent revenge against the woman who had cheated on him, Meursault helps Raymond because “je n’avais pas de raison de ne pas le contenter” (p. 54). He adopts the same approach in response to Marie’s invitation to marriage: “J’ai dit que cela m’était égal et que nous pourrions le faire si elle le voulait” (p. 69). Others might have felt uncomfortable when asked by “une bizarre petite femme” (p. 71) if she is able to sit down at the same restaurant table, but not Meursault: “Naturellement, elle le pouvait” (p. 71).

As the courtroom crowd mutters as his ‘crimes’ are described, Meursault realises for the first time that his true crime is that of being different: “Pour la première fois, j’ai compris que j’étais coupable” (p. 138).

Duhamel’s Fortuné Laudrel of ‘Le Voiturier’ prefigures Camus’ Meursault. Laudrel inexplicably kills his friend Ginest whilst the latter is in the process of castrating sheep with his teeth. He gives

no other explanation for his act other than to say that Ginest's act was "dégoûtant" (*LHA*, p. 28) and, as will Meursault, cannot conceive of any notion of guilt for his true crime: "La raison, la vraie raison, les juges de Rouen ne l'ont jamais connue. Laudrel, tout le premier, ne la connaissait point" (*LHA*, p. 28).

Laudrel is also a stranger to society. He looks and acts differently: "Il n'était pas tout à fait naturel. Il avait l'air de dormir plutôt que de vivre" (*LHA*, p. 16). From time to time, Laudrel "avait des absences pendant la conversation" (*LHA*, p. 16). He eventually leaves Liancourt, which is hardly surprising to the narrator, "puisque'on ne l'aimait pas et qu'il n'avait pas de société" (*LHA*, p. 14).

Purely as a function of these differences from mainstream society, Laudrel is labelled by the residents of neighbouring Liancourt as "le démon du pays" (*LHA*, p. 21), and is blamed for everything from the massacre of some pigs to the burning down of houses. When a young woman is found dead, it is Laudrel who is blamed, even though another confesses to the murder. The irony is that Laudrel is convicted of crimes he did not commit, simply on the strength of being different, whereas he does not feel personally culpable for a murder for which he is responsible. Similarly, Meursault will be convicted not on the basis of the act *per se*, but on conduct which is inconsistent with that which is expected by society.



Benjamin Crémieux describes ‘Le Voiturier’ as a story of “l’influence occulte de la pensée du groupe sur l’individu.”<sup>147</sup> In addition to feeling a sense of alienation, Laudrel endures the death of his wife, whom he loves, and also a significant health problem for which he refuses to seek medical advice. This causes most of those around him to take him “pour un garçon perdu” (*LHA*, p. 27). This conspiracy of circumstances leads Laudrel to commit the same absurd act as will Meursault, namely murder without justification. As the narrator comments: “Quand un garçon se met à tuer, il n’est point toujours aisé de connaître ce qui l’y pousse” (*LHA*, p. 9).

In the same way that Meursault will be unable to see that he has done anything wrong, Laudrel is incapable of conceiving of any notion of guilt for his crime: “Le curieux, Monsieur, est que ce malheureux ne semblait pas s’intéresser à son procès [...] il n’avait pas l’air bien convaincu que c’était lui qui avait fait la chose” (*LHA*, p. 29). The following comment from Bonnier, which he applies to Meursault, fits equally well for Laudrel: “Le crime est inexplicable, et notre société n’aime pas les mystères” (p. 119).

### ***DISPERSION***

Bonnier makes the point that for the most part, Meursault does not conceive of others as human beings, only objects: “*A priori*, il ne se distingue pas de ces visages anonymes qui, dans la rue, émergent de la foule, nous croisent ou nous dépassent, et qui entrent dans notre champ visuel de face [...]” (p. 105). Bonnier suggests that this fact creates “en nous un *sentiment* (our italics) de

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<sup>147</sup> Benjamin Crémieux. ‘*Les Hommes abandonnés* par Georges Duhamel’. *Nouvelle Revue Française*. January (1922), p. 107.

l'absurde, non pas tragique, mais ironique. Ce ne sont pas des êtres humains qui viennent à notre rencontre, ce sont des têtes et, à la limite, des expressions" (p. 106).

Similarly, Dodd suggests that throughout the *Vie et aventures de Salavin*, "the secondary characters tend to be functional, one dimensional figures rather than fully realised personalities" (p. 120). She cites Mme Salavin and Marguerite as two examples: "He sees those around him, not as people in their own right but as objects placed between him and his goal" (p. 125).

For Camus, when men and women judge others, they are incapable of understanding any of the internal characteristics of their subject and often, regard them as mere objects. Mersault notices this in *La Mort heureuse*: "Il admirait le curieux aveuglement par quoi les hommes, si renseignés pourtant sur ce qui change en eux, imposent à leurs amis l'image qu'une fois pour toutes ils se sont faite d'eux" (p. 163).

Braun notes: "Next to Heidegger, it was probably Jaspers who expressed Camus's intuitions most exactly. According to Jaspers, modern man transforms everything into objects, including his fellow man and himself" (p. 257). This concept was to find its voice in the second volume of Camus' notebooks: "Nostalgie de la vie des autres. C'est que, vue de l'extérieur, elle forme un tout. Tandis que la nôtre, vue de l'intérieur, paraît dispersée" (*Carnets II*, p. 39).

Leon Roudiez suggests a link between Camus and Duhamel in this context. Citing a well known passage from *L'Homme révolté*, Roudiez suggests:

Camus, however, is in general agreement with Gide, Duhamel, and others, when he writes, referring to what we perceive of men's lives: "Apercevant ces vies du dehors, on leur prête une cohérence et une unité qu'elles ne peuvent avoir, en vérité, mais qui paraissent évidentes à l'observateur. Il ne voit que la ligne de façade de ces vies, sans prendre conscience du détail qui les ronge. Nous faisons alors de l'art sur ces existences."<sup>148</sup>

There is ample evidence of this dispersion in the works of Duhamel. Prior to the intimate friendship with Loisel in *Deux Hommes* (1924), when Salavin looks at another, he sees a whole, happy entity and opposes that to the fragmented nature of his own personality: "Tous ces hommes-là, dit Salavin, sont des hommes heureux, puisqu'ils ne sont pas moi. Ils peuvent penser ce qu'ils pensent, et ça n'a, par bonheur, aucune importance. Ils peuvent nourrir des passions, cultiver des désirs, choyer des projets" (*LHA*, p. 209).

Fitch notes the reverse viewpoint; namely that others suffer from the same dispersion when they look at Salavin: "C'est que la rêverie et l'imagination, tout en jouant un rôle dans sa vie, ne trouve aucun reflet dans son existence matérielle par laquelle les autres le connaissent" (p. 34). Duhamel makes this same observation of how others perceive him when he writes, in *La Possession du monde* (1919): "Reconnais-le, tes camarades, s'ils sont vingt-trois, se font, de toi, vingt-trois représentations sensiblement différentes, et, cela, malgré toi, par le simple jeu de la vie" (p. 79).

Sartre would investigate these themes in detail in *L'être et le néant* (1943). In 'Le Regard', Sartre notes that the object being viewed, can, in turn, be transformed into the subject when he looks upon the viewer (p. 296). As Keith Gore suggests in a 1987 edition of Sartre's *Huis Clos* (1947), there then ensues a contest between individuals, where "all my relations with the other are based

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<sup>148</sup> Leon S, Roudiez. 'Characters and Personality: The Novelist's Dilemma'. *The French Review*. (1962), p. 561. Retrieved 08 August 2007 from <http://www.jstor.org>.

on a continuous attempt to find ways of keeping him as it were ‘trapped’ within his objectivity, while remaining a subject myself.”<sup>149</sup>

Perhaps this theory might provide a possible explanation for Salavin’s desire to reach out for Sureau’s ear. When confronted by his superior Sureau, Salavin might reasonably have felt like an object. Looking to seize the initiative, Salavin instinctively reaches out for Sureau’s ear to prove to himself “que cette oreille n’était pas une chose interdite, inexistante, imaginaire, que ce n’était que de la chair humaine, comme ma propre oreille” (*CM*, p. 14).

Pontré also notices evidence of this phenomenon in Laurent Pasquier in his observations of his sister Cécile. Laurent, argues Pontré, believes that Cécile is ‘saved’ by her musical genius and commitment to the arts. He cannot see how Cécile might be capable of suffering. Pontré notices this:

décalage entre l’idée que Laurent fait de sa soeur et la réalité de l’existence de Cécile. Parce qu’il ne la voit que de l’extérieur, il a tendance à l’idéaler sans se rendre compte des émotions qui la gouvernent (p. 196).

### ***CAMUS AND FRIENDSHIP***

McCarthy notes that in 1937, Camus was happy living in a house high on a hill outside Algiers with a balcony overlooking the sea. He shared the house with friends Jeanne and Marguerite although there were always many people staying there:

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<sup>149</sup> Keith Gore, ed. *Huis Clos: Jean-Paul Sartre*. London: Methuen, 1987, p. 11.

It was always full of people and Camus wrote a poem about it which shows his ambivalent need for friendship: ‘Where the world stops a friendship is born.’ But soon the world would begin to move again, spinning towards death and leaving the friendship behind (p. 98).

For Camus, friendship was elusive. In the *Combat* newsroom, “the moments of friendship around the long table remained as happy a memory as the rehearsals of the Equipe” (McCarthy, p. 129). Yet even after the revolt of Tarrou and Rieux in *La Peste* (1947) and the subsequent work of *Lettres à un ami allemand* (1948), Camus finds it difficult to move beyond the notion of the elite group described in *Noces* (1938). In the third volume of his notebooks, he remarks:

Je n’aime pas l’humanité en général. Je m’en sens solidaire d’abord, ce qui n’est pas la même chose. Et puis j’aime quelques hommes, vivants ou morts, avec tant d’admiration que je suis toujours jaloux ou anxieux de préserver ou de protéger chez tous les autres ce qui, par hasard, ou bien un jour que je ne puis prévoir, les a fait ou les fera semblables aux premiers.<sup>150</sup>

### ***DUHAMEL AND FRIENDSHIP***

If Camus’ need for friendship was, as McCarthy suggests, ambivalent, then Duhamel’s was urgent. Jean-Richard Bloch describes Duhamel’s “besoin de l’amitié virile.”<sup>151</sup> In *Biographie de mes fantômes*, Duhamel holds friendship to be one of the most important of his life experiences: “Si l’amitié forme un des thèmes essentiels de mes ouvrages, c’est d’abord qu’elle fut, qu’elle est, qu’elle sera l’un des ressorts majeurs de mon expérience humaine” (p. 67). Duhamel also acknowledges the many impediments to a successful friendship. Talking about a breakdown in his friendship with Chennevière in 1922, he notes: “Les épreuves de l’amitié ont toujours été, pour

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<sup>150</sup> Albert Camus. *Carnets III: March 1951 – December 1959*. Paris: Gallimard, 1989, p. 72.

<sup>151</sup> Jean-Richard Bloch. *Carnaval est mort — Premiers Essais pour mieux comprendre mon temps*. Paris: Éditions de la Nouvelle Revue Française, 1920, p. 186.

moi, cruelles et même dramatiques” (*LEE*, p. 126). It is logical then for Duhamel to explore this theme of friendship in the Salavin series, after the failure of Créteil. Jean Prévost agrees:

Tous les individualistes adorent l’amitié, depuis Epicure jusqu’à Montaigne. Aussi un livre comme *Deux Hommes* était naturel, était nécessaire dans la carrière de Duhamel. Les réactions de deux individus l’un sur l’autre, il devait fatalement s’imposer cette étude après celle du mouvement propre à l’individu isolé; il devait arriver au second grand aspect de la gravitation des âmes.<sup>152</sup>

Duhamel’s own turbulent relationship with Gabriel Adain may have formed the model for *Deux Hommes* (1924). Like Salavin’s relationship with Loisel, Duhamel’s friendship with Adain fluctuates between periods of joy and misery. Both commence with “une belle et longue lune de miel” (*BF*, p. 94), during which, in *Deux Hommes*, Salavin and Loisel are open and honest with one another. For example, Salavin frankly comments to Loisel: “Il y a dans ma vie un principe d’incertitude et de désordre.”<sup>153</sup> He even warns Loisel at the commencement of their friendship: “Je ne suis pas un ami pour vous. Il n’y a, en moi, aucune possibilité d’affection” (*DH*, p. 83).

For his part, Loisel shows himself extremely insightful in the early stages of their friendship and succinctly sums up his friend: “Vous êtes un homme dévoré de scrupules. Vous vous jugez avec sévérité, parce que vous avez, tout au fond, une trop belle idée de vous-même” (*DH*, p. 84). As for Loisel, he candidly admits his own truth: “Je n’ai jamais eu d’amis. Je n’ai que des camarades de travail ou de jeu. Il me faut un ami. Vous, et pas un autre” (*DH*, p. 87).

For the first time, perhaps, Salavin comes face to face with someone whom he respects and admires and who is also capable of an objective assessment of him. This process will be further

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<sup>152</sup> Jean Prévost. ‘L’Individualisme de Duhamel’. *Les Cahiers de l’Abbaye de Créteil*. December (2001), p. 50.

<sup>153</sup> Georges Duhamel. *Deux Hommes*. Paris: Mercure de France, 1963, p. 73.

developed by Duhamel in *Le Club des Lyonnais* (1929) with Aufrère and culminate with Salavin's death-bed self-appraisal in *Tel qu'en lui-même* (1932).

As Camus would find friendship when the world stops spinning, the honeymoon period of Salavin's relationship with Loisel slows the march of his own life and Salavin experiences "une heure de liberté totale. L'heure autour de laquelle la journée tourne, comme une roue aux lenteurs exaspérantes" (*DH*, p. 116).

As the friendship progresses, however, Salavin and Loisel begin to take on characteristics and mannerisms of each other. For example, Loisel finds himself agreeing with Salavin about the latter's affection for grey skies and wind even though "en vérité il n'avait jamais autant aimé le fantasque ciel de mars et le vent bourru" (*DH*, p. 72). Towards the end of the work he even assumes Salavin's annoying habit of misplacing objects: "Sa cravate change sournoisement de place dès qu'il la perd de vue" (*DH*, p. 214). In the same way, Salavin "se surprenait parfois avec étonnement à imiter certains gestes d'Edouard" (*DH*, p. 226).

In his dealings with others, Loisel has always been motivated by what he calls "la bonne technique" (*DH*, p. 61), which in essence means that he likes to keep up appearances. For example, when he first meets Salavin in the restaurant, Loisel "se fit apporter une «assiette à l'anglaise», ce qui ne manque pas de «distinction»" (*DH*, p. 63). As the relationship matures, Salavin suddenly finds himself similarly motivated. When he invites Loisel and Clémentine over the first time, he worries about how he might be received if he smokes before their arrival: "Que pensera la femme de Loisel?" (*DH*, p. 100). Slowly, but surely, Salavin and Loisel are subsumed

into one, the same danger to which Mersault thought himself susceptible if he remained in ‘la maison devant le monde’.

*Deux Hommes* (1924) is revealing from the perspective of dispersion, because at the highest point of the relationship, Salavin and Loisel relate to one another on the level of subject/subject and not subject/object. During this period, Salavin luxuriates in one hour of complete freedom, “l’heure où l’on est enfin soi-même, sous le regard complice et stimulant d’un être qui vous aime” (*DH*, p. 116).

*Deux Hommes* suggests that friendship might, at least temporarily, be capable of overcoming dispersion and restoring a sense of unity with others. Loisel’s friendship enables Salavin to temporarily view himself as:

un Salavin délivré de lui-même, un Salavin qui méprise la machine à coudre, foule sans honte les marches de son escalier branlant, se désintéresse de sa concierge et passe dans son corridor comme sous un arc de triomphe (*DH*, p. 108).

Comeau agrees: “Les débuts de l’amitié entre Salavin et Loisel apportent une telle transformation chez notre héros que l’on croirait volontiers qu’il est maintenant sauvé de lui-même” (p. 170). Similarly, Dodd suggests that *Deux Hommes* initially presents us with “a new Salavin — he has achieved his wish to “me recommencer” — and he seems, indeed, to be metamorphosed both mentally and physically” (p. 113).

It is of great importance, however, that when fissures develop within the friendship, Salavin returns to the anxious, self-absorbed man of *Confession de minuit* (1920). He immediately feels an object once more, and would give “vingt sous, cent sous, pour avoir le droit de porter la main sur le vêtement de ce monsieur et d’en chasser l’étrange cheveu blanc” (*DH*, p. 156). This is a



manifestation of his feeling for the absurd brought on by a sense of alienation. When Loisel is late for a planned engagement, Salavin demonstrates just how different he feels from his society:

Il murmure sourdement contre ces quartiers du Nord où il ne s'aventure presque jamais et dont les habitants ne sont pas, juge-t-il, de la même race que lui. Rien que des visages hostiles [...] (*DH*, p. 158).

The world also shrinks away from him, as “un silence inquiétant envahit le monde” (*DH*, p. 159).

There are a number of factors which contribute to the ultimate demise of the friendship of Loisel and Salavin. In the early stages, they make the mistake of regarding themselves at the centre of the universe and begin to lose touch with other friends and acquaintances. As Loisel confesses: “À compter d'aujourd'hui, je ne veux plus voir ces hommes” (*DH*, p. 113). The two men “ne comptaient que sur eux-mêmes. Ils n'espéraient rien des autres” (*DH*, p. 117). Indifference to the lives of others gradually turns into pure condescendence and pride. As the two men walk arm in arm: “Ils sont pleins d'orgueil parce qu'ils sont grands, parce qu'ils sont deux, parce qu'ils sont eux et non pas deux hommes quelconques” (*DH*, p. 118). Even Lhuilier, a source of compassion and friendship for Salavin in *Confession de minuit*, is ignored by Salavin when he is with his friend Loisel. As Lhuilier complains: “Vous ne m'avez pas dit bonjour, peut-être à cause de votre ami” (*DH*, p. 263).

It is almost as if Salavin seeks to deny his past before Loisel, a past where “l'homme était l'ennemi de l'homme; il ne songeait qu'à l'assujettir, à le voler, à l'abattre” (*DH*, p. 118). In fact, Loisel encourages Salavin to abandon his past in pursuit of their friendship, using logic that appeals to Salavin's urgent need for reinvention:

Et puis, qu'importe ce passé? Vous vivez, maintenant, une vie pleine et nette: vous travaillez, vous avez une femme et un enfant [...] Dites-vous, répétez-vous que tout le reste doit s'oublier, que vous êtes sauvé (*DH*, p. 86).

This is the personal revolution which Salavin courts throughout the entire cycle and which culminates with his suicide in *Tel qu'en lui-même* (1932).

In this context, both Loisel and Salavin prefigure Clamence prior to his fall in *La Chute* (1956). Loisel is the mirror image of Clamence at the outset of his friendship with Salavin. He is “tout à fait content de soi. Sa vie lui semblait enrichie et, incomparablement, plus belle que celle des gens qu'il croisait sur son chemin” (*DH*, p. 88). Similarly, Clamence will confirm: “Je jouissais de ma propre nature, et nous savons tous que c'est là le bonheur” (*La Chute*, p. 24).

Salavin initially lacks the confidence and self-assuredness of both Loisel and Clamence but this improves as his friendship with Loisel progresses, to the point where the two friends “reconstruisent l'univers moral sur des bases neuves et stables. Une grande pitié mêlée de mépris leur est venue à l'égard du reste de l'humanité” (*DH*, p. 119). Once more, any notion of solidarity or fraternity is excluded. This urge to abandon his past and relationships with others is an example of Salavin's being tempted by nihilism, a theme we will examine in more detail in chapter five.

As his relationship with Loisel begins to wane, Salavin re-acquires a memory of what it means to be Salavin. For example, he notices in himself “un Salavin d'autrefois, un Salavin presque oublié, longtemps refoulé dans les profondeurs, émerge, monstre tourmenté, à la surface du temps” (*DH*, p. 155).

Both men realise that they have ignored others to their own detriment. Ultimately, Loisel revisits his old work mates, but things are not the same: “J’ai perdu ma place dans le monde. J’ai sacrifié tous mes amis pour un seul homme. A son tour, celui-là m’a sacrifié. Je n’ai que ce que je mérite” (*DH*, p. 256). When Salavin and Loisel attempt to remedy this problem by introducing Salavin’s old friend Lanoue into the equation, Salavin becomes jealous when Loisel and Lanoue became close. Salavin suffers from “ce spectacle, et sa douleur grinçait des dents” (*DH*, p. 208).

The critics are divided in their assessment of *Deux Hommes*. Knapp suggests that the relationship is doomed from the outset: “Foremost, Salavin is incapable of friendship. He has never known the meaning of such a relationship” (p. 69). On the contrary, Salavin has certainly shown himself capable of beginning and maintaining friendships, as his relationships with Lanoue, Lhuilier and Loisel demonstrate. The point is, however, that these friendships are, for various reasons, incapable of enduring. With respect to Lanoue, Salavin himself describes him as “un camarade d’enfance” (*CM*, p. 43), and observes: “Lanoue a toujours fait partie de ma vie” (*CM*, p. 43), clearly implying a relationship of some duration. When Salavin attends dinner at Lanoue’s, he is initially at ease, playing with their infant and enjoying their meal together. The sequential diminution in his happiness is unrelated to any behaviour on the part of Lanoue or his wife. Whilst Knapp is right when she observes that ultimately, “his rapport with Lanoue ended in utter disaster” (p. 69), it is not right to say that Salavin is unable to make friends.

There is more merit in the next assertion by Knapp:

The kind of friendship enjoyed by the protagonists in *Two Men* cannot, as we have seen, be prolonged. It is based on an unconscious will to dominate, the need for one to thrive on the other. In effect, one member has to be the parasite. True friendship has to be experienced individually (p. 71).

Bourgeon is of a similar view: “Deux hommes, l’un donne, l’autre reçoit, l’un tourmente, l’autre souffre — et seul bénéficiera de ce commerce celui qui donne et qu’on tourmente” (p. 81). This is the contest at the heart of Sartre’s ‘Le Regard’. In a sense, both men pursue the friendship as a means to an end, Salavin with a view to finding the formula that might bring him salvation and Loisel with the aim of maintaining the image he has created of himself, consistent with ‘la bonne technique’.

Consequently, when Salavin loses his job, Loisel makes enquiries at his place of work and finds a position for him. Salavin is initially grateful, but this gratitude is quickly followed by resignation and despondency. Although Loisel might also have been motivated by a degree of compassion and good faith, his underlying reason for helping Salavin, (as it will be for Clamence in helping the infirm cross the road), is to gain a sense of fulfillment in having others reliant on him: “Obliger ses amis était la seule joie véritable [...]” (*DH*, p. 176). Just as Clamence will be unable, after being humiliated by the bicycle rider, to recall a “belle image de moi-même” (*La Chute*, p. 60), neither can Loisel, having been humiliated by Salavin, savour the joy that might otherwise be associated with the announcement that he is to have a financial interest in the business: “Il fut tout étonné de n’en ressentir aucune joie” (*DH*, p. 181). Loisel is now far removed from the confident man who walked into the restaurant at the beginning of the novel.

Loisel is Clamence’s brother because after his ‘fall’, Loisel acquires an image of himself which, unlike that he carefully manufactured prior to meeting Salavin, is not entirely self-serving. After fleeing Salavin and boarding a tram, Loisel gives over money for a ticket but is not handed proof of his purchase by the conductor. Loisel considers himself complicit in the crime, and his reaction demonstrates just how far he has come and how much he now resembles Salavin:

Je ne suis ni meilleur, ni plus sage, ni plus intelligent que ce misérable. Je ne suis pas ce que je suis, je ne fais pas ce que je fais, je ne veux pas ce que je veux, et j'exige quand même l'amour, l'admiration et la gratitude des hommes (*DH*, p. 275).

It is Lafay who identifies the real reason for the failed friendship. She describes the work as the “drame d'une impossible relation à l'autre, quand chacun se découvre étranger à soi-même” (*Duhamel revisité*, p. 57). In essence, Salavin and Loisel are both one-dimensional beings. Salavin, as we have seen, is defined by his thoughts and will forever be incapable of a meaningful inner dialogue unless he can reconcile his thoughts with reality. Foreshadowing Clamence, Loisel is incapable of having a meaningful dialogue with himself until the end of the work and accordingly, neither party has the ability to form lasting relationships. We have already noted Rizutto's suggestion: “Dialogue first requires inner dialogue” (*Camus' Imperial Vision*, p. 111).

At the end of the work, Loisel enunciates its principal theme, which was also to be that of *Le Désert de Bièvres* (1937): “Nous souhaitons que la concorde et l'harmonie régissent toutes les actions des peuples; et, pourtant, nous n'avons pu mettre à l'unisson nos deux voix” (*DH*, p. 277).

This theme is also evident in one of Duhamel's last works, *Le Complexe de Théophile* (1958). Here, Théophile Chédevièle and Ernest Himer both profess religious faith and both are employees of the same aviation company. Chédevièle, like Salavin, is a simple bureaucrat and Himer is a pilot. They often travel together and are able to form a friendship. However, in reality they are poles apart. While Chédevièle places his faith in reason, Himer loves games of pure chance, which he believes bring him closer to God.

Essentially, *Le Complexe de Théophile* is a story of exile and separation. From Himer's blunt assertion that: “Il est apparemment impossible aux hommes de s'entendre, même sur les

problèmes les plus simples,”<sup>154</sup> a feeling for the absurd is born in Chédevièle: “Le printemps multipliait ses sourires et ses charmes: je ne voyais rien, je ne sentais rien, je ne jouissais de rien” (p. 101).

Himer professes to pray to his own, personal God, something which Chédevièle cannot reconcile with his notion of faith. The absurd tightens its grip on him: “J’avais le sentiment d’avoir fait deux prières pour deux Dieux différents. Le monde tremblait sur ses bases. Mon angoisse était sans mesure” (p. 133). Feeling increasingly exiled, Chédevièle even grows apart from his sister Béatrice. As Salavin would blame his mother for his dismissal, so too Chédevièle will attempt to shift onto Béatrice, his feeling of alienation: “Elle prie pour moi, sans aucun doute, et cela signifie qu’elle prie pour je continue à faire vivre la maison. En somme, elle prie pour elle” (p. 102).

Chapters two and three of this thesis have investigated the bases upon which a feeling of the absurd can be experienced by an individual. As we have seen from the preceding discussion, this can be a destructive process, leading to a sense of alienation and estrangement. However, both Duhamel and Camus believe that such a feeling ought not be ignored; it is the starting point for a more sophisticated understanding of the absurd on an intellectual level. Camus stresses the importance of this process, noting that “un peu de pensée éloigne de la vie, mais *beaucoup y ramène* (our italics)” (*LMS*, p. 138). The choices available following this emotional awakening, are, as we have seen, ‘le retour inconscient dans la chaîne, ou [...] l’éveil définitif.’ We seek to demonstrate that the same choices are available for Duhamel’s protagonists. The following chapter will consider the first of these pathways.

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<sup>154</sup> Georges Duhamel. *Le Complexe de Théophile*. Paris: Mercure de France, 1958, p. 97.



#### **CHAPTER IV: 'LE RETOUR INCONSCIENT DANS LA CHAÎNE'**

In general terms, for Camus, 'le retour dans la chaîne' is constituted by any behaviour which amounts to a death in the midst of life itself: "Ce n'est pas de mourir qui m'effraie mais de vivre dans la mort" (*Carnets III*, p. 125). In essence, it means failing to accept full responsibility for one's life, generally reflected by resigning oneself to a mediocre life or to death.

#### ***A MEDIOCRE LIFE***

In the first volume of his notebooks, Camus describes the man who shows lots of promise, but who is content to work all day at a mindless task in an office. On Sundays, this man wakes late and sits at the window watching the rain or the passers by. Expressed simply by Camus: "Il attend de mourir" (*Carnets I*, p. 99). Mediocrity was anathema to Camus; it is a constant theme in his notebooks and works. Speaking of his accepting a post at Sidi-bel-Abbès school in 1937, McCarthy highlights the threat of an average existence as the real reason for Camus' departure after only one day: "In October he went there, stayed one day and caught the next train back. The ugliness of the town, the school and his work bothered him less, so he told Jacques Heurgon, than the mediocrity" (p. 97).

For both Duhamel and Camus, free time is the enemy only of the average man. In *La Pesée des âmes*, Duhamel suggests: "L'oisiveté n'est pas, pour les caractères mal défendus, un climat recommandable" (p. 164). Similarly, Mersault will note in *La Mort heureuse* (1938): "Avoir son temps était à la fois la plus magnifique et la plus dangereuse des expériences. L'oisiveté n'est fatale qu'aux médiocres" (p. 124).



In *Les Plaisirs et les jeux* (1922), Duhamel gives an example of a false use of time: “J’ai toujours eu pitié de ces malheureux qui consomment leur temps à supputer un héritage. Holà! Petits hommes! Ma race est devant moi. En route et bon courage!”<sup>155</sup>

Like Camus, Duhamel is a strident critic of the individual failing to accept full responsibility for his or her life, one manifestation of which is an unreasonable fear of, or resignation to, death. Prior to Gérard’s realisation that he is to die in Duhamel’s *Le Combat* (1913), he and his father Vincent are affected by this malaise. Anne-Marie comments on Vincent’s air of resignation: “Le fleuve [...] fait de toi un douloureux homme bien avant le temps” (*Le Combat*, p. 37). As will Camus’ plague, the flood brings death, physical for some, metaphysical for others, such as Vincent and his son, Gérard. Vincent is paralysed by the fear that the pain in his legs could somehow reach his heart and cause him to die: “Je cuve auprès du feu ma part de douleurs, et j’attends chaque jour de mourir, à mon tour” (p. 23). Driven into inaction by this fear, Vincent is as one with Camus’ man who sits at the window on Sunday afternoon. As Vincent declares: “Je ne vis pas... j’attends” (p. 25).

As does Mersault of *La Mort heureuse*, Vincent has the finances to enjoy a contented life, but seems incapable of happiness. It takes Anne-Marie to point out that, far from helping the peasants overcome their own fear of the flooding river, by giving them money, Vincent is actually cementing them into their mediocre routines. To convey Anne-Marie’s message, Duhamel uses similar language to that later employed by Camus, that of ‘waiting to die’: “Tu laisseras, sur la cheminée, non pas ce qu’il faut pour les faire vivre, mais ce qui permet d’attendre la mort” (*Le*

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<sup>155</sup> Georges Duhamel. *Les Plaisirs et les jeux*. Paris: Mercure de France, 1922, p. 173.

*Combat*, p. 36). For Vincent and Gérard at this point, they ‘know’ that they will eventually die, but that fact has not “truly registered” (Rizzuto, *Camus’ Imperial Vision*, p. 43).<sup>156</sup>

Once he achieves lucidity after learning he has a terminal illness, Gérard realises his error and tries to convey what he knows to the peasant workers: “Vous demeurez là, depuis des années, la tristesse appuie sur votre poitrine de même que l’eau pèse sur vos champs. Le goût de la mort épaissit vos lèvres” (*Le Combat*, p. 135). The alternative, conveyed once more by Anne-Marie, is a revolt against the river, and, in turn, the fear of death: “Je crois qu’on peut toujours vivre autrement qu’ici” (*Le Combat*, p. 36). This prefigures Diego’s stance in *L’Etat de siège* (1948) or the reasoning underlying *La Peste*: “Peste. Tous luttent — et chacun à sa façon. La seule lâcheté est de se mettre à genoux” (*Carnets II*, p. 107).

In Duhamel’s ‘Une expédition’, one of the short stories for *Les Hommes abandonnés* (1921), a man is murdered in nearby Ban-de-Moussy. Judge Bocquet and Dr Vendredi are charged with the duty of attending the scene of the crime, a field belonging to a local farmer. It is August and the field is high with grain. When the men arrive, the peasants have gathered and a solemn silence reigns. Not one of them, however, has had the courage to enter the fields. The narrator, a medical student, asks himself why that might be the case: “Était-ce effroi de la mort, crainte d’être compromis dans l’affaire, ou respect du froment, mais personne n’avait pénétré dans les blés” (*LHA*, p. 242). The reader could infer that an inherent fear of death explains the reticence of the peasants; when the judge requisitions one of them to carry the body away, they all willingly

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<sup>156</sup> Rizzuto’s use of the term ‘truly registered’ will be used throughout.

follow: “Derrière lui, tout le village se rua, d’un seul coup, et le champ n’eut plus rien de mystérieux, ni de sacré” (*LHA*, p. 246).

Early on in *Confession de minuit* (1920), Duhamel describes Salavin as living a ‘death in life’: “Je lis toujours couché, pour oublier le plus possible mon corps, pour être presque mort à ma propre vie et tout entier avec mes héros” (*CM*, p. 35). However, if the Salavin of *Confession de minuit* is acquiescent and submissive, the Salavin of subsequent instalments is much more resistant to the temptation to remain only that which he perceives himself to be. In an interview given by Duhamel to the magazine *Sept*, on 10 January 1936, Duhamel confirms that the subject he is dealing with is Salavin’s refusal to resign himself to what he considers an ordinary life:

L’histoire de Salavin c’est l’histoire d’un homme qui, privé d’axe métaphysique, ne renonce quand même pas à la vie morale et n’a pas accepté de déchoir (Simon, *Modernité de Salavin*, p. 92).

Simon sees a similar theme in the conduct of Laurent Pasquier: “Après chaque échec, un perpétuel rebondissement, non seulement parce qu’il faut bien en sortir, mais parce que l’échec même comporte une leçon, une expérience, une secrète richesse.”<sup>157</sup> The crucial difference between Salavin and Laurent is that, whilst the former seeks absolute reinvention, Laurent Pasquier’s response is a measured one, using the resources of reason and intelligence. For Laurent, there remain:

dans le chaos universel, des zones de raison et d’ordre, et la science, dans l’effondrement de la métaphysique, peut encore fournir des instruments et les directives d’une action noble et salutaire, puisqu’elle fait reculer la souffrance et la mort (Simon, *Modernité de Salavin*, p. 93).

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<sup>157</sup> Pierre-Henri Simon. *Georges Duhamel ou le Bourgeois sauvé*. Paris: Éditions du temps présent, 1946, p. 138.

Simon considers Salavin's story as one of "détresse personnelle, du dépassement impossible du soi" (*Modernité de Salavin*, p. 91). Later, in his notes for *Le Premier Homme* (1960), Camus will also stress the need for improvement rather than reinvention: "Thème de l'énergie [...] La seule loi de l'être c'est d'être et de se surpasser" (*Carnets III*, p. 149). The problem for Salavin is that he confuses improving himself, being "le meilleur homme" (*LPM*, p. 182), with the desire for complete reinvention, being someone other than who he is. We shall discuss this aspect of his personality in our final chapter.

### 'LE SAUT'

In *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (1942), Camus gives us more specific examples of 'le saut':

L'esquive mortelle, qui fait le troisième thème de cet essai, c'est l'espoir. Espoir d'une autre vie qu'il faut «mériter», ou tricherie de ceux qui vivent non pour la vie elle-même, mais pour quelque grande idée qui la dépasse, la sublime, lui donne un sens et la trahit (*LMS*, p. 23).

This concept is fleshed out later in the same work: "Le saut sous toutes ses formes, la précipitation dans le divin ou l'éternel, l'abandon aux illusions du quotidien ou de l'idée, tous ces écrans cachent l'absurde" (*LMS*, p. 125). There are then, for Camus, two principal expressions of 'le saut'. The first and most significant is reliance on hope, either hope for an eternal life or faith in some overriding idea that might transcend one's life and give it the unity it lacks. The second principal form of evasion is that of surrendering to the illusions of the everyday, or subscribing to a formulaic approach to life.

There is a third manifestation of 'le saut' evident in the works of Camus, namely that of nihilism. *L'Homme révolté* (1951) confirms our earlier conclusion that nihilism may precede absolute

lucidity. Whilst discussing the surrealists, Camus suggests that ‘l’éveil définitif’ lay beyond nihilism:

Si André Breton et quelques autres ont finalement rompu avec le marxisme, c’est qu’il y avait en eux quelque chose de plus que le nihilisme, une seconde fidélité à ce qu’il y a de plus pur dans les origines de la révolte: ils ne voulaient pas mourir (*HR*, p. 126).

Writing about Camus’ *Lettres à un ami allemand*, written in 1943/44 but published in 1948, Jauer comments on the fact that Camus aligns the ‘ends over the means’ nihilists of totalitarian régimes with the false hope offered by religion:

L’auteur nous présente ainsi une analyse du totalitarisme nazi comme ce saut que constitue le refus de l’absurde par la promesse des religions. Les nazis ont érigé de «faux dieux», révèrent des «dieux lâches», dieux auxquels l’auteur oppose l’homme lui-même (p. 208).

Duhamel uses similar language in *Manuel de protestataire* (1952): “Respectons l’ordre souverain, mais défions-nous de l’organisation dogmatique. Elle est à mettre au premier rang de nos faux dieux.”<sup>158</sup> Lafay confirms Duhamel’s position: “Les horribles expériences des Nazis pendant la Seconde Guerre mondiale ont justifié ses mises en garde contre le démon de l’organisation, le totalitarisme, les faux dieux”<sup>159</sup> (Lafay, *Georges Duhamel ou la Préoccupation éthique*, p. 115).

Thus, for both authors, nihilism is aligned with the false hope offered by religion and can be a manifestation of ‘le retour inconscient dans la chaîne’, an aspect we will treat in further detail in the following chapter.

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<sup>158</sup> Georges Duhamel, *Manuel du protestataire*. Paris: Mercure de France, 1952, p. 20.

<sup>159</sup> Arlette Lafay. ‘Georges Duhamel ou la Préoccupation éthique’. *Les Cahiers de l’Abbaye de Créteil*. December (1997), p. 15.

***DISDAIN FOR A FORMULAIC EXISTENCE***

As Jones suggests: “The type of behaviour which Meursault censures is behaviour which is automatic” (p. 21). This is consistent with Claude Treil’s argument that Meursault “redoute les sentiments sur lesquels la société a parfois tendance à faire des phrases: le Mariage, la Mort, l’Amour.”<sup>160</sup> In other words, there is in Meursault, “une véritable méfiance de la vertu formelle” (Treil, p. 118), something also present in his creator. Camus writes in the first volume of his notebooks: “L’homme vraiment libre est celui qui, acceptant la mort comme telle, en accepte du même coup les conséquences — c’est-à-dire le renversement de toutes les valeurs traditionnelles de la vie” (*Carnets I*, p. 118). Speaking of those who lived in Camus’ time, Albérès considers that Camus “a pu les amener à reconsidérer toutes sortes de conventions sur lesquelles la société avait tendance à se reposer.”<sup>161</sup>

For Camus, one function of his natural indifference is “ne pas consentir à la convention et aux heures de bureau” (*Carnets I*, p. 92). It is by rejecting the security of convention that men and women preserve for themselves the chance for a meaningful life: “Chômage: l’homme pleure. La grande misère de l’homme c’est qu’il ait à pleurer et à souhaiter ce qui l’humilie” (*Carnets I*, p. 114). Generally, any subscription to a life formula constitutes ‘le saut’ for Camus, and, whilst particularly relevant to the pursuit of wealth, his indifference in this respect also extends to notions of marriage and romantic love, as well as to the hope that society often places in miracles or some other divine intervention.

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<sup>160</sup> Claude Treil. *L’Indifférence dans l’œuvre d’Albert Camus*. Québec: Éditions Cosmos, 1971, p. 118.

<sup>161</sup> R.-M. Albérès. ‘Le Prix Nobel’. *Camus*. Paris: Hachette, (1964), p. 224.

*La Peste* (1947) demonstrates how truly difficult it is to break out of a life previously ordered by routine and convention. Initially, the people of Oran continue to catch public transport, attend the cinema and dine out. Much earlier, in ‘Une vie nouvelle’, one of the short stories for *Entretiens dans le tumulte* (1919), Duhamel pleads with his countrymen not to forget the horrors of the Great War, and to use it to completely revise their way of life. It is with regret that he concedes that for many:

Vous allez reprendre votre morale usée, vos vieilles religions compromises, vos institutions sociales et politiques condamnées, votre verre d’absinthe, votre esprit de clocher, votre naufrage quotidien! (p. 159).

André Thérive suggests that in relation to his friend Duhamel, it might come as a surprise to learn that “un esprit comme le sien ait nourri avant la guerre, certains préjugés modernes sur le progrès social et politique.”<sup>162</sup> Thérive suggests that, with the War as his catalyst, Duhamel’s “réveil fut dur” (p. 45), and that, as a result, he was obliged to revise his concept of civilisation (p. 44). Ouy agrees, suggesting a re-reading of *Civilisation* and *Vie des martyrs* so that one might recognise “qu’il faut travailler, de toute nécessité, à reconstruire l’univers moral” (p. 47). In *La Possession du monde* (1919), a work born from the Great War, Duhamel proposes, in much the same way as Camus will, that: “Il faudra réviser toutes nos valeurs, toutes nos définitions, tout notre vocabulaire” (p. 219).

### ***THE PURSUIT OF WEALTH***

Camus acknowledges that one of the principal manifestations of a life lived according to formula lies in the inherent desire in many human beings to accumulate wealth. In *Journaux de voyage*

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<sup>162</sup> André Thérive. *Georges Duhamel ou l’Intelligence du cœur*. Paris: Rasmussen, 1925, p. 45.

(1978), he writes: “Nous tombons d’accord avec R., toujours charmant compagnon, pour dire que le seul problème contemporain est celui de l’argent” (p. 27). There can be no doubt that Camus saw the pursuit of wealth, for the mere sake of it, as evidence of a death in life: “Toute vie dirigée vers l’argent est une mort. La renaissance est dans le désintéressement” (*Carnets II*, p. 92).

His dislike of such a life can easily be understood when we take into account the circumstances of his youth, one which, despite being lived amidst the poor of Belcourt, led Camus to the discovery of the simple and readily available pleasures of the natural world. Bonnier notes Roblès’ description of the young Camus’ indifference to the acquisition of possessions:

Quand j’ai connu Camus, à Alger, je faisais mon service militaire et je me souviens qu’il vivait dans une chambre absolument nue, qu’il ne possédait pour tout ameublement qu’un long coffre dont il se servait comme lit, comme armoire et table de travail. Ce n’était pas seulement pauvreté (et, de vrai, il était très pauvre), mais aussi et surtout: indifférence (p. 13).

However, if Camus despises the pursuit of wealth, he expresses sympathy for the plight of the humble worker, who becomes entrenched in an apparently inescapable routine, purely to meet the exigencies of life: “Le travail dans ce quartier n’était pas une vertu, mais une nécessité qui, pour faire vivre, conduisait à la mort” (*PH*, p. 279). As McCarthy says: “He continued to find in the forced frugality of poverty an aristocratic virtue; but he well understood how the tedious tasks of working-class life turned men into robots” (p. 83).

How then are these men and women to escape such a life? Camus investigates the ‘logical’ solution to this question in *La Mort heureuse* (1938) and *Le Malentendu* (1944). Rizzuto describes Mersault’s motivation in the former:



He kills and robs his wealthy friend Zagreus. Because money is time, earning money slowly becomes synonymous with dying slowly, with a humiliating human condition. Wealth, on the other hand grants Mersault independence (*Camus' Imperial Vision*, p. 8).

Camus is at pains to point out, however, that wealth does not bring happiness *per se*: it merely frees up time to pursue it. For Camus, the pursuit of wealth, like work, is a means to an end, but must never be an end in itself. Zagreus sums up Camus' position in this regard in *La Mort heureuse*. When he tells Mersault that: "Je suis certain [...] qu'on ne peut être heureux sans argent" (p. 75), he is not suggesting a direct causative link between the pursuit of wealth and happiness. Wealth frees up time, brings independence and with it, the chance of happiness:

Ne me faites pas dire que l'argent fait le bonheur. J'entends seulement que pour une certaine classe d'êtres le bonheur est possible (à condition d'avoir du temps) et qu'avoir de l'argent c'est se libérer de l'argent (*LMH*, p. 79).

Knapp points to evidence of this theme in the works of the earlier writer, Duhamel:

In a way, the laboratory in the *Struggle Against Shadows* is comparable to the community described in *The Bièvres Desert*, in which each individual is dedicated to some artistic endeavour. The outstanding difference, however, is that the material problems of those working in a laboratory are taken care of, whereas in *The Bièvres Desert* those arose to plague the group (p. 123).

There is ample evidence in *Le Désert de Bièvres* (1937) which supports Knapp's conclusion. For example, Laurent talks about "les soucis financiers, qui devaient par la suite hanter toutes nos pensées" (*DB*, p. 96). Justin expresses the irony of the group's situation, reflecting precisely the dilemma that will soon confront Mersault in *La Mort heureuse* (1938): "Nous avons la volonté de soustraire notre belle vie, notre jeune vie, à toutes les vilenies de l'argent; mais pour y parvenir, il nous faut justement de l'argent" (*DB*, p. 24). However, Justin remains alive to the fact that one could easily be seduced into idleness if circumstances were different. "Si nous étions riches, nous n'aurions probablement aucune envie de faire ce que nous voulons faire" (*DB*, p. 25).

In his memoirs, Duhamel notes how those who equate money with happiness “se donnent beaucoup de mal pour s’amuser, pour dépenser leur argent” (*TR*, p. 144). An illustration of this theme in his works can be found in *Querelles de famille* (1932). Here, Casimir inherits a fortune and moves from one hobby to another, searching, without success, for some form of contentment. He endlessly fills his home with machines, namely “tout ce qui permet à quelqu’un d’éviter quelque chose” (p. 145). Once more, Duhamel frames the dangers inherent in such an approach in the language of avoidance and flight. Eventually, “un démon caché sous le traversin lui souffle: «Eviter de vivre?»” (p. 153).

Similarly, in *Le Notaire du Havre* (1933), Laurent describes M. Courtois as having “usé sa vie” (p. 100) in a watch shop. Once more, Duhamel uses the language of avoidance, suggesting that Courtois worked:

jusqu’à la cinquantaine, dans le dessein unique et fervent comme presque tous les Français, en ce temps-là, de «se retirer», mot dont je suis bien surpris que si peu de gens perçoivent la résonance lugubre: démission, fuite, suicide (p. 100).

In *Les Voyageurs de “l’Espérance”* (1956), Duhamel provides his reader with an example of how to turn wealth to one’s real advantage. Here, he presents Emmanuel Fromond: “Trente ans avant le debut de cette histoire, [Emmanuel] avait eu la chance de faire un très bel héritage.”<sup>163</sup> Like Casimir, Emmanuel could have succumbed to a life of luxury and idleness. However, upon the receipt of his inheritance, Emmanuel “avait aussitôt décidé non certes de se retirer de la vie active, mais de se transporter sur les lieux de son travail préféré” (p. 19). Thus, he constructs a house for his family and, in typical Duhamel style, “un laboratoire pour ses recherches” (p. 19). Energetic, a

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<sup>163</sup> Georges Duhamel. *Les Voyageurs de “l’Espérance”*. Paris: Librairie Gedalge, 1956, p. 19.

humanist, and far from mediocre, Emmanuel Fromond would never allow wealth to lead to a life of idleness.

Similarly, In *Les Compagnons de l'Apocalypse* (1956), Dan Levoyer inherits a fortune and uses it to fund a pilgrimage throughout France to highlight the dangers of a world increasingly menaced by machines and nuclear war. Duhamel describes Dan as motivated by good faith. Ultimately, the group made up of Dan and his followers disintegrates and Dan resolves to share the remaining money equally between these 'compagnons'.

Once armed with the knowledge that they shall receive a fortune, Dan's followers immediately forget their commitment to the group and form their own projects. Benjamin explains that he will purchase a beautiful motor vehicle; Gabriel decides that he shall open a shop to sell religious objects; Pierre dreams of acquiring a fishing boat (p. 225). One has the feeling that these characters will lose the money as quickly as it arrived.

In 'Nouvelle rencontre de Salavin', one of the short stories in *Les Hommes abandonnés* (1921), men and women gather outside a bank to look at the notes and other objects in the window: "La foule stationnait interminablement devant ces objets morts qui représentaient des châteaux, de la vitesse, de l'amour, des fruits, des viandes, des horizons" (*LHA*, p. 210). A mediocre life devoted to the generation of wealth, says Duhamel, rests on the frenetic desire to accumulate one object after another: "L'homme raisonnable sait très bien, en achetant un objet... que ce jeu va l'obliger, demain, à mettre son acquisition au rebut pour acheter un autre objet" (*QF*, p. 56). Essentially, this is the life of Joseph Pasquier, one of these men "qui travaillent toute leur existence pour posséder l'objet de leur convoitise" (*PJP*, p. 72).

As will Camus, Duhamel equates wealth creation for the mere sake of it, with avoidance or flight: “Dans ce tourbillon des affaires, la plupart des hommes cherchent non seulement leur subsistance, mais encore à se détourner d’eux-mêmes, à s’oublier eux-mêmes [...]” (*BF*, p. 19). In *Querelles de famille* (1932), he continues his assault on the men of ‘business’: “C’est aux gens d’affaires que je m’adresse, à cette foule de traitants qui ont le sens du «business», le goût de l’argent” (p. 24). In the same work, Duhamel contrasts “cette bousculade infinie” (p. 58), with “la création véritable, féconde, durable” (p. 58).

For both Duhamel and Camus, the pursuit of wealth and the luxuries it brings are tools which human beings use to forget their inherent frailties and the finite nature of their existence. Laurent sums it up best in *Les Maîtres* (1937):

Je me disais que les hommes ont parfois besoin d’oublier, dans quelque débauche de luxe et de splendeur, qu’ils ne sont que des animaux très misérables, des organismes fragiles et dominés par le besoin, par la peur et la tristesse (p. 204).

There can be no better articulation, in the works of Duhamel, of an unconscious return into the chain following an initial awareness of the absurd.

Following his success, Joseph Pasquier surrounds himself with fine estates, beautiful objects and even takes a mistress. He regards those who speak haughtily about the evils of money with an air of scepticism:

Ils pensent tous à l’argent depuis le matin jusqu’au soir et même du soir jusqu’au matin. Seulement ils ne le disent pas, parce que ce sont tous des hypocrites. Je finis par croire que je suis le seul au monde à ne pas être hypocrite sur le chapitre de l’argent (*PJP*, p. 17).

The purchase of one estate leaves Joseph yearning for another and yet he cannot see that he is on the path to destruction:

Il ne peut pas être dans tous ses domaines en même temps et, chaque fois qu'il va vers l'un, il se prive des autres. La possession des biens matériels lui réserve sans doute encore des tourments bien plus amers (*CCO*, p. 210).

From time to time, Joseph is able to experience simple joys, but his enjoyment is short-lived and he is left confused and anxious:

Alors Joseph leva la tête, vit le ciel et poussa un long soupir. Jamais il ne songeait à regarder le ciel...Des souvenirs confus, naïfs, scolaires, se pressaient dans l'esprit de Joseph (*PJP*, p. 71).

Ignoring his 'simple souci', noted in chapter two, Joseph makes his own 'retour inconscient dans la chaîne' by pursuing greater wealth, crushing others along his path: "J'ai toujours traité mes adversaires comme des bêtes à la chasse" (*PJP*, p. 107).

Of course, money for Joseph is a means to *appear* important, in the same way that Clamence will need power and respect in *La Chute* (1956). For example, Joseph endeavours to justify his lavish expenditure on the trappings of his position: "Je vivrais, s'il le fallait, avec cinq francs par jour. Seulement, dans ma position, un homme doit avoir une bonne table, tenir un certain train de maison" (*PJP*, p. 141). Knapp points to this predominant theme in *La Chronique des Pasquier*, with particular reference to Joseph's plight:

Duhamel denigrated the materialism of anyone who, like Joseph, believed money to be the *sine qua non* of life; he believed fervently in honor and integrity as virtues capable of bringing one fulfillment and happiness; he was certain that love and kindness, man's most admirable gifts, should be central to one's relationships throughout life (p. 126).

It comes as no surprise, then, to discover that Joseph's fall in *La Passion de Joseph Pasquier* (1945) is swift and painful. Not only has he "no friends and is despised by his wife and sons" (Knapp, p. 125), he also, rather ironically, will lose his previously loyal servant Blaise, who leaves him only because he feels Joseph is losing his touch: "Vous perdez — beaucoup trop tôt, à mon humble avis — les qualités essentielles qui font un homme de proie" (*PJP*, p. 250).

Joseph's pursuit of wealth sees him indifferent to the lives of others, culminating in a shady arms deal which sees him turn a blind eye to suffering. Similarly, Mersault remains indifferent to the killing of Zagreus: "Wealthy, Mersault can enjoy the benefits of a crime that for him never took place" (Rizzuto, *Camus' Imperial Vision*, p. 9).

Caligula's message to his people is simple: "Si le Trésor a de l'importance, alors la vie humaine n'en a pas" (*Caligula*, p. 120).

### ***WORK FOR ITS OWN SAKE***

Camus' message, apart from two notable exceptions, is that work for the sake of working is a manifestation of 'le retour inconscient dans la chaîne'. The first exception is if the worker is passionate about what he is doing. Secondly, Camus retains a deep sympathy for the worker obliged to work in order to support himself and his family. In general, says Camus, one must have "la force de choisir ce qu'on préfère et de s'y tenir" (*Carnets II*, p. 93).

Camus draws a distinction between satisfying work with one's hands, and the mind-numbing work of the office. As Jacques will quickly learn in *Le Premier Homme* (1960):

Le vrai travail pour lui était celui de la tonnellerie par exemple, un long effort musculaire, une suite de gestes adroits et précis, des mains dures et légères, et on voyait apparaître le résultat de ses efforts [...] Mais ce travail de bureau ne venait de nulle part et n'aboutissait à rien (*PH*, p. 290).

Camus knew the value of hard work chosen freely. Pierre Aubrey notes that, in the preface to the complete works of Roger Martin du Gard, Camus writes: “Celui qui fait du travail libre sa raison et sa joie peut finalement supporter toutes les humiliations [...]”<sup>164</sup> If Coupé is the mouthpiece for Duhamel in *Les Sept Dernières Plaies* (1928), then Duhamel was of the same views as Camus. In this work, Coupé chides one of his officers, Camoire: “Vous avez tort de dénigrer une carrière que vous avez librement choisie” (p. 73).

Commenting specifically on the medical profession, Duhamel considers that: “Le bon médecin est celui qui, non seulement considère l'œuvre thérapeutique comme un devoir, mais qui surtout y prend intérêt et plaisir” (*IA*, p. 56). Conversely, those medical practitioners who have neither curiosity about, nor sympathy for, their patients are “des hommes qui se sont trompés de carrière” (*IA*, p. 106).

### **SOLITAIRE OU SOLIDAIRE?**

If committing oneself freely to a task which inspires the worker is Camus' ideal, ‘Jonas ou L'artiste au travail’, one of the short stories in *L'Exile et le royaume* (1957), illustrates the problem that both Camus and Duhamel must have experienced in their artistic lives. With success comes increased public exposure and demands on one's time. For Camus, ‘le saut’ consists of

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<sup>164</sup> Pierre Aubrey. ‘Albert Camus et la classe ouvrière’. *The French Review*. Vol. 32, No. 1. (1958), p. 16. Retrieved 09 August 2007 from <http://www.jstor.org>.

acceding to these demands, especially where mediocrity and convention rule the lives of those who make them.

Dunwoodie considers Jonas as having been:

swallowed up by the demands which obliterate the order and meaning in his life and, in this, he is a typical Camus creation, highly conscious of the present and its irreplaceable richness but forced into endless *fuite en avant* (p. 57).

If Jonas is a ‘typical Camus creation’, then Duhamel’s Patrice Périot may have appealed to Camus in 1950, for *Le Voyage de Patrice Périot* (1950) shares essentially the same subject matter as ‘Jonas’.

Camus’ Jonas is a talented painter, who lives at home with his wife Louise and his children: “Ce fut le moment aussi où le succès de Jonas lui valut beaucoup d’amis. Ces amis se manifestaient au téléphone, ou à l’occasion de visites impromptues” (*ER*, p. 113). As Jonas’ talent and reputation increase, soon his friends become disciples. “Aux amis se joignaient parfois les disciples: Jonas maintenant faisait école” (*ER*, p. 115). Despite the fact that those surrounding Jonas have little or no talent of their own, “un soupçon de fierté effleurait Jonas” (*ER*, p. 116).

Similarly, Patrice Périot is famous for his work in the laboratory. Commensurate with his growing standing in the community, Périot experiences increasing demands on his time; his brother Gustave alerts him to the same fate that will later await Jonas: “Toi, Patrice, tu es entouré d’une foule de médiocres. Oui, je sais, cela te donne l’illusion d’être quelqu’un” (*VPP*, p. 154).

The behaviour of some artists faced with many ardent admirers and “la certitude subjective du génie” (*DL*, p. 147) was lampooned by Duhamel in *L’Œuvre des athlètes* (1920), where the



posturing Rémy Belœuf presides over the “l’O.D.A.S., c’est-à-dire: l’Œuvre des athlètes spirituels.”<sup>165</sup> Seduced by his own sense of self-importance and any number of sycophantic followers, Belœuf considers himself superior to his contemporaries: “Evidemment, l’effort intellectuel de ma génération n’a pas encore pénétré la masse du peuple” (p. 37). Gradually, Belœuf’s followers believe themselves capable of grander work than their master, and soon, they become seduced in turn by their own sense of importance. One example is the bumbling Filliatre-Desmelin, who, after a period of obsequious behaviour in the company of Belœuf, becomes consumed by the importance of his own work and begins to speak of his “évolution” (p. 71) as a writer. Both Belœuf and Filliatre-Desmelin become dominated by the desire to be known as people of grand importance, a temptation which, albeit temporarily, afflicts both Périot and Jonas.

As Jonas’ admirers become his disciples, they begin to judge his work more critically. For instance, they demand that Jonas remains “fidèle à son esthétique” (*ER*, p. 117), as well as forcing Jonas to give “son avis sur leur propre production” (*ER*, p. 117). As Belœuf would also discover, Jonas’ admirers are transformed into his critics. As his reputation grows, Jonas finds that: “Un petit nombre de critiques, parmi lesquels se trouvaient deux des visiteurs habituels de l’atelier, tempéraient de quelques réserves la chaleur de leur compte rendu” (*ER*, p. 120).

Like Jonas, Périot generally finds himself acceding to the wishes of his visitors, who often turn up without notice: “Patrice Périot comprit, mais un peu tard, qu’une fois de plus il était pris, qu’il allait donc céder et que cela lui coûterait une journée entière de travail” (*VPP*, p. 113). It is this inability to refuse to see his visitors that will contribute to his fall.

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<sup>165</sup> Georges Duhamel. *L’Œuvre des athlètes*. Paris: Éditions de la *Nouvelle Revue Française*, 1920, p. 34.

When Périot's signature is fraudulently added to support a cause, the cuplrit, Gérin-Labrit, endeavours to excuse his act: "Mais cette gloire, qui vous permet de jeter un si grand poids dans la balance du destin, cette gloire, eh bien, elle ne vous appartient pas à vous tout seul" (*VPP*, p. 100). Gérin-Labrit then threatens him: "Si vous n'êtes pas avec nous, c'est-à-dire à la pointe de l'action, vous êtes contre le peuple, et, dès maintenant, un renégat" (*VPP*, p. 102). Slowly but surely, however, Périot, "non sans étonnement, se surpnt à parler comme Gérin-Labrit" (*VPP*, p. 123).

Like Périot, Jonas' fame means that he is asked to support one cause or another. As his status increases, "il fut aussi sollicité, comme tout le monde, d'intervenir pour dénoncer des injustices très révoltantes" (*ER*, p. 121). Suddenly, Jonas begins to see the error of his ways:

Non, il aimait sa peinture, et Louise, ses enfants, Rateau, quelques-uns encore, et il avait de la sympathie pour tous. Ma la vie est brève, le temps rapide, et sa propre énergie avait des limites. Il était difficile de peindre le monde et les hommes et, en même temps, de vivre avec eux (*ER*, p. 123).

Périot also struggles to balance a natural affection for his fellow man and the desire to be alone with his work and his children. Indeed, he only finds himself the subject of increased public scrutiny when he confesses to a journalist his desire to be the "témoin des souffrances du peuple au milieu duquel je suis né, je veux demeurer avec lui dans l'épreuve, dans l'effort et dans la joie" (*VPP*, p. 31). His friend Romanil explains the subtle difference between their views on this point: "Je n'ai jamais dit que j'aimais les hommes. Il m'arrive de les plaindre et ce n'est pas la même chose" (*VPP*, p. 121).<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> This statement from Romanil recalls a very similar entry in the third volume of Camus' notebooks, one to which we have already referred: "Je n'aime pas l'humanité en général. Je m'en sens solidaire d'abord, ce qui n'est pas la même chose" (*Carnets III*, p. 72).

Without knowing why, Jonas notices that he is working less: “Jonas travaillait moins, sans qu’il pût savoir pourquoi. Il était toujours assidu, mais il avait maintenant de la difficulté à peindre” (*ER*, p. 129). In the same way, Périot’s work suffers and he declares: “Il faudra que je travaille, ce soir. Le travail seul me fait du plaisir et du bien. Mais je n’ai plus jamais le temps de travailler à ce que j’aime. Et puis, les produits de la vie arrêtent la vie” (*VPP*, p. 60). As painting is for Jonas, work is a refuge for Périot, albeit one which becomes less available as demands on his time increase. Périot “se réfugia dans son travail comme au fond d’une très profonde caverne” (*VPP*, p. 84).

As society increasingly makes claims on the time available for both Jonas and Périot, their family lives at home begin to suffer. Jonas’ relationship with his wife is compromised and he notices “une ombre de tristesse passait sur le visage de Louise” (*ER*, p. 119). Périot’s son Hervé makes him aware of the same problem: “Tu veux être bon avec tout le monde. Et tu oublies d’être bon avec tes enfants, de t’occuper de tes enfants” (*VPP*, p. 54).

Both characters then begin to rebel against the demands of the public. Suddenly, Jonas notes his frustration with the same people for whom he had initially expressed sympathy: “Pour la première fois il était gêné par les gens qu’il rencontrait partout” (*ER*, p. 131). Périot acknowledges: “Ce qui m’empêche de travailler, ce sont les bêtises, les grossièretés, la radio du music-hall” (*VPP*, p. 91). With flight on his mind, Périot “traversa la Seine avec le sentiment de passer une frontière, de s’échapper, de fuir la société des hommes” (*VPP*, p. 127). Jonas retreats to his work room for a number of days and nights and finally emerges with one word written on a piece of paper, although it is impossible to tell whether the word is “*solitaire* ou *solidaire*” (*ER*, p. 139).

Périot echoes precisely the same sentiment: “A vrai dire, je suis un solitaire exilé dans la foule” (*VPP*, p. 79). However, he also feels a sense of solidarity with his fellow man, as Maurice Bruézière points out:

Son travail, son vrai travail, ce n’est pas l’enseignement, mais la recherche. Or, cette recherche est contrariée par toutes les sollicitations dont il est l’objet et dont il se défend mal, parce qu’il se sent *solidaire* (our italics) d’une foule de malheureux et entend protester contre «la cruauté universelle».<sup>167</sup>

Like Jonas, Périot oscillates between the desire for solitude and a society with which he feels sympathy and a degree of solidarity, between what he calls, not ‘solitaire ou solidaire’, but ‘connu et ignoré’: “Un peu plus tard, il se prit à penser, lui, le savant qui avait la chance d’être en même temps connu et ignoré, connu de ceux qui le devaient connaître, heureusement ignoré des autres” (*VPP*, p. 128). With his priorities out of balance and his family ignored, Périot suffers the ultimate punishment when his son Hervé commits suicide.

Duhamel’s *L’Archange de l’aventure* (1955) carries the same theme. Here, Cyprien Ricord is a painter, an occupation “librement choisi depuis l’adolescence.”<sup>168</sup> One day, as Cyprien is painting in the countryside, a passer-by introduces himself as Mikael Poirier, who considers that, “en matière de peinture, je suis un apôtre, un annonciateur, un messie” (p. 22). Ricord is seduced by the eloquent stranger and Poirier promises to promote his art. Ricord remains on guard, however, telling Poirier: “Je me refuse à faire intervenir, dans mon art, les questions d’argent” (p. 48). Ricord is caught up in Poirier’s enthusiasm for his work, but in a manner that recalls Gérin-Labrit’s conduct towards Périot, Poirier suggests to Ricord: “Oui, je ne pense qu’à votre gloire et

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<sup>167</sup> Maurice Bruézière. ‘Les Romans d’arrière-saison: De «Patrice Périot» au «Complexe de Théophile»’. *Les Cahiers de l’Abbaye de Créteil*. December (1986), p. 111.

<sup>168</sup> Georges Duhamel. *L’Archange de l’aventure*. Paris: Mercure de France, 1955, p. 13.

votre gloire sera ma gloire” (p. 54). Like Jonas, Ricord locks himself away: “Il semblait en proie à une sorte de rage” (p. 63), as he produces a number of fresh works.

Poirier is the Clamence of the art world, a man who seeks to become God in respect to all that is worthwhile in art. He attempts to infect Ricord with the same desire, suggesting to the art merchant Dorgerus that in the fresh style of Cyprien lurks “un homme nouveau” (p. 76). Ricord will initially embrace, but then wholeheartedly reject, this plea for his reinvention and in so doing, will return to his roots, demonstrating that whilst human beings can improve themselves, they will never successfully change their substance.

Caught up in the flurry of activity demanded of him by Poirier, Ricord soon expresses a feeling of nostalgia for the way his life used to be: “Parfois, il songe à ses propres ouvrages de l’ancien temps” (p. 138). Having ignored his wife, Ricord finds to his dismay that: “Brigitte a suggéré impérieusement une séparation des lits” (p. 144).

Increasingly, Ricord feels the need to retreat, confessing “un grand besoin de solitude” (p. 173). There is then a wonderful description by Duhamel which recalls ‘Entre Oui et non’ of Camus’ *L’Envers et L’endroit* (1937). For Ricord, the ‘oui’ is constituted by the “souvenirs de sa chère pauvreté” (p. 174), a place where: “Tout lui faisait plaisir, même la lumière d’avril, même les bourgeons de marronniers” (p. 174). Conversely, the ‘non’ is the “existence qu’il venait de vivre, parmi les maisons inhumaines, les maisons de cent étages, les parallélépipèdes de verre et de ciment” (p. 174). Ricord feels a sense of divorce between the old and the new, a feeling for the absurd. He yearns for his old life “dans la simplicité des mœurs et des pensées” (p. 175).

At the point of exhaustion, Ricord seeks out the company of l'abbé Lerude: "Je m'appelle Cyprien Ricord et j'ai besoin de votre amitié" (p. 177). There Cyprien realises that his substance has not changed, that "mon cœur est le même qu'hier et qu'autrefois" (p. 180). Regrettably, his awakening is too late for him and his wife Brigitte. He returns from another art trip to discover that Poirier has run off with her, leaving him with his child Vincent, whom he has also neglected terribly. His bank account has been stripped of its funds. As Janine will be in *La Femme adultère* (1957), Ricord is invaded by an urgent desire to rediscover the peace and unity of his former life: "Il était saisi par un besoin d'ordre, par un souvenir de la lointaine dialectique de son adolescence" (p. 205).

In one sense, *L'Archange de l'aventure* recalls *Caligula*. Poirier is the 'emperor' who seeks absolutes, guiding his subjects towards their personal destruction. Ricord is the subject, who quickly learns that one can be innocent and culpable: "Mais je ne comprends pas quelle est cette faute que j'ai faite" (p. 206). Having been subsumed into a society with which he has no affiliation, he feels a quickening of time, a sense of being propelled towards death: "Alors, je ne vais pas rester seul ainsi, jusqu'à l'heure de la mort" (p. 208). Ricord is overcome with a sense of condemnation: "Maintenant, il marchait comme doit marcher un condamné" (p. 209).

Ricord rebels against this absurdity and finds a renewed sense of peace and harmony through art, a sense of fraternity with his friend l'abbé Lerude, and a reinvigorated love for his son Vincent. Faced with the same dilemma as that which will later confront Jonas, Ricord chooses *solidaire* over *solitaire*. In so doing, he finds within himself, a sense of respect for:

le monde entier, pour le monde très malheureux des hommes, ses semblables, qu'il représentait désormais avec respect, avec amour, jusqu'au jour où lui serait à jamais ravie cette existence incompréhensible (p. 222).

He realises, as Camus will describe in *Discours de Suède*: “Celui qui, souvent, a choisi son destin d’artiste parce qu’il se sentait différent, apprend bien vite qu’il ne nourrira son art, et sa différence, qu’en avouant sa ressemblance avec tous.”<sup>169</sup>

### ***SYMPATHY FOR THE WORKER***

As we have seen, Camus retains a deep sympathy for the worker who has to work simply to support himself and his family. Aubrey comments on Camus’ own life as a worker, noting that his success:

n’était pas le produit des longs loisirs d’une adolescence bourgeoise choyée et libérée de tous soucis. Camus avait connu pour de bon la dure servitude du travail salarié, avec ses longues heures, ses tâches abrutissantes qui vous laissent l’esprit vide et le corps moulu (p. 15).

In the preface to the 1958 edition of *L’Envers et l’endroit* (1937), Camus empathises with the workers of the poor, industrial suburbs of Paris, suggesting that the conditions in which they find themselves are immeasurably worse than those which he experienced as a child on the streets of Belcourt: “Né pauvre, dans un quartier ouvrier, je ne savais pourtant pas ce qu’était le vrai malheur avant de connaître nos banlieues froides” (*EE*, p. 17).

Camus understands the way in which these workers are sometimes regarded by the rest of society.

As Aubrey suggests:

Il connaît leurs problèmes, leurs façons de penser et il ne peut avoir à leur égard le mépris sommaire des gens comme il faut qui jugent leurs semblables à la coupe de leurs vêtements ou à leur façon de tenir une tasse de thé (p. 15).

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<sup>169</sup> Albert Camus, ‘Discours de Suède’, *Essais*. Eds. R. Quilliot & L. Faucon. Paris: Gallimard, (1965), p. 1071.

Aubrey contends this is why Camus was an advocate of unionism, with one major proviso, namely that the unionists were “capables de faire respecter les lois sociales” (Aubrey, p. 16). At first blush, this is a statement that seems completely at odds with what Camus says in his notebooks and in *L'Étranger*. However, when viewed in the context of the ‘solitaire ou solidaire’ notion taken from ‘Jonas’, we can begin to better understand Camus’ statement. As Aubrey suggests: “Dans *L’Homme révolté*, Albert Camus expliquait comment l’équilibre entre l’individu et la collectivité se trouvait réalisé par la pratique du syndicalisme révolutionnaire” (p. 16). When Aubrey suggests that Camus had an urgent requirement to respect ‘les lois sociales’, he is not advocating an adherence to convention, but simply preserving the sense of fraternity and measure described in *L’Homme révolté* (1951), and with which Jonas and Patrice both grapple.

A good illustration of this balance in the works of Camus is the story of ‘Les Muets’, another of the short stories collected in *L’Exil et le royaume* (1957), and which Dunwoodie believes exemplifies “how personally implicated Camus felt in the world of the working class” (p. 47). Here, the strikers, forced to go back to work after being unsuccessful in their demands for a pay rise, decide that, in revenge, they will not speak at all to their boss. One day, the proprietor’s daughter is taken to hospital gravely ill, but still none of the men reply to his ‘bonsoir’. One worker, Yvars, is concerned about this, but, upon reflection, justifies his failure to reply on the basis of the boss’ intractability.

Aubrey notes that Camus recounted this story when, after the success of *L’Homme révolté* (1957), he was asked to accept an award by the proofreading workers in Paris. As Aubrey suggests: “Le profit n’est pas tout. Au nom de quoi devrait-on y sacrifier notre dignité, tout ce qui donne chaleur et saveur à nos relations avec les autres?” (p. 19).



Any criticism by Camus of the humble worker is limited to those who waste the time they have remaining in idle pursuits that reinforce that mediocrity. We find the following citation in *La Peste* (1947): “Sans doute, rien n’est plus naturel, aujourd’hui, que de voir des gens travailler du matin au soir et choisir ensuite de perdre aux cartes, au café, et en bavardages, le temps qui leur reste pour vivre” (p. 12). In the first volume of his notebooks Camus writes: “Il est normal de donner un peu de sa vie pour ne pas la perdre tout entière. Six ou huit heures par jour pour ne pas crever de faim. Et puis tout est profit à qui veut profiter” (*Carnets I*, p. 97). For the factory worker, ‘le saut’ consists in failing to make use of the time that remains his own. We find this citation in ‘L’Ironie’, another of the short stories in *L’Envers et l’endroit* (1937): “Et les jeunes aiment le billard et les cartes qui ne ressemblent pas au travail imbécile de chaque jour” (p. 45).

Much earlier, Duhamel notices the same phenomenon in many of his co-workers at the Front in times of war: “Ils jouent aux cartes, lisent les gazettes, pensent à des femmes et se plaignent de l’ennui” (*LPM*, p. 122). Similarly, when Duhamel talks of the ‘hommes d’affaires’ in *La Possession du monde* (1919), he notes that when not moving “d’homme en homme, avec une sorte de rage aveugle et bourdonnante” (p. 31), the same men “mangeaient, buvaient, usaient d’une femme ou recherchaient un sommeil plus aride que la mort” (p. 31).

Early in ‘L’Épave’, a short story for *Les Hommes abandonnés* (1921), Duhamel describes the seemingly idyllic setting of a peaceful village beside the sea. At six o’clock in the evening, the peasants and fishermen gather after a long day of work: “Des garçons, leur journée finie, fumaient, devisaient et lançaient des balles contre le mur rose” (p. 76). It must be remembered that these are the same men who will soon, with no thought for the lost sailors, fight over cans of

sardines given up by the wreck. For Duhamel, as it will later be for Camus, free time is only dangerous for the mediocre.

### **MARRIAGE**

For Camus, a refusal to accept traditional values includes a rejection of the customs surrounding romantic love and especially marriage: “Il reste à choisir le suicide le plus esthétique: mariage + 40 heures ou revolver” (*Carnets I*, p. 89). Such an attitude might well reflect Camus’ own experiences at this time. This volume of his notebooks spans the period 1935 to 1942, within which he separated from his first wife Simone Hié.

We have already noted the indifferent manner with which Meursault reacts to Marie’s proposal for marriage in *L’Étranger* (1942). Further, in *Le Premier Homme* (1960), Camus satirises, in the form of Josephin, the image of the man who marries because that is what is expected of him. Here, Camus contrasts the haphazard but joyous life of Ernest with that of Josephin, whose life is planned to the finest detail, including the date of his marriage and with whom: “Sur tous les plans, sa vie était organisée” (p. 133). One can readily understand why it is that he and Ernest clash, as Ernest lives for the present and Josephin plans only for the future: “Il avait toujours annoncé qu’il se marierait à quarante ans avec une femme qui aurait une situation” (p. 134).

There is evidence of this theme in the earlier works of Duhamel. Things generally end badly for those characters who marry for illegitimate reasons. For example, in *La Chronique des Pasquier*, the mediocre Ferdinand and his wife Claire marry out of a need for security, out of a desire to protect themselves against a world in which they cannot cope alone. In so doing, they become so enmeshed that they cannot experience anything outside the relationship. Ferdinand and his wife

Claire “sont condamnés à vivre et à vieillir dans l’horreur d’une intimité si close et si farouche qu’elle ne laisse à peu près rien transpirer d’elle-même au-dehors” (*Les Maîtres*, p. 16).

In *Vue de la terre promise* (1934), Laurent makes the point: “Si l’âme d’un homme est un domaine secret et difficilement accessible, il est une retraite mieux close et plus ténébreuse encore et que c’est l’âme d’un couple” (p. 109). In the same work, Cécile marries Valdemar for the wrong reasons and things quickly turn sour for her, with Valdemar’s drug addiction threatening her music career. Caught up in a loveless marriage, Cécile’s passion and genius yield in favour of a meek acquiescence and indifference: “Madame, dit-elle, je ne veux rien. Je ferai ce que Valdemar voudra” (p. 97). Angels Santa d’Usall confirms Cécile’s error: “Ce mariage de Cécile, mariage sans amour dans le seul but d’avoir un enfant, sera puni. Le petit Alexandre mourra en laissant sa mère dans la plus profonde des tristesses.”<sup>170</sup>

Similarly, in *Biographie de mes fantômes* (1944), Duhamel describes acting as a locum for a country practitioner, who pleads with Duhamel to keep from the mayor of the town, the secret of the doctor’s relationship with a young woman. Duhamel remarks in his memoirs how the woman lives virtually as a prisoner within the walls of the doctor’s house, “ayant, au nom de l’amour, renoncé à toute liberté. Elle souriait avec douceur et ne se plaignait pas de cette horrible servitude” (*BF*, p. 232).

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<sup>170</sup> Angels Santa d’Usall. ‘Diversité féminine dans l’œuvre de G. Duhamel’. *Les Cahiers de l’Abbaye de Créteil*. December (1984), p. 142.

### ***DOCTRINES AND IDEOLOGIES***

A theme common to both Duhamel and Camus, therefore, is a mistrust of those things that purport to divest men and women of the responsibility for their own lives. One further example is reliance on any doctrine which purports to explain all: “Je comprends alors pourquoi les doctrines qui m’expliquent tout m’affaiblissent en même temps. Elles me déchargent du poids de ma propre vie et il faut que je le porte seul” (*LMS*, p. 80).

Lafay notices the same preoccupation in Duhamel: “N’a-t-il pas sans cesse, dénoncé le péril des idéologies et des systèmes?” (*Georges Duhamel ou la Préoccupation éthique*, p. 115). This is confirmed by Duhamel in his memoirs: “Je me suis toujours défié des doctrines et surtout quand elles s’exercent sur cette chose éminemment instable que l’on appelle le goût” (*TR*, p. 181). Perhaps the following citation, taken from *Propos critiques* (1912),<sup>171</sup> and noted by Comeau, brings Duhamel squarely into line with what Camus would later advocate in terms of accepting the weight on one’s own life: “Le poète qui veut connaître par lui-même doit chasser de son esprit toute formule susceptible de lui dérober le rude contact de l’univers” (Comeau, p. 64).

For both Duhamel and Camus, the only matter of interest is whether one can live without recourse to any life formula or symbol. Writing to Duhamel, Rex Desmarchais declares: “[Salavin] illustre votre idée fondamentale, votre conception la plus chère: voir ce que l’homme, laissé à lui-même,

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<sup>171</sup> Georges Duhamel. *Propos critiques*. Paris: Eugène Figuière, Collection “Œuvres & Jours”, 1912.

privé de toute croyance surnaturelle, peut faire, jusqu'où il peut aller."<sup>172</sup> For Camus: "Savoir si l'on peut vivre sans appel, c'est tout ce qui m'intéresse" (*LMS*, p. 86).

Albérès summarises the issue generally, noting that in any discussion about the absurd, one can identify:

l'absence actuelle d'une notion universelle qui serve de *médiatrice* entre l'homme et le monde, qui lui épargne d'avoir à affronter seul la Fatalité d'un cosmos indifférent, une notion telle que l'étaient la Grâce ou la Science, ou la Raison (*Les Hommes traqués*, p. 206).

### ***A LIFE FORMULA AND RELIGION***

The critics differ on whether Camus was an atheist. Sansen speaks for those who consider that he was: "Camus fut un lecteur de Nietzsche. De ce dernier, il retient le ferme athéisme et la vision irrationnelle du monde et de l'homme."<sup>173</sup> McCarthy, on the other hand, prefers the view of Camus' good friend Louis Bénisti: "Bénisti insists that Camus was no atheist and perhaps not even an agnostic; he believed in a 'God of whom we can ask nothing.'" (McCarthy, p. 28).

There is some support for McCarthy's view when we consider the anecdote recounted by Camus' friend Fouchet, in which a child lay dying, having been knocked down by a bus. McCarthy notes in relation to this incident: "The mother's lament rang out and eventually Camus and Fouchet, having looked on helplessly, turned to leave. Camus pointed up at the perfect Algerian sky: 'See, He is silent'" (p. 28).

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<sup>172</sup> Rex Desmarchais. 'Lettre ouverte à Georges Duhamel à propos de Salavin'. *La Revue Dominicaine*. March (1945), p. 160.

<sup>173</sup> Raymond Sansen. 'Variations sceptiques sur le thème de la mort — de Marx à Camus'. *Mélanges de Science Religieuse*. (1993), p. 93.

Camus himself does little to clear up the matter. Bernard East notes Camus' statement in an interview afforded to *le Monde* on the 31<sup>st</sup> August 1956, in which Camus says: "Je ne crois pas en Dieu, c'est vrai. Mais je ne suis pas athée pour autant."<sup>174</sup>

A quick summary of Camus' works suggests that the weight of evidence favours Bénisti, for Camus seemingly does not reject outright the existence of God, but rather chides him for being unjust or derelict in his duty. In *L'Ironie*, part of *L'Envers et l'endroit* (1937), Camus describes the story of an old, sick woman as that of "la misère de l'homme en Dieu" (*EE*, p. 39), an obvious parody of Pascal's 'Misère de l'homme sans Dieu' (*Pensées*, p. 61).

In *Le Malentendu* (1944), when Maria pleads for help from God, the old servant appears and asks: "Vous m'avez appelé?" (p. 95). He subsequently refuses Maria's plea for help and, as we look back through the work, we recall Jan's description of the old servant at the beginning: "En tout cas, il n'a pas l'air d'entendre ce qu'on lui dit" (p. 31). In *Lettres à un ami allemand* (1948), Camus writes: "Je sais que le ciel qui fut indifférent à vos atroces victoires le sera encore à votre juste défaite."<sup>175</sup> Further, in *La Peste*, Rieux suggests to Tarrou: "Puisque l'ordre du monde est réglé par la mort, peut-être vaut-il mieux pour Dieu qu'on ne croie pas en lui et qu'on lutte de toutes ses forces contre la mort, sans lever les yeux vers ce ciel où il se tait" (p. 121). Williams notes that this statement by Rieux "actually conceives of the very same God" (p. 65).

Duhamel's own personal beliefs seem to have shifted over time, from a complete rejection of God in his youth, to an implied acceptance in his final years. In his memoirs for the period 1884 to

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<sup>174</sup> Bernard East. *Albert Camus ou l'Homme à la recherche d'une morale*. Montréal: Éditions Bellarmin, 1984, p. 57.

<sup>175</sup> Albert Camus. *Lettres à un ami allemand*. Paris: Gallimard, 1948, p. 81.

1901, Duhamel describes his local church: “C’est au cours d’une méditation dans ce sanctuaire que la foi m’a quitté” (*IA*, p. 37). Further, in *Les Espoirs et les Épreuves*, his recollections for the period 1919 to 1928, he confesses to “nulle foi religieuse” (p. 12).

In relation to Duhamel’s *Des Légendes, des batailles* (1907),<sup>176</sup> Comeau says:

C’est dans le poème intitulé “Les Marécages” que la rage antireligieuse s’exprime le plus violemment. Nous ne citons que quelques vers:

Paix d’ignorance aux cœurs paralysés de grâce,

Beauté vacuité d’esprit de ce qui croit,

Prostitution du grand mot que serait la Foi;

.....

Et Christ mort devant la raison des vivants (Comeau, p. 44).

In *Le Combat* (1913), the form of Gérard’s rebellion against the river excludes any reliance on God. When an engineer comments that the works are being undertaken on the site of an old priory and asks Gérard whether anyone thought to properly respect the site, Gérard replies simply: “Non, Monsieur...” (p. 166). Gérard is firmly convinced that “ce sol a rendu maintenant tout ce qu’il conservait de matières utiles” (p. 166). In *Civilisation* (1918), the story of ‘Lieutenant Dauche’ brings us closer to the concept of a God of whom we can ask nothing. As the medical officer explains to our narrator about the true nature of Dauche’s injury, he remarks: “Je ne parle pas de Dieu. L’idée même de Dieu semble s’être désintéressée de l’immense catastrophe.”<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> Georges Duhamel. *Des Légendes, des batailles*. Paris: Éditions de l’Abbaye, 1907.

<sup>177</sup> Georges Duhamel. *Civilisation*. Paris: Fayard, 1928, p. 36.

The very title of *Les Hommes abandonnés* (1921) begs the question: abandoned by whom? In ‘On ne saurait tout dire’, one of the short stories for the collection, the indifference of the natural world is placed on the same level as that of God, “ce paysage courroucé, immobile, inhumain comme le dieu de la bible” (*LHA*, p. 50).

The penultimate paragraph of another collected work, ‘La Chambre de l’horloge’, justifies the inference that, according to Duhamel, human beings have been abandoned by God. The subject matter for this work are the men and women of an old-age home, who, in the course of waiting to die, suffer every manner of physical and psychological ailment. All of this is observed and described by a child:

Levant au ciel des yeux brouillés de larmes, je songeais: «Pourquoi donc avez-vous abandonné les hommes? Ne ferez-vous point miséricorde à tous ces hommes malheureux?» (*LHA*, p. 312).

The term ‘miséricorde’ certainly places that quotation in a religious context. However, Comeau disagrees with that interpretation of the title:

Les hommes abandonnés ne sont pas tellement des hommes abandonnés de Dieu, comme la dernière page du livre le laisserait croire, mais abandonnés par leur libre-arbitre et livrés aux forces aveugles de la foule (p. 182).

Given the clear religious language and the raising of tear-stained eyes to the sky, it is perhaps a little difficult to accept this argument from Comeau, although, to be fair, the child does add: “Je n’aurais pu dire à qui s’adressait cette muette supplication” (*LHA*, p. 312).

In *La Possession du monde* (1919), Duhamel conceives of Christianity as a doctrine of injustice:



La doctrine chrétienne, qui a toutes les beautés, eut aussi toutes les audaces. Elle a cherché à faire prévaloir dans la foule cette notion sublime et téméraire que le salut serait réservé aux pauvres (p. 41).

Further, Duhamel makes a comment in his journal about the Lord's Prayer, which seems to bring him into line with Camus' notion of a God who has failed in his duty: "Le «délivrez-nous du mal» est absurde. C'est comme si on se permettait de dire à Dieu, soyez bon" (*LLA*, p. 168).

*La Chronique des Pasquier* would expand upon this notion. Here, Laurent puts Duhamel's own position to Cécile: "Si Dieu est tout puissant, pourquoi n'a-t-il pas, depuis longtemps, depuis toujours, remporté un triomphe total?" (*CCO*, p. 257). In *Vue de la terre promise* (1934), Laurent describes God in terms of a long-lost friend: "Je pense à Dieu comme on penserait à un ami qui serait mort" (p. 139).

In *Paroles de médecin* (1946), Duhamel describes the death of a child in 'Thrène pour une petite fille'. As Rieux will later refuse "jusqu'à la mort d'aimer cette création où des enfants sont torturés" (*La Peste*, p. 199), so too Duhamel uses the language of pure revolt in describing the death of the infant: "Oui, je sais que les enfants meurent, je sais que les enfants souffrent, et je ne peux m'y résigner. Je ne peux pas, je ne veux pas. Je vais crier à la face du ciel pluvieux, que je n'accepte pas cela" (p. 71). The suggestion is that God remains indifferent to the event: "Mais la souffrance des enfants, la mort des enfants? Vers qui faut-il me tourner pour dire que ce n'est pas tolérable, que je n'accepte pas cela?" (p. 72).

In *Cécile parmi nous* (1938), Cécile experiences the death of her son, and despite the fact that his death cannot be reconciled by Cécile — "Les petits enfants, Laurent, ne devraient pas mourir" (p. 267) — Cécile refuses to abandon her God. In fact, her conduct is the very antithesis of revolt.

She turns resolutely away from the world: “Moi, moi, il me semble que je ne suis plus sur terre, mais avec l’enfant, dans l’abîme, et que je vais le suivre à travers toutes les étapes de la dissolution” (p. 267). Cécile embraces the same God whom she clearly acknowledges is partly responsible for the death of her son: “Je ne demande pas à mon Dieu d’avoir créé ce monde incohérent” (p. 270).

It is a little difficult to reconcile Cécile’s conduct in light of the predominant theme of Duhamel’s work, which is essentially the rejection of faith in favour of the possibilities that exist on this earth in this life. Perhaps this position is preserved through the conduct of Laurent, who refuses to accompany Cécile into the church to pray, notwithstanding her distress and her suffering.

Later, in *Cri des profondeurs* (1951), Félix speaks of a “ciel indifférent à nos histoires” (p. 88) during the Nazi invasion.

At this point, it is difficult to resolve the question as to whether Duhamel considers God to be dead, or simply failing in his duty. Lafay also leaves that question open for Duhamel: “De ce silence ou de cette mort de Dieu, Duhamel ne tire, personnellement aucun orgueil ou sentiment de puissance. Tout au contraire, cette absence est pour lui le «*vide majeur*»” (*Duhamel revisité*, p. 139). Perhaps such a distinction is redundant, given that both Duhamel and Camus reject Christianity primarily on the basis of its being a doctrine which is irreconcilable with the death of innocent children.

Another basis upon which Camus says Christianity constitutes a ‘leap of faith’ is because its belief system cannot be objectively verified: “Je ne sais pas si ce monde a un sens qui le dépasse” (*LMS*, p. 75). In this context, we have already commented on the rejection by both authors of any

concept of an immortal soul. In the same way: “La notion d’enfer, par exemple, n’est ici qu’une aimable plaisanterie” (*Noces*, p. 42).

There is an interesting parallel between comments that both writers make about the futility of any desire for immortality. In *La Possession du monde* (1919), Duhamel says: “Or, je sens bien qu’en ce monde je n’attends pas de vivre, mais que je vis. Je sens bien que c’est ici qu’il me faut vivre sans retard” (p. 113). In his notebooks, Camus would write: “Futilité du problème de l’immortalité. Ce qui nous intéresse, c’est notre destinée, oui. Mais non pas «après», «avant»” (*Carnets I*, p. 51).

In *Civilisation française* (1944), Duhamel implores people to exercise their own powers of reasoning and judgment, rather than blandly accept the existence of God: “Je dis qu’il est irréligieux ou areligieux le peuple qui accepte l’idée de Dieu comme il accepterait une vague contrainte sociale, comme un article du code ou comme un règlement municipal”<sup>178</sup> Subscribing to the idea of God in the absence of a reasoned belief is, for Duhamel, tantamount to a leap of faith. As Knapp suggests, Duhamel:

felt that “honesty” was a deterrent to belief in church dogma. When man does not have faith, Duhamel declared, it would be dishonest of him to claim himself a believer. Duhamel, who lost his faith early in life, who was still agnostic and who still believed in honesty, had no patience at all with the hypocrite. He could not, despite Pascal’s wager, maintain any other attitude toward salvation (p. 140).

In *Hommage à François Mauriac*, Duhamel confirms Knapp’s viewpoint:

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<sup>178</sup> Georges Duhamel. *Civilisation française*. Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1944, p. 43.

Cette foi qui suffit à tout puisqu'elle offre une métaphysique, une morale, un système du monde et même une politique. Regrets sincères. Vains regrets. Le pari de Pascal est trop purement pragmatique pour me rechauffer le cœur.<sup>179</sup>

Rejecting the Pascalian wager must have been a difficult thing for Duhamel, for his admiration of Pascal is well known. In *Les Confessions sans Pénitence* (1941), Duhamel refers to Pascal as “depuis tant d’années, le compagnon de ma vie,” (p 145) and confesses to having carried a copy of Pascal’s *Pensées* with him to the Front in 1914.

In *La Possession du monde* (1919) and his memoirs, Duhamel debates with himself, the merits of whether to tell fatally wounded soldiers about their condition. At the heart of his deliberations is a contest between, on the one hand, this “certitude de la vie, ce fabuleux avenir qui est plus précieux de la vie” (p. 169), and on the other, the fact that “en vérité, le condamné à mort est encore riche d’avenir” (p. 170). What he criticises, however, is the enthusiasm with which men of the church rush to tell the injured they are dying. Michel Dyé makes the same observation and in doing so, links Duhamel’s criticisms with those of Camus twenty years later. Speaking of *La Pesée des âmes* in particular, Dyé says:

Conscient de la force du lien qui nous unit à ce monde, il pense qu’il ne nous appartient pas d’ôter aux êtres condamnés l’illusion de la vie; aussi déplore-t-il la cruauté des hommes d’Eglise qui, pour faire entrevoir une existence future aux grands blessés, n’hésitent pas à leur révéler leur fin prochaine. Par sa réprobation, il annonce ici l’attitude d’Albert Camus qui, dans *L’Étranger*, dénoncera une vingtaine d’années plus tard, «les certitudes» des prêtres qui ne sont que des croyances (*La Possession du monde ou la Quête du bonheur selon Georges Duhamel*, p. 158).

As Duhamel points out, even those, like François Mauriac, who have this ‘certitude’, are often as unhappy and miserable as those who do not:

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<sup>179</sup> Georges Duhamel. ‘Hommage à François Mauriac’. *La Revue du Siècle*. July-August (1933), p.20.

Nous serions tentés parfois de regarder avec envie nos anciens frères chrétiens assis dans leur certitude [...] C'est à de tels moments que Mauriac intervient, [...], il se penche à notre oreille, nous raconte une de ses histoires et dit pour terminer: «Vous voyez bien maintenant que moi qui ai la foi, je suis aussi malheureux, aussi misérable, aussi désespéré que vous» (*Hommage à François Mauriac*, p. 20).

In his memoirs, Duhamel describes the shift in his religious views:

Je n'ai pas la foi religieuse. Je suis, présentement, ce que j'appelle, pendant les heures de l'amertume, un agnostique désespéré, ce que j'appellerai plus tard, ayant pesé les idées et les mots, un agnostique chrétien (*LEE*, p. 10).

The indignant poet of his youth is now imbued with a measure of sympathy for, and even jealousy of, those armed with faith:

Accepter une métaphysique et la déposer aussitôt dans «l'arche sainte» pour se donner plus librement aux œuvres de la vie, c'est une solution de sagesse, tout au moins en apparence. Par malheur, je ne suis pas en état d'accepter [...] que les mots de la prière donnent de la pente à l'esprit (*LEE*, p. 10).

In relation to this process, Lafay comments:

C'est au cours des années 1935-1938 que l'amitié du Père Maydiou, dominicain de Juvisy, les conversations avec Mauriac, un climat familial religieux et surtout le retour à la foi chrétienne de Charles Nicolle vont favoriser chez Duhamel une évolution vers un «agnosticisme chrétien» (*Duhamel revisité*, p. 181).

Richard Bourcier takes it a step further, suggesting, of Duhamel's relationship with Charles Nicolle:

En 1957, Duhamel parle de nouveau de ce maître de science comme de vie qu'il considère comme un saint laïc. Depuis la mort de ce dernier au cours de l'année 1936, l'écrivain n'a pas réussi à lui adresser un dernier adieu. Quelque chose lui fait penser qu'il le reverra, bien qu'il ne croie pas à une vie future.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> Richard J. Bourcier. 'Georges Duhamel et la religion'. *L'Humanisme de Georges Duhamel*. Ed. Richard J. Bourcier. Scranton: Ridge Row Press, 1992, p. 187.

Bourcier is speaking here about Duhamel's *Problèmes de l'heure* (1957), in which, notwithstanding his ongoing inability to accept a religious faith, Duhamel suggests that "quelque chose me fait penser que je reverrai Charles Nicolle et que notre entretien est seulement interrompu" (p. 131). Bourcier points to Duhamel's last work, *Problèmes de civilisation* (1962),<sup>181</sup> as highly persuasive evidence that, towards the end of his life, Duhamel experienced a fundamental shift in his beliefs:

Avant la fin de *Problèmes de Civilisation* qui sera la dernière œuvre et publiée en 1962, Duhamel donne ce témoignage capital qui indique une nouvelle perspective dans sa pensée religieuse: «Mais je ne peux croire que le trésor de ma mémoire s'effacera dans le néant. Et ma mémoire me donne ainsi le sentiment et l'espoir d'une éternité spirituelle qui est ma suprême consolation.» (Bourcier, p. 188).

### ***A RELIGIOUS SENSIBILITY***

If Duhamel came closer to a more traditional religious belief towards the end of his life, it cannot be disputed that his work "est imprégnée d'un sens religieux de l'existence."<sup>182</sup> From the time that Duhamel lost his faith during a meditation at *Notre Dame des Champs*, the divinity of man became his focus. Robert Jouanny points out that this attitude is evident in Duhamel's early poems:

L'ambition initiale de Duhamel était grande: avant "l'Abbaye", il fut tenté par la vision épique de l'ascension constante de l'homme:

*Je suis l'Esprit, je suis l'Éternelle Beauté  
et Dieu s'il est, n'est Dieu que pour m'avoir créé  
dit-il dans Des Légendes, des batailles.*<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> Georges Duhamel. *Problèmes de civilisation*. Paris: Mercure de France, 1962.

<sup>182</sup> Lucien Christophe. 'Georges Duhamel et l'inquiétude religieuse'. *Synthèses*. March (1952), p. 30.

<sup>183</sup> Robert Jouanny. 'George Duhamel, poète'. *Les Cahiers de l'Abbaye de Créteil*. December (1985), p. 15.

Further, Comeau suggests:

Pour remplacer le Dieu transcendant qu'il avait de bonne heure refusé, Duhamel avait fait de l'homme le cœur de sa religion. *La Possession du monde*, à ce point de vue, peut être considérée comme la recherche d'une possibilité de salut dans l'homme et pour l'homme (p. 180).

Laurent shares the same religious sentiment in *La Chronique des Pasquier*, although it is clear that it does not emanate from God:

Parfois je me dis qu'un monde avec Dieu ne serait pas plus absurde que notre monde sans Dieu, que notre monde raisonnable. Je ne peux pas dire que je ne sente pas quelque chose qui serait le besoin d'une éternité, au contraire, mais je le sens avec mon corps, oui, plutôt qu'avec mon esprit (*VTP*, p. 140).

In *La Possession du monde* (1919), and in the absence of God, Duhamel links the feeling of grace to an understanding of the divinity of human beings: "La grâce! Elle est bien la conscience fugitive que l'homme prend de sa divinité" (p. 187). Chantel Fouché agrees:

Synthèse original de stoïcisme et du christianisme tels que les présente Renan, *La Possession du monde* offre un enseignement original: dépassant la simple résignation des stoïciens, «Supporte et abstiens-toi» (PM, 195), dépassant l'admiration que Renan voue à Jésus l'«homme incomparable». Duhamel, par cette discipline consentie de pauvreté matérielle qui ouvre aux joies supérieures, par cette allégresse à la fois humble et cosmique, invite l'homme à se rendre maître du monde en se divinisant le plus possible. « [...] Que l'homme ait foi en sa divinité!» ainsi se clôt le chapitre capital, «La Recherche de la grâce».<sup>184</sup>

We have previously considered examples of this notion of 'grace' in *La Possession du Monde*. However, it is also evident in *Vie des martyrs* (1917). In 'La Grâce', Duhamel compares the suffering experienced by two injured soldiers, Auger and Grégoire. Auger seems possessed of

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<sup>184</sup> Chantel Fouché. '«Miracle n'est pas œuvre»: Georges Duhamel, héritier de Renan'. *L'Humanisme de Georges Duhamel*. Ed. Richard J. Bourcier. Scranton: Ridge Row Press, (1992), p. 172.

natural gifts of humility and self-confidence, able to guide the surgeons in their work and to sing silly songs with officers who come to visit. Duhamel describes Auger as “touché de la grâce” (p. 190), although there is no suggestion that this grace is a function of God.

On the other hand we have Grégoire, who, much like Gérard in *Le Combat*, is convinced that he is to die. He finds no respite in the comforting words of the surgeon and is content to face the wall each day rather than have his bed moved so that he may be able to see the other soldiers in the room: “Mais Grégoire n’est connu de personne; il regarde le mur, il maigrit, et la mort seule semble s’intéresser à lui” (*VM*, p. 189). Duhamel considers that Grégoire, who has not been visited with the same grace as that of Auger, is condemned but for the persistent hand of friendship and communion. “Mais Grégoire est damné si vous ne lui tendez pas la main” (*VM*, p. 191).

Of the source of this grace, Duhamel says this in ‘La Grâce’ (1917): “Dieu lui-même doit avoir pitié des damnés, lui qui leur a refusé la grâce” (*VM*, p. 191). Accordingly, the source of Duhamel’s grace is not God, a message consistent with some statements in *La Possession du monde* (1919). For example: “Il ne faut pas perdre contact avec l’univers si l’on veut vivre en état de grâce” (*LPM*, p. 180).

Comeau considers that ‘La Recherche de la grâce’ “est le chapitre de *La Possession du monde* ayant probablement attiré les critiques les plus acerbes à son auteur” (p. 111). As we have seen, Duhamel cites examples of a feeling of grace being provoked by the sight of an osier bed or tarpaulin. As Comeau suggests: “Voilà un pouvoir bien grand accordé à une bien humble créature” (p. 111).



Comeau cites Henri Massis, from *Le Cas de M. Georges Duhamel*, published in 1922. Comeau notes Massis' description of these episodes as "courtes ivresses physiques, traduites en lyrisme spiritualiste [...] promues au rang 'd'expériences religieuses'" (Comeau, p. 113). Comeau apparently disagrees with such criticism, noting that Duhamel "évite justement d'employer le mot de religion parce que l'espèce de mysticisme qu'il prêche ne débouche sur rien de véritablement transcendant" (p. 113). Whilst it is true that the source of Duhamel's grace is exclusively limited to the world, criticisms like those of Massis are bound to arise, because, although Duhamel nowhere uses 'le mot de religion' in describing his concept of grace, he seemingly has no objection if it is labelled in that manner: "Il en est qui appellent cela Dieu. Beaucoup d'autres ne donnent pas de nom au miracle, mais l'espèrent quand même à genoux" (*LPM*, p. 183).

We have already postulated that Duhamel's grace is a similar concept to the 'pantheistic upsurge' of *Noces* (1938). Reduced to its fundamental components, is Duhamel's grace nothing more than "le simple accord entre un être et l'existence qu'il mène" (*Noces*, p. 65)? In essence, as Comeau suggests, *La Possession du monde* is "cet acte de foi en l'homme et au monde" (p. 115). It is, as Bourcier notes, an expression of Duhamel's:

foi en un humanisme laïc. Puisque lui et nombre de ses contemporains n'ont pas la faveur d'une foi religieuse, Duhamel préconise un bonheur terrestre, fait par l'homme, à la portée de l'homme, établi sur la primauté de l'esprit et du cœur et non sur les conquêtes d'un matérialisme technique (p. 183).

This is precisely the view of Thérive: "Duhamel espère qu'une religion nouvelle, suffisante à l'esprit et au cœur, peut être donnée aux hommes de demain qui auront oublié le christianisme" (p. 56). Duhamel's grace is a recognition of this "religion humaine" (*LEE*, p. 44). Knapp summarises the position well:

Duhamel, an agnostic his whole life, did not and could not become a member of a church. He was not religious in the conventional Catholic manner. He did believe in an Eternal Force and with fervor. He felt compelled to probe his beliefs, to sound out his own depths, to find the God within (p. 147).

It is also worth noting that Duhamel is certainly not the only writer on the absurd to recognise within himself and others, fleeting, seemingly unexplained, moments of happiness. For example, Albérès quotes from the journal of Julien Green, noting how his sincere man is from time to time:

envahi par une joie inexplicable. «Un homme se tient debout près d'une fenêtre et regarde tomber la neige, et tout à coup se glisse en lui une joie qui n'a pas de nom dans le langage humain» (*Les Hommes traqués*, p. 151).

Salavin experiences similar transient periods of happiness and Comeau comments on the link between these examples and those of *La Possession du monde* (1919):

Il existe en effet une parenté étroite entre les courts moments d'euphorie par lesquels passe Salavin et les exemples que donnait Duhamel au début du chapitre en question (p. 169).

Tonnet-Lacroix agrees: “Salavin souhaite «l'état de grâce» qui lui donne l'impression de «posséder le monde»” (p. 173).

Even the Salavin consumed by a lack of self-worth in *Confession de minuit* (1920), recognises: “Il faut si peu de chose pour me rendre heureux” (p. 19). In *Journal de Salavin* (1927), after his boss describes him as a ‘noble cœur’, Salavin experiences an episode of unbridled joy. He retreats to the streets, the place where he habitually celebrates these fleeting moments of happiness before they dissipate. Like the other episodes, this moment, too, is to be shortlived: “Le bonheur est une chose terrible; une miette de pain dans mon lit, une ombre sur un visage, un grain de sable dans ma chaussure et l'univers est menacé” (*JS*, p. 110).

Indeed, Camus will also recognise such moments, primarily in the form of the ‘pantheistic upsurge’. In his early notebooks, he recognises “cette joie étrange qui descend du ciel vers la mer” (*Carnets I*, p. 36).

### ***THE SEARCH FOR A LIFE FORMULA***

If life is capable of delivering such overwhelming feelings of contentment and unity, then what is the trigger? Is there some absolute, apart from Christianity, that might provide some rule to give life order and meaning?

In *Lettres au Patagon* (1926), Duhamel describes a visit one night from a young man, twenty years of age. Belonging to the “génération de jeunes hommes dont la guerre a profondément bouleversé la formation morale,”<sup>185</sup> the young man confesses an urgent need for some rule which will guide his life: “Oui, moi, je sais ce que je veux. Je veux un corps de doctrine” (p. 46).

In *Biographie de mes fantômes*, Duhamel confesses the search for his own rule or religion, and, initially, he thought he had found it in his medical studies, which represented for him “une logique, une exactitude qui allaient à la grandeur. Je le répète, je fus transporté. A peine sorti de l’église, je cherchais, ici et là, l’ombre d’une religion” (p. 88). Later in the same memoirs, he almost pleads: “Non! Non! Il faut une règle, acceptée mais aussi imposée. Une règle qui tombe de haut pour être plus sûrement humaine” (p. 100). In *Le Temps de la recherche*, he suggests:

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<sup>185</sup> Georges Duhamel. *Lettres au Patagon*. Paris: Mercure de France, 1926, p. 45.

Les sociétés humaines cherchent, à travers des convulsions dramatiques, une formule de vie sociale qui leur donne l'équilibre et peut-être plus de justice et sans doute plus de bonheur (p. 23).

After the loss of his faith, there remained for Duhamel, "cet ardent désir d'une règle" (*LEE*, p. 80). In this context, Dodd suggests a link between Salavin and his creator, suggesting it is:

significant that Georges Duhamel had, on another occasion, spoken of Salavin's drama as "la recherche du salut" and safe to see a certain parallel between the writer and searcher after some kind of absolute truth and Salavin searching for the answer to the problem which Camus' Tarrou was later to pose as "Peut-on être un saint sans Dieu?" Duhamel was groping with precisely the same problem through Salavin and deals with it explicitly in the third volume of the cycle (p. 53).

There is no doubt that Camus also sought a rule of life to govern his conduct. East agrees: "Dans un monde qui a perdu ses raisons de vivre et où règnent le meurtre et la raison du plus fort, il devient impérieux de se donner une conduite à suivre, une ligne d'action" (p. 61). The "desire to transcend the human condition"<sup>186</sup> does not attract any criticism. However, there is support for the suggestion that Camus' search went beyond that. For example, Jean Grenier suggests that Camus' desire to join the Communist party was in part motivated by the search for "une première vérité d'où il tirerait une méthode de vie et de pensée."<sup>187</sup> Pierre Gascar agrees that Camus was guilty of the search for some absolute: "Ce goût du symbole, du symbole que, seule, la nature propose lorsqu'elle a conservé sa pureté originelle, trahit, chez Camus, une forme obscure du sentiment religieux."<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> Anthony Rizzuto. 'Camus and a Society Without Women'. *Modern Language Studies*. Vol. 13, No. 1. (1983), p. 4.

<sup>187</sup> Jean Grenier. *Albert Camus, souvenirs*. Paris: Gallimard, 1968, p. 42.

<sup>188</sup> Pierre Gascar. 'Le dernier visage de Camus'. *Camus*. Paris: Librairie Hachette, (1964), p. 262.

McCarthy also considers that a certain religious sensitivity resided in Camus, born out of his early experiences which formed the subject for 'Noces à Tipasa' (1938):

He cannot bring himself to give up a religious urge which springs from his sense that the world is beautiful. The delight he took in the Algerian countryside was so intense that, deny it as he might, he felt it must possess some greater significance (p. 154).

Do these sentiments not recall 'la grâce' of *La Possession du monde*? Without expressly referring to Duhamel, Gascaur thinks so. Speaking of *La Chute* (1956), he says:

La pensée de Camus, dans les derniers ouvrages qu'on lui doit, est, au sens propre du mot, et je n'hésite pas à l'écrire, chrétienne [...] tout le rattache, sinon à la religion, du moins à l'humanisme chrétien (p. 255).

As it did earlier for Duhamel, Camus' religious sense manifests itself in the form of the divinity of man: "Il a décidé de fonder sa religion sur l'homme" (East, p. 56). McCarthy considers that it is this religious sense that forms part of Camus' originality, an argument that could be tempered somewhat in light of our observations of Duhamel: "Camus' originality lay in his attempt to preserve man's religious sense although it could not be satisfied and to make him live in the absence of God" (p. 147).

Indeed, some critics, including Gascaur (p. 262), consider that, like Duhamel, Camus became more favourably inclined towards Christianity in his later years. That conclusion perhaps sits a little uneasily, however, with extracts like that which follows from *L'Homme révolté* (1951), in relation to what constitutes true, metaphysical rebellion. The rebel "blasphème d'abord au nom de l'ordre, dénonçant en Dieu le père de la mort et le suprême scandale" (p. 42). The notion of a God who turns a deaf ear applies equally to a discussion of revolt as to the idea of the absurd: "Un dieu sourd est la seule imagination religieuse des révoltés" (p. 49).

### ***THE RELATIVE AND THE ABSOLUTE***

Essentially, Camus' objection to hope for an eternal life of the soul, or faith in some absolute transcendence, distills down to a contest between the relative and the absolute: "Déchiré entre le monde qui ne suffit pas et Dieu qu'il n'a pas, l'esprit absurde choisit avec passion le monde: partagé entre le relatif et l'absolu, il saute avec ardeur dans le relatif" (*Carnets II*, p. 63). On the one hand, there are those things that human beings can see, touch or prove. On the other hand, there is pure mystery:

Entre ce ciel et ces visages tournés vers lui, rien où accrocher une mythologie, une littérature, une éthique ou une religion, mais des pierres, la chair, des étoiles et ces vérités que la main peut toucher (*Noces*, p. 47).

For example: "Ce cœur en moi, je puis l'éprouver et je juge qu'il existe. Ce monde, je puis le toucher et je juge encore qu'il existe. Là s'arrête toute ma science, le reste est construction" (*LMS*, p. 36). In this context, Camus distinguishes between those things capable of enduring and those relative entities, like human beings themselves, with a limited life.

Duhamel drew the same distinction. *Fables de mon jardin* (1936) provides a good example of the difference between enduring nature and perishable humanity. In 'La Colline et la rivière', Duhamel attempts to reassure the hill that man's construction in the form of a road will withstand the attempts by the river to whittle away the hill, to which the hill replies: "Mais, dans mille ans, serez-vous là?" (p. 169). Léon Binet also observes of Duhamel: "Il avait été étonné, dans la visite des temples en ruines, de l'assaut donné par le monde végétal à l'œuvre des hommes."<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> Léon Binet. 'Georges Duhamel, naturaliste'. *Georges Duhamel 1884-1966*. Paris: Mercure de France, (1967), p. 47.

In *La Peste* (1947), Camus pits the relative, in the form of the courage and learning of Dr Rieux, against the absolute, represented by Paneloux's Christian symbolism. In a note for *La Peste* made in his notebooks, Camus highlights this "lutte de la médecine et de la religion: les puissances du relatif (et quel relatif!) contre celles de l'absolu. C'est le relatif qui triomphe ou plus exactement qui ne perd pas" (*Carnets II*, p. 69). However, the relative also has its limits:

Richard déclara qu'à son avis, il ne fallait pas céder à l'affolement: il s'agissait d'une fièvre à complications inguinales, c'était tout ce qu'on pouvait dire, les hypothèses, en science comme dans la vie, étant toujours dangereuses (*La Peste*, p. 51).

Camus refutes the ability of science to explain all and demonstrates, in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (1942), that beyond a certain point, science, like religion, makes its own leap of faith:

Mais vous parlez d'un invisible système planétaire où des électrons gravitent autour d'un noyau. Vous m'expliquez ce monde avec une image. Je reconnais alors que vous en êtes venus à la poésie [...] (p. 37).

The science that was to explain all, descends into the hypothetical: "Ainsi cette science qui devait tout m'apprendre finit dans l'hypothèse" (*LMS*, p. 37). As Cruikshank suggests, Camus:

remains on his guard against that deification of reason to which his own tradition is prone. Complete faith in reason or absolute rejection of reason are both, he holds, betrayals of man's situation in the world and only serve to promote harmful delirium. Camus' concern is to find a way of living which accepts the absurd instead of veiling it behind either rationalism or irrationalism (*Albert Camus and the Literature of Revolt*, p. 45).

This same science is capable of ultimate destruction. As Camus wrote in *Combat*:

Que dans un monde livré de tous les déchirements de la violence, incapable d'aucun contrôle, indifférent à la justice et au simple bonheur des hommes, la science se consacre au meurtre organisé (Lévi-Valensi, *Camus à Combat*, p. 570).

This is precisely the objection to science and technology that Duhamel maintained throughout his career. In *La Possession du monde* (1919), and echoing the Gospel according to Matthew, Duhamel describes the same contest between the relative and the absolute:

La plus suave des voix humaines a dit: «Faites-vous au ciel des biens qui ne périssent pas!» Qu'il nous soit pardonné, si nous osons murmurer: «Faites-vous, en ce monde, des biens qui ne périssent pas!» (p. 114).

Having lost his faith and turned to science, Duhamel prefigures Camus: “Rien n'est définitif dans l'empire des sciences de la vie et rien même dans celui des sciences dites exactes” (*BF*, p. 88).

Laurent would learn the very same lesson from M. Chalgrin in *Les Maîtres* (1937): “Mais déclarer que la raison permet de tout expliquer, c'est créer une superstition nouvelle” (p. 41). In fact, notwithstanding his occupation as a ‘savant’, Laurent concedes to Justin that science and reason can, as Camus would later suggest, ultimately end up in the realm of the mystical or absolute:

Malheureusement, tous ceux qui, parmi nous, s'efforcent d'expliquer le monde élaborent une théorie et s'enfoncent presque tout de suite dans leur théorie comme une citadelle. Aussitôt, ils deviennent aveugles, sourds, insensibles et ils ne voient plus le monde (*CPN*, p. 202).

For Duhamel, one function of this contest between the relative and absolute, between reason and mystery, is the contest between the heart and the mind — between feelings and intelligence. As Luc Estang notes, Duhamel “m'émeut par la difficile conciliation que j'y vois de la fidélité du cœur et de l'honnêteté de l'intelligence” (p. 114).

This is also a theme which Dunwoodie identifies in Camus. Referring to *L'Envers et l'endroit*, he says:



In a 1932 review of Bergson's *Les Deux Sources de la morale et de la religion*, Camus wrote: "Rien de plus séduisant que cette idée: écarter l'intelligence comme dangereuse, baser tout un système sur la connaissance immédiate et les sensations à l'état brut". His frequent attacks on the alienating effects of Reason indicate that this remained an ideal dear to Camus, for whom feelings hold more attraction than reason (p. 21).

As we have seen, this contest is the subject matter for Duhamel's *La Nuit d'orage* (1927). Lisbeth's illness causes François to call into question his reasoning and teachings to date, including "cette sagesse déterministe qui n'accepte pas les phénomènes que pour les éclaircir, les résoudre, leur assigner un rang dans l'enchaînement universel" (p. 82). Losing faith in science and the power of rational explanation, François becomes an easy prey for his thoughts and, like Salavin, he descends into obsessive, compulsive thought processes. As Salavin would be careful not to step on the lines in the sidewalk, François refuses to turn on lamps or remove certain weeds for fear of ushering in some new unhappiness: "Il m'arrivera quelque chose de pénible" (p. 117).

There then ensues a contest between reason and superstition. The latter urges him to simply jettison the object, but, later, his pride and faith in science prevent him from so doing: "Que ne s'agit-il de moi, de ma propre santé, de ma vie même!" (p. 101). The specialist Tessart, unable to find any physical reason for Lisbeth's illness, sends her to the country alone, inferring that François may be in some way to blame. François is still afflicted by notions of superstition and chance. In sending Lisbeth away at the train station, he is consumed by the fear that her carriage will inevitably derail. He convinces himself that he can even foresee all the drama and carnage of the derailment. One moment later, he then angrily rejects the notion of a premonition, pounding the ground with his foot in rage as once more, cause and effect are called upon: "Non, non, non! Il n'y a pas de pressentiments. Il n'y a que des signes, des symptômes et des causes" (p. 144).

François then receives a letter from Abel which confirms that the object was in fact a lucky charm and not a ‘porte malheur’, as originally suspected. As Keating notes: “François was thus faced with the knowledge that his fears were self-induced, and as a result, his confidence in the powers of the intellect was severely shaken” (p. 90). After referring to Pascal’s wager, François clearly speaks for Duhamel when he says: “Je ne tardai pas à comprendre qu’en demandant à Dieu, par cette voie détournée, de me soulager de mes terreurs superstitieuses, je le rebaisais lui-même au rang d’une superstition majeure” (*LNO*, p. 177).

At the conclusion of the work, François enunciates the principal theme: “Le merveilleux n’est donc pas dans la nature, soit! J’ai bien compris la leçon. Mais le merveilleux est en nous et c’est assez!” (*LNO*, p. 197). It is François’ *interpretation* of his world that causes him to question his intelligence, precisely the same theme which we have already examined. Ultimately, François accepts that the world resists any attempt to ascribe a deeper meaning to it, realising “que le monde n’est que ce qu’il est” (*LNO*, p. 18).

The contest between feelings and reason is also at the heart of Duhamel’s *Le Complexe de Théophile* (1958). Notwithstanding his belief in God, Théophile Chédevièle prefers reason over the intuition of his sister Béatrice and the “impulsions personnelles” (p. 46) of pilot, Ernest Himer. Chédevièle borders on the obsessive, reasoning out situations to absurd conclusions. Fearing that his sister’s clumsiness will cause her, one day, to break “le sucrier de Saxe” (p. 19), his reason leads him, “par charité” (p. 19), to break it himself and throw it in the bin.

The same reasoning leads Chédevièle to acknowledge that it might be better to throw his nephews in the Seine to save them from a difficult life (p. 20). Ultimately, when he suggests that Himer

satisfy his wish to kill himself by accepting the controls of a doomed aircraft, he becomes complicit in the suicide of Himer and the murder of innocents.

Maintaining the right balance between the heart and the mind is of critical importance to Duhamel. In his works, he demonstrates the dangers inherent in too rigid an insistence on either reason or mystery and suggests ways in which a compromise might be found. In *Remarques sur les mémoires imaginaires* (1933), Duhamel refers to the “religion du réel” (p. 14) as being made up of fanatics whom he labels as “les mangeurs de chair crue” (p. 18), on the basis of their refusal to accept any other basis of explanation, neither “les condiments, ni les sauces” (p. 15).

In *La Chronique des Pasquier*, there are any number of characters waiting to criticise those scientists, including Laurent, who have contributed to the advancement of technology, to the point where it is capable of mass destruction. As Sénac suggests in *Les Maîtres* (1937): “En somme, vous, les savants, vous êtes les principaux instruments du désordre universel” (p. 33). Ironically, even Joseph chides Laurent, Joseph who knows nothing more than how to generate wealth: “Tu ne sais presque rien d’utilisable” (*Les Maîtres*, p. 46).

In *Les Maîtres*, Rohner is held up as a ‘mangeur de chair crue’. Keating describes him accurately in this manner: “Nicholas Rohner, of the medical faculty, advocates a harsh, uncompromising realism, pure of any taint of mysticism or sentiment” (p. 111). Surprisingly then, like Salavin and François of *La Nuit d’orage*, we find that he has his own superstitions. For example: “Il ne veut pas allumer sa cigarette en troisième à la même flamme. Il touche du bois quand il redoute quelque éventualité fâcheuse” (*Les Maîtres*, p. 142).

Félix Tallemand is also a calculating pragmatist in Duhamel's *Cri des profondeurs* (1951). Yet, he too descends into the mystical from time to time: "Je ne suis pas superstitieux, mais quand je conduis ma voiture, j'aime que les oiseaux s'envolent vers la droite" (p. 77). Félix is even able to mould his superstitions to suit his own purposes: "Quand les oiseaux s'envolent vers la gauche, il me faut un très petit effort d'imagination pour penser que je roule sur la même route, en sens inverse, et qu'ainsi l'ordre est rétabli" (p. 77).

Similarly, Patrice Périot would also discover, to his great sadness: "An overly cerebral or scientific attitude is as limiting and eventually destructive as a totally religious one" (Knapp, p. 146).

Those consumed by an overwhelming interest in the absolute are also well represented in Duhamel's works. Perhaps the best example is Thierry, the religious son of Patrice Périot. As he explains to his father: "Ce que je cherche, ce n'est pas la connaissance de la relativité, par exemple, c'est la connaissance de l'absolu" (*VPP*, p. 186). Knapp agrees:

Perhaps the most interesting character, from a philosophical point of view, is Thierry. His religiousness is as extreme as his father's work in the laboratory. Both are escape mechanisms. Thierry, in effect, rejects life for an eternal world of the spirit (p. 146).

The purest manifestation of a middle ground in the works of Duhamel is undoubtedly Chalgrin, the second protagonist of *Les Maîtres* (1937). Dyé describes him as follows:

Face aux limites de l'humaine condition — mal moral, mal physique, impuissance de la raison à tout expliquer — qui plongent le héros duhamélien dans un profond désarroi, celui-ci comprend qu'au lieu de s'en remettre à l'intelligence seule, il convient de faire appel à l'intuition et de prendre en considération la vie morale et les sentiments, comme le souhaite Chalgrin, nouveau rationaliste.<sup>190</sup>

Like his creator Duhamel, Chalgrin does not subscribe to Rohner's view that science is capable of explaining everything: "Je ne suis pas de ceux qui trouvent tout logique, tout naturel et tout explicable. Non, certes, non" (*Les Maîtres*, p. 38). Clearly enunciating Duhamel's view, Chalgrin continues:

Je souhaite, si vous voulez toute ma pensée que le rationalisme ne se considère plus comme l'adversaire-né de la connaissance intuitive ou religieuse ou même mystique ou poétique (*Les Maîtres*, p. 41).

Knapp provides a good summary of *Les Maîtres* (1937):

To have been taught that the mind is the highest aspect of man, that reason could and should never be dethroned, is to negate the whole affective world of emotions and senses — all those qualities and feelings which relate man to man (p. 119).

In a similar vein, Dyé suggests this of Duhamel:

Jugeant que l'intelligence pure enferme l'être humain en lui-même et s'avère impuissante à lui procurer le bonheur, Duhamel nous dit en creux qu'il faut faire confiance au cœur pour trouver la paix (*Un roman moderne centré sur les rapports de la science et de la morale*, p. 92).

If then, for Duhamel, it is the realm of the heart that must have the last word, how might that manifest itself on a practical level for his readers? In *Remarques sur les mémoires imaginaires* (1933), he suggests that the answer might lie in the work of art: "Je ne suis pas un pur mangeur de

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<sup>190</sup> Michel Dyé. 'Un roman moderne centré sur les rapports de la science et de la morale'. *Les Cahiers de l'Abbaye de Créteil*. December (2001), p. 91.

chair crue. Je ne suis pas un fanatique du fait. J'aime aussi l'œuvre d'art" (p. 25). Prévost confirms Duhamel's view in this regard: "L'art reste en effet le seul moyen d'obtenir entre les hommes, non pas une unité, mais une union, plus réelle que celle de l'intelligence" (p. 48).

There is no doubt that Salavin receives Duhamel's feeling of grace through the medium of music. For example, when Marguerite notices Salavin's improvement on the flute, he experiences a short period of happiness at Notre Dame, at the end of his walk:

Ce fut une heure mémorable. Seul, avec les nuages et le vent forcené, je rencontraï Salavin face à face, un Salavin sauvé, dégagé de la foule de ces sales pensées parasites au milieu desquelles il végète comme une plante opprimée (*CM*, p. 116).

Helping out at the theatre arranged by le père Gagnepain, the poor workers in *Cécile parmi nous* (1938) are the beneficiaries of Duhamel's source of grace. Here, they feel themselves "gagnés par un bien-être qui ressemblait à l'ivresse du vin" (p. 153). Interestingly however, Cécile, the only character in *La Chronique des Pasquier* who has the ability to create beautiful works of art, is destined to live a life of sadness, marked by time away from her family, a failed marriage and the death of a child. The point is that if salvation truly resides within the work of art, it is only an ephemeral salvation.

Similarly, Rizzuto suggests of Camus: "The unity sought by the self, related to the "divine" appetite, is satisfied in art but only temporarily" (*Camus' Imperial Vision*, p. 98). Braun makes the same point in relation to Grand of *La Peste* (1947):

Their personal aims, love for Rambert and artistic perfection for Grand, although fated to destruction in an absurd world, had in themselves the power to keep the plague at bay. Both are saved. Both have conquered absurdity — for a while (p. 96).

In opposing the work of art directly to works of pure reason, is Duhamel himself not indulging in the quest for absolutism, albeit on the human scale — essentially the same quest undertaken by Salavin? Blanchet suggests that question might be answered affirmatively:

Ne pouvant, pendant de longues années, s'appuyer sur les certitudes de la Foi qui offre des réponses à tout, il a préconisé une sorte de rédemption de l'homme par l'art. La nature sans doute nous fournit des joies simples auxquelles nous sommes souvent trop habitués mais les créations artistiques de l'homme remplissent un rôle plus fécond.<sup>191</sup>

Comeau is more forthright in his criticism:

Pour Duhamel, la connaissance poétique se fait par 'intuition', alors qu'en science on opère selon une 'méthode', elle porte sur 'l'essence des êtres' et fait "pénétrer le secret des faits'. Comme la métaphysique donc, elle porte sur un absolu (p. 74).

After all, In *La Possession du monde*, Duhamel describes art as "le don suprême que les hommes se font de leurs découvertes, de leurs richesses" (p. 127). His passion for the theatre, for example, is described in unmistakably religious terms:

Le phénomène du théâtre, qui est proprement un phénomène unanime, est sauvé de toute vilanie quand il est dominé par l'art véritable et qu'il prend un caractère de cérémonie religieuse (*LPM*, p. 88).

In *Cécile parmi nous* (1938), Duhamel describes in religious language the feeling of grace experienced by the theatre workers: "Tous les hommes, toutes les femmes se recueillent dans une paix profonde. Ils savent que, pour un temps, la délivrance va leur être accordée" (p. 218).

If these critics are right, then in proposing the work of art as an essential tenet of the divinity of man, Duhamel is perhaps creating his own symbol or absolute. Camus will make the same point

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<sup>191</sup> Urbain Blanchet. 'La Musique dans l'humanisme de Georges Duhamel'. *L'Humanisme de Georges Duhamel*. Ed. Richard J. Bourcier. Scranton: Ridge Row Press, (1992), p. 76.

about the work of art: “On aurait tort d’y voir un symbole et de croire que l’œuvre d’art puisse être considérée enfin comme un refuge à l’absurde. Elle est elle-même un phénomène absurde [...]” (*LMS*, p. 131).

Interestingly, however, there is persuasive evidence that, despite his comments in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, Camus might also be guilty of elevating the work of art to the status of an absolute. Jones suggests that in the work of Camus:

there comes across a quasi-mystical search for some absolute transcending life itself: this leads him to see in art ‘un moyen d’arriver au divin’ (*Cah 2*, 251), and it is precisely the intuitive, emotive channels he associates with art that Camus finds more reliable, more satisfying, than intellectual reasoning (p. 12).

### ***THE TEMPTATION TO INDIFFERENCE***

In this chapter, we have examined those phenomena that purport to divest men and women of the responsibility for their own lives. Camus, in particular, speaks of the need for a constant effort: “La tentation est forte de rejeter cet effort incessant qui me rend malheureux dans le bonheur lui-même” (*Carnets III*, p. 207). The works and personal writings of both Camus and Duhamel contain references to the ease with which one might succumb to indifference or resignation. As East explains: “La tentation demeure permanente de retourner à l’état antérieur” (p. 112). Camus himself talks of the difficulty in maintaining the struggle: “Certains matins [...] je n’ai que l’envie de m’asseoir et d’attendre que le soir arrive. J’ai cette envie et j’y cède parfois” (*Carnets III*, p. 77).

In *Biographie de mes fantômes*, Duhamel explains his own battle with resignation, which commenced in his twentieth year:



Mais c'est pendant cette lumineuse vingtième année que j'ai poussé au plus loin l'art de me torturer moi-même, c'est-à-dire de refuser les présents de la vie, de souhaiter d'autres vertus que celles dont je bénéficiais, d'aimer les femmes qui ne m'aimaient pas, de désespérer celles qui ne pouvaient me chérir, de m'interroger sans fin sur le sens de ma vie, de ne pas accepter tel que je me trouvais chaque matin, de vivre sans bonne grâce pour les autres et sans charité pour moi-même (p. 78).

In the same volume of his memoirs, Duhamel describes in the language of avoidance, the impediments that he places in front of himself, even in the process of creation: “Devant cette nécessité, le premier mouvement de l'homme est un mouvement de fuite. Il cherche quelque prétexte à différer l'instant de l'épreuve et le moindre prétexte lui est aussitôt bon” (p. 16). Even the humanist Laurent Pasquier admits to a “grande faim de solitude et de fuite” (*VTP*, p. 203), and, at his lowest ebb in *Le Combat contre les ombres* (1939), he thinks about “l'île déserte. C'est désormais un des thèmes de sa vie. «Fuir, là-bas, fuir...»” (p. 269). This temptation to indifference will now be examined in greater depth in the following chapter.

## **CHAPTER V: INDIFFERENCE**

### ***NATURAL INDIFFERENCE***

In a detailed work entitled *L'Indifférence dans l'œuvre d'Albert Camus*, Claude Treil concedes that indifference may be born purely from a feeling for the absurd: “Elle naît du sentiment du vide, et de l’attrait que ce vide exerce sur celui qui l’entrevoit. Elle naît aussi d’une nostalgie de la sérénité [...]” (p. 66).

Treil suggests a distinction between what he terms “une indifférence naturelle et une indifférence acquise” (p. 16) in Camus’ thought. According to Treil, natural indifference usually manifests itself in the form of a general apathy, or constant passivity. He suggests that one may become naturally indifferent in circumstances where sickness or old age mean that the body must, of necessity, conserve its forces. In support of that argument Treil suggests that it was Camus’ natural indifference that enabled him to manage his tuberculosis, a condition which forced the soccer-mad youth to accept certain physical limitations. At the peak of his illness, Camus left Belcourt and moved in with his uncle. Treil records Camus’ natural indifference, from this point on, as manifesting itself primarily in the form of an indifference “aux attaches que constituent les biens matériels et les obligations sociales” (p. 52).

### **‘UNE INDIFFÉRENCE NATURELLE’ IN THE WORKS OF CAMUS**

Treil labels those who are naturally indifferent as “[p]ersonnages passifs: les simples” (p. 113) and suggests that Meursault is the flagbearer of this kind of character in Camus’ work. We have previously noted Meursault’s rejection of ‘expected’ social behaviour: “Messieurs les jurés, le lendemain de la mort de sa mère, cet homme prenait des bains, commençait une liaison

irrégulière, et allait rire devant un film comique” (*L'Étranger*, p. 144). However, Meursault is not always indifferent. Rather, his indifference is one which arises only when he is confronted by social norms. He is not indifferent to his mother's death, only to the behaviour expected in this situation by society. Perhaps the murder of the Arab could be explained, in part at least, in the light of Meursault's rejection of society's most important convention: that which forbids the killing of another human being without lawful excuse.

### **'UNE INDIFFÉRENCE NATURELLE' IN THE WORKS OF DUHAMEL**

In *Le Japon entre la tradition et l'avenir* (1953), Duhamel notices a natural passivity in the Japanese people, during his visit in 1952:

Ce peuple immense, s'infiltrant partout dans les cités, dans la nature, sur l'eau des ports, se comporte en toutes choses avec une dignité qui, à certains moments, ressemble à l'indifférence, au fatalisme (p. 48).

In his fictional works, this type of indifference is exemplified in *Le Prince Jaffar* (1924), particularly in the character of the Arab Mokrani, as evidenced in his relationship with the prince: “Mokrani s'en alla prendre le thé à la menthe et jouer aux cartes avec le prince, dont il ne déteste pas la société” (p. 8). Framed in the negative, this description is suggestive of the later relationship between Meursault and Raymond in *L'Étranger*. Although Mokrani does not seem to have any real affection for the prince, he has no reason to dislike him. Similarly, despite Raymond's reputation in the quartier, Meursault sees no reason not to associate with him: “D'ailleurs, je n'ai aucune raison de ne pas lui parler” (*L'Étranger*, p. 47).

**'UNE INDIFFÉRENCE ACQUISE' IN THE WORKS OF CAMUS AND DUHAMEL**

According to Treil, sensitive souls, whose hearts are hardened by the unreasonableness of the world, can use an indifference born of restraint and modesty as a protective mechanism while hiding their own feelings. In the forward to Treil's work, Camus' friend, Emmanuel Roblès, suggests that: "L'indifférence pour Camus a été un refuge, la zone aveugle [...] où le cœur se minéralise après trop de coups reçus" (Treil, p. 11). This type of indifference, Treil maintains, "loin d'être, comme on le croit généralement, une absence de sentiments, est plutôt le masque qui recouvre et protège un cœur particulièrement sensible" (p. 20). One potential disadvantage of this attitude, Treil suggests, is that it condemns such sensitive souls "à une solitude intérieure qui mène facilement à la mélancolie, et même au pessimisme" (p. 21). This quotation is also an apt one for a number of Duhamel's characters, including Salavin and Blanche of *La Lumière* (1911).

As we have seen, Blanche has lost her zest for life. Bernard senses the truth about Blanche and, in his discussion with his father, sums her up well:

Elle s'incline vers mon...obscurité, cela l'attire comme le silence...comme la mort. Vous écoutez, plein d'inquiétude, mais vous ne soupçonnez peut-être pas un danger. Je suis un homme habitué à respirer la crainte avec l'air même qui me nourrit. Je sens qu'il y a là quelque chose d'anormal et de décisif (p. 70).

Bernard identifies for his father this 'abnormality' in Blanche which, it seems, borders on absolute indifference: "Il y a là comme un amer désir d'être moins que ce qu'on est...N'avez-vous jamais éprouvé ce goût de ne plus être vivant?.. Il me semble que pour ceux qui voient, cela doit commencer ainsi" (p. 71). He adds: "Il y a là un besoin de renoncement que je ne saurais laisser grandir à mes côtés" (p. 72). Despite her professing to be happy and needing nothing, it is clear that an acquired indifference has taken hold of Blanche. As she explains to Jérôme: "Je ne veux

plus sortir d'ici, je ne veux plus rien de ce qui est ailleurs, je n'aime plus rien de ce qui est ailleurs" (p. 79).

Roblès' description of Camus' indifference as a refuge recalls Salavin's sacred 'canapé', a place where he withdraws from society and family and to be alone with his thoughts and dreams: "Qu'il vous suffise pour l'instant de savoir que ce canapé est, à mes yeux, un lieu sacré, car c'est étendu sur lui que, parfois, j'ai possédé le monde en rêve" (*CM*, p. 35). If there is evidence of indifference within Salavin, then it can be seen as an acquired indifference, because his obsessive personality is completely at odds with the passive nature of Mokrani.

Salavin is chronically sensitive to the acts and words of others, in both a positive and negative way. To begin with, he is unable to think about the ear episode "sans ressentir un inexprimable agacement" (*CM*, p. 15), and he describes the ensuing months as a period of "détresse morale dans laquelle je patauge" (*CM*, p. 16). At one point he is so consumed by a sense of self-worthlessness that even the innocent conduct of a vagrant by the gates of the Luxembourg gardens is perceived as a slight: "Deux pas de moi, il s'arrêta, comme s'il m'eût senti, comme s'il eût perçu le bruit de ma vie" (*CM*, p. 77).

Zéphir describes Salavin's hyper-sensitivity: "Toute sa vie durant, on le sent inquiet, tendu, prêt à tressaillir, toujours en alerte et, bien souvent, pour des motifs qui laissent froid la plupart des gens."<sup>192</sup> This sensitive nature condemns Salavin to the same 'solitude intérieure' described by Treil. Immediately after his dismissal, Salavin retreats to his other sanctuary, the street, where he

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<sup>192</sup> Jacques J. Zéphir, *Psychologie de Salavin de Georges Duhamel*. Paris: Éditions Universitaires, 1970, p. 101.

wanders aimlessly through his favourite haunts, across the Pont d'Austerlitz and through Le Jardin des Plantes, reflecting on his misfortune.

In 'Nouvelle rencontre de Salavin', one of the short stories in *Les Hommes abandonnés* (1921), in the course of a solitary walk through the street, Salavin sees the man to whom he made his confession in the bar at midnight: "Il lui avait confessé toute sa vie, raconté toutes ses angoisses, fait pressentir sa chute" (*LHA*, p. 178). Consumed by an unreasonable "sorte de haine mêlée de honte" (*LHA*, p. 178), Salavin makes a detour to avoid him and once more seeks out a safe haven. The subsequent description of this episode clearly demonstrates Salavin's preference for an indifference acquired as a sort of protective mechanism or refuge:

Délivré de ce tourment, il traversa le pont et chemina vers la Bastille, le front bas, ne regardant que ses chaussures souillées de boue, envahi d'une indifférence qu'il jugeait souhaitable parce qu'elle représentait, pour lui, maintenant, le bonheur (*LHA*, p. 178).

At the moment of recognising his own indifference, Salavin becomes transfixed by the banal image of his shoes covered with mud. On this score, Treil makes an interesting point about those characters in Camus' work who reveal a certain indifference. He argues that, at the moment of withdrawal into indifference, Camus' characters "affectent de s'absorber dans des détails matériels" (p. 83). Accordingly, as he approaches the gallows in *Les Justes* (1949),<sup>193</sup> Kaliayev shakes his leg to rid his shoes of a bit of mud.

Salavin's need for solitude often leads him into melancholy and pessimism. We have already considered the sequential diminution in his happiness in *Confession de minuit* (1920), when he

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<sup>193</sup> Albert Camus. *Les Justes*. Paris: Gallimard, 1950.

dines with Lanoue and his family on the night of his dismissal. Notwithstanding the company of his friends, Salavin notes that “la solitude s’élargissait autour de moi, ténébreuse, impénétrable, mortelle” (p. 49). He mutters various excuses and rushes out into the street, in order to be alone. Finally, he makes it back to the safety of his room, where, after taking off his shoes, he is consumed by feelings of despair and worthlessness: “Les poings aux dents, je passai la nuit à me mépriser et à me haïr” (p. 52). He becomes obsessed by his own pessimism, and once more feels a stranger in his world: “Je m’en allais donc par les rues en ruminant ma vie et en constatant, presque à toute minute, que le monde m’échappait, que j’étais abandonné, un vrai pauvre, un misérable” (p. 66).

Treil considers that Camus’ own acquired indifference manifested itself in the form of “ce détachement et ce contrôle de soi” (p. 47), in the face of a domineering grandmother, a sad and silent mother and the downtrodden, putrid streets of Belcourt. As Treil concludes: “Tout cela ne se faisait qu’au pris d’un endurcissement du cœur” (p. 33).

Rizzuto’s opinion is consistent with that of Treil:

Camus also observes that same indifference within himself. Unable to say whether it, too, derives from emotional emptiness or plenitude, he does understand that it allows him at times to disregard and neglect a woman whose nature, nevertheless, he shares intimately (*Camus’ Imperial Vision*, p. 4).

This indifference is also present in Salavin, who demonstrates that he is capable of neglect and of a lack of consideration for the two most influential female figures in his life, his mother and Marguerite. Following his dismissal, Salavin describes his family circumstances in a manner that recalls those of Camus himself: “Ma mère est veuve, mon père est mort alors que j’étais encore dans la première enfance, si bien que je ne connais presque rien de lui” (*CM*, p. 17).

Boucharenc notices the absence of a father figure in the lives of many writers who portray the feelings of post-war anxiety:

N'est-il pas remarquable, à cet égard, de constater que chez les plus brillants peintres de l'inquiétude d'après-guerre, Soupault, Drieu, Cocteau, Crevel... la faille historique coïncide avec la défaillance paternelle: tous les quatre sont orphelins de père depuis l'enfance — ils savent de quoi ils parlent. Il n'est rien de tel dans la structure familiale de Duhamel qui puisse entrer en résonance intime avec le scénario collectif (p. 61).

If not in his creator, there is evidence of such a family structure in Salavin.

There is little evidence to suggest that Salavin's mother is as stifling or oppressive as Camus' grandmother. Yet there can be no doubt that she is the head of the household and exerts a significant influence on her son: "Je suis habitué à vivre sous le regard de ma mère. Je suis habitué à ce regard qui m'enveloppe, me pénètre, glisse sur mon visage, erre dans mes cheveux, comme une main, comme un souffle" (*CM*, p. 102). Salavin is completely reliant on his mother for the preparation of his meals, for the pressing of his shirts and for the general running of the household. He confesses as much to the stranger in the bar, noting that with the small rent received by his mother, "elle fait très bien marcher la maison" (*CM*, p. 17). Indeed, he suggests that she is "la seule personne au monde qui me donne parfois envie de me jeter à genoux" (*CM*, p. 17). In fact, this is precisely what happens: when she sympathetically greets the news of Salavin's dismissal, he drops to his knees (p. 32).

Salavin only notices one fault in his mother, in that from time to time she treats her thirty-year-old son as a child, hardly surprising when one considers that Salavin actively courts such a response. For example, when he returns home after being dismissed, he is filled with a sense of dread at having to tell his mother of his dismissal: "La pensée qu'il allait falloir annoncer à ma mère la



désastreuse nouvelle revint et m'accabla d'ennui" (*CM*, p. 19). Instead of discussing the matter quietly with his mother, he retreats to his room, insolently throwing his shoes onto the floor.

Albérès notices a link between Salavin and Meursault in the context of the relationship that each has with his mother: "On accusera Meursault de ne pas avoir pleuré à l'enterrement de sa mère; Salavin, qui aime la sienne, se surprend un jour à se demander comment il utilisera à sa mort la petite rente qu'elle lui laissera" (*Les Hommes traqués*, p. 192). However, as we have suggested, Meursault is not indifferent to his mother's death, only to the rituals which society demands he follow. Similarly, Salavin is not indifferent to his mother's life; he clearly loves her: "Je ne pense donc jamais à sa mort que comme une éventualité lointaine et presque improbable, dont l'imagination suffit à me remplir les yeux de larmes" (*CM*, p. 74).

There comes a moment, however, in *Confession de minuit*, when, as Albérès point out, Salavin openly considers the benefits which might flow from the death of his mother, principally in the form of his succession to the small rental income of eighty francs per month. This thought comes upon Salavin suddenly, seemingly without warning, and notwithstanding the fact that his mother is only sixty years of age and in good health: "J'allais, en arrivant à la maison, apprendre que ma mère venait de mourir subitement" (p. 74).

What occurs to Salavin, and which will also be Meursault's motivation for killing Zagreus in *La Mort heureuse*, is the promise of financial independence, which he considers might be the catalyst for his reinvention: "Et puis? — Moi et toute ma vie à refaire" (*CM*, p. 75). This speculation plunges him into a melancholy where he is plagued by "«mes pensées» cette vermine dont je ne peux ni me rendre maître ni me débarrasser" (*CM*, p. 76). He punishes himself in the obscurity of

his bedroom at night: “Impossible de nier qu’il y avait en moi un homme capable de spéculer sur la mort de ma mère, un homme capable de calculer son petit bonheur en escomptant la mort de ma mère” (*CM*, p. 81). Dodd suggests that: “His thoughts about his mother’s death and running away with his best friend’s wife, although harmless enough, are as vivid and real to him as if he had actually experienced them [...]” (p. 102). Our reading matches that of Dodd: Salavin seems capable of indifference towards his mother, notwithstanding the traits he shares with her and his clear affection for her.

There is also evidence of Salavin’s indifference in his conduct towards his wife, Marguerite, who is perhaps more like Salavin than his mother. She, too, is honest and hard-working, and, like her husband, she is shy and prefers the company of Salavin’s mother of an evening, rather than going out with friends. In *Confession de minuit*, one night Salavin is left alone with Marguerite and confesses to “un désir ardent de parler à Marguerite, de lui dire des choses affectueuses” (p. 119). He hides his true feelings for her and in this respect, there is evidence of an acquired indifference:

Je n’eus aucune difficulté à navrer Marguerite, à l’accabler sous un flux de paroles qui étaient, précisément, tout le contraire de ce que j’éprouvais si grand besoin de lui confier (*CM*, p. 119).

If, as Treil suggests, Camus had acquired indifference, how does this sit with his “ardeur à vivre, un goût de l’amitié, des plaisirs des sens, des exaltations de l’esprit” (Treil, p. 9)? All these, Roblès rightly ascribes to Camus in the preface to Treil’s work. The answer, suggests Treil, lies in the fact that Camus himself lived a life of ‘Entre oui et non’. Pitted against the unpleasant odours of the rats and open sewers, was “le parfum des lentisques et des oliviers sur les chemins vibrant sous le soleil et la lumière” (Treil, p. 34). The technique of the young Camus was to block out the ‘non’ with the forces of indifference in order to fully subscribe to the riches of the ‘oui’. Thus,

the young Camus was already alive to the contradictory nature of existence, which would lie at the heart of the absurd: “Ce contraste entre la splendeur des soirs et le dénuement de Belcourt fait précisément l’envers et l’endroit de l’œuvre d’Albert Camus” (Quilliot, p. 36).

This type of indifference, Treil argues, also manifests itself in a desire to withdraw from society. He cites Camus’ love for the ocean: “Si la mer est une refuge, c’est qu’il s’y sent détaché de tout; elle est le lieu où son indifférence peut régner à l’abri de la société” (p. 71). Falls points to similar behaviour on the part of the young Duhamel:

Le monde lui semble une jungle. Il y a bien, comme avant, quelques beaux endroits: la nature, que le garçon découvre à Septueil, et la musique qu’il aime déjà avec ferveur, mais cela ne suffit pas à cacher la laideur et la brutalité de la vie (p. 42).

In his own way, Salavin also lives a life ‘Entre oui et non’. The ‘oui’ is undoubtedly the realm of the mind, when he conjures up fabulous images of his life as he imagines it might be. As the sea is for Camus, the canapé and the streets are for Salavin:

Dès que je me trouve face à face non plus avec mes imaginations mais avec des êtres vivants, mes semblables, je suis si vite à bout de courage! Je me sens l’âme contractée, la chair à vif. Je n’aspire qu’à retrouver ma solitude pour aimer les hommes comme je les aime quand ils ne sont pas là (*CM*, p. 66).

The ‘non’ is reality, which constantly seeks to intrude. As Dodd suggests: “We become aware of the real world again, a world in which children become ill, jobs are lost, marriage degenerates into resentfulness or indifference” (p. 69).

### ***THE TEMPTATION OF ABSOLUTE INDIFFERENCE***

The danger with acquired indifference is the temptation to espouse absolute indifference, in other words, to completely withdraw from the world and from its inhabitants. This is the stone-like

existence desired by Marthe in *Le Malentendu* (1944), also exemplified by the attitude of Camus' mother and by the indifference of the natural world. This type of indifference is summed up by Dunwoodie:

Clearly, the function of both mother and world is to permit his withdrawal, into stasis, indifférence, that is into a loss of consciousness and desire, a fusing of the Self in the Tout. This is, in fact, a theme rarely absent from Camus's works, and it frequently appears as a temptation because it naturally deprives the individual of all-important lucidity (p. 16).

Whilst initially proposed by Camus in 'Noces à Tipasa' as a way of coping with the absurd, Camus could not reconcile such indifference with the problem of consciousness, although indifference remained with him as a temptation right up to his death. As McCarthy concludes: "Entry into the mother's world is too easy" (p. 136).

Grenier notes that during Camus' adolescence, Camus often felt a "mépris général pour le monde entier [...]" (p. 13). Treil also suggests that Camus fought the temptation of "l'indifférence absolue" (p. 159), which Treil aligns with the "indifférence totale" (p. 159) of the nihilists: "La tentation la plus forte est alors de ne plus s'enthousiasmer et, surtout, d'accepter tout avec l'air entendu et blasé de celui qui se croit fort parce que plus rien ne l'étonne ni ne l'émeut" (p. 159).

This description from Treil does not fit well with the indifference shown by Caligula, nor even Meursault. In fact, this type of indifference seems to be more akin to that described by Treil earlier in his work as "cette indifférence par égoïsme" (p. 76), which he suggests infiltrated many French people after the end of the Second World War. This was especially true for those who had undergone the horrors of the Occupation. Camus makes a direct reference to this type of indifference in the first of his *Lettres à un ami allemand* (1948):

Ce que votre victoire n'aura pu entamer, votre défaite l'achèvera. Mais du moins, avant que nous fassions l'épreuve de l'indifférence, je veux vous laisser une idée claire de ce qui ni la paix ni la guerre ne vous ont appris à connaître dans le destin de mon pays (p. 22).

In these letters, Camus concedes “la perpétuelle tentation où nous sommes de vous ressembler” (p. 23).

Duhamel was also acutely aware of this temptation towards absolute indifference, especially when it manifests itself on the level of indifference to the lives of others. In his memoirs, he laments the “nuage d'indifférence” (*PA*, p. 310), which enveloped many of his countrymen post war.

‘L'Épave’ of *Les Hommes abandonnés* (1921) is a good example of this temptation towards absolute indifference. In this collection, we find ‘Une Expédition’. The narrator and his medical student friends have gathered together with Judge Bocquet and Doctor Vendredi to drink beer on a Sunday afternoon. The men are dragged away from their party with the news that a murder has been committed in nearby Ban-de-Moussy. However, Judge Bocquet remains indifferent to the fact of the murder: “Mais...Mais qu'est-ce que vous voulez que j'y fasse?” (*LHA*, p. 227).

The narrator and his friends have to make their way to the nearby town on foot in the heat; Duhamel's descriptions recall the stifling heat of the day of Meursault's mother's funeral: “La chaleur changeait de caractère, sans cesser d'être extrême; avec les progrès du jour, elle devenait orageuse” (*LHA*, p. 235). As is the case in ‘Le Voiturier’, the townsfolk have already found their murderer and are holding him for the judge and doctor. Rather than lament the death of one of their own, the people envy the dead man's shoes, in a manner which recalls ‘L'Épave’: “Ils considéraient les bottes du mort et l'un d'eux murmurait: - Ç'a de bonnes bottes” (*LHA*, p. 254).

After the autopsy, the men withdraw to the home of M. Audemard, where the uncomfortable atmosphere is broken by the pop of champagne corks: “La détonation fut comme un signal” (*LHA*, p. 257). The situation becomes farcical when Mme Audemard introduces her daughter who sings for the group. As the group leaves the party late at night after much celebration, there is an exchange between the doctor and the tax collector, in which mere lip service is paid to the fundamental human values of justice and solidarity:

J’entendais, dans un demi-sommeil, le docteur et le percepteur échanger leurs vues avec cette gravité que donne la fatigue. Les mots société, justice, instruction, solidarité, et quelques autres, revenaient à intervalles réguliers (*LHA*, p. 270).

### ***NIHILISM***

Another form of acquired indifference, one which Treil believes “est plus dangereuse pour la société que l’indifférence naturelle” (p. 17), is that which leads to nihilism. As we noted in our introduction, there are two principal forms of nihilism identified by Camus. The first is that practised by absolutists who allow all means in the pursuit of some ultimate end: “La fin justifie les moyens? Cela est possible. Mais qui justifiera la fin? A cette question, que la pensée historique laisse pendante, la révolte répond: les moyens” (*HR*, p. 365). Secondly, there is the “tout est permis” (*HR*, p. 82) attitude of those who reject moral standards in the face of a feeling that all actions have assumed an equivalent value.

The ‘end justifies the means’ nihilists are generally represented by totalitarian régimes, although on an individual level, it is manifested by the rejection of one’s past, coupled with a desire to begin again: “Another impulse in Camus is to be a man without a biography, to be a hero living a succession of present moments without doubt or guilt, in other words, without a past” (Rizzuto, *Camus’ Imperial Vision*, p. 50). According to Camus, purely historical thought is nihilistic

because it unreservedly accepts the evil wrought by the past: “Une pensée purement historique est donc nihiliste: elle accepte totalement le mal de l’histoire et s’oppose en ceci à la révolte” (*HR*, p. 360). Paradoxically, any notion that history can be brought to an end by the revolutionary is equally nihilistic because, as Camus explains in *L’Homme révolté* (1951), one cannot escape from history: “Si notre histoire est notre enfer, nous ne saurions en détourner la face. Cette horreur ne peut être éludée” (p. 309).

Rizzuto notes that in *L’Étranger*: “Meursault seldom refers to his past. He lives in his body, on the level of sensation” (*Camus’ Imperial Vision*, p. 11). Rizzuto continues:

Meursault does not cry at the funeral. How could he if tears, acknowledging physical and emotional loss, proclaim our place in the biological and social processes of birth and death, the acquisition and loss of human ties? (*Camus’ Imperial Vision*, p. 16).

In *La Chute* (1956), Clamence denies his past and creates a self-serving image of himself, which, like that of Meursault, is devoid of any concept of guilt or judgment. The incident on the bridge over the Seine that rainy night acts as the catalyst by which Clamence acquires, “against his will, a nagging memory of his inaction and [...] experience[s], much to his surprise, the discomforts of guilt” (Rizzuto, *Camus’ Imperial Vision*, p. 115).

Both types of nihilism are often accompanied by an impulse in the protagonist to assume the position of fate or God. In the period in which he wrote *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (1942) and *Caligula* (1944), Camus made the following entry in his notebooks: “Nous n’avons qu’une façon de créer Dieu, qui est de le devenir” (*Carnets II*, p. 127). In *L’Homme révolté* (1951), Camus notes the link between those who “veulent faire de la terre le royaume où l’homme sera dieu” (p. 171) and the “révolutions nihilistes” (p. 171) of the twentieth century. As East explains: “Ce Dieu n’est pas

seulement silencieux, il est injuste et cruel. L'homme qui veut exercer le métier de Dieu n'a qu'une chose à faire, devenir cruel" (East, p. 51).

As McCarthy explains when speaking of Caligula: "Drusilla's death has demonstrated that man is at the mercy of the gods; ergo his only significant acts are those which assume the gods' prerogatives, namely suicide and murder" (p. 145). Similarly, Jones notes that for *La Chute* (1956): "If God does not exist then Clamence is God" (p. 60). This impulse to become God is often manifested by an inability in the protagonist to conceive of any notion of guilt. Of Clamence's 'fall', Rizzuto suggests: "As a god who became a man, he has acquired a memory, which makes absolute innocence, or guilt, impossible. The ability to forget is what separates gods from men" (Rizzuto, *Camus' Imperial Vision*, p. 125).

Lafay argues that Duhamel stands apart from other post-war writers by virtue of his refusal to be tempted by nihilism. Although Lafay does not mention Camus specifically in this context, her language suggests she had him in mind:

A la différence des écrivains de son temps, partisans de l'éthique de la table rase, tenté par le nihilisme, la révolte, le désespoir ou l'absurde, Duhamel s'efforce de jeter les bases d'un nouvel humanisme, d'une sagesse qui dépende du cœur de l'homme (*Georges Duhamel ou la Préoccupation éthique*, p. 113).

Whilst the last part of this citation is apt for Duhamel, we consider that his works, particularly *Les Hommes abandonnés* (1921), permit the conclusion that Duhamel was indeed tempted by nihilism.

Like Camus, Duhamel completely rejects the absolutism of totalitarian régimes. In his memoirs, he criticises "cette forme d'intelligence inflexible, obstinée, aveugle, sourde, stérilement



calculatrice, que je suis bien obligé d'appeler l'intelligence allemande" (*TR*, p. 92). He also highlights the 'end justifies the means' attitude of the nihilists:

Les agresseurs, les ordonnateurs de désastres ne semblent pas avoir douté de leur victoire, ni de ses effets proches ou lointains. Ils pensaient, visiblement, qu'elle serait prompte et péremptoire, qu'elle permettrait tout, qu'elle excuserait tout et que, finalement, elle arrangerait tout (*PA*, p. 10).

Like Camus, Duhamel also recognises the propensity in twentieth-century man for violence: "Il va falloir que l'humanité déshabituée du crime et ce n'est pas l'intelligence armée qui fera cette merveille" (*LPM*, p. 212). In *Entretiens dans le tumulte* (1919), Duhamel chronicles the period 1918 to 1919. As he acknowledges in 'Les Reîtres', there are men who are made for war; he calls them "des hommes incapables de devenir autre chose que des soldats" (p. 226). He goes on to make the following declaration: "Étrange! Étrange! La race des gladiateurs et des reîtres n'est pas éteinte, et, point davantage, hélas! la race de ceux qui savent les utiliser" (p. 229). An air of pessimism pervades this work. There is a forlorn recognition that despite the best efforts of men of goodwill and peace, war and its attendant suffering will always accompany humanity. As Nicolas Beaupré notes of *Entretiens dans le tumulte*: "Duhamel semble en fait regretter que les hommes ne mettent pas la même énergie, la même volonté, la même unité à faire la paix qu'ils ont mises à faire la guerre."<sup>194</sup>

In *Les Espoirs et les épreuves*, Duhamel contrasts the desire for domination of the Nazis with France's own colonial ambitions in North Africa. Of the former, he says:

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<sup>194</sup> Nicolas Beaupré. 'L'Immédiat Après-guerre chez Georges Duhamel: Le tumulte et la hantise de l'oubli'. *Les Cahiers de l'Abbaye de Créteil*. December (2008), p. 48.

Nous savons qu'une politique fondée toute entière sur l'intimidation, sur les arrestations, les exécutions capitales, sur une propagande pacifique soutenue par une armée immense et une diplomatie souterraine, belliqueuse, nous savons, depuis Hitler, qu'une telle politique aboutit à d'horribles catastrophes (p. 233).

Whereas, on the other hand, he describes France's intentions in North Africa as disinterested, suggesting that France "a rêvé d'envoyer partout des instituteurs, des médecins, des missionnaires et des conservateurs de musée, d'abord, et non de céder à d'autres tentations moins nobles" (*LEE*, p. 143). This is the same message of *Consultation aux Pays d'Islam* (1947), where Duhamel suggests that "l'œuvre de la France, dans les pays d'outre-mer, est grande et respectable."<sup>195</sup> This is a rather sugar-coated vision of France's role, for it is difficult to accept France's 1830 'débarquement', as Jules Roy calls it,<sup>196</sup> accompanied by the armada of Duperré, as anything other than pure, colonial ambition.

Indeed, Duhamel ignores many of the criticisms levelled at France in its dealings with the Algerian independence movement. This attitude is consistent with his vision of France in general as a natural leader in Europe and the true home of western culture and civilisation. In his writings, there is a sense of the same unquestioning nationalism similar to that which Jules Roy noticed in his own mother: "Elle était d'une race superbe, orgueilleuse, facilement exaltée, sûre d'elle-même et incroyablement naïve" (p. 28).

Camus was more willing to criticise France's involvement in Algeria. Alfred Knopf suggests that he rejected the "often scornful or off-hand manner of many French, and the development among

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<sup>195</sup> Georges Duhamel. *Consultation au pays d'Islam*. Paris: Mercure de France, 1947, p. 121.

<sup>196</sup> Jules Roy. *A propos d'Alger, de Camus et du hasard*. Paris: Le haut quartier, 1982, p. 12.

the Arabs (through a series of stupid measures) of the complex of humiliation that is at the centre of the present drama.”<sup>197</sup>

In typical style, Camus looks for a balanced approach when dealing with the question of Algeria. In essence, he rejects the haughtiness of the French and the unmistakable fact of “colonialism and its abuses” (Knopf, p. 102). At the same time, recognising that by 1954 the Algerian French had been present in that country for well over a century, he rejects the Arab plea for absolute independence. In both parties, Camus recognises the temptation of nihilism, manifested in the French by the slaughter and torture of innocent Algerians, and in the Arabs by the terrorism of the Front de Libération Nationale.

From a political perspective, a common theme in Camus’ writings is that the temptation towards absolute indifference can actually encourage or perpetuate unjust or mediocre governments. As Le premier Alcade suggests to the fisherman in *L’État de Siège* (1948): “Il s’agit de savoir, mon brave, si vous êtes de ceux qui respectent l’ordre existant pour la seule raison qu’il existe?”<sup>198</sup>

The tendency to simply accept unjust régimes without question is also one of Duhamel’s favourite themes. We find it in the cowardly acquiescence of Félix Tallemend in *Cri de profondeurs* (1951): “Mais puisque nous sommes vaincus nous n’avons plus qu’à obéir” (p. 92). Thomas Lestrangier also yields to the dictates of the demons in *Nouvelles du sombre empire* (1960): “J’ai commencé d’obéir, ce qui, depuis le drame, est ma fonction essentielle, ma seule forme d’activité” (p. 32). Santelli refers to Duhamel’s post-war efforts towards the ‘résurrection’ of civilisation: “Tentative

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<sup>197</sup> Alfred A. Knopf. *Resistance, Rebellion and Death — Albert Camus*. London: Hamish Hamilton Ltd, 1964, p. 104.

<sup>198</sup> Albert Camus. *L’Etat de siège*. Paris: Gallimard, 1948, p. 107.

hélas presque désespérée, car les hommes tiennent à leurs vieilles querelles, à leurs vieilles pierres, à leurs choses usées” (*Adieu à Georges Duhamel*, p. 136).

In the works of Duhamel, linked to this indifference is an apathy towards technological advancement. For Duhamel, the world of technological progress leads to indifference, and, in the hands of the nihilists, to pain and suffering:

La plupart des inventions humaines propres à nous donner du bonheur ou du plaisir, même du plus noble, sont encore susceptibles, entre des mains scélérates ou malhabiles, de se transformer en instrument de souffrance et de mort (*SVF*, p. 10).

Lafay comments on this theme in Duhamel’s *Les Voyageurs de “l’Espérance”* (1956). Prior to the nuclear explosion, the Fromond family, Lafay argues, was “tout entiers absorbés par leurs occupations quotidiennes” (*Duhamel revisité*, p. 196), too much so to be concerned with the alarming advances in science and technology going on about them: “Les Fromond restent indifférents aux nouvelles alarmantes qui leur parviennent du monde turbulent de la civilisation scientifique et technique” (*Duhamel revisité*, p. 196).

Bonnier suggests that in killing the Arab, Meursault aligns himself with the emperor of *Caligula*: “Bien qu’il soit le véritable héritier psychologique de *Noces*, Meursault pâtit de l’erreur de Caligula, et l’accentua. Avec lui, la fatalité cessa d’appartenir aux dieux pour tomber, si l’on ose dire, dans le domaine public” (p. 143). Whilst Caligula’s response followed intellectual lucidity, prior to receiving his death sentence, Meursault has only conceived of the absurd on an emotional plane. Afflicted with a feeling that all things have assumed an equivalent value, Meursault shoots the Arab and is completely unable to conceive of any notion of guilt for the crime: “Je ne

regrettais pas beaucoup mon acte” (*L’Étranger*, p. 154). During the trial process, however, he becomes aware of a society which judges him and “finally, he discovers memory” (Jones, p. 34).

We have also noted Duhamel’s ‘Le Voiturier’ in this context. As Meursault will feel his hand tighten around the revolver, for Laudrel, there “vint un moment où il commença de trembler sur ses jambes” (*LHA*, p. 27) and he lodges an axe in the throat of Ginest. As Meursault will later demonstrate, Laudrel is incapable of conceiving of any notion of guilt and refuses to interest himself in his prosecution.

Laudrel certainly lacks the mental capacity to understand the gravity of his act. Duhamel tells us that he “n’avait pas une once d’intelligence” (*LHA*, p. 13). However, Laudrel has led an otherwise exemplary life, one of honesty, hard work and faith. Installing himself in Berville after the death of his wife, he joins the church and the brothers of charity. He is not naturally indifferent. As the narrator confesses: “Quand un garçon se met à tuer, il n’est point toujours aisé de connaître ce qui l’y pousse” (*LHA*, p. 9).

So what is it that causes Laudrel’s moral compass to malfunction? Perhaps the answer lies in what Rizzuto has to say about the motivation behind Meursault’s act:

Caligula wanted the pleasure of knowing what he was doing and then, like Patrice Mersault in *La Mort heureuse*, that of forgetting it. Camus was much more ambitious in *L’Étranger* [...] Whereas Caligula and Patrice Mersault could try to suppress the memory of what they did, how much worthier of a god not to have to suppress it at all (*Camus’ Imperial Vision*, p. 25).

If Laudrel lacks the sophistication and passivity of Meursault, he too carries within him, as the title might suggest, the seed of nihilism. Let us not forget also that Laudrel is deeply troubled by the death of his wife and is completely estranged from society: “Il n’avait point fait d’amis à

Rouen, non plus qu'à Elbeuf" (*LHA*, p. 14). Whilst Duhamel does not hold these facts up as contributing to Laudrel's act, what better circumstances might exist for an unsophisticated man to feel that everything has assumed an equal value?

In the same collection, we find Duhamel's 'Origine et prospérité des singes', a short story that foreshadows *La Chute*. Like Clamence, the principal character is a professional; in this case a doctor, and perceives himself as possessing neither a past, nor having any faults:

De mon temps? Mais je n'ai pas de temps. Toujours jeune, vous dis-je, et jamais fatigué! Voilà comme je suis. Jamais soif et jamais faim. Je mange quand j'ai le temps et je bois quand j'y pense. Je n'ai pas de besoins, pas de défauts. C'est comme ça! (*LHA*, p. 108).

Crémieux comments on this absence of any personal history in the doctor, describing this work by Duhamel as one of the "développement d'une légende privée de tout fondement historique" (p. 108). As Clamence will later do, Duhamel's doctor has constructed an image of himself as a saint, almost a Robin Hood figure:

Que le raccommodeur de faïence et de porcelaine qui passe dans la rue vienne me dire: «J'ai besoin de m'acheter un turlututu, prêtez-moi cent sous». Je suis un homme à lui répondre: «Tenez, mon ami, voilà mille francs». En admettant, bien entendu, que j'aie les mille francs. Mais qu'un monsieur, avec un monocle dans l'œil, vienne me raconter: «Je suis le duc de Madrid. J'ai oublié mon portefeuille à l'hôtel Carlton. Voulez-vous me prêter dix louis, pour payer le chauffeur?» Je lui répondrai tout aussitôt: «Voilà dix sous. Et maintenant, filez! Et plus vite que cela, ou je préviens la police.» (*LHA*, p. 109).

Having shifted his practice thirty-one times, he eventually lands in Brigandval, in the middle of wine country. Indeed, he describes himself as a God: "Le rôle du bon Dieu est difficile à tenir, au milieu d'une population travaillée par le vin nouveau" (*LHA*, p. 122). A previous move saw him a doctor for a mine in Pas-de-Calais. In describing that move as one of the worst errors of his life, he prefigures Clamence when he complains: "J'avais été demandé par une fraction de la

municipalité” (*LHA*, p. 110). He needs the admiration of many. He cannot conceive of the possibility that his own conduct may have contributed to his shifting about, and, in this way, he retains that state of complete innocence, or the ability to forget, which mirrors the later conduct of Meursault and Clamence. More evidence of his divinity is presented, when, on his return to the Soissonnais, he had “guéri presque miraculeusement une jeune paralytique” (*LHA*, p. 113).

When a baby is not carried to term and dies, the father declares it a ‘singe’ and the townsfolk adopt that as their truth. The doctor’s reaction? “J’étais au comble de la fureur, tout en restant maître de moi, comme vous imaginez” (*LHA*, p. 133). At the same time, however, it is this insistence by the townsfolk that Melanie has in fact given birth to a monkey that creates a change in the doctor. This seems to act as a catalyst for him, just as that rainy night on the Seine was for Clamence: “Je dois ajouter que je ne me sentais pas, moi-même, dans mon sens ordinaire. Je crois bien que je ne marchais pas droit” (*LHA*, p. 137). Could it be that the willingness of the townsfolk to accept an absurdity causes the doctor to question the image he has created for himself? “Je me sentais même prodigieusement altéré” (*LHA*, p. 139).

After experiencing his own ‘fall’, the doctor has the opportunity to see himself as he is but unfortunately, he remains indifferent. This is the same response as that later offered by Clamence. The doctor could have set the townsfolk straight and shattered their perception of the birth, yet he prefers inaction. He perpetuates a lie, which is the image he has constructed of himself in the eyes of others: “Il n’y avait plus qu’à laisser courir le singe. Après tout, la vérité, ce n’est pas ce qui est, c’est ce que les hommes veulent” (*LHA*, p. 142).

In *Confession de minuit* (1920), an alienated and confused Salavin, motivated by a sense of the equivalence of value of all things, reaches out and touches the ear of his employer. On the way to the home of Lanoue, after his dismissal, Salavin meets an old work acquaintance, Delaunay, who makes his own confession to Salavin, detailing his misfortune and grief in the form of his wife's illness and the death of his child. Salavin's initial reaction is to offer Delaunay money, and the latter reacts with surprise and incredulity. Now Salavin finds himself in the position of his mother and feels a strange sense of fulfillment at the sight of the miserable Delaunay: "C'est peut-être monstrueux à dire, mais sa douleur excitait en moi une ardente sympathie qui ne m'était pas désagréable" (*CM*, p. 41). Salavin purports to place himself at Delaunay's disposition: "Puis-je te servir à quelque chose? he asks Delaunay, "As-tu besoin de moi" (*CM*, p. 41). Salavin leaves Delaunay with the promise of future visits, yet candidly confesses to the stranger in the bar at midnight: "Je ne suis pas allé le voir. Je ne sais même pas ce qu'il est devenu et je ne me suis plus jamais inquiété de lui" (*CM*, p. 41).

The language employed by Duhamel around this event suggests that Salavin may also have felt an impulse to be God-like. For example, Delaunay is described as being in a state of 'désespoir' and 'douleur'. When Salavin meets Delaunay, he suggests that he would have "*sacrifié* (our italics) bien des choses pour qu'il ne fût pas malheureux" (*CM*, p. 41). Salavin presents as someone who is initially interested in Delaunay's plight but who quickly loses interest. If Salavin is tempted by an impulse to be God-like, then he is a God of whom Delaunay can ask nothing.

In *Nouvelle Rencontre de Salavin* (1921), any doubt about the presence of that impulse is dispelled. Unlike Meursault and Caligula, Salavin does not kill with his hands, but rather through the force of his will. Since he cannot function reasonably in the real world, he will use the only



resource he has, his thoughts. As we have seen, he successfully wills the death of workmate Gigon, merely so that he may assume his place at work. Soon after, “la place de la Bastille s’était mise à tourner” (*LHA*, p. 196), suggesting that Salavin is perhaps dreaming, but arguably, Salavin’s thoughts and dreams *are* his reality. As Henri Daniel-Rops suggests, Salavin is able to live:

en une sorte de domaine du possible où, toute frontière abolie entre la velléité du rêve et le vouloir de l’acte, il pourrait arriver à commettre n’importe quoi, même un crime, parce qu’il a révélé en lui les postulations que chacun de nous enferme, mais qu’il n’est pas capable de les dompter.<sup>199</sup>

Salavin then turns his mind successfully to the task of divesting a passer-by of his wallet, using the proceeds to acquire a gun. With the weapon, he is “le seigneur du monde. Qui le dirait?” (*LHA*, p. 213). As Clamence will later do, Salavin seeks to deny his past, his own personal history. Like a true nihilist, he wants to start over again: “Oh! comme je voudrais recommencer tout, recommencer le monde, me recommencer, recommencer seulement ce que je viens de faire, seulement cette respiration, ce regard!” (*LHA*, p. 214). There is in this statement, no evidence that Salavin intends to become the best man he can be. This is pure, unfettered revolution.

For these reasons, we cannot accept Dodd’s assertion that “Salavin’s story is not nihilistic” (p. 312). Other critics accept that Salavin is tempted by nihilism. For example, Tonnet-Lacroix considers that: “Comme Dada, il se sent parfois pris de fureur destructrice contre l’humanité; il rêve de table rase et d’un monde neuf” (p. 165). Guespin agrees, suggesting that there lurks in Salavin’s desire to reinvent himself, a temptation to sacrifice the means for the end: “Salavin a, dans ses résolutions, une énergie effarante. Celle du visionnaire. Il sacrifiera tout à sa tentative

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<sup>199</sup> Henri Daniel-Rops. ‘Les Idées et les lettres: Salavin’. *Le Correspondant*. March (1933), p. 915.

hallucinée” (p. 68). Similarly, Garguilo concludes: “Tous les épisodes du rêve de Salavin, au-delà de leur “contenu manifeste”, ont un “contenu latent” qui exprime la volonté de voir se réaliser les désirs les plus inavouables” (*Le “Cycle” de Salavin: Un “Nouveau Roman” des années vingt*, p. 53).

In *Jugements* (1924), Henri Massis notes the shift in emphasis in the short period between *La Possession du monde* (1919) and *Confession de minuit* (1920). Speaking of the latter work, he says: “Il ne s’agit plus ici de l’«humanité», mais d’un homme comme nous [...]”<sup>200</sup>

Indeed, Massis suggests (p. 200), that Duhamel may have intended Salavin’s confession to be his own. Duhamel has denied that he modelled Salavin on himself. However, Françoise Danset and Paul Maunoury suggest that Salavin was “une sorte de double de la personnalité que Duhamel a refusé d’être, la conscience de ce mal du temps, né de l’angoisse d’exister dans un monde privé de Dieu.”<sup>201</sup> If, as André Rousseaux suggests, *Confession de minuit* is one of “ces ouvrages où un écrivain se délivre de son démon le plus intime et le plus obsédant,”<sup>202</sup> then we might be justified in drawing an inference that Duhamel, like Salavin, was perhaps seduced by nihilism at one time or another.

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<sup>200</sup> Henri Masis. *Jugements*. Paris: Plon, 1924, p. 195.

<sup>201</sup> Françoise Danset and Paul Maunoury. ‘Une biographie par l’image’, *Georges Duhamel parmi nous*. Eds. Françoise Danset and Paul Maunoury. Paris: Editions du Valhermeil, (2000), p. 19.

<sup>202</sup> André Rousseaux. *Portraits littéraires choisis*. Genève: Skira, 1947, p. 23.

### ***PARTIES TO NIHILISM***

Williams states: “*La Peste* could not fail to present plague as a form of total evil, or, as Camus put it in his *Carnets*, ‘une pédagogie nihiliste’” (p. 17). For Camus, those, like Cottard, who align themselves with the plague, or seek to profit from it, become party to nihilism. Simon agrees: “Seront condamnés ou ridiculisés les méchants ou les pervers qui s’accordent au règne du mal, comme Cottard.”<sup>203</sup>

As Camus suggests, one must remain vigilant in the presence of the plague:

On sait trop bien qu’on ne peut pas avoir confiance en son voisin, qu’il est capable de vous donner La Peste à votre insu et de profiter de votre abandon pour vous infecter” (*La Peste*, p. 181).

As a representative of the forces of indifference, Cottard’s conduct is, for Camus, the very antithesis of ethical revolt. As Williams notes: “[Cottard] thrives during the plague because he has not learnt the fundamental value of human existence” (p. 57). The humanist values which are revealed by rebellion are absent in the mind of Cottard; according to Braun, his logic is also that of Caligula: “Camus could not express more clearly that the plague was a lack of love and solidarity. Cottard might be a midget Caligula” (Braun, p. 94).

In his work devoted to Duhamel, Falls notices a similar climate in the period following the Second World War to that portrayed in *La Peste*: “Il est à craindre que quelques-uns d’entre eux ne se soient laissés gagner par les dangereuses pratiques du marché noir” (p. 29). In the works of Duhamel, Cottard is reflected in Joseph Pasquier and Félix Tallemand of *Cri des profondeurs*

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<sup>203</sup> Pierre-Henri Simon. ‘Le Combat contre les Mandarins’. *Camus*. Paris: Librairie Hachette, (1964), p. 117.

(1951). As Cottard would involve himself in the sale of rations (*La Peste*, p. 132), so Joseph Pasquier profits from the sale of munitions. Recalling the indifference of those who obey a government merely because of its incumbency, Joseph explains his actions:

Je ne souhaite la guerre pour aucun pays. Personne ne souhaite la guerre. Mais puisqu'elle est déclarée, puisqu'elle existe et qu'il y a des gens qui en tirent de l'argent, je ne vois pas pourquoi je n'en prendrai ma part" (*CPN*, p. 38).

Joseph profits from the plague and in doing so, joins it. Comeau refers to his state of mind as a "jouissance, selon sa 'philosophie barbare et vigoureuse'" (p. 254). Joseph's logic sees him turn away from humanist values. His entry into the world of creation and art occupied by Laurent and Cécile is purely motivated by money. As Comeau notes, Joseph's is "un art annexé à la finance" (p. 256). Joseph is prepared to sacrifice the means for one absolute end: wealth.

In *Cri des profondeurs* (1951), Félix also profits from the invasion by exploiting Winterberg's arrest. Didier suggests that he seems at ease doing so: "Félix, tu sembles à ton aise comme un poisson dans l'eau" (p. 96). This language recalls that used by Camus in describing Cottard: "Il y avait pourtant dans la ville un homme qui ne paraissait ni épuisé, ni découragé, et qui restait l'image vivante de la satisfaction" (*La Peste*, p. 177). Félix is encouraged in his plot to divest Winterberg of his shares in the company by the occupier's representative, Zamian, who exemplifies the 'end justifies the means' of the nihilists: "Ce qui marque le caractère d'un homme, comme d'un peuple évidemment, c'est la grandeur des vues plus encore que des moyens" (p. 127). Zamian attempts to justify the role of the occupier: "L'idée d'une Europe unie, disciplinée, puissante, capable d'imposer sa loi à tout le reste de l'univers, vraiment, cela ne vous jette pas dans l'enthousiasme?" (p. 159). In doing so, he echoes the language used by Cottard in *La Peste*

with a view to justifying his actions: “La seule façon de mettre les gens ensemble, c’est encore de leur envoyer La Peste” (*La Peste*, p. 179).

As it was for Caligula, the error common to Cottard, Joseph Pasquier and Félix Tallemand was to deny, or remain indifferent to, the suffering of other human beings. The Europe that Zamian has in mind recalls that described by Camus in the third of his *Lettres à un ami Allemand* (1948):

Mais du moins je sais que lorsque vous dites Europe, même à vos meilleurs moments, lorsque vous vous laissez entraîner par vos propres mensonges, vous ne pouvez vous empêcher de penser à une cohorte de nations dociles menées par une Allemagne de seigneurs, vers un avenir fabuleux et ensanglanté (p. 59).

In this chapter, we have examined the theme of indifference as a function of ‘le retour inconscient dans la chaîne’. As Meursault, Salavin and Laudrel demonstrate, indifference and nihilism are generally born from a lack of ‘lucidity’. However, as Caligula confirms, if nihilism can follow a feeling for the absurd, then, *a fortiori*, it can also follow an intellectual appreciation. Let us now examine the second of the paths which Camus says might be followed after a feeling for the absurd, that which he calls ‘l’éveil définitif’.

***CHAPTER VI: 'L'ÉVEIL DÉFINITIF'***

“During the 1940’s [sic] Camus began to concentrate on what he calls the ‘paroxysm’: the moment when the tragic hero realizes his condition” (McCarthy, p. 261). All that is needed to begin the process of ethical rebellion, Camus suggests, is further reflection. Braun elucidates:

Out of his initial experience certain duties also emerge: the first one is intellectual lucidity. In contrast to a number of his contemporaries addicted to the irrational, Camus has consistently advocated *more* consciousness as a cure for the wound inflicted by consciousness (p. 28).

As Camus says in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (1942):

Le sentiment de l’absurdité au détour de n’importe quelle rue peut frapper à la face de n’importe quelle homme. Tel quel, dans sa nudité désolante, dans sa lumière sans rayonnement, il est insaisissable. Mais cette difficulté mérite réflexion (p. 26).

For Camus, the ‘pourquoi?’ of *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* must be further investigated. As East confirms: “Le «souci» représente un point de départ” (p. 17). In other words, once the absurd has been felt, it must then be understood.

The inescapable fact of death is, according to Camus, self-evident, but often difficult to identify through the many layers of the everyday: “C’est quand tout fut couvert de neige que je m’aperçus que les portes et les fenêtres étaient bleues” (*Carnets II*, p. 60). Rizzuto explains: “The difference is the mind’s ability to perceive the absolute truth of death and to act on it before it acts on you” (*Camus and a Society Without Women*, p. 6), apparently not an easy task for Camus’ protagonists, given that they require some sort of crisis to truly understand the absurd. For example, Meursault needs a death sentence, Caligula the death of Drusilla, the citizens of Rome a murderous emperor,

the inhabitants of Oran the plague and Clémence the prospect of a perilous plunge into the freezing Seine.

Camus himself needed no other catalyst than the wind to experience his own 'prise de conscience'. In *Noces* (1938), 'Le vent à Djémila' sees a moving away from the corporeal communion with nature championed in the very same collection in 'Noces à Tipasa'. Here, says Camus: "Ce bain violent de soleil et de vent épuisait toutes mes forces de vie" (*Noces*, p. 26). The wind erodes Camus' body: "Comme le galet verni par les marées, j'étais poli par le vent, usé jusqu'à l'âme" (*Noces*, p. 25). What remains is a consciousness that cannot ignore "la certitude consciente d'une mort sans espoir" (*Noces*, p. 28). Bonnier describes this crisis of consciousness for Camus as "la plus grave de toute son œuvre" (p. 63), a reasonable statement given that this state of lucidity is a pre-condition for ethical revolt: "Il faut insister sur cette crise, et essayer d'en dénouer l'importance" (Bonnier, p. 64).

In 'Le Vent à Djémila', we now see a Camus less interested in a pure, instinctive enjoyment of nature, but rather a Camus, who like the earlier writer Duhamel, wants to understand how bodily joys are inscribed on the soul. As Bonnier explains: "Cet instant privilégié lui laissera sur l'âme une sorte de brûlure qu'il ne pourra jamais guérir [...]" (p. 69).

### ***AN EMOTIONAL RESPONSE OR LUCIDITY?***

Both Camus and Duhamel recognise the difference between a simple feeling and an understanding of that feeling. In *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, Camus notes: "Comme les grandes œuvres, les sentiments profonds signifient plus qu'ils n'ont conscience de le dire" (p. 26). Questioning

whether life is worth living, Camus states: “Ce sont là des évidences sensibles au cœur, mais qu’il faut approfondir pour les rendre claires à l’esprit” (p. 17).<sup>204</sup>

Much earlier, in *Les Poètes et la poésie* (1914), Duhamel describes “cet abîme virtuel qui sépare la sensation de la perception.”<sup>205</sup> In *Guerre et littérature* (1920), he says: “J’estime qu’il y a une grande différence entre le fait de souffrir et le fait de connaître sa souffrance.”<sup>206</sup> In the same work, he explains what he means, and this reveals his position as essentially that adopted later by Camus:

Les hommes sentent avec force et vivacité, mais ils connaissent avec imperfection et faiblesse; j’entends qu’ils ont grand’peine à penser ce qu’ils éprouvent, à identifier leur désespoir ou leur enthousiasme. Leur douleur est grande, mais qu’elle est impuissante à s’exprimer, qu’elle est peu capable de s’apprécier, de se mesurer avec des mots (p. 21).

Writing on Duhamel’s *Essai sur le roman* (1925), Ablamowicz summarises the role of the writer according to Duhamel; a role which notes the distinction between a feeling for the absurd and a more refined, intellectual process in which man uses his own demise as the catalyst:

L’écrivain est là pour secourir cette humanité, il est là pour l’aider dans sa marche laborieuse vers un avenir meilleur ou, au moins, paisible. Car l’homme en effet a besoin de savoir et de dégager d’un subconscient obscur les raisons pourtant difficilement acceptables de sa triste condition (p. 51).

One of the stories of *Civilisation* (1918), ‘Lieutenant Dauche’, provides an excellent example of the difference between an emotional and intellectual experience of the absurd as understood by

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<sup>204</sup> Camus’ preface to an American edition of *L’Étranger*, re-states this position: “Et Camus, dans la même préface à l’édition scolaire américaine, d’ajouter: «Il s’agit là d’une vérité encore négative, la vérité d’être et de sentir, mais sans laquelle nulle conquête sur soi et sur le monde ne sera jamais possible»” (Bonnier, p. 121).

<sup>205</sup> Georges Duhamel. *Les Poètes et la poésie*. Paris: Mercure de France, 1922, p. 28.

<sup>206</sup> Georges Duhamel. *Guerre et littérature*. Paris: Adrienne Monnier, 1920, p. 22.



Duhamel. Lafay refers to this story as a “parabole de la mort de l’homme, dans le monde de l’absence de Dieu et de la barbarie de la guerre [...]”<sup>207</sup>

In this story, the narrator/protagonist has sustained a mild injury, one that sees him convalescing in a hospital near the Front, and which causes him to reflect, in a general way, upon the fragility of the body:

Je me plus à demeurer, pendant de longues heures, en compagnie d’une souffrance physique supportable, mais qui me donnait à éprouver ma patience et à réfléchir sur la vulnérabilité d’un organisme en lequel j’avais placé jusque-là une opiniâtre confiance (p. 34).

Lieutenant Dauche is convalescing at the same hospital and he and our protagonist strike up a friendship. A medical officer explains to the protagonist that Dauche has sustained a fatal brain injury and that it is only a matter of time before he dies. Like Camus, the medical officer makes a general statement that although all human beings ‘know’ they are to die, that this reality does not ‘truly register’ with them:

Hélas! monsieur, vous ferez comme moi et comme bien d’autres: vous vous accoutumerez de vivre dans la compagnie de gens qui partagent encore notre univers, mais dont on sait indubitablement qu’ils sont déjà des morts (p. 37).

Counselled to keep the true nature of Dauche’s injury from the lieutenant, the protagonist is charged with the weight of his friend’s condition, which crystallises in him the fact of the universal ‘death penalty’: “L’automne me rendait plus sensible le destin de Dauche qui, lui-même, me faisait plus cruellement connaître le destin de tous” (p. 40).

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<sup>207</sup> Arlette Lafay. ‘Le Roman de Salavin: une problématique de la mort de l’homme’. *Roman 20-50*. Vol. 34. (2002), p. 22.

Together with Dauche, the protagonist attends a concert nearby and it is at this point that he is able to compare the wonder of the music with the harsh reality of Dauche's impending death. The absurd now assumes the dimension of the paradox of *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* and the protagonist finds himself "en proie à un réel tourment" (p. 39). The weight of Dauche's condition becomes a "crise" (p. 40) and he is then sufficiently lucid to understand the difference between an emotional and intellectual appreciation of the fact of death:

La maladie crée, dans la vie de chaque jour, des circonstances semblables; mais leur tristesse est tempérée par l'espérance, ou même par ce qu'il y a de progressif dans l'abandon qu'on en fait. Je dus à la guerre de connaître une angoisse nouvelle et de vivre à côté d'une créature dont je savais qu'en dépit de sa force et de sa beauté elle demeurerait sous le coup d'une déchéance terrible et n'avait d'avenir que ce qui en tient dans l'espoir et l'ignorance.

Cette ignorance de nous-mêmes est une chose bien précieuse et qui fait envier celle, souveraine, des bêtes et des plantes (p. 40).

Dauche finally falls back against a tree, convulsing horribly. For the protagonist, the spectacle of his death stands in stark contrast to the death of those around him on the battle field. It is intimate, up-close and ugly:

J'éprouve, à évoquer ce spectacle, une sorte de honte. J'avais souvent rencontré la mort et la guerre m'avait fait vivre avec elle dans une horrible intimité, mais je n'avais jamais vu de si laid et de si bestial (p. 44).

According to Camus, an urgent and personal comprehension of the fact of death is a pre-condition to metaphysical revolt. The critics agree. In the preface to Bonnier's work, *Albert Camus ou la Force d'être*, Roblès notes his friend Camus' obsession with death (p. 12).

The key for Camus (and for Duhamel) is to transform that vague and remote understanding into an urgent appreciation. In 'Le Vent à Djémila', Camus says: "Créer des morts conscientes, c'est diminuer la distance qui nous sépare du monde" (*Noces*, p. 31). He suggests that this awareness is

a fundamental component of civilisation: “Le vrai, le seul progrès de la civilisation, celui auquel de temps en temps un homme s’attache, c’est de créer des morts conscientes” (cited by Bonnier, p. 71).

Pierre Debray-Ritzen describes Duhamel’s humanism as “lucide et alarmé.”<sup>208</sup> In *La Pesée des âmes*, Duhamel sets out his purpose in writing his memoirs: “J’ai découvert, j’ai compris que ma mission sera d’expliquer à tous les hommes ce qu’ils savent sans le savoir” (p. 161). This statement appears at the end of a passage in which Duhamel comments on the fact that his stories for *Vie des martyrs* were, in general, well received by the public. These stories of courage and sacrifice in the presence of suffering and death justify the inference that, for Duhamel, what human beings ‘savent sans le savoir’ encompasses this higher level of consciousness later described by Camus.

As Dodd suggests in relation to Duhamel, death is the “threat which determines our attitude to life” (p. 59). Similarly, Lafay suggests: “Dans une société où les hommes ont tenté de fuir la mort, il n’a pas craint de l’évoquer” (*Duhamel revisité*, p. 9). Ablamowicz draws the same conclusion:

Le romancier est là [...] pour nous faire comprendre que le tragique de la destinée humaine est imminent à tout être intelligent et que la pensée humaine ne peut porter que sur le triste sort de cette race condamnée à revivre toujours la même expérience décevante et cruelle (p. 51).

Albérès notes Camus’ fascination with those condemned to die: “Un symbole qui devient chez lui une obsession: le condamné à mort. Dans toute son œuvre, la condamnation à mort revient sans cesse” (*Les Hommes traqués*, p. 196). For Camus, such an accelerated state of awareness

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<sup>208</sup> Pierre Debray-Ritzen. ‘En mal de civilisation’. *Les Cahiers de L’Abbaye de Créteil*. December (1985), p. 14.

represents the opposite of suicide, the fundamental question with which he grappled in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (1942): “Le contraire du suicidé, précisément, c’est le condamné à mort” (*LMS*, p. 79).

To become conscious of mortality provides a measure of control over death. In the second volume of his notebooks, Camus refers to this theme as subject matter for a possible work:

Roman, Condamné à mort. Mais on lui fait passer le cyanure...Et là, dans la solitude de sa cellule, il se mit à rire [...] Il allait *pouvoir choisir*...Se dire «allons» et puis «Non, un moment encore» et savourer ce moment...Quelle revanche! (*Carnets II*, p. 281).

All human beings are condemned to death, but the key for Camus is to accelerate that understanding from some arbitrary point in the future to the present moment. This is one of his favourite techniques and he achieves this aim by placing his protagonists, or someone close to them, in a position of immediate peril. This method runs through all his major works, from *L’Étranger* (1942) to *La Chute* (1956). Albérès notes that: “Il est frappant de constater que tous les héros du dernier grand écrivain apparu en France, Albert Camus, sont des hommes aux abois” (*Les Hommes traqués*, p. 8).

Much earlier, Duhamel had reflected on the importance of a catalyst in the process of becoming ‘conscious’. As he states in *Guerre et littérature* (1920): “Il faut que les événements touchent bien rudement un homme pour l’amener à modifier les idées qu’il s’est formées sur certaines choses” (p. 43). Duhamel concludes this work with the forlorn recognition that perhaps even his own children might have to experience tragedy in order to truly understand their position in the world:

Toutefois, je désespère d’apprendre quelque chose à mes fils et je me demande avec angoisse si, *pour savoir ce que nous savons* (our italics), ils ne devront pas, eux aussi, faire la tragique expérience (p. 52).

These words echo those used by him in *La Pesée des âmes* quoted above.

In addition to their personal battles with illness, both Camus and Duhamel also contended with the death of those in close physical or emotional proximity. Camus' first experience with death came at an early age with the passing of his austere grandmother. Notwithstanding the indifference with which Camus regarded his grandmother, he still cried at her funeral. As Treil suggests, however, he did not mourn his grandmother, but rather *the fact* of death: "Ce qu'il pleure c'est, non pas sa grand-mère, mais la mort, la mort qu'il ne saura jamais accepter et contre laquelle, bientôt, il se révoltera" (p. 38).

At thirty-five years of age, Camus visited his father's tomb and noted with surprise that his father was only twenty-nine at the time of his death. As Treil points out, this was a revelation for Camus, one which would crystallise his "révolte contre l'injustice du sort mortel des hommes" (p. 43). This is the essence of Camus' metaphysical revolt.

Similarly, Duhamel's youth was shattered, when at fourteen years of age, in 1898, he learned of the death of his friend Jules in a tragic accident. Duhamel describes the profound impact that this event had on him: "Je n'étais encore familiarisé avec les images de destruction et la mort" (*IA*, p. 155). Comeau suggests that: "La perte de ce compagnon d'élite fut pour Duhamel une des grandes épreuves de sa jeunesse" (p. 32). As the following, key citation suggests, this event made the fact of his own inescapable destiny the primary focus of the young Duhamel's reflections: "Le thème de la destinée allait, à compter de ce jour, accompagner et nourrir toutes mes jeunes méditations" (*IA*, p. 155).

The death of Duhamel's father, in June 1928, was also an important catalyst in this context. Duhamel had already been through the Great War and had come into daily contact with the wounded and dying, yet the death of his father brought home to him more intimately, the fragile nature of the human condition:

J'avais déjà vu mourir nombre d'hommes, en temps de guerre et en temps de paix. Pendant la dernière nuit de l'agonie, au chevet de mon père, je songeais à tant de veilles, à tant de soupirs et de râles, à la profonde humilité de la condition humaine (*LEE*, p. 258).

Duhamel continued to write about the war well after its end; its impact on him is amply illustrated by the opening passage of *Guerre et littérature* (1920): "Une fois encore, si vous le voulez bien, une fois encore parlons de la guerre" (p. 5). In this work, Duhamel describes the field of battle and devastated countryside as "des lieux où la guerre avait un caractère suprême, *paroxystique* (our italics)" (p. 20).

Early in hostilities, Duhamel lost his good friend Henri Doucet, shot in battle one morning as he stood up to survey the countryside. Like the death of his childhood friend Jules, the killing of Doucet amplified Duhamel's personal sense of loss and death: "Chaque jour, à compter de ce jour, je ne peux pas ne pas imaginer la mort de mon ami, et non pas extérieurement, avec le secours des images, mais par un épuisant effort de l'âme" (*PA*, p. 77).

Comeau suggests that Duhamel's 'crise de conscience' occurred contemporaneously with the War:

Cette nouvelle vocation nous apparaît comme le résultat d'une grave crise de conscience au cours de laquelle notre écrivain fut amené à remettre en question l'essentiel de ses conceptions sur l'humanité et sur le monde qu'elle se façonne. Crise ayant mis Duhamel en face d'un monde qui n'était pas celui de sa jeunesse: monde changé, parce que des mois de méditation lucide dans un climat d'horreur lui avaient permis de le voir dans sa réalité nue, en dehors de toute illusion: monde changé encore, parce que la guerre y avait provoqué des transformations profondes et irréversibles (p. 94).

It is difficult to accept this explanation in light of the metaphysical revolt of *Le Combat* (1913). An explanation more consistent with Duhamel's memoirs and works is that, as a result of war, Duhamel's revolt would now focus on the injustices perpetrated by mankind, rather than on the inherent injustice of the human condition. As Désiré Dénuît suggests, "les peuples ont déchaîné sur eux-mêmes un raz de marée d'une innommable barbarie" (p. 59).

However, as we noted in our first chapter, it is beyond dispute that the Great War amplified the sense of the absurd for Duhamel. Dyé supports that conclusion:

Il éprouve au plus haut point l'absurdité du monde. Épuisé, vidé d'espoir devant la cruauté et la folie de la guerre, il ressent jusqu'au vertige un dégoût profond face à cette époque furieuse. Cette terrible épreuve modifie profondément sa vision de l'homme (*La Possession du monde ou la Quête du bonheur selon Georges Duhamel*, p. 155).

Ouy agrees that there were, for Duhamel, two principal forms of injustice against which man must rebel, namely "contre les maux dont il est le maître" and "l'irréparable fatalité" (p. 57). In *La Lumière* (1911) and *Le Combat* (1913), Duhamel had investigated the second of these forms. During the Great War, he confronted the first.<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> Pratt confirms that Camus later conceived of the very same distinction. He cites an interview which Camus gave to *La Revue du Caire* in 1948, in which Camus said: "Il y a la mort des enfants qui signifie l'arbitraire divin, mais il y a aussi le meurtre des enfants qui traduit l'arbitraire humain" (Pratt, p. 132).

To Duhamel's disgust, the horrors of the Great War would soon be repeated. As Falls suggests: "La Seconde Grande Guerre fut certainement un coup très dur pour l'optimisme de Georges Duhamel" (p. 89). At the time, Duhamel had to come to terms with the disappearance of whole families known and loved by him: "Des familles entières — que nous avons trouvées dans notre voisinage, puis connues, puis aimées — ont disparu dans la fournaise des crématoires" (*LEE*, p. 156).

In *Les Espoirs et les épreuves*, Duhamel describes the years which followed the two World Wars not in terms of respect for law and order, but as periods of rebellion: "Les grandes convulsions de l'humanité, nous l'avons bien vu pendant les années qui ont suivi les deux guerres, inspirent aux jeunes âmes non le respect des disciplines, mais la révolte et le dégoût" (p. 81). Comeau also describes Duhamel's "révolte devant les horreurs de la guerre" (p. 120).

In *Positions françaises*, Duhamel urges the pacifists to arm themselves, to send a message to Germany that "la lutte serait longue et dure" (p. 45). Something more than political or religious intervention will be required if France and her allies are to defeat the Germans. The time for negotiation or indifference has come and gone. It is now a time for revolt. Speaking of the conquered Czechs, Duhamel says: "Il est impossible que ne se produise pas, dans cette multitude bâillonnée, quelque geste de rébellion" (*PF*, p. 105).

He repeats this message in *Paroles de médecin* (1946), using the language of pure rebellion: "Résistance! Voilà donc le mot qui a manifesté au monde entier que le peuple français, surpris, trompé, trahi, n'acceptait pas sa défaite comme irrévocable [...]" (p. 198).



**'CRÉER DES MORTS CONSCIENTES' (Noces, p. 121)**

François Ewald points to the frequent use of death as a catalyst in the works of Camus: “La mort, la sienne propre ou celle d’autrui, est pour Camus le seul point à partir duquel il y a lieu d’évaluer la vie.”<sup>210</sup>

In *La Mort heureuse* (1938), the catalyst for Mersault’s crisis and subsequent revolt is the sight of a dead body on the sidewalk outside a restaurant. From this moment on: “La mort se révélait douceuse et insistante et c’est son appel même et son souffle humide que sentit Mersault au moment où il partit à grands pas sans se retourner” (*LMH*, p. 108). Upon the return to his hotel, “le cœur vide et le ventre serré, sa révolte éclatait” (p. 109).

Traumatized by the death of his sister Drusilla, with whom he shared an incestuous relationship, Caligula’s epiphany in the play leads him to the only truth he recognises: “Les hommes meurent et ils ne sont pas heureux” (p. 112). Having become personally aware of his inescapable destiny, Caligula embarks on a murderous rampage which has as one of its aims to accelerate in his subjects an understanding of the inevitability of their own demise and of the necessity to start living before it is too late: “Ils sont privés de la connaissance et il leur manque un professeur qui sache ce dont il parle” (p. 113).

Thus, Caligula is both the recipient and the purveyor of the lesson: “Il se met dans le rôle du professeur qui a décidé de faire prendre conscience à ses élèves de la perspective absurde de la réalité de ce monde” (East, p. 103). According to the emperor, all men who do not know the truth

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<sup>210</sup> François Ewald. ‘L’Absurde et la révolte’. *Magazine Littéraire*. (1990), p. 43.

are equally culpable: “D’ailleurs, ils sont aussi coupables les uns que les autres” (*Caligula*, p. 120). At dinner with Hélicon and the senators, the lesson becomes self evident: “Vous avez fini par comprendre qu’il n’est pas nécessaire d’avoir fait quelque chose pour mourir” (*Caligula*, p. 141). A plot is hatched to kill the emperor. Like the prisoner of Camus’ notebooks who holds the cyanide pill to his mouth, Caligula takes control over his own death, luxuriating in his final moments: “Caligula breaks the mirror, confronts his assassins in whose plot he has deliberately acquiesced and dies with a last wild cry: “I am still alive” (Brée, p. 22).

As Caligula is for his subjects, so the plague of *La Peste* (1947) is the catalyst by which the men and women of Oran are awoken from their mediocrity and acquire an accelerated understanding of their inevitable demise. As Camus says in his notebooks: “Nous savons que La Peste a sa bienfaisance, qu’elle ouvre les yeux, qu’elle force à penser. Elle est à ce compte comme tous les maux de ce monde et comme le monde lui-même” (*Carnets II*, p. 69).<sup>211</sup> The inhabitants are then able to identify what truly matters: “Les couleurs du ciel et les odeurs de la terre qui font le passage des saisons étaient, pour la première fois, sensibles à tous” (*La Peste*, p. 107). In the same way the snow reveals to Camus the colour of his doors and windows, “après La Peste, [il] entend la pluie sur la terre pour la première fois” (*Carnets II*, p. 120).

In *La Chute* (1956), Clamence makes the following statement early in the work which confirms that he has given the human condition some thought: “Peut-être n’aimons-nous pas assez la vie? Avez-vous remarqué que la mort seule réveille nos sentiments?” (p. 36). The problem for Clamence is that he makes this pronouncement at a time when his life coincides perfectly with

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<sup>211</sup> Williams agrees with this view: “Plague brings an end to the mental plague of routine and reawakens the capacity for emotion” (p. 63).

how he would like it to be. It is given rather haughtily and accompanied by other gratuitous, self-promoting declarations, such as drawing attention to the fact that he likes to help the infirm across the road. Accordingly, minimal weight ought to be attached to his early reflection on the human condition. One would be justified in asserting that if Clamence is generally aware of the human condition, it has not yet 'truly registered' for him.

The path to Clamence's personal 'paroxysm' begins relatively early in the work with the health problems to which we have referred. When he fails to go to the aid of the drowning woman, he begins to acquire a personal sense of his own demise. Following the incident, he refuses to read the newspapers out of a growing sense of guilt; the image he has created of himself begins to crumble: "Je n'ai plus cette clarté d'esprit à laquelle mes amis se plaisaient à rendre hommage" (p. 78). Clamence's 'simple souci' then becomes something more akin to a crisis: "La pensée de la mort fit irruption dans ma vie quotidienne. Je mesurais les années qui me séparaient de ma fin" (p. 94).

The confident man who had previously courted the admiration of others now feels threatened by these very same people. Like the beachcombers in Duhamel's *L'Épave* (1921), Clamence now feels the need to lock his door at night: "Autrefois, je ne fermais pas mon appartement à clé, ni ma voiture" (*La Chute*, p. 134). Previously, "Clamence a vécu dans un état que l'on pourrait qualifier d'insignifiance heureuse" (East, p. 115). Now that Clamence has the weight of his own mortality on his shoulders, things are different.

For Duhamel, as it would become later for Camus, an intimate understanding of death is often the starting point for lucid self-examination. In *Essai sur le roman* (1925), he urges human beings to

make the most of the time just before “la mort quotidienne”<sup>212</sup> of sleep takes hold. This time, says Duhamel, is “la minute lucide de l’examen” (p. 30).

Like the people of Oran, the Fromond family’s values are completely reconfigured in Duhamel’s *Les Voyageurs de “l’Espérance”* (1956). An atomic bomb blast means that the family is “soumis à un événement perturbateur qui bouleverse son existence” (p. 202). If the fact of the bomb was not enough, the death of uncle Guillaume “favorise chez les membres du clan la prise de conscience du lien qui les unit dans la souffrance et la détresse” (Lafay, *Duhamel revisité*, p. 204). As is the case with the people of Oran, the members of the family are now able to identify what is truly important to them. As Lafay suggests: “Faisant la part du nécessaire et du superflu, de l’utile et de ce qui ne l’est pas, ils ont pris conscience de l’essentiel, c’est-à-dire des choses qu’il faut sauver” (Lafay, *Duhamel revisité*, p. 203). The family now re-discovers fundamental human values, including the desire for learning, good sense and reason, prudence, patience and hard work.

In *Les Compagnons de l’Apocalypse* (1956), Dan Levoyer spends five years meditating upon “la douleur dans laquelle il s’était trouvé [...]” (p. 62) after the death of his wife and child during a Second World War bombing raid.

In *Le Voyage de Patrice Périot* (1950), Duhamel grants the busy Périot the luxury of an occasional stroll through the streets of Paris: “Ce temps que je passe à traverser Paris, c’est du temps bien employé, du temps donné à la réflexion, du temps perdu; autrement dit, du temps

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<sup>212</sup> Georges Duhamel. *Essai sur le roman*. Paris: Marcelle Lesage, 1925, p. 30.

gagné” (p. 11). Yet even this man of letters needs a catalyst to break free from the crushing routine of his work and public demands, which, as we have seen, give him a sense of the absurd. This catalyst comes in the form of the suicide of his son Hervé, a suicide which Estang suggests is itself a function of the absurd: “On le devine. Le garçon se plaignait de l’ennui. Mal d’époque, mal romantique recrudescant, alors, à l’enseigne de *l’absurde*” (p. 115). Hervé’s death sharpens Périot’s own view of the world as absurd:

Ce monde égaré dans lequel nous vivons peut-il encore admettre une règle? Il n’y a plus ni repos, ni refuge. Il n’y a plus ni lumière, ni voix qui tombe des espaces infinis. Nous vivons dans un monde mort (*VPP*, p. 169).

There is in this quotation, a clear reference to Pascal’s *Pensées* — “Le silence éternel de ces espaces infinis m’effraie” (*Pensées*, p. 110).

We have already noted the birth of Suzanne Pasquier’s feeling for the absurd. This emotional understanding is amplified when she returns from the idyllic surrounds of Nesles to visit her ageing parents. She has no need for the death of someone close to her to move beyond this initial awareness; the mere ageing of her parents is enough. Raymond Pasquier is now thin and gaunt, whilst her mother Lucie-Éléonore “était maintenant très vieille, presque impotente” (*SJH*, p. 352). For the first time, Suzanne becomes distinctly aware that her parents, particularly her mother, may soon not be there to protect her as they have done in the past, and she begins to ruminate about her own condition:

La barrière qui se dressait entre Suzanne et l’avenir confus, entre Suzanne et l’inconnu, entre Suzanne et quoi donc encore de plus terrible? la mort peut-être, la barrière qui protégeait encore Suzanne lui paraissait maintenant tout à fait branlante et fragile. Encore un petit peu de temps, et les vieux Pasquier finiraient par disparaître (p. 352).

For the first time, Suzanne feels her youth dissipating and, like Janine of *La Femme adultère*, it is through the medium of the young, vibrant girl that she had been that she begins to understand her place in the world: “Le miroir de Suzanne lui semblait, pour la première fois, chargé d’un trouble refus” (p. 354). Whilst not yet confronted with the image of herself as an old woman, Suzanne notices in the corner of her eye, “de plis imperceptibles” (p. 355). There, before the mirror, Suzanne’s level of awareness reaches its highest point. Here, “*pour la première fois de sa vie*, (our italics) Suzanne sentait avec une force désespérée qu’elle était quelqu’un de mortel, quelque chose, oui, quelque chose de périssable” (p. 356).

Like Renaud Censier of *La Nuit de la Saint-Jean*, Suzanne fears that she may have wasted her life and begins to understand that the pursuit of her love for the theatre was based solely on a love of herself, fed by the admiration of a mediocre crowd. Visited by Hubert Baudoin, who begs her to return to Nesles, Suzanne refuses, and, instead, agrees to depart by ocean liner for a tour with the rest of the troupe. Inconsolable, she considers it too late to reinvent herself and retires to her cabin to further contemplate the sea and a life apparently lost.

It is on this seemingly despondent message that Duhamel concludes his novel. We are not told much about Suzanne in the ensuing and final instalment in the series, *La Passion de Joseph Pasquier* (1945). When writing to Cécile, Laurent notices that Suzanne is “profondément changée et attristée” (*PJP*, p. 125), and there is also a reference to the fact that Suzanne has continued with her career. It is interesting to speculate how Duhamel could have treated Suzanne’s return to the theatre, for, at least from a Camusian perspective, she now seemingly possesses all that she needs for revolt. Has she, as Lafay suggests, in truth “perdu sa vie” (*Duhamel revisité*, p. 187)?

In the works of both authors, for some characters, the possibility or realisation of the death of those close to them is simply not enough to give rise to ‘l’éveil définitif’. Nothing less than a personal brush with death is sufficient.

At first blush, Meursault and Salavin have little in common, even though both are condemned men, Meursault by society in the form of the trial jury, and Salavin by an inability to reinvent himself. Meursault is completely indifferent to what people might think of him. Salavin, on the other hand, is meek, lacking a sense of self-worth and totally consumed by how he is perceived by others. One could speculate that Meursault would have spent no time conjuring up for his mother an excuse for why he was sacked, or dreaming about becoming the action hero of a burning theatre. Similarly, Salavin may have blushed and retreated to the safety of his canapé in the face of Marie’s invitation to marry and may perhaps have dismissed Raymond’s request for help on the grounds of his dubious character. Meursault’s thought on the day of his mother’s funeral of the pleasure he might have derived in a walk “s’il n’avait pas eu mamam” (*L’Étranger*, p. 22) may have sent Salavin spiralling into guilt and depression, similar to that which he experiences in *Confession de minuit*, when thinking about the small rental income he might receive in the event of his mother’s death.

Furthermore, whilst Salavin actively seeks out the ‘second sens de notre vie’, Meursault seems content to accept his life for what it is. Bonnier disagrees, citing Meursault’s journal-like description of his life as evidence that he is searching for himself:

Mais, pour Meursault, cette manière de journal de bord qu’il tient avec soin et sur lequel il consigne le moindre fait représente sa dernière raison d’être. Il a besoin d’un témoin de lui-même, puisqu’il n’est que le témoin des autres (p. 110).

This recalls Salavin's keeping of his own diary in *Journal de Salavin* (1927), in which he records evidence of saintly acts. As Bonnier describes Meursault, Dodd describes Salavin: "The diary becomes a source of comfort to him, a substitute for the human companionship precluded by his misanthropy" (p. 122). The following description by Bonnier of Meursault could be easily applied to Salavin: "Entraîné de force dans le temps de la fatalité ou du hasard, il cherche continuellement à le tenir en échec, à se rassembler, bref, à se posséder. Meursault est à la recherche de son âme" (p. 110).

If Meursault is truly in search of his 'vie intérieure', then certainly it cannot be said that he is prepared to put in the same amount of effort as Salavin. It is almost as if Meursault is content to wait for a sign, something that will be imposed on him by the world which will bring him the sense of unity he seeks. Of course, that duly arrives in the form of his 'involuntary' murder of the Arab and subsequent death sentence. Unlike Salavin, Meursault will not actively search out a meaning for life. After all, as Bonnier himself suggests, "le pain ne suffit pas à donner le bonheur, et Meursault ne semble pas avoir faim" (p. 118). In this sense, one can perhaps understand Duhamel's admiration for Salavin, communicated in 'Vie et mort d'un héros de roman', the first chapter of *Semilles au vent* (1947):

Puis-je me consoler en songeant que l'échec de Salavin n'est pas un échec total et irrémédiable. Vraiment, parce qu'il a voulu le salut, parce qu'il a souhaité le salut avec tant de ferveur et de persévérance, par là-même n'est-il pas sauvé déjà? Le désir du salut n'est-il pas l'essence même du salut, n'est-il pas le seul salut? (p. 24).<sup>213</sup>

Despite their differences, Zéphir notices "les nombreuses ressemblances qu'accusaient deux personnages, nés à des époques différentes et séparés par vingt années de distance" (*Psychologie*

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<sup>213</sup> Comeau also notes this passage in the context of Duhamel's admiration for Salavin (p. 181).



*de Salavin*, p. 43). We can identify their honesty, reliance on routine and more importantly, the fact that they both initially feel the absurd rather than understand it. However, we consider there is a much stronger bond that unites Meursault and Salavin; both acquire, very late in the work, an urgent understanding of their own demise, and finally recognise what it means to be happy. As Dodd suggests of Salavin:

There is even a suggestion that he himself, on the verge of death, reaches a certain degree of comprehension. His is not the bitter outburst of a Meursault about to be executed but prefigures the same basic belief in life (p. 310).

Treil considers that Meursault's 'crise de conscience' occurs earlier, suggesting that his mother's death left Meursault "bouleversé" (p. 126). For example, Treil notes that Meursault runs to make the bus for Marengo, walks the two kilometres to the old-age home, and, at the funeral, notes the blood pulsing in his temples. However, these facts are equally consistent with another explanation, namely that Meursault loved his mother and will miss her. The searing heat on the day of the funeral could explain the blood rushing to his temples. The problem with elevating the death of his mother to a catalyst for some deeper, intellectual process is the fact that there is a temporal break between the funeral and the killing of the Arab, unlike Caligula whose murderous campaign begins soon after Drusilla's death.

Treil goes on to make an interesting point in relation to the four bullets deposited into the Arab immediately following the first fatal shot. He argues that at this moment: "Meursault se trouve face à la mort qu'il vient de créer [...] Ces quatre coups supplémentaires ne sont plus pour l'Arabe, mais pour cette mort présente devant lui [...]" (p. 129). However, this argument is weakened by the fact that Meursault continues to remain indifferent to the killing throughout the

court process. Ultimately, it is truly only the fact of his own imminent death which equips Meursault with consciousness. Braun elucidates:

The awakening Meursault experiences brought him a greater awareness of his condition: he had always been sentenced to death, although it was not imminent. From this fact, he deduced that nothing mattered, neither his mother's death, nor that of the man he killed; unlike Caligula, he did not wish to increase suffering, but if he did so inadvertently, it did not matter too much. One thing mattered, however, and that was his own death (p. 69).

Perhaps Treil's argument that Meursault's intellectual process precedes his death sentence is consistent with the proposition that Meursault's intellectual experience is a subtle one over time in a three-step process; one which begins with his mother's death, continues with his firing four more bullets into a lifeless body and culminates with the trial process. However, as East confirms, it is the fact of the death sentence which sharpens Meursault's resolve:

Sa condamnation et son exécution imminente l'ont sensibilisé à cette grande vérité que, peu importe le moment et le comment de sa mort, celle-ci n'en demeure pas moins évidente. Il le savait de façon notionnelle, maintenant il le sait avec son intelligence et aussi avec ses viscères (p. 137).

William M. Manly also notices how his death sentence shows us "an aroused Meursault who, in the face of his own death, is brought to a realization of truths which he had only dimly perceived earlier."<sup>214</sup>

Prior to his death sentence, Meursault is unaware of how his refusal to obey convention sets him apart from society: "J'avais le désir de lui affirmer que j'étais comme tout le monde, absolument comme tout le monde" (p. 103). As Bonnier suggests: "Pour reprendre un qualificatif cher à Camus,

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<sup>214</sup> William M. Manly. 'Journey to Consciousness: The Symbolic Pattern of Camus's *L'Étranger*'. *PMLA*. Vol. 79, No. 3. June (1964), p. 327.

tout *semble* (our italics) futile” (p. 103). Once armed with the knowledge that he is to be executed, however, this ambivalence disappears. Albérès comments on the “joie absurde que connaît *l’Étranger* de Camus devant la mort” (*Les Hommes traqués*, p. 104).

There is no doubt that prior to his death sentence, and in keeping with his desire to live simply and instinctively through his body, Meursault derives enjoyment from the natural world. Yet, prior to his incarceration, his expression of this enjoyment is measured and deliberate, like the matter-of-fact manner with which he deals with most things in his life: “J’ai été heureux de revenir en marchant lentement le long des quais. Le ciel était vert, je me sentais content” (*L’Étranger*, p. 45). Following the court’s order that he be executed, things take on a decidedly more urgent tone: “Jamais mon oreille n’avait perçu tant de bruits, distingué de sons si ténus” (*L’Étranger*, p. 172).

Brée summarises these changes in Meursault, brought about by his impending execution:

Meursault sees, at last, that to exist is happiness. His indifference to the sights and smells of the world turns into a conscious love; his passive acquiescence to the violence done human beings turns into a passionate revolt against death and a sense of human fraternity. He can now understand the small joys that filled the last days of his mother’s humble life (p. 19).

Salavin experiences an emotional feeling for the absurd in *Confession de minuit* (1920) and in the next few volumes, he searches for the ‘second sens de notre vie’. Each attempt fails and, as Mersault will flee Algeria for Europe in *La Mort heureuse* (1938), he flees to North Africa in the final instalment of *Tel qu’en lui-même* (1932). Like that of Mersault, his flight is brought about by an inability to overcome a growing feeling for the absurd. However, whilst Mersault’s ‘crise’ will follow his witnessing a dead body on the pavement in Prague, Salavin, at least until the final pages of *Tel qu’en lui-même*, is afforded no such luxury by Duhamel.

Without a catalyst, Salavin lacks the intellectual capacity to reconcile his feelings. Simon sees it in similar terms: “L’obstacle intellectuel est infranchissable, au point que la découverte même d’une *équivalence* lui est impossible” (*Modernité de Salavin*, p. 96). Pontré agrees that Salavin “n’arrive jamais à comprendre avec lucidité les impulsions intérieures auxquelles il est sujet” (p. 50).

Despite serious illness and the death of his mother and son, at no time prior to sustaining the fatal injury at the hands of Moktar does Salavin experience Camus’ ‘*éveil définitif*’. Zéphir suggests Salavin is possessed of a “lucidité étonnante” in relation to “notre nature humaine” (*Psychologie de Salavin*, p. 132), but the examples he gives in support of this assertion do not include any intimate awareness of death. Rather, he notes Salavin’s reflections on his inability to find friends outside the office, or the ephemeral nature of his joys (*Psychologie de Salavin*, p. 132).

As Dodd points out, from time to time throughout the cycle, Salavin experiences moments of lucidity. In particular, she refers to the instances in *Journal de Salavin* (1927), where Salavin recognises the truth behind his quest for sainthood and “acknowledges that he does not want to change ‘la racine...l’être profond...cette chose qui est en moi’” (p. 129). Yet if these are, as Dodd suggests, “dramatic moments of complete lucidity” (p. 129), they can only be a momentary recognition of the false altruism that motivates him to become a saint, rather than a pointer to the greater intellectual process that acts as the catalyst for revolt.<sup>215</sup> These rare moments of honest self-appraisal do no more than serve to reinforce Salavin’s feeling of absurdity, because not long

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<sup>215</sup> Daniel-Rops also considers Salavin “constamment lucide” (p. 925), but the examples he gives demonstrate that whilst Salavin may occasionally be able to view himself with greater objectivity, his ‘lucidity’ does not extend to ‘l’*éveil définitif*’.

after that, he will be dreaming again, once more setting in motion the schism between appearance and reality.

Salavin's illness at the conclusion of *Journal de Salavin* (1927) is a serious one, brought on by his catching a chill after giving his clothes for Jibé. Interestingly, Dodd considers that Salavin may have intended to kill himself by offering his clothes and shoes to Jibé at the conclusion of *Journal de Salavin*. There is no evidence of this in the work itself, and, indeed, one might be justified in concluding that, if Salavin genuinely intended to kill himself, he would have sought out a surer way of carrying out the deed. Offering his clothes to Jibé and running home in the cold certainly seem insufficient. On the other hand, placing himself before the armed and angry Moktar towards the end of *Tel qu'en lui-même* (1932) would support the inference that, in this final instalment, Salavin indeed intended to kill himself. Dyé agrees that Salavin approaches Moktar "au péril de sa vie" (*Exotisme et peinture du monde colonial dans Tel qu'en lui-même*, p. 122).

Of the earlier episode with Jibé, Salavin readily concedes to Aufrère early on in *Le Club des Lyonnais* (1929) that: "J'ai failli mourir."<sup>216</sup> However, Salavin's reaction: "Puisque je ne suis pas mort, je vis" (p. 19), is hardly the passionate cry of the lucid rebel. Dodd suggests this is a "neutral" (p. 135) response. One could perhaps substitute 'resigned.' Having survived his own nadir, there is nothing left for Salavin but to begin rolling his rock again: "Eh bien! je cherche, au sens absolu du verbe" (*CL*, p. 20). Thus, Salavin's near-death experience at the conclusion of *Journal de Salavin* (1927) does not give birth to revolt, but rather to a renewed but misguided desire, in *Le Club des Lyonnais*, for personal reinvention.

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<sup>216</sup> Georges Duhamel. *Le Club des Lyonnais*. Paris: Mercure de France, 1929, p. 19.

Nevertheless, *Le Club des Lyonnais* marks an ever-so-slight shift in Salavin away from a predominantly subjective view of himself and of his world. This he achieves with the benefit of the self-proclaimed “spectateur pur”, Aufrère. As Dodd suggests, in this volume, Salavin comes face to face with someone who is prepared to criticise him when it is warranted, and who “recognises and attempts to correct Salavin’s tendency to dramatise his anxieties” (p. 138).

The death of Devrigny towards the end of *Le Club des Lyonnais* aids Salavin in his intellectual process, but does not crystallise it. In his letter to Marguerite, he demonstrates that he has become more aware of the human condition, but yet still he cannot accept himself as he is: “Je demande à réfléchir dans la solitude. Je demande à faire quelque chose pour devenir un homme autre que celui dont tu as déjà tant souffert” (*CL*, p. 286).

Guespin considers that Salavin’s letter to Marguerite at the conclusion of *Le Club des Lyonnais* shows glimpses of a more intellectual approach by Salavin: “Retour à la conscience? Le dernier mot est un bref plaidoyer. C’est une folie, une folie lucide, qu’entreprend Salavin” (Guespin, p. 109). This subtle shift in Salavin’s ability to view himself objectively will find its full effect towards the end of the final instalment, *Tel qu’en lui-même*.

Not even the death of Salavin’s mother, in *Le Club des Lyonnais*, grants him the lucidity he requires. Whilst he suggests that: “Il n’y a plus rien entre la mort et moi” (p. 243), he soon forms yet another project for his personal salvation. This time, instead of becoming a saint, he will simply be “un homme. Rien de plus. Un homme simple et bon” (p. 271). However, it is a little difficult to agree with Pontré’s suggestion that this statement from Salavin amounts to a realisation that “la paix intérieure qu’il recherche ne se trouve autre part que dans la compassion

pour les autres qui souffrent” (Pontré, p. 117), because this latest project is still coloured with notions of self-gratification and heroism:

Il irait parmi les hommes, cherchant les malheureux, les réprouvés, les vaincus. Il n'en manque pas! Et il s'efforcerait de les consoler, rien de plus. A l'occasion, les instruire. Pour les meilleurs, pour les sujets d'élite, les réhabiliter, les sauver peut-être (p. 271).

This resolution from Salavin to simply accept his duty as a man will have a certain familiar ring for later readers of *La Peste* (1947). Here, in response to Tarrou's desire to become a saint, Dr Rieux says: “Je n'ai pas de goût, je crois, pour l'heroïsme et la sainteté. Ce qui m'intéresse, c'est d'être un homme” (p. 230). However, there is a fundamental difference in the circumstances in which these two similar declarations are made. Salavin's is made without a true consciousness of death, but, admittedly, with the courageous but misguided refusal to accept his feeling for the absurdity of life. Rieux's later statement is also courageous, but has the added benefit of being made from a state of lucidity born from an intimate understanding (as a doctor and as a potential plague victim) of what it means to die.

Salavin is the seeker of absolutes, of complete reinvention. Rather than place faith in absolutes or miracles, Rieux will be genuinely concerned to accept his duty as a man. Pierre-Louis Rey suggests that:

Rieux sacrifie son temps, sa santé, sa vie (qu'il soit épargné par l'épidémie tient du miracle), celle de sa mère, qui loge avec lui, d'une certaine façon celle de sa femme, sur laquelle il renonce à veiller pour se consacrer tout entier aux victimes de l'épidémie, mais il le fait uniquement pour accomplir sa condition d'homme, non pour sauver son âme, ni même pour changer en Messie et servir ainsi d'exemple aux autres.<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>217</sup> Pierre-Louis Rey. ‘Un malentendu: la sainteté laïque de Camus’. *Vives Lettres/Université des sciences humaines de Strasbourg*. Vol. 7, Issue 1. (1999), p. 97.

Accordingly, whilst Michel Martinez suggests a link between “l’interminable défaite’ du métier quotidien de Rieux, et celle de la vie de Salavin, avec le refrain du ‘je recommencerais’ commun aux deux livres,” (p. 67), one must keep in mind the varying degrees of ‘lucidity’ of these two protagonists. Garguilo makes an important observation in this context: “Le malheur de Salavin, c’est de n’avoir pas compris ce que le Dr Rieux enseignera dans *La Peste*: qu’il n’est pas nécessaire d’être un saint ou un médecin, qu’il suffit d’être un homme.”<sup>218</sup> We suggest that the reason Salavin does not understand Rieux’s lesson is because of a lack of lucidity. If, as Lucien Guissard contends, Salavin’s actions amount to “une grande révolte,”<sup>219</sup> then Salavin’s can only be an unconscious rebellion, at least until the final pages of *Tel qu’en lui-même*. The crux of the issue is that Rieux’s will be an *ethical*, measured rebellion which follows lucidity, whereas Salavin’s is a search for some absolute after acquiring a feeling for the absurd.

Salavin also distinguishes himself from Tarrou on the same basis. Both are motivated to become lay-saints, but Tarrou will undertake his task with genuine sympathy for others and absolute lucidity brought on by witnessing an execution. Salavin’s desire to become a saint is motivated by the ongoing search for an absolute, without the benefit of lucidity and not in the least altruistic. As Santelli suggests, “on ne s’improvise pas saint [...]” (*Georges Duhamel, l’homme, l’œuvre*, p. 101).

It is difficult to accept Dodd’s assertion that, prior to his sustaining his fatal injury, Salavin is “constantly haunted” (p. 59) by death, or has acquired “this knowledge of his own finiteness” (p.

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<sup>218</sup> René Garguilo. ‘Georges Duhamel, Précurseur de l’absurde’. *Georges Duhamel: témoin du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle*. Eds. Robert Jouanny and Arlette Lafay. Paris, Minard, (1987), p. 159.

<sup>219</sup> Lucien Guissard. ‘Un humanisme négatif’. *Georges Duhamel 1884-1966*. Paris: Mercure de France, (1967), p. 121.



59). If Salavin understands that all human beings are condemned to die, this fact never ‘truly registers’ for him until after he is shot by Moktar. We prefer Dodd’s observation that Salavin “sees glimmers of a truth which he cannot ignore” (p. 107), a truth that will finally be revealed to Salavin in *Tel qu’en lui-même*. Dodd does speak of Salavin’s “mysterious transition through death into something which was denied him in life” (p. 45). We see this ‘mysterious transition’ as Salavin’s ‘prise de conscience’.

One could therefore postulate that Salavin’s conduct in *Tel qu’en lui-même* (1932) is a function of a latent desire to become conscious. Up until this point, he has not been possessed of a sufficient catalyst. Following the emotional awakening of *Confession de minuit*, all attempts by Salavin to find the unity he seeks inevitably end in failure. Now in the final volume, we see him instinctively throwing himself under a train to save a young girl, willingly coming into proximity with patients affected by the plague, giving a blood transfusion in circumstances where there is a risk of infection from a vagrant.

Tonnet-Lacroix places the act of saving the young girl from the train on the same level as the infamous touching of the ear in *Confession de minuit*:

Aux yeux de Salavin, le geste spontané qui lui a permis de sauver une petite fille n’a rien d’admirable; c’est pour lui un geste de réflexe qui lui a échappé, tout comme cet autre geste par lequel il ne peut s’empêcher de toucher l’oreille de son patron (p. 164).

Whilst that argument might have some merit if the heroic act is viewed in isolation, how does one then explain the fact that Salavin thereafter continuously places himself in positions of peril? The act of saving the young girl is more than the act of a man experiencing the absurd for the first time — it is the involuntary act of a man looking for personal consciousness.

As Tonnet-Lacroix suggests, Salavin “semble constamment à la recherche d’un secret qui lui échappe [...] Comme il le dit à Aufrère, il «cherche», ou bien encore, il «attend», au sens absolu du terme” (p. 166). Whilst this description could fit Salavin’s search for salvation, we consider that the true secret is finally revealed in *Tel qu’en lui-même* (1932) in the form of genuine lucidity.

In the final pages of *Tel qu’en lui-même*, and with the knowledge that he has sustained a fatal injury, Salavin ironically now rebels against the same death that he has courted: “Il semblait faire un grand effort pour conserver les yeux ouverts” (p. 285). Not only could this phrase be interpreted as an effort not to succumb to his injury and die, but also, viewed metaphorically, an attempt to remain focused and seize the import of death and thus life.

Consequently, and as Meursault will later discover, Salavin finally realises what it means to be happy. The face of the previously passive man wracked with anxiety now radiates “une paix profonde” (p. 287), and Salavin declares himself “très bien, très content” (p. 287). Once more, Salavin considers himself capable of starting over: “Si je devais recommencer une autre vie, il me semble que je saurais. Comme ce serait simple! Comme nous serions heureux!” (p. 287). On this occasion, however, Salavin’s declaration seems not to be coloured with the same sense of fatality as those which preceded it. One senses that but for his death, Salavin may well have found his ‘salut’. As Guespin declares: “Salavin a échoué, mais son échec, cette fois-ci, n’est pas l’enlèvement dans la médiocrité, le retour à la paresse” (p. 131).

Hart disagrees, suggesting that “the reader may be forgiven for doubting this particular expression of Salavin’s confidence in himself” (p. 176). So, too, Zéphir suggests that it is unlikely that

Salavin would have been able to dominate “le besoin obsédant qui le pousse à vouloir toujours se dépasser” (*Psychologie de Salavin*, p. 313). However, Zéphir also concedes that this desire for reinvention is a “pulsion inconsciente” (p. 313). Perhaps then, armed with ultimate ‘consciousness’ about the human condition, Salavin might have succeeded had he survived. Dodd agrees that Duhamel seems to have given Salavin “the benefit of the doubt” (p. 160) in this regard.

On many levels, Duhamel’s play *Le Combat*, first performed in 1913, prefigures *La Peste* by Camus. The floodwaters which threaten the village mirror the external threat of the plague to the inhabitants of Oran. The manner in which the landowners and peasants finally shake off years of entrenched resignation to the inevitable rise of the river foreshadows the revolt championed by Camus. Let us isolate the catalysts that lead to that revolt in *Le Combat*.

Firstly, there is the fundamental threat of the river. For years, the river (like the haphazard and random nature of the plague) has, from time to time, broken its banks and inundated the fields of the villagers, resulting in a loss of crops and of self-esteem. Up until now, the villagers have been resigned to the occasional inundation, and, given his family’s history of illness, Gérard is initially afflicted with the same ambivalence, judging any action as pointless. When Anne-Marie tries to stir Gérard into action, all he can do is forlornly refer to the death of his mother and sister: “Je n’ai rien tenté, mais je suis battu; j’étais battu avant de naître” (*Le Combat*, p. 42). He firmly believes there is no point in doing anything when one is destined for a similar fate; he expresses his indifference in the following way: “Et qu’il est meilleur de ne rien tenter quand on est marqué pour un sacrifice” (p. 43). The point is that Gérard understands that he is going to die, even has a fear of death, but the fact of his demise has not truly registered for him.

However, Gérard's 'paroxysm' is set in motion when he falls ill. He confesses to Dr. Hubert: "Je ne suis qu'un homme, et très jeune, et rempli, comme tous les autres, du besoin de ne pas mourir" (p. 70). Hubert seems to know more about Gérard's illness than he is letting on, and, at first, attempts to deflect Gérard's concerns. It is only when Gérard asks Hubert to look him squarely in the eye that Gérard finds something in Hubert's expression that suggests all is not well. Hubert tries to tell him he is wrong, but Gérard will have none of it. Eventually, Hubert admits the possibility and lowers his head.

It is this sudden 'prise de conscience' that propels Gérard towards life: "Tu sais bien que je vais bientôt mourir, mourir" (p. 76). At this point, Gérard suggests the project of the construction of a river retaining wall. When Michel asks why he has never suggested it before, Gérard replies: "C'est que je n'ai pas toujours su tout ce que je sais maintenant" (p. 88).

Unfortunately, Gérard's crisis of consciousness comes too late for him. There is an awkward silence when Hubert suggests that it might take three years to complete the project, and Gérard's frailty means that he is unable to participate in the physical labour. Ironically, his death is both the catalyst for his revolt and the agent that compromises it. Gérard's revolt comes too late, but at least he has snapped those around him out of mediocrity and resignation. As Falls suggests, he has also been able to use the imminence of his death to fully understand both the wasteful attitude of his life before his illness, and the value of the project, which, despite his death, is about to come to fruition: "Devant la mort il a pleinement conscience de la grandeur à laquelle son effort lui a permis d'atteindre" (p. 63).

*Le Combat* is the story of a pure metaphysical revolt against the injustice of the human condition, which prefigures *La Peste* (1947) and which is the precursor to the works born from the injustice of the Great War, *Vie des martyrs* (1917), *Civilisation* (1918) and *La Possession du monde* (1919):

*Le Combat* est comme une préfiguration de la pensée de Duhamel lui-même. Dans sa vie, ainsi que dans celle de son personnage, il se produit un événement considérable qui vient éprouver ses idéals, qui canalise ses efforts dans une direction pressentie, sans doute, déjà, mais encore mal définie: je veux parler de la guerre de 1914-1918 (Falls, p. 65).

We have already examined *Nouvelles du sombre empire* (1960) in the light of alienation and of an emotional awakening to the absurd. As the work proceeds, Thomas Lestrangier moves towards a deeper understanding of his position. We know that Duhamel's hell, like Sartre's in *Huis Clos* (1944), is specially crafted to suit each individual, but what is common to the inhabitants in Duhamel's work is that all have been inoculated against death.

Thomas would love to return to the earth to make people aware that death "n'est en vérité que le prélude à d'autres douleurs" (p. 153). In hell, Thomas begins his intellectual awakening; he is subjected to medical procedures designed, ironically, to ensure his survival in circumstances where death might be desired: "On faisait quelque chose pour nous préserver et non pas pour nous détruire" (p.38). He writes to his Wife: "Le sommeil est sévèrement interdit et même puni...comme une coupable allusion au néant" (p. 95). The point is that Thomas had previously lived a death in life. Hell has saved him, as Caligula saved the Romans from "the dreamless sleep of mediocrity" (Cruikshank, *Albert Camus and the Literature of Revolt*, p. 197).

Like Salavin, Thomas is finally able to see what life might have been like, or could be again, if he is given a second chance by Bernadoni, conjuring up for himself “une adorable image de ce qu’aurait pu être mon bonheur” (p. 15). Like Janine in *La Femme adultère* (1957) and Meursault of *L’Étranger*, Thomas’ revolt sees him immediately turn towards the natural world: “J’ai vu un petit espace de ciel noir avec des étoiles. Je suis tombé à genoux. Ah! les hommes de la Terre ne connaissent pas leur bonheur” (*NSE*, p. 152).

***AN INITIAL RESPONSE TO THE ABSURD: THE COMMUNITY OF LE MYTHE DE SISYPHE***

In *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* Camus outlines four human models, which he considers most capable of preserving the tension generated by the absurd and living within its boundaries, namely the Spanish lover Don Juan, the actor, the creator, and the conqueror. In fact, Rizzuto suggests a subtle movement towards a community in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (1942):

Its perspective is becoming horizontal, with more emphasis on multiple human relationships, out of necessity since Nature resists our manipulation, out of choice since Camus himself does not want to be annulled by someone else’s love (*Camus’ Imperial Vision*, p. 39).

Rizzuto’s assertion is a bold one, because, *per se*, it is difficult to conceive how any of Camus’ models allow for reasonable human relationships. Don Juan is never with any woman long enough to allow any significant relationship to develop and he meets them on the level of the body alone. The conqueror is presented as aloof and alone and the actor and creator live intense existences in exile. We agree with Rizzuto’s conclusion that “Camus eventually portrays man confronting himself, not as he is, but as he wishes himself to be. He joins us, but as an actor-hero. But where is the human community in all of this?” (*Camus’ Imperial Vision*, p. 50).

The absurd man of *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (1942) has convinced himself that he will resist the absurdity of life. For the absurd heroes of this essay, their initial response is one of quantity rather than quality:

Si je me persuade que cette vie n'a d'autre face que celle de l'absurde, si j'éprouve que tout son équilibre tient à cette perpétuelle opposition entre ma révolte consciente et l'obscurité où elle se débat, si j'admets que ma liberté n'a de sens que par rapport à son destin limité, alors je dois dire que ce qui compte n'est pas de vivre le mieux mais de vivre le plus (p. 86).

For Camus in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, the goal of the absurd man is to undertake as many experiences as he can in bite-sized chunks of time: “Le présent et la succession des présents devant une âme sans cesse consciente, c'est l'idéal de l'homme absurde” (p. 90). He must also be passionate and committed: “J'exalte l'homme devant ce qui l'écrase et ma liberté, ma révolte et ma passion se rejoignent alors dans cette tension, cette clairvoyance et cette répétition démesurée” (p. 121). He must pursue not only a *quantity* of experiences but also a *variety* of experiences: “La morale d'un homme, son échelle de valeurs n'ont de sens que par la quantité et la variété d'expériences qu'il lui a été donné d'accumuler” (p. 87).

Don Juan is the perfect embodiment of the quantitative approach. Unlike Salavin, he cannot be ‘annulled’ by another, since there is no meeting of the minds, only one of bodies. He does not project his mind into the future, and, accordingly, to the extent that it is possible, he is able to separate himself from the inexorable march of time towards death: “Since Don Juan is both committed to the body and uninvolved, “le temps,” Camus writes, ‘marche avec lui’” (Rizzuto, *Camus' Imperial Vision*, p. 46).

### ***EVIDENCE OF A QUANTITATIVE APPROACH IN DUHAMEL***

As a painter of the human heart, one could speculate that Duhamel would advocate quality over “le démon de la quantité” (*DL*, p. 136). As his friend Thérive suggests: “Le règne humain étant aussi le règne de la qualité, on doit, aux yeux de Duhamel, éviter de lui appliquer le gabarit de la quantité” (p. 43). In *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, Camus tells us that a quest for sainthood is one of quality, not quantity (p. 102).

What then is to be made of the fact that Duhamel himself led a passionate, fervent existence, in which he accumulated a variety of experiences? After all, he contemporaneously discharged the tasks of “poète, dramaturge, essayiste, romancier, médecin, biologiste, académicien et grand humaniste” (Richard J. Bourcier, ed. *L’Humanisme de Georges Duhamel*, p. ii), all after achieving lucidity. His principal memory of his time at Créteil is one of “une activité non pas désordonnée, mais multiple, défricheuse et parfaitement allègre” (*TR*, p. 46).

In a letter to Martin du Gard of 12 February 1921, written at the time he published *Confession de minuit* (1920) and *Les Hommes abandonnés* (1921), Duhamel describes learning music, notes his desire to learn a new language and explains: “J’ai tant de choses que j’ai envie de faire et qui méritent quand même d’être faites” (Lafay, *Témoins d’un temps troublé*, p. 30). Speaking of his love of both medicine and art, Gérard Duhamel cites George’s reflections on his work: “Il précise d’ailleurs un peu plus loin sa pensée: ‘*Mon vrai repos consiste à changer de travail*’.”<sup>220</sup> Are these descriptions reasonable evidence of an ethic of quantity within Duhamel himself?

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<sup>220</sup> Gérard Duhamel. ‘Les Apophtegmes de Georges Duhamel’. *Les Cahiers de l’Abbaye de Créteil*. December (2001), p. 76.



There is even evidence of a quantitative logic in *La Possession du monde* (1919). A passionate existence, open to all experiences and born from the catalyst of war, would seem to accord well with the quantitative ethic of *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (1942). Speaking about *La Possession du Monde*, Cruikshank notes:

[Duhamel] appears [...] to conceive of happiness as a form of knowledge and love which has to do with a total and sympathetic openness to the diversity of human experience [...] On the subject of possessing the world he writes: “Il ne faut rien refuser; il faut tout accepter, tout évaluer, tout mettre en réserve (p. 63).” This is the formula for happiness and he applies it to the world of men, to the world of nature, to the world of art.”<sup>221</sup>

### **RAYMOND PASQUIER, DON JUAN**

There is no doubt that Duhamel modelled Raymond Pasquier, in part, on his father. In his memoirs, Duhamel describes his father, “[qui] mordait à pleines mâchoires dans la vie qu’il aimait sans la moindre pudeur et sans la moindre hypocrisie” (*IA*, p. 29). He goes on to record the various occupations pursued by his father during the course of his life: “Mon père était journaliste, le voici pharmacien, ou du moins, dans les fonctions et la posture du pharmacien; puis il est agriculteur, éleveur, vraiment je ne saurais plus dire; puis, et sans transition, je le vois commerçant” (*IA*, p. 58). His father studied Latin and Greek and constantly endeavoured, “en pleine maturité, de faire un cruel effort pour redresser son existence, pour changer de route, comme disent les marins” (*IA*, p. 151). Bernard Duhamel also describes his grandfather as a “collectionneur d’aventures.”<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>221</sup> John Cruikshank. *Variations on Catastrophe, some French Responses to the Great War*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1982, p. 123.

<sup>222</sup> Bernard Duhamel. ‘Georges Duhamel’. *Les Cahiers de l’Abbaye de Créteil*. December (1986), p. 11.

Whilst Camus may also have admired such a fervent, changeable existence, he may not have approved of the fact that the course of conduct of Duhamel's father was dictated by appearances. Duhamel's memoirs record that his father's every endeavour was geared, not towards the passionate accumulation of experiences, but always with a view to accumulating wealth and honours, "enfin songer à la gloire" (*IA*, p. 145). In essence, Duhamel confirms his father as "follement sensible aux considérations de prestige" (*IA*, p. 147).

In *La Nuit de la Saint-Jean* (1935), like Don Juan, Raymond Pasquier bluntly accepts his own infidelities: "L'amour, c'est une vocation, c'est une carrière" (p. 182). He equates his love of women with passion and desire and has no regrets. As will Meursault in *L'Étranger*, he accepts others at face value: "Mais moi, je vous prends comme vous êtes" (*NSJ*, p. 183). Arguably, as Laurent concedes, it is the pragmatic Monsieur Pasquier who is the happiest character in the work: "Le seul qui soit heureux de vivre! Oui, oui! Il est probablement le seul" (*NSJ*, p. 209). Knapp also believes that: "Doctor Pasquier still looks upon himself as a young bull or Don Juan as far as women are concerned" (p. 121).

There is also evidence that Raymond Pasquier lives with a lucid understanding of death. For example, in *Cécile parmi nous* (1938), he explains to Laurent:

La vie est une pourriture sacrée. Nous ne pouvons vivre sans faire alliance avec les forces souveraines de la putréfaction. Seulement, nous disons fermentation, par décence, peut-être par peur. Moi, je n'ai pas peur. J'aime la vie, donc j'aime la pourriture sacrée (p. 23).

One would not have any difficulty accepting these words straight from the mouth of Don Juan. Raymond Pasquier lives the passionate existence that will be recommended by *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*: "Vous dites extravagance et moi je dis esprit d'entreprise, initiative, courage, innovation,

curiosité, vitalité” (*CPN*, p. 25). Everything for Raymond Pasquier is a succession of present moments and contains the promise of new beginnings: “Je considère que, pour moi, tout n’est encore qu’au commencement” (*CPN*, p. 25). As will Meursault, Raymond Pasquier refuses to play the game society has mapped out for him: “Tout le monde m’a trouvé ridicule quand l’idée m’est venue de commencer des études et d’apprendre *rose-la-rose* à quarante-cinq ans passés” (*CPN*, p. 24).

However, we begin to see the underlying motivation for Raymond Pasquier’s approach to life, which Duhamel saw in his own father. Asked by Laurent the reason for his latest incarnation as “un grand écrivain” (*CPN*, p. 27), his father candidly admits his goal as precisely that of his son Joseph: “Je vais gagner de l’argent. Rien de plus simple” (*CPN*, p. 26). Like Salavin, M. Pasquier is concerned with absolute, personal reinvention: “J’en ai assez de tirer le diable par la queue. Et maintenant, je vais changer toute ma vie” (*CPN*, p. 26). He is consumed by appearances and by money. We could therefore speculate that whilst the writer of *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (1942) may have admired the *means* by which Raymond Pasquier lived his life, the author of *L’Homme révolté* (1951) may not have approved of the *end* to which these means were directed.

Duhamel’s *Querelles de famille* (1959), opens with a similar quantitative theme:

Ce qu’il convient de susciter, de cultiver désormais chez nos enfants, pour les mettre à l’abri des déconvenues et du désespoir, c’est une aptitude générale à changer de métier tous les deux ans (p. 49).

However, as the work progresses, Duhamel becomes a little clearer about what he means when he talks about variety in life:

L'homme n'avait pas envie de changer, jadis, quand il vivait dans sa maison natale, parmi ses meubles de famille. Le siècle de changement est sur nous. Je l'étonnerais bien, notre siècle, si je lui disais, pourtant, qu'il est le siècle de l'ennui. Car l'ennui provient du fol changement que tous ces pauvres bougres auraient tort de confondre avec la radieuse variété (p. 211).

Specifically in relation to Don Juan, Duhamel has this to say:

Il faut que le monde change. Soit! Si du moins changer signifie, pleinement, vivre. Don Juan change parce qu'il s'ennuie, et Don Juan s'ennuie parce qu'il change. Nous somme environnés de misérables «donjuans», des «donjuans» du costume, du mobilier, de la bâtisse, de l'auto, du spectacle, que sais-je? (p. 211).

Duhamel draws a distinction between the quantity of experiences within the same discipline and a variety of experiences across a spectrum of activities. In fact, a closer look at *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* reveals that, although Camus talks about variety when formulating his ethic of quantity, for the most part his heroes act within the one discipline. No more needs to be said about Don Juan in this context. Similarly, the actor creates various characters, but on the same stage each evening, and the artist generally works within the same discipline.

### ***THE ACTOR***

Camus' passion for the theatre is well documented and, consistent with his early quantitative approach, he undertook many different tasks within the theatre. As Lebesque notes, "[Camus] occupa tous les emplois: comédien, metteur en scène, machiniste, souffleur" (p. 159).

Duhamel's own passion for the theatre is evident in his memoirs. In *Inventaire de l'abîme*, he recalls with fond affection the days of his youth, when he and his brother frequented 'le théâtre de l'Odéon' in Paris. In 1908, following the failure of the experiment at Créteil, Duhamel records

travelling with a troupe of actors on tour. At night he shared a dormitory with the male actors and marvelled at their “chanceuse profession” (*TR*, p. 130).

As we have seen, Duhamel fell into a deep melancholy after the Great War. His recovery was aided by the re-birth of the theatre of Le Vieux-Colombier and a re-commitment to artistic endeavours with his friends: “La petite fleur de giroflée, la fleur de l’espérance, recommençait à s’épanouir entre les pierres de nos ruines” (*LEE*, p. 32).

For Camus, however, the actor represents much more than the man who simply plays a part. In *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (1942), Camus admires the actor, because in the short time taken to present a play, he or she has to live an intense existence and then fade away:

Il faut qu’en trois heures il éprouve et exprime tout un destin exceptionnel. Cela s’appelle se perdre pour se retrouver. Dans ces trois heures, il va jusqu’au bout du chemin sans issue que l’homme du parterre met toute sa vie à parcourir” (p. 111).

Like Don Juan, the actor achieves a feeling of unity of self where mind and body converge: “Il est à cet endroit où le corps et l’esprit se rejoignent [...]” (*LMS*, p. 113).

It is important to note, however, that, for Camus, acting is not, *per se*, a response to the absurd. The fate of the actor might be recognised for what it represents by the lucid man or woman: “Je ne dis pas que les acteurs en général obéissent à cet appel, qu’ils sont des hommes absurdes, mais que leur destin est un destin absurde qui pourrait séduire et attirer un cœur clairvoyant” (*LMS*, p. 108). Once again, Camus links the idea of consciousness and lucidity with an elite; he draws a distinction between those who attend the theatre simply to be entertained, and those more sophisticated beings who understand, as Hinchliffe does, that the “actor’s stage becomes a symbol of our universe enclosed with ‘absurd walls’” (p. 37). The man who simply attends to be

entertained, “l’homme quotidien” (*LMS*, p. 108), is equated with “l’homme inconscient” (*LMS*, p. 108) by Camus, whereas the being who is conscious and lucid “commence où celui-ci finit, où cessant d’admirer le jeu, l’esprit veut y entrer” (*LMS*, p. 108).

Duhamel gives some wonderful descriptions of the same, everyday man in the context of the cinema. For example, in *Scènes de la vie future* (1930), he describes “la foule qui patiente aux guichets des cinémas. A quoi donc me fait penser cette foule, avec son long cheminement? N’est-ce pas aux animaux qui montent vers la tuerie?” (p. 97). In *Deux Hommes* (1924), Salavin notices the same phenomenon: “Les hommes et les femmes entrent au cinéma sans empressement, sans joie, dirait-on. Ils vont là comme au bureau. C’est l’heure du plaisir” (p. 153).

In *Suzanne et les jeunes hommes* (1941), Duhamel portrays the life of theatre actress Suzanne, the youngest of the Pasquier clan. In describing her penchant for the theatre, Duhamel notes not only the passionate existence of the actor, but also emphasises the self-repeating nature of the task. Suzanne loves:

ce jeu perpétuel qui se substituait à la vie, qui transfigurait la vie, qui haussait la vie jusqu’aux sphères enchantées où il n’y plus que des héros, des déesses, le bruit des harpes et l’écho des paroles éternelles (p. 96).

If one of the attractions of the creative process is, for Camus, that it “marque à la fois la mort d’une expérience et sa multiplication” (*LMS*, p. 131), then Duhamel’s earlier description is the very essence of what would be the quantitative approach of *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*.

However, Suzanne’s love for the theatre, at least initially, is also based only on appearances and not on any deeper meaning or significance: “C’est ainsi qu’elle était heureuse, dans cette bonne chaleur de l’amour des autres, dans ce rayonnement d’hommage et d’admiration” (*SJH*, p. 96).

This phenomenon is something of which Camus was also aware. In the first volume of his notebooks, he comments on the inherent urge in human beings to appear as something they are not, and concludes: “Chaque fois que l’on (que je) cède à ses vanités [that is, the ‘vanity’ of appearing other than what one is], chaque fois qu’on pense et vit pour «paraître», on trahit” (*Carnets II*, p. 76).

Initially, Suzanne is the same as ‘l’homme inconscient’ that Camus describes in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*. In this way, she resembles the crowds that flock to see her:

ces foules indociles, parfois stupides, toujours ingrates qui la flattaient de leurs regards, de leurs soupirs, de leurs clameurs, et qui l’oubliaient sans doute dès qu’elles avaient tourné le dos pour courir à d’autres divertissements (*SJH*, p. 357).

As Salavin sees in the world of his thoughts, Suzanne sees in the theatre, a substitute universe which is kinder than reality. For Suzanne, the theatre is “plus beau, plus riche et plus surprenant que la vie, plus vrai, surtout, que cette vie décevante, toute gâtée de hasards absurdes” (*SJH*, p. 96). For Suzanne, as for Salavin, the missing link is consciousness. Prior to her own crisis of consciousness, Suzanne is purely the actor, rather than the actor who is aware of her condition. As we have seen, following her ‘crise’, Suzanne returns to the theatre. We are not told enough about her in the subsequent volumes to assess any change in her.

### ***THE CREATOR***

In *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, the creator, or artist, is held up as the most important of all Camus’ models for the absurd man, as “la joie absurde par excellence, c’est la création” (p. 129). Creation sits well within Camus’ quantitative approach because, ignoring the temptation to explain human kind’s place in the world, it rests solely upon experience and description.

Whilst art, for Camus, includes painting and sculpture, he reserves special comment for music and literature. Music obeys the primary impulse of the quantitative ethic because “les vibrations se rencontrent cependant en un univers inhumain” (*LMS*, p. 136), and “si un art est privé d’enseignement, c’est bien celui-là” (*LMS*, p. 135).

In his journal entry of 28 October 1927, Duhamel describes a visit to the home of his friend Dilip Roy. Roy spends the evening entertaining the Duhamels with a performance of traditional, Indian music and Duhamel’s comments about the evening reveal that he also recognises the gratuitous nature of the music, or, as Camus would later describe in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, “cet exercice de détachement et de passion” (p. 139). Duhamel describes the Indian’s music in this way:

La musique ou un parfum, rien de mieux pour nous faire deviner un monde inconnu, ou même pour nous faire comprendre à quel point ce monde nous est peu compréhensible. Des mots simplifieraient tout, unifieraient tout. Avec la musique tout garde son recul et sa perspective” (*LLA*, p. 55).

Whether playing the flute or listening to a concert, music was a source of great joy for Duhamel. There can be no more inhuman universe than that experienced by those serving at the front during the Great War. In ‘Un Concert’, a chapter of *Les Sept Dernières Plaies* (1928), Duhamel recounts the story of the fatally-wounded Barouin, who, on the verge of death, is able to delay his demise for one hour because he wishes to listen to the musicians and singers who have gathered to perform. The suggestion is that Barouin is acutely aware of his fate, for Duhamel describes him thus: “Il avait l’air terriblement occupé et je compris tout à coup qu’il était sur le point de finir” (*SDP*, p. 203).

Barouin is the quintessential absurd man. Like Camus’ prisoner who gleefully holds the cyanide pill in front of him, Barouin uses the fact of the concert to take back some control over his death:



“Un homme peut retarder sa mort d’une heure, s’il a vraiment du courage et s’il a vraiment bon cœur” (*SDP*, p. 206). There is nothing left for Barouin but the pure sensation of the music. At the time of his death, he seeks no consolation, no explanation for why he must die. On the contrary, as the concert plays, “son visage prit une expression de résolution, de fierté” (*SDP*, p. 205). This is the silent manifestation of what will be Caligula’s defiant cry in the face of death — ‘I am still alive!’ Camus himself could not have chosen a more apt example to demonstrate this point.

According to Camus, the temptation to explain is greatest in the fictional work of art, but for such a work to truly respect “les commandements de l’absurde” (*LMS*, p. 139), it must illustrate, as we think Duhamel does, “le divorce et la révolte” (*LMS*, p. 139). In this way, the work of art is truly “une fin et un commencement” (*LMS*, p. 138). For the artist of *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, the secret is perseverance in an effort considered sterile, like that of Sisyphus:

De toutes les écoles de la patience et de la lucidité, la création est la plus efficace. Elle est aussi le bouleversant témoignage de la seule dignité de l’homme: la révolte tenace contre sa condition, la persévérance dans un effort tenu pour stérile (*LMS*, p. 156).

As André Parinaud suggests: “De tous les «princes sans royaume» de l’univers absurde, l’être par excellence est le créateur qui «travaille pour rien».”<sup>223</sup>

Duhamel’s memoirs demonstrate this same appetite for completion and renewal: “Je découvrais, comme peut et doit le faire chaque artiste, que toute œuvre d’art est fin en soi et moyen pour s’acheminer vers une œuvre plus difficile et plus haute” (*PA*, p. 254). In *Le Temps de la recherche*, and despite the initial euphoria of the first presentation of his play *La Lumière* (1911),

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<sup>223</sup> André Parinaud. ‘La Vie d’un écrivain engagé’. *Camus*. Paris: Librairie Hachette, (1964), p. 19.

Duhamel is already thinking about other plays: “Dès le lendemain, j’entrepris d’inventer une autre pièce” (*TR*, p. 169). The same thing happens after the relative success of *Dans l’ombre des statues* (1912): “Je m’efforçai de penser à quelque autre ouvrage et d’oublier ce demi-succès” (*TR*, p. 207).

This theme is repeated in *Chroniques des saisons amères* (1944), in a passage that embodies the quantitative ethic:

J’ai toujours pensé qu’une œuvre d’art est en même temps une fin en soi et un moyen. Une fin en soi, parce qu’en la composant, on doit y voir le suprême aboutissement d’une expérience. Un moyen parce que l’exécution de cette œuvre doit toujours permettre à l’artiste d’imaginer une autre œuvre, plus difficile et plus belle.<sup>224</sup>

If both Camus and Duhamel share this appetite for completion and renewal, Duhamel does not share the vision of *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* as to what constitutes the ideal novel. As Camus suggests in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, the secret of the novel lies in its ability to reproduce the experiences available within the real world: “Créer, c’est vivre deux fois” (p. 130). As Leal suggests, for *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*: “The sole aim of art is to reproduce reality, thus establishing and defining the absurdity of man’s existence” (p. 71).

In his earlier *Essai sur le roman* (1925), Duhamel discusses this type of novel, one in which the narrator “raconte tout ce qu’il sait, tout ce qu’il a vu ou entendu, sans y rien ajouter, sans en rien retrancher, en s’efforçant d’être aussi fidèle que possible à la vérité” (p. 61). Essentially, this novel belongs to the school of the Naturalists, which together with that of the Romantics, dominated French literature of the nineteenth century.

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<sup>224</sup> Georges Duhamel. *Chronique des saisons amères*. Paris: Paul Hartmann, 1944, p. 41.

In *Essai sur le roman*, Duhamel goes on to discuss the various other forms the novel might take, and, although he makes it clear that there is no formula “pour faire des chefs-d’œuvre” (*ER*, p. 65), he leaves his reader in no doubt that the school of Naturalism is his least favourite. One of the dangers of such an approach, believes Duhamel, is that unsophisticated minds might “finissent par se désintéresser résolument de la réalité pour ne se soucier que de ses imitations” (p. 47). He gives an example of the men who derive no enjoyment from a certain part of the countryside, but who are “vivement touchés” (p. 45) by a painting of the same scene.

Camus would eventually move away from his initial view of the novel espoused in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*. When we come to examine revolt in chapter six, we will note how Duhamel’s own conception of the novel in *Essai sur le roman* accords with Camus’ final position in *L’Homme révolté*.

### ***THE CONQUEROR***

Camus begins his chapter on conquest in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* with a monologue from a conqueror in the traditionally accepted meaning of that term. In this introduction, the conqueror of men and lands attempts to justify the “tout ou rien” (p. 119) attitude that confronts the nihilist. Faced with a choice “entre l’histoire et l’éternel” (p. 119), the conqueror chooses history, because “j’aime les certitudes” (p. 119).

This is one of the few references to history in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, a theme that would dominate *L’Homme révolté* (1951). When Camus talks about history, he means the inability of mankind to overcome an established precedent of violence and war: “The curse of history, in Camus’s opinion, seems to consist in man’s propensity to react to one excess with another one, without

ever finding proper limits or balance” (Braun, p. 93). The conqueror, as he is traditionally recognised, responds to violence with violence and replaces one form of tyranny with his own.

We have already examined Duhamel’s rejection of the traditional conqueror, epitomised by the Nazis and “les nihilistes russes” (*DL*, p. 188).

### ***CAMUS’ ‘NEW CONQUEROR’***

In the second half of his chapter on the conqueror in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, Camus moves away from the traditionally-accepted definition of the conqueror, and, in doing so, foreshadows the ethical revolt that would begin with *Lettres à un ami allemand* (1948):

Jusqu’ici la grandeur d’un conquérant était géographique. Elle se mesurait à l’étendue des territoires vaincus. Ce n’est pas pour rien que le mot a changé de sens et ne désigne plus le général vainqueur. La grandeur a changé de camp. Elle est dans la protestation et le sacrifice sans avenir (*LMS*, p. 120).

Camus begins his analysis with metaphysical revolt and labels Prometheus “le premier des conquérants modernes” (*LMS*, p. 121). It is at this point that Camus defines the new conquerors as “ceux d’entre les hommes qui sentent assez leur force pour être sûrs de vivre constamment à ces hauteurs et dans la pleine conscience de cette grandeur” (*LMS*, p. 121).

Camus makes no excuses for the fact that such a definition necessarily limits the members of the group. In *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* itself, he says: “Quelques-uns ont parlé de génie. Mais le génie, c’est bien vite dit, je préfère l’intelligence” (p. 122). He also refers to the new conquerors as “audacieux” (*LMS*, p. 124) and “virils” (*LMS*, p. 124). Thus, Camus’ new conqueror is not the man who comes to the theatre to gaze upon the actor and dream of his own possibilities, but rather

the man who is lucid and intelligent enough to see the play for what it represents, and to join in the production.

### ***THE NEW CONQUEROR AND LUCIDITY***

In order to rise up, the conqueror must know what oppresses him. As Camus explains in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*: “Un surnuméraire aux Postes est l'égal d'un conquérant si la conscience leur est commune” (p. 98). He continually comes back to the requirement for being lucid or conscious and, in the context of the conqueror, relates this directly to an understanding of the fact that the conqueror's intelligence and spirit “mourra en même temps que ce corps. Mais le savoir, voilà sa liberté” (*LMS*, p. 122). For the conqueror of *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, and, for that matter, the lowly postal worker or man in the street, that which oppresses him is death: “Dans l'univers du révolté, la mort exalte l'injustice. Elle est le suprême abus” (*LMS*, p. 123).

Camus maintains that this elite group is capable of human relations; these he sees as a luxury: “Il n'y a qu'un seul luxe pour eux et c'est celui des relations humaines” (*LMS*, p. 122). From this ‘luxury’ emanates the beginnings of an ethical revolt, but, in truth, it all sounds a little haughty:

Comment ne pas comprendre que dans cet univers vulnérable, tout ce qui est humain et n'est que cela prend un sens plus brûlant? Visages tendus, fraternité menacée, amitié si forte et si pudique des hommes entre eux, ce sont les vraies richesses puisqu'ils sont périssables (*LMS*, p. 122).

From this, Rizzuto concludes: “At most, *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, which had been on Camus' mind as early as 1938, exalted an heroic elite that consented to serve the masses” (*Camus' Imperial Vision*, p. 57). After all, Camus' new conqueror seems turned inward on himself, not outward towards society: “Les conquérants parlent quelquefois de vaincre et de surmonter. Mais c'est toujours «se surmonter» qu'ils entendent” (*LMS*, p. 121).

Claire Hoch considers: “The group at the Abbaye did not think itself select and apart from the world or from their potential audience” (p. 152). However, Duhamel’s own assessment suggests otherwise: “Nous ne cherchions sûrement pas un remède général aux misères de la société; nous ne pensions qu’aux hommes de notre condition; à ceux qu’on appelle aujourd’hui, nous sans pompe, les travailleurs intellectuels” (*TR*, p. 42). Lafay also suggests that the Créteil experiment smacked of “le non-conformisme.”<sup>225</sup>

These descriptions sit a little uneasily with *La Possession du monde* (1919):

Les hommes, nos semblables. Leur figure est bien le spectacle le plus passionnant qui nous soit proposé. Leurs gestes constituent bien, du fait d’un penchant naturel et d’une indestructible solidarité, le principal objet de notre curiosité. Bon! Nous posséderons d’abord tout cela. Nous posséderons cet autrui inépuisable (p. 45).

The very term ‘possession’, at least when applied to human beings, implies some sort of ownership, even a sense of control or ascendancy, although Duhamel prefers the definition which leans towards that of a deep understanding: “Posséder, c’est connaître, c’est comprendre” (*LPM*, p. 97).

Notwithstanding this definition, an air of superiority in his relations with others is conveyed in the chapter of *La Possession du monde* entitled ‘La Possession d’autrui’. Describing a bus trip in which a neighbouring passenger falls asleep against his shoulder, anxious to continue his “glorieuse promenade à l’intérieur de [s]oi-même” (p. 76), Duhamel initially pushes the passenger away. Deciding to let the head rest where it may, Duhamel feels “une chaleur étrange et délicate”

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<sup>225</sup> Arlette Lafay. ‘Le Non-conformisme de Georges Duhamel’. *Les Cahiers de l’Abbaye de Créteil*. December (1984), p. 33.

(p. 76), and eventually professes to have “déchiré l’enveloppe épineuse et savourais, comme une pulpe nourrissante, la présence, la compagnie humaine” (p. 76). In describing the experience, however, he uses the term “enfant” (p. 76), (in the context of how his neighbour’s breath escapes his mouth), and also “le petit bonhomme” (p. 77). Accordingly, Duhamel’s assertion that he owes this passenger a great debt rings a little hollow.

Even in circumstances where others, including strangers, are non-receptive to Duhamel, he foreshadows his possession of them, born from an interest taken in the other “de tout mon cœur et de toute mon intelligence” (*LPM*, p. 85). “Confus ou irrité,” says Duhamel, the other “venait à mes pieds” (p. 85). Comeau asserts:

Plusieurs pages, dans ce chapitre, prêchent une possession d’autrui qui ressemble davantage à une forme de domination qu’à la communion des âmes. Chercher à découvrir le visage intime de celui qui se refuse à le montrer, vouloir forcer le défaut de la cuirasse chez celui qui a créé autour de sa personne un système de défense, voilà qui touche à l’indiscrétion, même si Duhamel s’en défend” (p. 105).

There is a clear suggestion, even in *La Possession du monde*, of Duhamel’s belonging to an elite group. As Comeau suggests: “Il semble y avoir ici plus d’égotisme subtil que de charité” (p. 105). This sense of elitism aside, *La Possession du monde* is undoubtedly a plea for greater understanding and recognition of other human beings, and brims with emotionally charged statements such as: “Je voudrais vous connaître tous, et, chacun en particulier, vous prendre par le bras et aller me promener avec vous” (p. 107).

In making his plea, however, Duhamel resembles what would become the new conqueror of *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, in that he too stands apart from the masses which he nevertheless consents to educate. That attitude is clearly communicated in his memoirs for the period in which *La*

*Possession du monde* was written. We have previously noted it, but it is worth repeating: “J’ai découvert, j’ai compris que ma mission sera d’expliquer à tous les hommes ce qu’ils savent sans le savoir” (*PA*, p. 161).

Gérard Duhamel speaks of “cette idée, souvent répétée dans son œuvre, que les élites, en France, se préparent et se renouvellent continûment dans la masse profonde de la nation. Et c’est par le travail et la volonté qu’elles se dégagent du vivier populaire” (*Les Apophtegmes de Georges Duhamel*, p. 75). As Duhamel says in *Discours aux nuages* (1934): “Un peuple est grand quand il produit de grands hommes.”<sup>226</sup>

In fact, Duhamel defines his own ‘conquérant’ in *La Possession du monde* in terms which preserve this sense of elitism:

L’homme dont nous recherchons la compagnie parce qu’elle est exaltante n’est pas forcément celui qui s’applique à nous donner de nous-mêmes une excellente opinion. Souvent, il est taciturne, parfois bourru, ou encore ironique, tranchant. Pourtant, il émane de toute sa personne comme un assentiment, un aveu de confiance. Même s’il nous marque nos défauts avec insistance, avec roideur, il ne nous porte pas à désespérer de nous ou de notre avenir. Et, s’il ne nous entretient jamais de notre personne, nous sentons encore, à un geste imperceptible, à un accent de ses paroles, à un éclat de son regard, qu’il s’intéresse à nous (p. 82).

This description is similar to how Thérive describes his friend Duhamel: “Il écoute toujours, avec une attention de psychologue et de médecin. Il scrute les gestes, il surveille les reflexes. Bien entendu, cette surveillance, qui pourrait être gênante, n’est perceptible qu’à des yeux presque aussi attentifs que les siens” (p. 21).

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<sup>226</sup> Georges Duhamel. *Discours aux nuages*. Paris: Éditions du Siècle, 1934, p. 72.



In discussing *La Chronique des Pasquier*, Marc Blancpain summarises the very essence of the new conqueror:

Quant aux *Pasquier*, [...] ne sont-ils pas le témoignage des efforts que certains d'entre nous, *les meilleurs*, ont eu le courage d'entreprendre pour retrouver des raisons de restaurer, de maintenir et de poursuivre la civilisation de l'Europe et l'espérance au cœur des Européens? (*Georges Duhamel et l'Europe*, p. 39).

The best example of Camus' new conqueror in the works of Duhamel is Laurent Pasquier, in what might conveniently be termed 'stage one' of his revolt. We know that Laurent acquires a sense of the absurd early on in his life. Like his creator, he endures the death of a young friend. However, it is not until the fifth instalment of the series, *Le Désert de Bièvres* (1937), that Laurent supposedly achieves 'lucidity'. Wandering through the gardens of the estate, reflecting on the circle of life and death for all living things, Laurent experiences his own 'crise de conscience': "C'est là, dans ce clos sauvage, que, *pour la première fois*, (our italics) j'entrevis avec une enthousiaste horreur le sens et la logique inhumaine de cette vie dont nous sommes à jamais les esclaves" (*DB*, p. 128).

Michel Dyé agrees that this volume sees Laurent moving towards a more intellectual appreciation for the absurd:

La sagesse résignée de Laurent qui se dégage du final tragique, amplifié par le suicide de Jean-Paul Sénac dont les causes demeurent mystérieuses, traduit l'évolution du héros des *Pasquier* de l'idéalisme à une prise de conscience plus précise de la mesure humaine (*Un roman moderne centré sur les rapports de la science et de la morale*, p. 92).

In the following instalment, *Les Maîtres* (1937), Laurent writes a letter to his friend Justin, in which he sets out his 'solutions' for a life now endowed with lucidity: "Justin, cher vieux frère, il n'y a que deux solutions, je te l'ai dit: ou vivre, comme tu le fais au milieu des petits, ou vivre,

comme je veux le faire, dans le rayonnement des grands” (p. 28). In setting out his goal, Laurent confesses to having acquired “un grand appétit d’héroïsme” (p. 27), and uses similar language to that later employed by Camus, when he describes his ‘new conqueror’. As Laurent explains to Justin: “Ceux qu’il faut rechercher et suivre, se sont les grands, ce sont les hommes en qui l’étincelle est une vraie lumière, capable de dissiper, au moins un instant, nos ténèbres” (p. 27). If, as Rieux will do, Justin has readily accepted his duty as a man, Laurent, prefiguring Tarrou, is not yet ready to abandon sainthood and heroism.

Whilst Laurent proposes that he surround himself with the grand masters of the laboratory, the clear inference is that he considers himself possessed of sufficient intelligence to one day join them. There is seemingly no room for a wider human community in Laurent’s project. In *Les Maîtres*, Laurent has an air of Rizzuto’s ‘consenting to serve’ the masses. As regards his family and friends he says: “On les a reçus, on les garde, on les porte, on les subit, et c’est comme cela” (p. 52).

This initial response from Laurent is also evident in *Le Combat contre les ombres* (1939), where Laurent demonstrates a sense of frustration in having to deal with his work colleague Birault and Larminat, an administrator:

Pour travailler, pour faire sereinement une œuvre, une grande œuvre, il ne faudrait ne voir personne, ne s’intéresser à personne, n’aimer personne. Mais, alors, quelle raison aurait-on de faire une œuvre? Encore un problème insoluble. Il n’y a que des problèmes insolubles (CCO, p. 162).

Laurent becomes so consumed with his petty dispute with Birault, that he is incapable of any sense of fraternity in the face of impending war:

Un grand souffle d'angoisse commençait à courir sur l'Europe effrayée. Laurent n'entendait point venir cet orage. Il ne comprenait que son mal, il n'éprouvait que sa tempête (CCO, p. 246).

As Comeau affirms: "Cet attachement excessif à soi, qu'on a déjà vu chez Salavin, chez Laurent même et que nous verrons encore chez Suzanne, se traduit finalement par une aliénation et une frustration par rapport à la vie" (Comeau, p. 261).

In this volume, Laurent turns thirty-three and, despite having supposedly achieved lucidity in *Le Désert de Bièvres*, he continues to experience feelings for the absurd, which are difficult to reconcile with an apparent 'prise de conscience':

C'est un immense champ de vie qui reste à labourer. Et, pourtant, que signifie l'étonnant changement de rythme qui, depuis près d'un lustre, brouille toute supputation? Il semble que les années se mettent à tourner bien plus vite que naguère et que jadis (CCO, p. 12).

These observations confirm that if Laurent has reflected on the human condition, the fact of death has not yet 'truly registered' for him.

Ultimately, it will be the fact of war that acts as the genuine catalyst for Laurent's awakening and subsequent ethical rebellion, for as Laurent confirms in the introduction to *Le Notaire du Havre* (1933) his life's devise (which foreshadows Rieux's attitude in *La Peste* (1947)), was born during the battle of Verdun:

J'ai, vers l'âge de trente-cinq ans, c'est-à-dire en pleine guerre, exactement pendant la bataille de Verdun, écrit sur mon carnet de poche la phrase suivante: «Miracle n'est pas œuvre.» (NH, p. 22).

Like the new conqueror of *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, and although armed with the attributes that Camus would later flesh out in *L'Homme révolté*, Laurent, for now, remains aloof. If Camus was

to eventually cast aside Don Juan, then the question for *L'Homme révolté*, *La Peste*, and Laurent will be whether revolt and a broader human community are mutually exclusive.

## *CHAPTER VII: REVOLT*

Camus' concept of revolt is that aspect of his thinking which has attracted the most criticism, much of which is focused on what is alleged to be a lack of guidance as to the practical forms which revolt should take. For example, Sartre considered that: "Ce cartésien de l'absurde refusait de quitter le sûr terrain de la moralité et de s'engager dans les chemins incertains de la *pratique*" (*Albert Camus*, p. 6). McCarthy suggests that in Camus' lecture at Columbia University in March 1946, he:

asserted the importance of revolt which was man's refusal to accept [Hitler's] violence. Once more the audience was pleased because revolt seemed a simple, happy matter. Yet it was also imprecise because he did not list the forms which revolt should take (p. 216).

McCarthy also suggests that: "While spending hundreds of pages attacking marxism Camus offers few alternative forms of protest [...] Camus cannot perceive any fruitful interaction between self and the universe except for the religious moments of oneness and the defiance of *Sisyphé*" (p. 251).

Conversely, Albérès believes that in *L'Homme révolté*, Camus did not succumb to the temptation to make revolt "une notion mystique, un mythe de notre temps" (*Les Hommes traqués*, p. 212). He argues that Camus made revolt "une pensée réelle et quotidienne" (p. 214).

It might be argued that McCarthy's criticisms are misplaced for two reasons. Firstly, there are no 'forms which revolt should take'. Revolt has only one form — a refusal to accept the human

condition, for *L'Homme révolté* (1951) merely re-affirms the principles that were implicit in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (1942):

L'insurrection humaine, dans ses formes élevées et tragiques, n'est et ne peut être qu'une longue protestation contre la mort, une accusation enragée de cette condition régie par la peine de mort généralisée (*HR*, p. 132).

Whilst it is true that in *L'Homme révolté*, Camus discusses revolt in a political context, it flows from the notion of metaphysical revolt which permeates *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*. As Louis Chaigne suggests, *L'Homme révolté* “se trouve inséparable du *Mythe de Sisyphe* qu'il prolonge, éclaire, rectifie, et même, à certains égards, transcende.”<sup>227</sup>

Essentially, *L'Homme révolté* is an attack against nihilism, for all nihilists share a common demoninator — an ability to conceive of murder. As Hochberg suggests, in allowing murder, the nihilists, “align themselves with man's eternal enemy — death. To rebel against death, as the lucid man does, is thus to reject these tyrannies, be they of church or state. And, in so doing, the lucid man becomes the rebel” (p. 96). Thus, “the revolt against death is, in fact, the archetype for all rebellion” (Hochberg, p. 96).

Camus never defines revolt as being anything other than a simple refusal to accept injustice: “Qu'est-ce qu'un homme révolté? Un homme qui dit non. Mais s'il refuse, il ne renonce pas” (*HR*, p. 27). That very refusal *is* the act of revolt. Indeed, buried within the critique of McCarthy to which we have referred are the very words which exemplify the nature of Camus' revolt: ‘refusal’, ‘protest’ and ‘defiance’,

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<sup>227</sup> Louis Chaigne. *Vie et œuvres d'écrivains*. Paris: Fernand Lanore, 1956, p. 13.

The second thing to say about McCarthy's criticisms (and Sartre's for that matter) is that Camus' life and works contain practical examples of revolt. In *L'Homme révolté* (1951), as in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (1942), the mere refusal to accept the universal death penalty is a form of protest against injustice in its own right:

Il peut, en revenant sur lui, orienter une nouvelle recherche [...] Je crie que je ne crois à rien et que tout est absurde, mais je ne puis douter de mon cri et il me faut au moins croire à ma protestation (*LMS*, p. 23).

As East points out: "L'absurdité parfaite doit être muette" (p. 41). Thus, the mere fact of exercising one's choice in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, that life is worth living, is a form of revolt in itself: "Malgré tout, il faut vivre, c'est l'essentiel" (East, p. 41). This is the revolt of Sisyphus, who defies an unjust God by persisting in an act which he knows to be futile.

Camus himself rebels against the German occupation by joining the Resistance and by writing for the clandestine *Combat*.

In *L'Étranger* (1942), after becoming truly conscious of the imminence of his death, Meursault rages against the priest who visits him in his cell as Meursault awaits his execution.

In *Les Justes* (1949), Kaliayev rebels against the unjust régime of the grand duke with violence of his own, but only on the basis that he is prepared to give his own life, which, for Camus, elevates him above nihilism.

In *La Peste* (1947), Rieux "se dresse contre cette souffrance insupportable, et, retenu par Paneloux, qui voudrait l'y réconcilier, lui jette «avec violence» [...] Ce cri du cœur résume sa révolte et toute son action" (Pratt, p. 127).

Writing in relation to Duhamel, Ouy highlights his insistence on an “*acceptation courageuse*” (p. 118) of the human condition, and then summarises the forms of rebellion championed by Duhamel:

De quel cœur l’homme qui ne s’est pas «évadé» va donc lutter contre la douleur, contre le mal, contre la sottise dangereuse, les préjugés meurtriers, bref contre tout ce qui rend la vie, sur terre, moins heureuse qu’elle ne pourrait, qu’elle ne *devrait* être! (p. 118).

In this quotation, we find evidence of a metaphysical revolt, and also one of rebellion against forces which conceive of death, the very same elements of what would become Camus’ notion of revolt. Lafay agrees, suggesting that Duhamel saw himself as a “poète-médecin, souffrant de la souffrance de ses semblables, luttant désespérément contre les forces de la mort.”<sup>228</sup> In another detailed work on Duhamel, and in relation to the question of suicide, Arlette Lafay makes a direct link between Duhamel and Camus in terms of revolt against the absurd: “À l’absurde et au désespoir, il a opposé le défi, la révolte, la passion de la vie, rejetant le suicide qui est «*insulte à l’existence*», «*négarion de soi-même*», comme le dira plus tard Camus.”<sup>229</sup>

Duhamel’s life and work are both replete with practical examples of what would later become known as Camusian revolt. Endowed with absolute lucidity at a young age, and foreshadowing Jacques of *Le Premier Homme* (1960), Duhamel would resist “la laideur et la brutalité de la vie” (Falls, p. 42), using personal effort and commitment to excellence in his school work.<sup>230</sup>

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<sup>228</sup> Arlette Lafay. ‘Présentation’. *Georges Duhamel et l’idée de la civilisation*. Ed. Arlette Lafay. Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, (1994), p. 28.

<sup>229</sup> Arlette Lafay. *La sagesse de Georges Duhamel*. Paris: Librairie Minard, Les Lettres Modernes, 1984, p. 275.

<sup>230</sup> The need for personal effort is also presented by Camus as a requirement for the metaphysical rebel: “Je choisis seulement des hommes qui ne visent qu’à s’épuiser ou dont j’ai conscience pour eux qu’ils s’épuisent” (*LMS*, p. 98).



As Falls suggests of Duhamel: “Il travaille bien maintenant et c’est à l’école précisément qu’il remporte sa *première grande victoire dans la lutte contre la vie hostile* (our italics)” (p. 47). In the same way that knowledge and learning would instill in Jacques the realisation that he would be worthy “de découvrir le monde” (*PH*, p. 164), Falls argues that Duhamel’s scholastic success brought him a greater confidence in the discovery of “un monde digne d’être aimé” (p. 53).

The experiment at Créteil was also a form of metaphysical rebellion. Here, Duhamel sought to immerse himself in a fraternal environment of hard work and commitment to artistic pursuits, concepts which would become fundamental to Camus’ vision of ethical rebellion. The failure of the project did nothing to divest Duhamel of the urge to resist the absurd, and, soon afterwards, he would pen two works of metaphysical revolt, in the form of two plays, *La Lumière* (1911) and *Le Combat* (1913).

In these works, Duhamel’s metaphysical revolt is a rebellion against the forces of fate, against the “injustice et inégalité” (*ET*, p. 249) of “la force des choses” (*ET*, p. 247) or “l’injustice imminente de la nature” (*ET*, p. 247). In the course of such a rebellion, Duhamel finds “de la dignité humaine” (*ET*, p. 247).

We have already examined the role of Blanche in *La Lumière*. Her acquired indifference to life must be conquered. Bernard is alive to the problem and is keen to be part of the solution. He recognises that Blanche must be able to look at her life afresh: “Nous allons transformer notre façon de vivre. Il faudra nous distraire un peu, vous distraire” (*La Lumière*, p. 87). “Dix jours de tourment et d’incertitude” (p. 108) give rise to a rebellion by Blanche against fate. The

melancholy that previously ruled her life melts away. Bernard witnesses her revolt: “Tu as cherché, tu as tiré de toi-même quelques cris. Ah! ces cris!...” (p. 108).

*Le Combat* (1913) is also a work of pure rebellion against fate. Falls believes that in *Le Combat*, Duhamel “y proteste contre l’injustice” (p. 63), the two principal forms of which are an act of God, in the form of the floods, and Gérard’s terminal illness. Gérard’s revolt is contemporaneous with his ‘crise de conscience’: “Mon mal est oublié et [...] je suis plein de vigueur” (p. 79).

Faced with the reality of man’s inhumanity to man in the Great War, Duhamel’s response was one of pure rebellion, as Dénuit confirms: “Georges Duhamel commence de juger la partie où il est engagé. L’indignation fait irruption dans son cœur” (p. 65). This rebellion would manifest itself in his joining a mobile ambulance to work at the Front with his resources of passion and intelligence. During the Second World War, he worked at a hospital in Pontchaillou, the subject for the collection of non-fictional narratives in *Lieu d’asile* (1945). In this work, as in *Civilisation* (1917) and *Vie des martyrs* (1918), he would describe the revolt of the seriously wounded against the distinct possibility of death:

L’homme sent bien que, s’il ne veut pas disparaître, il lui faut, comme autrefois et comme toujours, faire appel à toutes les forces de la chair et de l’âme, prendre sa peine à bras le corps et lutter, jusqu’à la consommation du destin.<sup>231</sup>

During the Second World War, Duhamel’s personal revolt against the Nazis took place on many levels, although it is probably best manifested in his profound silence during the Occupation. We know that Duhamel was visited by the German occupier and some of his works were confiscated

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<sup>231</sup> Georges Duhamel. *Lieu d’asile*. Paris: Mercure de France, 1945, p. 137.

or destroyed, including the first edition of *Lieu d'asile* (1940). Duhamel's was a silence that stood in stark contrast to the prolific publishing and commentary that had flowed from his pen since 1919, and so there can be no mistake that his silence contained an element of defiance. César Santelli suggests that Duhamel's "présence silencieuse fait décidément plus de bruit en faveur de la résistance [...]" (*Georges Duhamel, l'homme, l'œuvre*, p. 58). Fonbaustier agrees, singling out for special mention, the words of Louis Parrot:

Louis Parrot évoque très justement les affres du choix fait par Duhamel. Le silence, la 'résistance à visage découvert', le mènent à une tâche 'moins brillante peut-être' que celle des écrivains réfugiés dans la clandestinité ou dans le maquis, 'mais non moins efficace'.<sup>232</sup>

At no time, however, did Duhamel cease writing: "But the silent, unhappy years were rich in meditation" (Hoch, p. 64). The fruit of his labours was produced for all to see following the defeat of the Nazis: "Il a continué d'écrire, pour le lecteur de demain, pour continuer d'exister malgré les persécutions dirigées contre sa personne" (Fonbaustier, p. 141). The collection of essays for *Refuges de la lecture* (1954) is one of the proofs of that commitment.

As far as the French Academy was concerned:

Sa résistance se traduit en premier lieu par la décision d'une présence systématique aux séances du jeudi au cours desquelles il tient le rôle de garde-fou face aux manœuvres que pourraient tenter certains de ses confrères (Fonbaustier, p. 145).

In 'Les projets de Cousin', one of the chapters for *Civilisation* (1917), Cousin rebels against horrific injuries and his imminent demise: "Par-dessus l'abîme trouble et sanglant, il aimait à

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<sup>232</sup> Isabelle-Marie Fonbaustier. 'Les Saisons amères de Georges Duhamel'. *Les Cahiers de l'Abbaye de Créteil*. December (1991), p. 143.

prolonger la vie d'autrefois jusque dans la vie future. Jamais de verbes à l'imparfait, mais un éternel et miraculeux présent" (p. 47).

In 'Lieutenant Dauche' (1919), the protagonist rebels against Dauche's fatal brain injury, and, eventually sees Dauche's inevitable demise as a symbol for the human condition. When Dauche falls against the trunk of a tree and begins to convulse, the protagonist's revolt is contemporaneous: "Je me mis à trembler à mon tour, comme si le frisson du malade eût été contagieux, et mon impression de désespoir et de dégoût en fut accrue" (*Civilisation*, p. 44). This is a similar revolt to that which will be experienced by Mersault after seeing the dead body on the pavement in Prague.

Commenced by Duhamel at the height of hostilities in 1917, *La Possession du monde* (1919) is a passionate and lyrical plea for unity in the face of the absurdity of war. Richard Aldington calls it "the worst book [Duhamel] has written"<sup>233</sup> and there is no doubt that it certainly lacks the intensity and "actuality" (Aldington, p. 79) of his earlier *Vie des martyrs* and *Civilisation*. However, it remains important for the purposes of this chapter because it is a work of pure revolt. In the preface to the 1963 edition, Duhamel himself describes the work as one born out of a sense of rebellion: "Je rassemblai pieusement mes raisons de résister et de vivre" (*LPM*, p. 10).

In *L'Homme révolté*, (not surprisingly, given Camus' lengthy summary of the thought of Nietzsche), Camus speaks in terms of a slave's revolt against his master. Braun summarises his position succinctly:

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<sup>233</sup> Richard Aldington. 'Georges Duhamel'. *The Anglo-French Review*. February (1920), p. 80.

Crushed by fate like a slave by his master, man can choose either to act as fate and master in relation to other men (which is what Caligula does), or to reject the order of master and slave altogether, and assert the brotherhood of men in the face of an absurd fate (p. 49).

In the earlier *La Possession du monde* (1919), Duhamel also refers to this concept of slave and master: “Le monde a longtemps connu et connaît encore l’esclavage. Des maîtres ou des chefs se sont arrogé le droit extravagant de disposer d’autres êtres humains” (p. 50). As will Camus, Duhamel conceives of relationships based not on intimidation and control, but rather on intimacy and fraternity: “Nous nous détacherons de la possession brutale pour mieux rêver à la possession intime” (p. 51).

*Elégies* (1920)<sup>234</sup> is permeated with a sense of fraternity and communion of men in the face of violence and death. Robert Jouanny suggests of Duhamel that:

lorsque son expérience du monde cesse d’être celle d’une révélation euphorique et optimiste, d’une inquiétude individuelle, lorsqu’elle s’accompagne d’un contact avec le Mal, la Douleur, la Violence, alors Duhamel est un poète au sens le plus fort. Ainsi dans la “Ballade de l’homme à la gorge blessé”:

Ne parle pas, frère au cou déchiré!  
 Il me suffit de trouver ton regard [...]  
 Frère! Ne sais-tu pas que, dès que tu frissonnes,  
 Comme un rameau de peuplier je frissone? (*Georges Duhamel, poète*, p. 20).

However, one must disagree with Jouanny when he says: “Duhamel n’est jamais le poète de la révolte, même lorsque confronté à la guerre [...].” (*Georges Duhamel, poète*, p. 16). We contend that works such as *Elégies* are works of revolt in their own right, born from Duhamel’s sense of revulsion at man’s inhumanity to man.

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<sup>234</sup> Georges Duhamel. *Elégies*. Paris: Mercure de France, 1920.

As will Meursault, Salavin rebels against the certainty of his own demise late in *Tel qu'en lui-même* (1932), with a heightened sense of awareness for the things which he had previously taken for granted. Martinez refers to Salavin's previous failures as acts of revolt (*La Sainteté sans Dieu dans les Salavin*, p. 69), but they were carried out without the benefit of lucidity. We prefer to think of Salavin's collection of failures as a search for the 'second sens de notre vie', rather than acts of pure rebellion.

In *Lieu d'asile* (1945), Mme Annette rebels against a likely death with all of her strength: "Mais non, moi, je veux vivre! Je peux vivre! Je vous montrerai que je suis capable de vivre" (p. 27).

In *Les Voyageurs de "l'Espérance"* (1956), the Fromond Family rebels against a seemingly certain death by fighting for survival and then combining their resources of intelligence and hard work to re-establish a life for themselves.

In *Les Compagnons de l'Apocalypse* (1956), Dan Levoyer rebels against the death of his wife and child, killed by a bombing campaign during the Second World War, by forming a group and travelling through France speaking about the dangers of a technologically advanced world menaced by the threat of nuclear war.

We find a kind of Sisyphus in the fictional works of Duhamel in *Le Voyage de Patrice Périot* (1950). Having acquired lucidity after the suicide of his son Hervé, Périot is at first overcome by sadness and despair: "Tout de suite, il sentit, dans sa bouche, le goût de la tristesse. Tout de suite il comprit que le désespoir était là, comme un bête de proie sûre de son empire" (p. 171). There is no overt rebellion from Périot, although his refusal to be tempted by Thierry's faith in God prepares the ground for his stubborn refusal to accept his condition:

Toi, oui, mon petit, tu peux prier; mais, moi, moi, je ne sais pas, je n'oserais pas. Et je te dis encore: qui prier? Je ne suis pas fou. Je suis très malheureux, mais je ne suis pas fou (p. 237).

Like Camus, Périot gives serious thought to the question of suicide, but ultimately rejects it in favour of a refusal to accept the injustice of the world. The final passage of the work typifies the revolt of Sisyphus and could have come directly from Camus: “Il comprit qu’il lui faudrait persévérer dans l’angoisse et l’affliction jusqu’à l’heure du destin, persévérer dans l’amour et même dans l’espérance” (p. 255).

But for his faith in God, one might also argue that Théophile Chédevièle in Duhamel’s *Le Complexe de Théophile* (1958) ultimately represents a lucid Sisyphus. Like Périot, Chédevièle shares many of the same characteristics as his creator. For example, he refuses to renounce his right to observe and criticise. He has a firm dislike of games of chance and believes that mediocrity reigns supreme at the casino and the racetrack. He also has a dislike of publicity and of bureaucracy and a deep mistrust of people who are motivated by money. Unlike his creator, however, Chédevièle is armed with faith.

Having experienced his own ‘prise de conscience’, there is no overt revolt from Chédevièle. In fact, it is quite the opposite. There is an air of resignation and even relief when he learns that he is to accompany Himer on the ill-fated flight. He could have walked away, but he convinces himself that he has merited this fate and in this respect, he is guilty of Camus’ ‘fuite en avant’: “En fait, la vie m’était déjà, et me serait plus tard, intolérable. Alors mieux valait mourir” (p. 197).

At this point he is the opposite of Meursault. If Meursault used his death sentence to rediscover a sense of communion with his world, Chédevièle turns away from his world, suggesting that “les

bruits de la vie, autour de moi, me semblaient étrangers, incompréhensibles, sans intérêt, sans importance” (p. 205). Ironically, it is also the knowledge of his death sentence that enables Chédevièle to rediscover a simple, human communion with his sister Béatrice: “En vérité, j’étais déjà détaché de tout et de tous; mais non [...] de ma seule amie, non de ma chère Béatrice” (p. 205). Chédevièle is subsequently spared when his seat on the flight is allocated to another. Like Périot, he is saved from suicide.

As Caligula’s subjects realised that one does not have to be guilty of anything to be ‘culpable’, so too, Chédevièle accepts that: “Tous les hommes sont complices de quelque chose” (p. 224). Notwithstanding the air of pessimism that pervades the work, it ends on a note of hope, as it did for Patrice Périot. With the love and support of his sister, Chédevièle resolves to live his life with an “espérance désespérée” (p. 225), akin to that of Sisyphus as he begins to roll his rock once more.

One senses that this work is Duhamel’s attempt to come to terms with Mauriac’s assertion (which we have considered already), that those armed with faith are often as miserable and confused as those who do not hold religious beliefs.

### ***REVOLT AND HUMAN NATURE***

For the Camus of *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, value judgments mean nothing in light of the quantitative ethic: “Si je reconnais que la vie est absurde, il n’y a rien qui justifie tel type de comportement par rapport à tel autre type possible, il n’y a rien qui justifie les jugements de valeur” (East, p. 39). However, through revolt Camus discovers a nature common to all men. As East suggests: “La



révolte n'a pas fondé la nature humaine, mais elle lui a permis de s'affirmer" (p. 67). This is what sets Camus apart from the existentialists:

It is Camus' ultimate purpose to affirm, against the thrust of the last two hundred years of Western history, against Sartre who claims that what we are is what we decide to be, against his own *Mythe de Sisyphe*, the existence of a human nature. (Rizzuto, *Camus' Imperial Vision*, p. 105).

This nature is only revealed, not created by revolt.

The solitude which often accompanies a feeling for the absurd is suddenly transformed by revolt into the understanding of a bond common to all. As Sansen suggests of Camus:

L'appropriation même de sa révolte lui fait découvrir une solidarité. Refus de l'humaine mais commune condition, cette révolte dépasse peu à peu sa première affirmation solitaire: «je me révolte, donc je suis» fait place à «je me révolte, donc nous sommes» (p. 94).

Jauer notes Camus' 'Remarque sur la révolte,' published in *L'Existence*, 1945, which focuses on the transition from an individual experience of the absurd, to the collective adventure which flows from revolt: "Dans l'expérience absurde, la tragédie est individuelle. À partir du mouvement de révolte, elle a conscience d'être collective. Elle est l'aventure de tous" (Jauer, p. 206). Williams notes a reply by Camus to a critique by Barthes, where Camus confirms the same evolution from *L'Étranger* (1942) to *La Peste* (1947):

*La Peste* marque, sans discussion possible, le passage d'une attitude de révolte solitaire à la reconnaissance d'une communauté dont il faut partager les luttes. S'il y a évolution de *L'Étranger* à *La Peste*, elle s'est faite dans le sens de la solidarité et de la participation (Williams, p. 68).

The new conqueror of *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (1942), aloof and alone in his heroic state, has suddenly discovered humility and a sense of fraternity.

In *Scènes de la vie future* (1930), Duhamel draws a distinction between “la civilisation matérielle ou mécanique, d’une part, et, d’autre part, une civilisation dite morale ou véritable [...]” (p. 10). This is a distinction that Duhamel maintained throughout his career. It is one that we can identify readily in *Civilisation* (1918). True civilisation, suggests Duhamel, does not reside in a science and technology capable of mass destruction, but rather “dans le cœur de l’homme” (*Civilisation*, p. 125). For Duhamel, it is made up of many of the same values that Camus will rediscover through revolt; sympathy and compassion, together with a sense of solidarity and communion with other human beings.

However, Duhamel seems unsure as to whether these values truly belong to some common human nature. In *Civilisation française* (1944), he suggests not, declaring that human civilisation “n’est pas inscrite dans la substance nucléaire et donc qu’elle n’est pas organiquement héréditaire” (p. 5). However, elsewhere, he appears to conceive of a common bond that transcends any notion of race, sex or nationality. For example in *Semailles au vent* (1947), he says:

J’ai passé jusqu’ici ma vie à tracer des figures dans lesquelles des êtres humains, différents par l’âge, le sexe, la nationalité, la profession, parfois même la race, m’ont avoué qu’ils reconnaissent presque toujours quelque chose qui leur était propre” (*SV*, p. 40).

Duhamel often talks of morals or values inherent in human beings, some of which, outlined in *Discours aux nuages* (1934), they share with all living things, such as courage and patience (p. 85). Others, he considers, “sont le propre de l’homme” (*DN*, p. 83). These include “la clémence, l’abnégation, l’esprit de sacrifice, la faculté de renoncement” (*DN*, p. 84).

Duhamel considers that it is in part man’s capacity for ‘renoncement’ that sets him apart from animals. He introduces this concept in *La Possession du monde* (1919): “Dans le renoncement,

peut-être, réside notre distinction, le trait qui nous marque et nous isole” (p. 146). He gives us a broader definition of this concept in *Civilisation française* (1944). Here, ‘renoncement’ is defined as an ability to sacrifice certain short-term gains for the greater good of oneself and one’s society. The key is to remain “désintéressé, animé par l’esprit de sacrifice et d’abnégation” (*CF*, p. 33):

Certaines civilisations des temps anciens ont prospéré quelque temps par l’argent ou par la force. Elles n’ont laissé, dans les annales de l’humanité, qu’un souvenir exécrationnel et sans rayonnement. Les sociétés occidentales ont, au cours d’expériences laborieuses, découvert l’étrange pouvoir du désintéressement. La doctrine chrétienne a montré que, pour atteindre et posséder certains biens, il fallait être capable de renoncer à beaucoup d’autres biens (*CF*, p. 32).

For Duhamel: “Il faut d’abord chercher, individuellement, notre satisfaction en dehors de l’argent, notre bonheur en dehors des tourbillons de jouissance” (*LPM*, p. 222). In other words, ‘renoncement’ entails a turning away from those things that dispense immediate gratification: “Dans un ordre supérieur de l’humanité, les choses apparemment inutiles sont les plus utiles du monde” (*CF*, p. 35). Thus, technical and scientific progress is discarded in favour of a return to the humanities:

Ces connaissances pratiques [...] sont aussi des connaissances fragiles et temporaires. Les études humanistes [...] constituent une discipline propre à former le jugement et le raisonnement (*CF*, p. 35).

Thérive describes Duhamel’s literary method as one of “faire apparaître la constitution foncière de l’âme par l’étude de ses déviations.” (p. 41). This quotation conceives of a set of fundamental principles for the governance of the “règne du cœur” (Thérive, p. 38). Thérive talks in terms of a rediscovery of these principles: “Il y a dans l’ordre physique des maladies fossiles; il y a des maladies inédites. Pourquoi le domaine moral n’offrirait-il pas aussi des vérités à découvrir ou à retrouver?” (p. 41).

Writing in relation to Duhamel, Ouy suggests that inherent in *Entretiens dans le tumulte* (1919), is the message that through metaphysical revolt, man might rediscover his own set of values and rise above nihilism.

Péniblement adapté aux exigences de la nature, il a fini par dépasser la nature et, en dépit de bien des crimes et bien des infamies, il a découvert la douceur du pardon, la majesté du sacrifice, la beauté de la pensée, la merveilleuse consolation des arts, la grandeur de la justice, le désir de la sagesse... Bref, il a en quelque manière transgressé l'ordre naturel, il a lutté, il luttera contre la prétendue «force des choses» (Ouy, p. 114).

*L'Humaniste et l'Automate* (1933) is important in our present discussion, because it confirms that, in the act of rebellion, and long before *L'Homme révolté*, Duhamel rediscovers his own values. In this work, he laments the loss to scientific advancements of certain fundamental values within the medical profession: “Ce qui me paraît donc en jeu, dans l'évolution actuelle de la médecine, prise comme exemple, et plus généralement du monde, c'est la vertu de sympathie, le sentiment de sympathie.”<sup>235</sup>

With war as the catalyst for his own rebellion, Duhamel rediscovers a human value in the form of sympathy: “C'est pendant cette première phase de la guerre que j'ai vraiment découvert la sympathie, éprouvé ses ressorts et mesuré son empire” (*LHA*, p. 72). His description of the discovery of such a value unmistakably confirms that, for Duhamel, the value of sympathy belongs to a pre-existing, human nature, “ce grand besoin de sympathie qui est le fond de notre nature” (*LHA*, p. 99). Elsewhere, he describes it as “une exigence du corps, une vertu animale” (*LHA*, p. 74). From the same catalyst of war, Duhamel discovers a sense of fraternity and solidarity with his fellow man: “Victimes et soigneurs, nous vivons en chœur sous l'aile du péril

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<sup>235</sup> Georges Duhamel. *L'Humaniste et l'Automate*. Paris: Paul Hartmann, 1933, p. 69.

mortel. L'heure était venue de la communion, de la totale sympathie, du don de l'homme à l'homme" (*LHA*, p. 74).

In 'Le Sacrifice', one of the short stories for *Vie des martyrs* (1917), Léglise discovers values of sympathy and compassion after having been close to death and having both legs amputated, values which seemingly emanate from deep within him: "Il s'est inquiété de ses voisins, de leur nom, de leurs blessures. Il a, pour chacun, un mot de compassion qui vient du fond de la chair" (*VM*, p. 158). Similarly, in 'A Verdun', Duhamel discovers that:

au milieu de cette incroyable tragédie, le rire n'était pas complètement éteint. C'est peut-être une des particularités ou des grandeurs de notre race, c'est sans doute, plus généralement, un impérieux besoin de l'humanité entière (*VM*, p. 128).

In *La Passion de Joseph Pasquier*, Laurent returns from the war with a renewed sense of fraternity, even conceiving of a sort of fundamental human nature. Writing to Cécile in America he says: "Tu me rends évidente et sensible, sœur, une certaine forme de cet «universel humain» auquel je serais parfois tenté de ne plus croire" (*PJP*, p. 115).

In *Défense des Lettres* (1937), Duhamel describes the act of writing as an act of metaphysical revolt in itself:

La majeure partie des écrivains, par le fait même qu'ils poursuivent une œuvre, bonne ou mauvaise, affirment un sentiment nécessairement optimiste. Nous sommes obligés de croire qu'ils refusent toute adhérence au néant [...] (p. 301).

We can now better understand how the writing of works like *Vie des Martyrs*, *Civilisation* and *La Possession du monde* are acts of rebellion in their own right. M.-L. Bidal notes “le souffle de révolte fréquent dans les œuvres nées de la guerre...”<sup>236</sup>

In *Défense des Lettres*, Duhamel rejects the professed aim of many writers to “corriger les mœurs” (p. 301), in favour of a desire to enable his reader to better understand, or rediscover certain fundamental values: “A la notion de correction se substitue petit à petit la notion plus étroite, plus triste, plus pure aussi de connaissance” (p. 303). This notion is linked with the suggestion that these values have always existed, and are simply waiting to be revealed to the reader, through a collaboration between writer and teacher: “Je ne pense pas que les mœurs soient plus basses aujourd’hui que jadis et le dévergondage plus couramment toléré” (p. 302).

Thus the act of writing, the profession of being a writer, is, for Duhamel, an act of revolt in its own right, which might lead to the rediscovery by his reader of certain core values.

### ***COMMUNION WITH THE NATURAL WORLD***

East extracts and summarises the fundamental human values which Camus considers make up a human nature. The first is that of a disinterested communion with the natural world, or what East calls, “ce goût instinctif pour la lumière, la vie et la joie de vivre” (p. 73). This is the ‘oui’ of Camus’ life as a boy on the streets of Belcourt. It is also the theme of *Noces* (1938); the same disinterested joy experienced, but not understood, by Meursault prior to his death sentence. In *La Peste* (1947), Rieux and Tarrou experience this same communion with the world when they

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<sup>236</sup> M.-L. Bidal. *Les Écrivains de l’Abbaye*. Paris: Boivin, 1938, p. 128.

escape the plague and swim in the ocean beneath the stars. As Pratt notes: “La vraie libération de la peste se trouve dans l’union de l’homme et de la terre” (p. 160).

Like many of Duhamel’s protagonists, Blanche in *La Lumière* (1911) takes for granted the simple pleasures that are readily available to her. Her governess Catherine sums up the problem very early on in the work:

Nous qui sommes de ce pays, nous ne regardons pas souvent la montagne et pas assez les arbres et les autres merveilles de cette terre. Ce sont de vieilles choses que nous avons toujours vues, nous les connaissons sans les regarder (p. 18).

Blind from birth, Bernard has had to rely on his other senses to live from day to day, and, accordingly, despite his blindness, he already lives in a heightened state of awareness. As he explains to Blanche, “je ne quitte jamais un endroit qu’après y avoir reçu tout ce que je pouvais y recueillir de joie” (p. 100). Initially, he seeks to instill in Blanche this same deep appreciation he has for the world. Now, Blanche is able to see “le soleil qui va se coucher derrière la montagne” (p. 92). Bernard implores her to continue, urging her now to describe the sun. Blanche remembers her frail eyes, but, encouraged by Bernard, Blanche stares into the sun and suffers some damage to her eyes.

Following her rebellion, in which she shouts out in the company of Bernard, Blanche acquires a heightened state of awareness and rediscovers the joy of a simple communion with nature: “Je voudrais ouvrir les yeux et voir trois petits brins d’herbe qui remuent au vent, entre les cailloux” (p. 108). Blanche is now armed with all she needs to truly possess her world: “Je veux voir. Je veux voir!” (p. 109).

Following Gérard's revolt in *Le Combat* (1913), he is now the complete antithesis of the man, who, prior to receiving the news of his impending demise, is resigned to death. Like Blanche, he seeks to rediscover his natural world as soon as possible: "Et maintenant, il faut respirer le printemps et savourer la vie qui mène tout le monde!" (p. 80).

In *La Possession du monde* (1919), Duhamel urges his reader to rediscover the beauty of the natural world, one which contains treasures that have always existed, but which are revealed in the course of rebellion:

Le monde! Il faut à notre amour le monde entier: les pierres, les nuées, les grands arbres de la route, le vol angulaire des oiseaux qui fuient dans le soir, les verdure agitées tout en haut de ce mur qui tente vainement d'enclorre la propriété d'autrui, l'éclat de ces fleurs que l'on aperçoit à travers la grille du parc, et cette grille et ce mur mêmes (p. 48).

In 'Le Sacrifice', Légglise initially confesses that he would rather die than have both legs amputated, and Duhamel finds himself assuming for Légglise, as Bernard did for Blanche, the role of "l'avocat de la vie" (*VM*, p. 153). In wondering how best to console Légglise, it is the natural world that provides the answer for Duhamel: "Tous les peupliers se mettent à remuer leurs feuilles. D'une seule voix, qui est la voix même de l'été, ils disent: «Non! Non! Il n'a pas raison.»" (*VM*, p. 151). The second operation is a success; Légglise slowly returns to life, one in which he is still able to "respire l'odeur de la verdure, des pelouses fauchées, du gravier grillé par le soleil" (*VM*, p. 164).

Thus, Duhamel must not only care for the wounded and the dying, he must also rebel for them when they are too weak or too afraid to fight themselves. As Manuel Lladonsa Vall-llebrera



suggests, of *Vie des martyrs*: “Quelquefois le médecin doit lutter avec le malade qui préfère la mort.”<sup>237</sup>

### ***RESPECT FOR HUMAN DIGNITY***

Rebellion also reveals the value of dignity for all human beings, irrespective of whether they merit such respect. As East confirm for Camus: “Cette dignité, il faut la reconnaître à tous les hommes, même à celui qui nous en semble indigne” (p. 81). A fine example in the works of Camus is the infirm Zagreus of *La Mort heureuse* (1938) who, despite a debilitating condition, retains a passion for the pure flame of life:

J’accepterais pis encore, aveugle, muet, tout ce que vous voudrez, pourvu seulement que je sente dans mon ventre cette flamme sombre et ardente qui est moi et moi vivant. Je ne songerai qu’à remercier la vie pour m’avoir permis de brûler encore (p. 70).

As East points out, it is Camus’ respect for human life that:

explique l’attachement, qui peut paraître démesuré, de Zagreus à sa vie, bien que celle-ci soit pour lui extrêmement réduite, voire même humiliante. L’infirmes de *La Mort heureuse* refuse d’abrégé cette vie à laquelle il croit tant (p. 88).

Marcel Wiriath suggests that one of the principal results of Duhamel’s revolt against alarming advances in technology was to place “la dignité de la personne humaine en majuscules.”<sup>238</sup> Similarly, Thérive highlights Duhamel’s “grand respect pour la dignité humaine, quelles que soient les voiles qui l’enveloppent. Un homme vaut un homme, s’il a une âme” (p. 42).

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<sup>237</sup> Manuel Lladonosa Vall-Ilebrera. ‘Vie des martyrs et la Première Guerre mondiale’. *Les Cahiers de l’Abbaye de Créteil*. December (1984), p. 10.

<sup>238</sup> Marcel Wiriath. *Silhouettes*. Paris: Éditions Self, 1949, p. 30.

Duhamel respected the dignity of all men and women, irrespective of whether it may have been merited. Jacques Madaule suggests: “Il aime ces hommes, tous ces hommes, bien qu’il sache parfaitement qu’ils ne furent pas tous admirables, ni même impeccables.”<sup>239</sup> Consequently, Duhamel would respect the lives of injured German soldiers, as much as those of his own countrymen. Foreshadowing Rieux, he says: “Bien traiter l’ennemi blessé, pour un médecin, ce n’est pas un trait d’héroïsme. C’est la stricte règle du métier” (*PF*, p. 188). Similarly, in *Lieu d’asile* (1945), Duhamel is proud of the many patients of different nationalities that he is able to help at Pontchaillou: “Même au seuil de l’agonie, la France reste généreuse” (p. 131).

Laurence Campa describes *Vie des martyrs* in a manner which could summarise Camus’ own position in relation to the respect for human life and dignity: “L’œuvre défend la vie contre tout, malgré tout. Son titre même, prenant à rebours la légende dorée de *la mort heureuse* (our italics), espère la vie et le salut dans ce monde-ci.”<sup>240</sup>

Many examples of this theme can be found in the war writings of Duhamel. In ‘Les Projets de Cousin’, the forty-year old Cousin has his leg amputated but, in a manner which recalls the attitude of Zagreus, he retains a passionate urge to continue living: “Avec une jambe de plus ou de moins, il était lui-même et, de ses yeux vert clair, sortait une flamme généreuse qui n’était pas seulement du regard, mais surtout de l’âme pure” (*Civilisation*, p. 47). For Duhamel, the respect for human dignity, “l’amour et le respect de l’homme” (*PF*, p. 50), is a fundamental element of true civilisation. In *Positions françaises* (1940), his message for the Germans is simple:

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<sup>239</sup> Jacques Madaule. ‘Duhamel devant la guerre’. *Duhamel et nous*. Paris: Bloud & Gay, (1937), p. 44.

<sup>240</sup> Laurence Campa. ‘La Parole consolatrice sur la réception de *Vie des martyrs*’ (1916-1929). *Les Cahiers de l’Abbaye de Créteil*. December (2008), p. 32.

L'Allemagne ne sait donc pas encore que la meilleure façon, la seule façon de mériter l'affection des peuples, ce n'est pas de publier des brochures mensongères, c'est de respecter la vie humaine [...] (p. 176).

Further, in *Lieu d'asile* (1945), we find the example of 'Sœur Marie de l'Annonciation' (p. 36). Having sustained significant injuries, the sister prepares herself for death. Her health then improves for a short time, after which she finally succumbs. In response to the Archbishop's suggestion that the Sister lived a life full of meaning, Duhamel thinks to himself: "Toute vie, sans doute, a un sens et toute mort de même" (p. 38).

In the same collection, we find Mme Marcelle, who, despite having both legs amputated, "ne se plaint jamais et pourrait, par la seule vertu de son sourire, donner une leçon à tous les philosophes du monde et même aux plus fermes Stoïciens" (p. 58).

### ***SOLIDARITY***

The next value unearthed by rebellion is that of solidarity. This is the sense of fraternity and courage experienced by Rieux and Tarrou in *La Peste* (1947), that quality noticed by Camus while working for the Resistance during the Second World War.

Ironically, it is also that experienced by Meursault following his revolt in his cell. He fondly recalls his mother and hopes to be surrounded at his execution with as many people as possible, even though they might loathe him. Walter Pabst believes this demonstrates that Meursault now yearns for a simple human communion: "Il ne désire plus qu'une chose: qu'un grand nombre de

spectateurs l'attendent à son exécution avec des cris de haine, afin qu'il puisse être moins seul dans les dernières minutes."<sup>241</sup> Pratt agrees (p. 146).

Duhamel's poems collected in *Compagnons*<sup>242</sup> communicate a strong sense of solidarity in the face of the injustice of the human condition. The following extract is taken from 'Ode A Quelques Hommes':

Mais puisque me voici retenu par ces chaînes  
 Qui nous unissent et nous chargent tous ensemble,  
 Il faut que ma prison ne soit pas un exil!  
 Ne craignez point de vous asseoir trop près de moi,  
 Parlez avec les mots que vous aimez bien dire,  
 Riez autant que le demande votre joie,  
 Votre joie belle et nécessaire.

From this extract we can distill the fundamental elements of what would become Camus' notion of revolt; a recognition of the temporal chains that bind all human beings, metaphysical rebellion ('Il faut que ma prison ne soit pas un exil!') and a simple communion with other human beings.

In *Positions françaises* (1940), Duhamel speaks of the "grand mouvement de solidarité humaine" (p. 173) aroused by the conduct of the Nazis in the period immediately prior to the Second World War. Thérive suggests that Duhamel's plea for communion really only finds its full expression in the context of a condemned world: "Le règne du cœur, ce triste et douloureux appel à la

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<sup>241</sup> Walter Pabst. 'Un héros absurde, Meursault et ses ancêtres'. *Les Lettres romanes*. (1991), p. 196.

<sup>242</sup> Georges Duhamel. *Compagnons*. Paris: Gallimard, 1918.

communion des âmes souffrantes, n'a tout son prix que dans un monde perdu, lugubre et condamné" (p. 38). Similarly, Barjon describes Duhamel's humanism as a function of his revolt:

C'est pour la défense universelle que Duhamel mobilise les valeurs capables de préserver l'homme de la mort. De là la qualité de son humanisme, qui n'est en rien celui d'un esthète, mais celui d'un lutteur engagé dans le furieux affrontement des puissances de vie et de destruction (p. 114).

Following Blanche's revolt against fate in *La Lumière* (1911), it will be human love, "la vraie lumière" (p. 153) that saves Blanche and Bernard. Losing their way in the storm provokes Bernard's confession of love for Blanche, and, in a somewhat overly-sentimental and hollow ending, Bernard and Blanche are, ironically, saved from walking over a cliff by the same hand of fate that previously struck them down.

In *Le Combat* (1913), and despite learning of his imminent demise, Gérard nevertheless rejoices in the sound of happy school children playing beneath his window; previously, like his father Vincent, he could not abide it. With new passion and energy, Gérard forms the project of constructing a dyke to hold back the floodwaters that threaten the village. His enthusiasm rubs off on those around him, as he excitedly explains the bold nature of his project. Ultimately, Vincent becomes infected by Gérard's enthusiasm: "C'est une folie! Mais c'est une bonne folie" (p. 107). Vincent's commitment to the work gives him strength and makes him forget his illness: "Je suis aujourd'hui si fort et si nerveux que je ne crois plus guère avoir été malade" (p. 164). Even grandfather rises to his feet with Gérard's aid to go for a walk in the sunshine. When the peasants embrace the task and commence work, Breugnot comments: "On se sent vivre, à chaque instant"

(p. 154). There follows a concerted effort by all, landowners and peasants alike, in the construction of the wall; there is a concomitant sense of brotherhood and solidarity.<sup>243</sup>

In *Les Compagnons de l'Apocalypse* (1956), Dan Levoyer is genuinely motivated by a sense of compassion and solidarity when he travels the country speaking about “les périls qui menaçaient l’humanité à l’âge de la science triomphante [...]” (p. 103). Along the way, and encouraged by the success of his speaking tour, Dan is seduced momentarily by those who seek from him, some sort of miracle. From time to time, he even ‘lays hands’ upon the sick, but soon realises his error. At no time, however, does Dan really lose sight of his original motivation. Pontré describes how Dan’s revolt enables him to discover a bond common to all, and a sense of renewed unity in an absurd world:

Dans *Les Compagnons de l'Apocalypse*, Duhamel applique sa philosophie de la compassion à une souffrance particulièrement moderne, celle provoquée par la conscience de l’absurdité de l’existence humaine, pour la comparer dans un même personnage aux possibilités de paix spirituelle offertes par la foi religieuse (p. 338).

Dan’s is an ethical rebellion, for although he retains a belief in God, in identifying:

la prière avec la compassion fraternelle des humanistes, il cherche à inspirer chez tous les hommes cette compassion qu’il considère le seul chemin vers la paix à l’échelle individuelle ainsi que mondiale (Pontré, p. 338).

It is a sense of fraternity which allows Camus’ rebel to revolt against the oppression of other parties: “Le mouvement de révolte n’est pas obligatoirement réservé à l’opprimé. Au spectacle de l’oppression d’autrui, le témoin peut se révolter” (East, p. 74). Thus, Camus conceives of

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<sup>243</sup> Duhamel may have been inspired to write *Le Combat* by his admiration for the Dutch, who also joined together to hold back the waters (*Discours aux nuages*, p. 88).

rebellion against injustices in Algeria, Spain and elsewhere. It also enables those, like Rieux and Castel, to sacrifice their own interests for the benefit of others: “Avant de chercher à être un héros ou à devenir un saint, le plus important est d’être solidaire. L’essentiel consiste à prendre le parti des victimes, en exerçant son métier d’homme” (East, p. 79).

This is precisely the same role that Barjon attributes to the earlier writer, Duhamel:

Il n’est pas un chrétien qui, respectueux de l’inviolable secret des âmes, ne se sente obligé de saluer en Duhamel une des plus pures figures d’entre ces hommes dont nous parle Camus dans *La Peste*, «qui, ne pouvant être des saints et refusant d’admettre les fléaux, s’efforcent cependant d’être des médecins» (p. 115).

Similarly, Thérive argues that for Duhamel, the assumption of the pain and suffering of others is a function of a sense of fraternity:

Endurer les maux qu’on n’a pu réduire, oui, cela appartient aux grandes âmes; mais il faut aussi assumer la charge, si c’est possible, d’une part de certaines douleurs, aller au-devant d’elles, les subir généreusement. Quelles douleurs? Eh! celles d’autrui... On voit donc que ce dolorisme-là n’est que sympathie et fraternité (p. 53).

This attitude is borne out in *Manuel du Protestataire* (1952), where Duhamel declares himself “toujours du côté de l’opprimé, du persécuté, de la victime...” (p. 8), an attitude which manifests itself in caring for the victims of two World Wars. This is also the role ultimately accepted by Laurent Pasquier:

Laurent Pasquier était déjà médecin, comme le sera Rieux dans *La Peste*, et c’est, en somme, en circonscrivant l’un et l’autre leur effort énergique et méthodique dans une aire d’efficacité pragmatique et temporelle qu’ils trouvent le moyen non seulement de ne pas déchoir mais de progresser en conscience et en valeur” (Simon, *Modernité de Salavin*, p. 93).

**'MIRACLE N'EST PAS ŒUVRE'**

Quilliot suggests of Camus that: “Tout son difficile effort n’a tendu qu’à rétablir un équilibre entre la révolte métaphysique et la révolte historique, entre l’acceptation de la condition humaine et l’adhésion à l’histoire” (p. 157). Caught between history and God, the aim of Camus’ rebel is to avoid absolutes and to simply accept his duty as a man:

L’importance que revêt l’équilibre dans la morale de Camus nous permet de comprendre pourquoi, dans ses écrits romanesques ou dans ses pièces de théâtre, la tâche héroïque consiste à bien faire son métier d’homme (East, p. 100).

Quilliot summarises this duty as follows: Au fond, c’est une sorte de morale moyenne que recherche Camus: *la bonne volonté* (our italics) plutôt que l’héroïsme, la santé plutôt que le salut, l’humanité plutôt que la sainteté” (p. 181).

This is the essence of Laurent’s life motto, ‘miracle n’est pas œuvre’, born during the battle of Verdun. *Le Notaire du Havre* (1933) will invest Laurent with one half of this equation, although the catalyst of war is necessary for him to fully realise it. In this first instalment of the *La Chronique des Pasquier*, Laurent’s faith in miracles is shattered when a large inheritance for the family turns out to be a relatively modest sum. The hope for a better life for the family evaporates when Raymond Pasquier borrows money against the security of the inheritance and squanders it on some hairbrained scheme. At the end of the work, Laurent confesses himself to be “guéri, pour jamais, du miracle, des prodiges et des événements magiques” (p. 280).

Many critics have commented on this theme. Gérard Duhamel finds it applicable not only to Duhamel’s characters but also to the author himself:



Ainsi l'œuvre, patiemment rassemblée, devient le fruit de la connaissance, où l'écrivain restitue cette vision intérieure et la détache de soi, pour instruire, séduire ou enseigner. Et le miracle, c'est la jouissance qu'apporte cette création, gagnée sur l'indifférence de l'univers (p. 74).

Blancpain notices the important link between Laurent's motto and *La Peste* (1947):

Ce thème, nous le retrouverons dans *La Peste* de Camus. De deux personnages confrontés au plus terrible et pressant des désordres, l'un veut être un saint, comme Salavin, l'autre entend se comporter en médecin qui combat, comme Laurent, à la mesure de ses forces. Même en présence de l'horreur, et même si, un moment assoupi, on redoute son retour, il importe de la combattre, sans repos, patiemment, obstinément, parce que d'abord l'action est momentanément efficace et qu'ensuite la vie a toujours fini par renaître et reprendre (*Georges Duhamel et la guerre*, p. 26).

However, as Blancpain suggests, Laurent's motto could also apply to his work in the laboratory:

“Laurent, en quelque sorte, a fait serment pour tenter de l'écarter ou tout au moins de travailler pour l'ordre et l'équilibre, à sa place, dans sa mesure, et sans attendre de miracle... ‘Miracle n'est pas œuvre’ ”(*Georges Duhamel et la guerre*, p. 26).

Laurent's motto is equally applicable to Duhamel's work in both wars. In *L'Humaniste et l'Automate* (1933), his description of the work performed by the surgeons foreshadows the patient devotion of Rieux and Castel in the face of the plague. The doctors apply themselves “avec beaucoup d'intelligence et de dévouement aux questions que leur proposait une grande guerre moderne” (p. 70). As Rieux and his band of brothers will form teams of sanitation workers to battle the plague, Duhamel and his fellow doctors “formions un petit nombre d'équipes et faisons de notre mieux pour venir à bout d'une besogne surhumaine” (p. 71).

Dénuit summarises Duhamel's conduct during the Great War: “Et quelle est son attitude? D'abord celle d'un homme qui remplit avec acharnement son devoir personnel” (p. 64). This is an attitude

reflected by Duhamel's good friend and 'savant' Charles Nicolle, who "disait en mourant qu'il faut malgré tout avoir confiance et travailler" (*Problèmes de l'heure*, p. 150).

In *Mémorial de la guerre blanche* (1939), Duhamel urges France not to place faith in any miracle: "Il ne faut pas croire aux miracles. Il ne faut pas croire que le chancelier Hitler et son parti de violence vont brusquement s'effondrer et s'évanouir comme des bonshommes de fumée."<sup>244</sup> Similarly, in *Positions françaises* (1940), Duhamel counsels his countrymen to adopt behaviour consistent with Laurent's maxim. In answer to the pleas by ordinary men and women to do something to assist the effort, Duhamel suggests they have patience, to first undertake their duties as human beings and to demonstrate compassion for others. The time may come when active engagement in the struggle is required, with the consequent risk of losing one's life:

Dans le grand malheur de tous, heureux celui qui s'incline sur le plus humble devoir et songe avec résignation: «Il suffit d'ouvrir les yeux pour se trouver du travail. Mon œuvre est sans éclat, mais je l'accomplis de tout mon cœur. Il n'est si modeste besogne qui ne demande beaucoup de tendresse. Que la patience me soit accordée jusqu'au jour où je pourrai donner toute ma mesure et sacrifier, peut-être, autre chose que mon orgueil (p. 112).

Another good example can be found in *Lieu d'asile* (1945), where a young schoolteacher gives her blood to help the injured at Pontchaillou. Yearning to do more, she becomes headmistress of a school for injured children (p. 31).<sup>245</sup>

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<sup>244</sup> Georges Duhamel. *Mémorial de la guerre blanche*. Paris: Mercure de France, 1939, p. 96.

<sup>245</sup> In this context it is interesting to note Quilliot's suggestion in a discussion of *La Peste*, in which he uses similar language to Duhamel in *Positions françaises* (1940): "La tâche de l'instituteur, comme celle du vrai médecin, est humble et *sans éclat* (our italics). Il lui est demandé moins d'esprit de sacrifice que de patience, moins de génie que de compréhension" (p. 182).

In ‘Qui est le récit du colon Philippe’, one of the short stories for *Le Prince Jaffar* (1924), Philippe rebels against the plague of famine with the resources of courage and intelligence. In this way, he mirrors Rieux’s later course of conduct in *La Peste* (1947): “Elle [la famine] a ses ennemis aussi: mais nous sommes encore trop peu nombreux, trop inquiets, trop timides, trop désarmés. Patience!” (p. 115).

If Rizzuto is right and “Camus makes Rieux a doctor in order to break the long chain of flamboyant heroes” (*Camus’ Imperial Vision*, p. 74), then one might be justified in concluding that Camus may have admired Duhamel’s conduct in offering his medical skills in both wars. Rather surprisingly, Camus arrives at a different conclusion, commenting specifically in relation to him in *Combat*:

Il y vante la forme de résistance qu’il a pratiquée et qui s’est déroulée, paraît-il, au grand jour, ce qui demandait plus de courage que la modeste lutte entreprise par 300 000 combattants clandestins (Lévi-Valensi, *Camus à Combat*, p. 420).

Camus continues: “Il ne faut pas jouer au héros quand on a été seulement un bon et sage serviteur, et que les fonctionnaires ne doivent jamais parler plus haut que les vrais guerriers” (p. 420).

The likely source of Camus’ ire is *Paroles de médecin* (1946), in which Duhamel “never forgot to talk of the doctors who fought in the resistance — those men he singled out for particular praise” (Knapp, p. 138). A balanced view, however, suggests that Camus’ criticism of Duhamel is misplaced. Camus’ primary objection seems to be that Duhamel has glorified his conduct and that of other medical practitioners, at the expense of the soldier who actually fights in the battle. However, when one considers Duhamel’s work as a whole, there can be no doubt that he was in

perfect agreement with Camus as to the identity of the true hero of the war. In his recollections of the Great War in *La Pesée des âmes*, he salutes:

le vainqueur de Verdun, c'est le soldat français, je dis bien le simple soldat français. La victoire de Verdun n'est pas le résultat d'une pensée stratégique ou même tactique, c'est la récompense d'un peuple courageux (p. 148).

Camus' criticisms are also inconsistent with *Vie des martyrs* (1917) and *Civilisation* (1918), works constructed during the act of war and with the aim of communicating to the French people, the suffering and heroism of the soldier. As Knapp suggests: "Duhamel does not intend to complain or to solicit pity from others, but rather to educate an ignorant public, to acquaint them with the plight of the man of the battlefield" (p. 51). Lafay also notes: "Venue l'heure de la libération, Duhamel fut félicité pour sa courageuse conduite. La presse, de nombreux organismes de résistance, le général de Gaulle lui rendent hommage" (*Duhamel revisité*, p. 16).

### ***THE REJECTION OF HISTORY***

A rediscovery of certain core values inherent in human beings brings Camus closer to his contemporary:

Son éthique de la révolte lui a fait découvrir l'existence d'une nature humaine. En s'appuyant sur cette découverte, il en déduit que ce qui importe, c'est l'homme présent et concret et non pas l'homme futur. En d'autres termes, Camus rejette de façon formelle, toute pensée qui fait de l'histoire un absolu (East, p. 84).

As Camus explains in *L'Homme révolté*: "Nous ne pouvons agir que dans le moment qui est le nôtre, parmi les hommes qui nous entourent" (p. 16). For Camus, history "devient symbole de mal, guerre, destruction" (East, p. 97). It is the world of the absolutist régime, a world "qui menace d'être le nôtre" (*HR*, p. 47), the destroyer of values, and enemy of human nature: "Choisir

l’histoire, et elle seule, c’est choisir le nihilisme” (*HR*, p. 307). Albérès summarises Camus’ position:

L’impuissance de l’homme de bonne volonté devant les grands fléaux de l’Histoire — cette impuissance que constatèrent tous ceux qui ne purent conjurer la folie et le crime des années quarante — voilà la constatation *historique* qui est à la base de la pensée «politique», au sens large du mot, d’Albert Camus (*Le Prix Nobel*, p. 225).

Our argument is that the much earlier work of *La Possession du monde* (1919) is also a revolt against the forces of history, that which Duhamel calls “la désespérante folie du monde occidental” (*LPM*, p. 62). This is exemplified in ‘Le Dernier Voyage de Candide’ (1938), one of the short stories for the collection bearing the same name. Here, Candide notices that he is coming into old age, and resolves to leave his garden to see the world. Everywhere he goes, he sees prisons holding political prisoners and former revolutionaries. Candide notices the world trapped in a circle of violence. As a local merchant explains to him:

Les membres du gouvernement actuel, avant d’être au pouvoir, étaient eux-mêmes sous les verrous. S’ils ne font pas, au plus vite, fusiller leurs adversaires, ils risquent, dès la prochaine émeute, de quitter le palais pour retourner au cachot.<sup>246</sup>

Further, in *Homère au XX<sup>e</sup> Siècle* (1947), Duhamel compares the wars described by the great Greek poet with the two World Wars, mournfully declaring that humanity “demeure amèrement semblable à elle-même.”<sup>247</sup> However, as Camus would argue in *L’Homme révolté* (1951), Duhamel agrees that history must be resisted. Utilising what would become the pure language of Camusian revolt, Duhamel writes:

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<sup>246</sup> Georges Duhamel. *Le Dernier Voyage de Candide*. Paris: Fernand Sorlot, 1938, p. 13.

<sup>247</sup> Georges Duhamel. *Homère au XX<sup>e</sup> Siècle*. Paris: Union Latine d’Éditions, 1947, p. 75.

Il leur faut voyager, lutter contre les éléments, cultiver un sol souvent ingrat, paître des troupeaux, les défendre contre des ennemis pillards, conjurer la défaveur des dieux, se concilier leurs bonnes grâces, résister aux épidémies, à la vieillesse, aux épreuves de toute nature, il leur faut, enfin et surtout, faire la guerre, répondre à la cruauté des hommes par la ruse et la représaille (p. 18).

### **MEASURE**

Van Meter Ames draws the following conclusion from Caligula's insight:

The emperor's admission that he is mistaken means that even if God is gone everything is not permitted; that merely in terms of human relationships there is still a difference between right and wrong. If the mad Caligula can see that the world of men is right in resisting a tyrant and putting him in the wrong, there is the possibility of working out a positive and cooperative way of life.<sup>248</sup>

In *L'Homme révolté* (1951), Camus completely rejects the 'tout est permis' philosophy of contemporary nihilism and as we have seen, argues in favour of the means over the end.

Soon after, in 1953, Duhamel uses the same language to describe the nihilist revolutionary in *Les Espoirs et les épreuves*:

Je les connais, ceux qui ne détestent pas de se parer de l'épithète sonore de «révolutionnaires». Ils ne veulent pas admettre que la révolution est un moyen, ce qu'on appelait jadis l'*ultima ratio*. Pour les vrais révolutionnaires, la révolution est une fin en soi. Et quand la révolution s'achève, ils ne songent qu'à recommencer. La plupart des sincères périront, dans ces bousculades, pour que soient assouvies les ambitions d'un petit nombre (p. 252).

In 'Gouvernement d'un jardin', part of *Fables de mon jardin* (1932), Duhamel uses the metaphor of his garden to convey a sense of the disorder and injustice that would reign if left to its own devices: "Si, toutes portes fermées, le jardin se trouvait livré soudainement à lui-même, au fort de

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<sup>248</sup> Van Meter Ames. 'Theater and Fiction in France'. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*. Vol. 8, No. 4. June (1950), p. 242. Retrieved 08 August 2007 from <http://www.jstor.org>.

la belle saison, il vivrait deux ou trois jours encore dans l'obédience" (*FMJ*, p. 25). A part of being a good gardener is to be able to recognise the varieties which are likely to take over, oppose them and place limits upon them:

L'art du jardinier a pour objet de résister aux puissances de la nature, de protéger les espèces les plus belles, qui sont aussi les plus délicates, de donner une place à chacun, mais de limiter la place de chacun, d'aider les faibles et de refréner les audacieux (p. 28).

Moderation is the key to understanding the argument of both Camus and Duhamel in this regard. In *Les Justes* (1940), in the person of Stepan, Camus portrays the 'tout est permis' attitude of the nihilist revolutionary. Stepan is the man who accepts that the revolution is an end in itself. If the revolution should succeed, then he will either become the oppressor in his turn, or launch another revolution.

Camus compares this absolutism with the measured approach of Kaliayev. It is he who only participates in the revolution so that violence and murder might be avoided in the future, refuses to throw a bomb into the carriage of the grand duke when children are at risk of being killed, and is prepared to sacrifice himself in order to demonstrate that his own violence is "nécessaire et inexcusable" (*HR*, p. 217). As Camus explains in *L'Homme révolté*, true revolt has moderation at its heart: "La mesure n'est pas le contraire de la révolte. C'est la révolte qui est la mesure" (p. 376). As Rizzuto says: "In order to preserve the living evidence of revolt, and therefore its authenticity, the oppressor's status must be changed but his life preserved" (Rizzuto, *Camus' Imperial Vision*, p. 96).

In *Le Voyage de Moscou* (1927), Duhamel comments specifically on the Russian revolutionaries of 1917. Whilst refusing to sanction the crime and terror that accompanied the revolution,

Duhamel also asks his reader to recognise “ce qu’elle apporte de grand, de durable et de sain.”<sup>249</sup>

In this work, Duhamel is highly critical of the ongoing censorship of the new régime, particularly in relation to the direction that many young writers are pointed. Nevertheless, the theme which permeates this work is that the violence of the revolution was both justified and unjustifiable:

Les sociétés occidentales, qui considèrent avec horreur la destruction ou la déchéance de la noblesse et de la bourgeoisie russes, pourraient réserver quelque peu de leur compassion à ces légions de jeunes hommes qu’elles ont, pendant la guerre mondiale, offertes en holocaustes (p. 246).

The concept of measure also explains Camus’ reasoning, in *Lettres à un ami allemand* (1948), as to why France waited so long before deciding to take up arms against the Germans in the Second World War: “Il nous a fallu tout ce temps pour aller voir si nous avons le droit de tuer des hommes, s’il nous était permis d’ajouter à l’atroce misère du monde” (p. 26).

Duhamel’s earlier work of *Positions françaises* (1940) mirrors a number of the sentiments of *Lettres à un ami allemand*. Duhamel links the concept of measure to that of his notion of true civilisation, suggesting that “le degré de civilisation auquel un peuple est parvenu se mesure aux efforts que ce peuple accomplit pour résoudre les discords sans recourir à la violence” (p. 7). As Camus would eventually find violence ‘nécessaire et inexcusable’, so too Duhamel comments on the initial reticence of England and France to enter the conflict “jusqu’au moment où la guerre leur parut une terrible nécessité (*PF*, p. 9).

Come 1939, Duhamel would cast aside the pacifist ideals that survived the Great War, in favour of revolt. He talks in terms of revolt against the injustice of a régime that would seek to “réduire le

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<sup>249</sup> Georges Duhamel. *Le Voyage de Moscou*. Paris: Mercure de France, 1927, p. 246.



monde entier en esclavage” (*PF*, p. 58), and urges his countrymen to rise up against their potential German masters: “Et c’est bien pourquoi je dis: que les pacifistes résistent, qu’ils s’arment pour résister” (*PF*, p. 60). As Camus will write *to* a fictional German friend, Duhamel describes receiving letters *from* a real German friend, M. B..., for whom “les frénésies hitlériennes lui inspirait une sincère horreur” (*PF*, p. 120).

In *Images de la Grèce* (1928), Duhamel notes the ease with which the oppressed can quickly become the oppressor, should the rebel not act with measure and good faith:

La frénésie du vainqueur se retourne contre lui-même. Il n’a pas compris à temps que la richesse capitale d’un territoire, ce sont les hommes qui l’habitent. Chasser un peuple de ses foyers n’est pas qu’une action déshonorante, c’est une méprise ruineuse et, comme tout ce qu’inspire la haine, un principe de décadence (p. 71).

When speaking to Vietnamese students in Saigon on the 13 December 1947, Duhamel again stresses the importance of acting with moderation: “Tout l’effort des hommes raisonnables consiste donc à considérer avec attention la marche des événements et à contribuer en quelque manière au maintien d’un équilibre.”<sup>250</sup>

In an article for *Le Figaro*, in January 1948, Duhamel recognises that there will be those who, in the exercise of their authority, or in the course of their revolution, exceed the bounds of reasonableness, and, in so doing, move from oppressed to oppressor:

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<sup>250</sup> Georges Duhamel. ‘Pensées pour les élèves vietnamiens des Grandes Ecoles’. *Les Cahiers de l’Abbaye de Créteil*. December (1991), p. 54.

C'est sans doute que, si le maître outrepassé les droits qu'il a reçus, ou qu'il s'est acquis, d'autres mots s'imposent à nous et nous appelons le mauvais maître un tyran, un despote et un oppresseur.<sup>251</sup>

A good example of such an attitude is that of Karl de Rohan, whom Duhamel met in Austria in or about 1922/23. He would meet him again in 1942, when de Rohan confessed sympathy for the Nazi cause and attempted to convince Duhamel that the Nazis would restore a peace to Europe and the world, similar to that during the Roman empire which lasted for six centuries. Duhamel's response is consistent with his preference for the means and not the end: "Monsieur, lui dis-je, vous me vantez un monde fermé, entièrement soutenu par une police odieuse, un monde qui, de ce fait, vit dans un équilibre absurde" (*LEE*, p. 140).

### ***THE DEATH PENALTY***

The principal of measure is one of the bases upon which Camus rejects the death penalty: "A partir du moment où l'on accepte le meurtre, serait-ce une seule fois, il faut l'admettre universellement" (*HR*, p. 62). Duhamel rejects it also, principally on the same basis. As Comeau notes: "Malgré sa qualité incontestable de Résistant [...] Il s'élèvera notamment contre le recours abusif de la peine de mort" (p. 222).

### ***REVOLT AND REVOLUTION***

In *L'Homme révolté* (1951), Camus is at pains to distinguish ethical revolt from revolution. According to Camus, revolution retains the meaning that it has in astronomy, namely that of the movement which describes a complete circle or transition: "En théorie, le mot révolution garde le

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<sup>251</sup> Georges Duhamel. 'Dominus et Magister'. *Les Cahiers de l'Abbaye de Créteil*. December (1991), p. 63.

sens qu'il a en astronomie. C'est un mouvement qui boucle la boucle, qui passe d'un gouvernement à l'autre après une translation complète" (*HR*, p. 140). The fundamental difference between revolution and revolt, Camus argues, is that, whilst the former is absolute in its nature, revolt, by virtue of its faithfulness to the concepts of measure and moderation, is necessarily limited in scope: "Le mouvement de révolte, à l'origine, tourne court" (*HR*, p. 140).

Camus maintains that true revolution is impossible, for if there had been one real revolution, complete unity would have been achieved. This proposition, suggests Camus, governs the behaviour of all revolutionaries, who seek to conclude history and begin again:

S'il y avait une seule fois révolution, en effet, il n'y aurait plus d'histoire. Il y aurait unité heureuse et mort ressasiée. C'est pourquoi tous les révolutionnaires visent finalement à l'unité du monde et agissent comme s'ils croyaient à l'achèvement de l'histoire (*HR*, p. 142).

For Camus, personal revolution is just as dangerous as politically motivated revolution when it is acted out with the 'tout est permis' attitude. Marthe of *Le Malentendu* is perhaps the best example of this. As we have seen, it is Marthe's urgent desire to discard her present life in favour of one by the sea that leads her to murder. Mersault of *La Mort heureuse* (1938) acts similarly, looking to reinvent a life of mediocrity by murdering Zagreus and assuming his wealth. East argues that Caligula also fits into this category, although perhaps it is more accurate to say that Caligula seeks to effect a personal revolution in the lives of his subjects:

Les meurtres perpétrés par Mersault, Marthe, ou encore Caligula découlent de l'exercice de leur volonté. Ce sont des meurtres délibérés et voulus dans le dessein d'obtenir un changement de vie (East, p. 119).

Camus believes that most revolutions are characterised by murder. The revolution, obedient to the dictates of nihilism and absolutist in its aims, has in fact turned against its rebel origins: "La

révolution, obéissant au nihilisme, s'est retournée en effet contre ses origines révoltées" (*HR*, p. 308). According to Camus, revolution is a destroyer of human nature and of the values revealed by revolt. By engaging in a monologue and not a dialogue, the successful revolutionary seeks to destroy and to replace one revolution with another.

On the other hand, the measured, but continuously defeated approach of the true rebel gives weight to the concept of human nature. In essence, ethical rebellion seeks unity whereas totality is the aim of the revolutionary:

La révolution triomphante doit faire la preuve, par ses polices, ses procès et ses excommunications, qu'il n'y a pas de nature humaine. La révolte humiliée, par ses contradictions, ses souffrances, ses défaites renouvelées et sa fierté inlassable, doit donner son contenu de douleur et d'espoir à cette nature (*HR*, p. 312).

In the preface to *Manuel du Protestataire* (1952), published one year after *L'Homme révolté*, Duhamel also specifically distinguishes revolution from what he calls '*l'esprit révolutionnaire*'. A closer analysis of these passages confirms that what Duhamel understands by this phrase is precisely what Camus means to convey when he speaks of rebellion. Indeed, when we look at Camus' notebooks for the period 1935 to 1942, we find an entry in February 1938 which uses identical language to that of Duhamel, and which prefigures the concept of revolt later espoused by Camus in *L'Homme révolté* (1951): "*L'esprit révolutionnaire* (our italics) est tout entier dans une protestation de l'homme contre la condition de l'homme" (*Carnets, Vol I*, p. 105). Whilst these phrases are identical, it cannot be suggested that Duhamel borrowed the term from Camus, because the first volume of Camus' notebooks was not published until 1962, some ten years after Duhamel's *Manuel du Protestataire*. However, their use of the very same phrase does serve to demonstrate how closely aligned both authors were in their thinking.

For Duhamel: “La révolution, c’est un bouleversement soudain et brutal dans l’ordonnance du monde, et, si nous nous en tenons aux sociétés humaines, dans les institutions, dans les coutumes, et les mœurs” (p. 9). Similarly, for Duhamel: “Le révolutionnaire est celui qui souhaite un tel changement et qui tâche à le déterminer par tous les moyens en sa puissance” (p. 9). Accordingly, for Duhamel, as for Camus, the revolutionary is a nihilist, one who is prepared to use any means in the pursuit of some absolute end.

In *Manuel du Protestataire*, When Duhamel describes his concept of ethical rebellion, the relevant passage could easily have come from the pages of *L’Homme révolté*, for it refers to the fundamental elements of refusal, measure, and a mistrust of history, all of which lie at the heart of Camus’ revolt:

Or l’action et l’efficacité de *l’esprit révolutionnaire* (our italics) supposent, on voudrait le croire, le jeu de l’esprit d’examen, l’exercice de la critique, l’aptitude à juger les idées, les hommes, les œuvres, les régimes, les lois, un invincible vœu de protestation et de refus en présence de tout ce qui va contre le sens même de la vie, contre l’expérience historique et les nécessités de l’équilibre (p. 9).

In a chapter for *Manuel du Protestataire* entitled ‘La Cité et la cité souffrante’, when Duhamel mournfully envisages a society founded upon unfettered revolution, he aligns his ‘esprit révolutionnaire’ with revolt. He imagines a society:

dont presque tous les membres seraient des machines vivantes, aptes à faire, par spécialisation dès le principe, des travaux bien définis, des machines incapables de réaction critique et donc de *révolte* (our italics) (p. 16).

After the end of the Second World War, France had to come to terms with having to deal with Germany and her collaborators. As East explains, Camus initially found himself on the side of those who considered that vengeance was the only legitimate path to follow, especially given the undisputed fact that the actions of the collaborators had contributed to the death of many French

people. Those who preached moderation at this time were represented by François Mauriac and a very public debate was played out between these two principal voices, namely between Mauriac and Camus. As East notes, “pour le Camus de cette époque de polémique, la France ne peut porter en son sein ces hommes de l’injustice ou de la trahison” (p. 150).

Leading up to the period in which he wrote *Les Justes* (1949) and *L’Homme révolté* (1951), it was perhaps inevitable that Camus’ attitude would change: “Graduellement, Camus s’est rallié aux thèses de Mauriac. Il a reconnu que le désir de justice est concrètement devenu soif de vengeance et que cela ne menait à rien” (East, p. 151).

After the Great War, Duhamel favoured a measured response, one consistent with having been a medical practitioner, who, as we have seen, cared for German and French soldiers alike with the same sense of humanity. In *Les Espoirs et les épreuves*, Duhamel describes travelling through the German countryside in 1921 with his friend Charles Vildrac, “à travers cette Allemagne humiliée mais renaissante et pour laquelle nous n’avions alors que des pensées non d’absolution mais de charité” (p. 87).

In ‘Deux Hommes’, one of the short stories for *Entretiens dans le tumulte* (1919), Duhamel compares Houtelette’s thirst for vengeance with Cauchois’ more measured approach. Houtelette “appelle à grands cris le moment où ses compatriotes pourront enfin commettre des crimes comparables à ceux de l’ennemi” (p. 89). Cauchois reflects Duhamel’s own measured approach:

A entendre raconter les crimes de l’enhavisseur, Cauchois ressent une vive douleur et, de toute son âme, il souhaite que, l’heure venue des retours de fortune, les hommes qui parlent sa langue ne s’abaissent jamais à rien de honteux (p. 88).

Duhamel's measured approach after the Great War was to be sorely tested after the horrors perpetrated by the Nazis, and, in his memoirs, we see glimpses in Duhamel of Camus' own initial attitude towards the Germans and their collaborators:

Les horreurs de la seconde guerre mondiale m'ont conduit si loin dans la voie de la tristesse, elles m'ont laissé tant de souvenirs insurmontables que j'abandonne à d'autres, plus jeunes, les pensées de pardon et de réconciliation (*LEE*, p. 61).

Despite these horrors, Duhamel remained proud of the fact that: "La France, quand elle était libre, n'a jamais succombé aux abjectes délices de la fureur et du carnage, comme tant d'autres pays" (*LEE*, p. 97), an attitude which mirrors that of Camus and Kaliayev.

In *Lettre à Lucien Descaves sur l'épuration* (1946), Duhamel advocates a measured approach to the question of punishment of collaborationist writers, one which clearly brings him into line with the writer of *L'Homme révolté*: "Nous avons pensé que cette trahison méritait un châtement et j'ai, dès les premières heures de la libération, déclaré que jamais le châtement ne devait être confondu avec la vengeance."<sup>252</sup>

In the context of the revolutionary, Camus even justifies suicide in one circumstance:

S'il arrive que, dans un contexte historique spécifique, on soit amené à tuer, il faut que celui qui s'y résout accepte de donner sa propre vie pour signifier par là qu'aucune raison ne justifie le meurtre (East, p. 90).

This is the principal theme of *Les Justes* (1949), where Kaliayev finds himself in the position of accepting that murder is unjustifiable, but necessary.

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<sup>252</sup> Georges Duhamel. 'Lettre à Lucien Descaves sur l'épuration'. *Les Cahiers de l'Abbaye de Créteil*. December (1985), p. 93.

One can surmise that the nihilist Stepan, for whom the revolution is a complete end in itself, would have had no difficulty sacrificing innocent children for the sake of the cause. That which Camus finds appealing in Kaliayev is a combination of self-abnegation and deep respect for the lives of others. According to Camus, this elevates Kaliayev above history and nihilism and confirms him as a pure rebel:

Un si grand oubli de soi-même, allié à un si profond souci de la vie des autres, permet de supposer que ces meurtriers délicats ont vécu le destin révolté dans sa contradiction la plus extrême. On peut croire qu'eux aussi, tout en reconnaissant le caractère inévitable de la violence, avouaient cependant qu'elle est injustifiée. Nécessaire et inexcusable, c'est ainsi que le meurtre leur apparaissait (*HR*, p. 217).

Similar sentiments are expressed by Duhamel shortly after in his memoirs. After noting the inherent desire in every living thing to continue living, Duhamel suggests:

La grandeur de l'homme consiste à faire certaines choses qui vont contre l'enseignement de la nature, certaines choses que la nature déconseille. Le sacrifice volontaire n'est point absolument exclu des activités biologiques (*LEE*, p. 117).

In *Problèmes de l'heure* (1957), Duhamel suggests that in an appropriate case, self-sacrifice might be the ultimate expression of 'désintéressement':

L'homme qui pousse, par exemple, le désintéressement jusqu'à sacrifier sa vie pour une belle cause ou pour un être cher, trouve, dans une telle action, la récompense suprême: il accomplit sa vie, lui donne une parfaite plénitude et lui prépare d'incalculables conséquences" (p. 52).

Duhamel warns against suicide in general, but suggests, as does Camus, that it might be legitimate in one circumstance: "Mais la démission et le suicide des petits ne sont jamais demandés qu'au bénéfice de quelque réalité collective" (*LEE*, p. 117). Duhamel makes these comments in the course of refuting the position of Jean-le-Bleu that he would rather be German and alive, than French and dead, a position derided by Duhamel (*LEE*, p. 118). The following quote, taken from



*Mémorial de la guerre blanche* (1939) in a discussion about Jean-le-Bleu, prefigures Kaliayev's position in *Les Justes* that murder may be 'nécessaire mais inexcusable':

Il ne suffit pas, pour vivre, de vouloir vivre à tout prix. Il faut en avoir la place, il faut en conserver les moyens. Je considère avec compassion l'objecteur de conscience qui est prêt à perdre la vie pour ne pas commettre de meurtre; mais je crois qu'aujourd'hui ce grave débat se présente dans une lumière moins simpliste.

L'histoire contemporaine nous prouve cruellement que ce n'est pas la soumission qui permet d'éviter la guerre (p. 126).

The time has come for revolt, one which is necessary to conserve certain fundamental values: "Il est encore au pouvoir de la France pour prendre ferme position pour protéger et pour sauver toutes les valeurs de l'esprit, toutes ces valeurs dont elle est jusqu'ici dépositaire et, nécessairement, garante" (*MGB*, p. 134). In rising up against German oppression, Duhamel's French soldier, as will Kaliayev, places his own life at risk for his people.

In *Tel qu'en lui-même* (1932), Salavin removes everything that might have reminded him of his previous life. His mother, who held such influence over him, is dead. He cuts himself off from Marguerite and the shadowy havens of Montmartre which protect him. He takes himself out of France, assumes an alias and retreats to the dust and heat of North Africa to begin his life afresh. This is to be Salavin's final attempt at reinvention, one last effort to make his actions coincide with the heroic vision he has of himself. As Gianfranco Rubino suggests: "S'il veut se quitter, il doit quitter le décor de sa vie quotidienne."<sup>253</sup>

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<sup>253</sup> Gianfranco Rubino. 'L'Espace impossible de Salavin'. *Roman 20/50*. December (2002), p. 58.

In *Le Club des Lyonnais* (1929) when Salavin tells Aufrère of his desire to “faire ma révolution personnelle” (p. 200), Aufrère warns: “Il n’y a pas de révolution sans victimes. Même quand il s’agit de révolution personnelle” (p. 200). *Tel qu’en lui-même* will confirm the truth of that statement for Salavin.

At the conclusion of *Tel qu’en lui-même*, Duhamel bids an emotional farewell to Salavin, by accepting “avec un calme désespoir, de n’être que ce que je suis” (*TQM*, p. 288). Far from advocating resignation to the fact of the absurd, this statement merely amounts to an acceptance on the part of Duhamel, of the false hope offered by the *miracle* of personal revolution. As Camus would say in *L’Homme révolté* (1951): “L’homme est la seule créature qui refuse d’être ce qu’elle est” (p. 24), a description which could easily be applied to Salavin.

If, however, as we suggest, Salavin’s confrontation with Moktar in the dark is a thinly disguised suicide attempt, could it therefore be suggested that in killing the object of his own revolution, namely himself, Salavin has raised himself above his nihilism as will Kaliayev? The answer to that question must surely be no, for Kaliayev participates in the revolution against an unjust régime “parce qu’il aime la vie” (East, p. 91), and not because it is an end in itself. On the other hand, Salavin, at least initially, is motivated purely by a desire for personal revolution born from the discussion with the stranger in the bar at midnight. The attempts at intimate friendship in *Deux Hommes* (1924), at sainthood in *Journal de Salavin* (1927), and political action in *Le Club des Lyonnais* (1929), emanate from a desire for absolute reinvention and not from a deep-seated altruism. As André Maurois suggests, Salavin “agit, non par amour spontané, mais par système” (p. 200).

Salavin's leaving Paris in *Tel qu'en lui-même* (1932) is also a function of this desire for personal revolution, although, as we have noted, the acts of courage and bravery exhibited by Salavin in this final instalment in the series are not coloured with the same sense of self-interest that permeates the earlier volumes. Dyé suggests that in giving his blood for the vagrant Hassine, Salavin is no longer motivated by the desire to *appear* a saint and, as Rieux was to do twenty years later, is simply undertaking his duty as a man:

C'est en donnant, malgré sa faible santé, son sang pour Hassine, la petite gouape assassinée par ses congénères et en se proposant comme infirmier pour garder les quatre Tunisiens atteints de La Peste pulmonaire — la plus dangereuse — qu'il force l'admiration de tout le milieu médical. Il atteint alors véritablement à la sainteté, une sainteté laïque que Duhamel nous propose en exemple près de vingt ans avant l'auteur de *La Peste* (*Exotisme et peinture du monde colonial dans Tel qu'en lui-même*, p. 123).

What makes these apparently genuine acts of courage difficult to explain is the fact that Salavin is not 'conscious' at the time he performs them, although he is certainly moving towards a state of lucidity. Up until he receives the fatal injury, Salavin has consistently demonstrated little understanding of the human condition: he remains breathtakingly naïve when it comes to the absurd. For example, he reacts with innocent surprise when Aufrère asks him: "Auriez-vous trouvé quelque agréable manière de combler le vide normal de l'être?" (*CL*, p. 85). In response, Salavin opens his eyes wide: "Le vide normal? fit-il avec étonnement" (*CL*, p. 86). As Guespin suggests, when confronted with life as it is, Salavin is "incapable d'analyse lucide" (p. 76).

Even Salavin's apparently 'legitimate' saintly acts in *Tel qu'en lui-même* leave him hollow and unsatisfied. Martinez astutely notes Salavin's similar reaction after each episode:

Que dit-il après le sauvetage, pourtant inespéré et assez miraculeux, de Christine? ‘Trop facile’. Après la transfusion sanguine, qu’il espérait plus éprouvante? ‘Trop facile... Il était prêt à souffrir davantage’. Après la quarantaine en compagnie des pestiférés? ‘Aucun mérite, c’est clair’ (p. 83).

This proves that Salavin may never be satisfied. One catalyst remains: his own death.

Prior to his fatal injury at the hands of Moktar, Salavin alerts his friend Dargoult to the fact of his having written a letter, deposited in his trunk, which Dargoult eventually reads after Salavin sustains his injury. Salavin begins this letter with the words: “S’il m’arrive de mourir” (*TQM*, p. 262), and refers to the preparations which he has made for this eventuality. When the doctors tend to Salavin after his injury, he consistently rejects them: “Je ne veux pas. Je ne veux pas” (*TQM*, p. 259), he pleads to Doctor Arnould. Soon after, when his wound is seemingly improving, Salavin’s state nevertheless deteriorates. This is consistent with a man who has made up his mind that he will die. The pre-meditated writing of the letter and his reluctance to engage with the medical practitioners are clear evidence that Salavin has had such events on his mind for some time. Salavin is complicit in his own demise, as Caligula will be for Camus.

Ironically, it is only when Salavin is fatally wounded in *Tel qu’en lui-même* that he becomes capable of true rebellion. We have seen how he struggles to keep his eyes open. As will Meursault, Salavin’s genuine revolt occurs very late in the series when he truly understands that he is to die. Only then does his emphasis shift from the ‘Je’ — the product of the absurd — to the ‘Nous’ discovered by revolt. As he explains to Marguerite: “Oh! si je devais recommencer une

autre vie, il me semble que je saurais. Comme ce serait simple! Comme *nous* serions heureux! (our italics)” (p. 287).<sup>254</sup> To date, no critic has noticed this important shift in Salavin’s language.

This is not the stoic defiance of Sisyphus that Salavin exemplifies up to this point. This is pure rebellion. Jacques Zéphir also distinguishes Salavin from Sisyphus at this point.

Cependant, chez Salavin, le mot de la fin est différent, car il ne découvre pas comme Sisyphus un bonheur douteux dans l’acceptation orgueilleuse de sa condition absurde, mais il meurt en reconnaissant qu’il s’est trompé et que, s’il devait recommencer une autre vie, il saurait mieux cette fois, comment s’y prendre (*Psychologie de Salavin*, p. 44).

For these reasons, we cannot agree with Jean Onimus, when he suggests that, “à la différence de Camus, Salavin ne se révolte pas.”<sup>255</sup>

We cannot accept Dodd’s assertion that “at no time does [Salavin] show any love for his wife” (p. 219). As he lies dying, for the first time Salavin experiences a simple, human communion with his wife. He feels his wife’s heartbeat, takes in the smells of France and rediscovers his affection for ‘Les Jardin des Plantes’ in Paris. Only then does he understand, as Laurent will come to understand, that happiness means accepting one’s life and working hard to improve it. Falls summarises Salavin’s situation well:

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<sup>254</sup> As Grégoire says in ‘Prière sur la Montagne Sainte-Geneviève’, one of the chapters for *Discours aux nuages* (1934): “«Nous» n’est pas le mot des beaux jours. La joie ne parle pas au pluriel. «Nous» est le cri de la peine, le soupir des âmes qui se rapprochent pour souffrir ensemble et pour souffrir moins durement d’être ensemble” (*DN*, p. 269). This observation fits Salavin rather well.

<sup>255</sup> Jean Onimus. ‘Folentin, Salavin, Roquentin: trois étapes de la conscience malheureuse’. *Etudes*. January (1958), p. 17.

La leçon que Laurent en tire n'est pas très différente de celle qui vient d'illuminer les derniers moments de Salavin: le refus de la vie qui nous a été donnée, les tentatives d'évasion en dehors de cette vie, tout cela est illusoire; seul est efficace l'effort qui accepte la vie et qui travaille avec persévérance à l'améliorer. Certes, la devise de Laurent ne semble pas s'inspirer d'une défaite absolue (p. 87).

In *L'Archange de L'aventure* (1955), Poirier is a revolutionary in the world of art. He wants to effect his own personal revolution, as much as he desires the same result for Ricord. In defining himself to Ricord, he recalls Clamence of *La Chute* (1956): "Mon nom est Mikael, l'archange Mikael. Je tue chaque jour un monstre et chaque jour, je célèbre la joie de vivre, de rêver, de se dépasser, d'être presque un dieu" (p. 69).

Poirier seeks out Dogerus, one of his contacts, to further promote the remodeled Cyprien Ricord. In urging Dogerus to accept Ricord's work for display and sale, Poirier suggests that he has converted Ricord (p. 76), and proudly describes the reinvented Ricord: "Alors, Cyprien Ricord a changé non pas de manière, ce qui ne voudrait pas dire grand-chose, mais d'esprit, mais de religion, de substance, de personne. C'est un homme nouveau" (p. 76).

Poirier wants to wipe away Ricord's personal history. He calls his new work 'La Peinture initiale' (p. 89). This is the total reinvention actively courted by Salavin but resisted by Ricord. Slowly, Poirier comes to the conclusion that he may not have effected the grand reinvention that he had envisaged. Speaking to Ricord, he says: "Vous n'êtes pas encore purgé des vieilles idées" (p. 86).

After the revelation that Poirier has made off with his wife and his money, the full weight of his transformation becomes apparent to Ricord. Now, he is able to see his revolution for what it was, "la gloire soudaine comme un coup de tonnerre. Les folies, les modes, les caprices du monde" (*AA*, p. 209). This state is that of the 'miracle', as opposed to the 'œuvre' in the form of "la lente et

longue maturation” (p. 190) as an artist. Like Caligula’s subjects, Ricord soon understands that one can be innocent and culpable. “J’ai fait une faute que je ne comprends pas” (p. 211).

Ricord rebels against the absurdity of the world and the absolutist aims of Poirier: “Il allait falloir résister, serrer les mâchoires” (p. 201). As Pontré suggests in relation to this work, “ce sont uniquement les actions de l’individu qui ont la possibilité de compenser cette absurdité” (p. 335). Following his rebellion, Ricord rediscovers a sense of family and friendship with l’abbé: “Il avait son fils et il avait trouvé un ami, un frère, un témoin de sa détresse” (AA, p. 217). Ricord returns to the art of his old life, finding comfort and pleasure in the simple design of his son playing in the sand.

### ***REBELLION AND ART***

For the Camus of *L’Homme révolté* (1951), artistic creation follows revolt, in much the same way as the values of solidarity and compassion: “L’art, du moins, nous apprend que l’homme ne se résume pas seulement à l’histoire et qu’il trouve aussi une raison d’être dans l’ordre de la nature” (p. 344). Art belongs to, and affirms the existence of, a fundamental human nature.

Pratt considers that Joseph Grand in *La Peste* (1947) is the quintessential rebel in that he “se met, dès les premières manifestations de la peste, au service de ses concitoyens” (p. 179), and, in the time that remains his own, devotes himself to the futile search for artistic perfection.

Over twenty years earlier, in *Les Plaisirs et les jeux* (1922), Duhamel notes how the desire to create is fundamentally a part of this human nature: “A voir cette passion de dessiner qu’ils ont tous, je comprends, mieux que jamais, que créer est dans la nature de l’homme” (p. 60). He makes

the same point about music in *La Musique libératrice* (1921): “C’est une chose qui répond à un des besoins les plus profonds de notre nature.”<sup>256</sup>

As we have seen, Duhamel and many of his characters turn to some form of artistic creation in the course of their rebellion. We have already suggested that Duhamel’s retreat to Créteil was in part a function of his metaphysical revolt. In *Le Temps de la recherche*, he describes a fête in the grounds of *l’Abbaye* in the summer of 1907. Here, all of the participants display their works of art. There are painting displays, theatrical pursuits and poetry readings, an orgy of creation which cured the collective problems of the group, at least in the short term, and restored a sense of unity with the world: “La journée de juillet fut si pure, si parfaitement heureuse que, toutes querelles oubliées, nous pûmes croire assurée la paix du monde et de notre demeure” (*TR*, p. 85).

During the Great War, Duhamel rediscovers the simple joy of music when he learns to play the flute (*La Musique libératrice*, p. 16). In *Les Sept Dernières Plaies* (1928), ‘Un concert’ enables Barouin to achieve a sense of peace and pride in the face of an impending death. Further, in *Chronique des Saisons amères* (1944), as the war raged about Duhamel, music was the “grande flamme [qui] illuminait notre vie” (p. 108). Similarly, in *Nouvelles du sombre empire* (1960), Thomas’ letter writing is “ma seule consolation dans cet abîme” (p. 151).

In *La Possession du monde* (1919), Duhamel addresses his reader in these terms:

Si tu es malheureux, opprimé, si tu doutes douloureusement de ton avenir, de tes vertus, de ton pouvoir d’amour, et si rien, dans le ciel, ne répond à ta prière, à ton besoin de délivrance, rappelle-toi que tu n’es pas abandonné sans recours (p. 128).

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<sup>256</sup> Georges Duhamel. *La Musique libératrice*. Paris: “Les Fêtes du Peuple”, 1921, p. 9.



Essentially, then, Duhamel is addressing the metaphysical rebel. What then, is this ‘recours’ to which Duhamel considers the rebel should turn? The answer is a combination of solidarity and art — a sense of fraternity with the grand artists and their artworks themselves: “Les hommes te restent. Les meilleurs d’entre eux ont fait, pour ta consolation, pour ta rédemption, des statues, des livres et des chants” (p. 128). For the rebel to whom these secrets are revealed, a feeling of unity and exaltation is won:

L’êtreinte qui oppressait ta poitrine semble céder; tu respirez avec une sorte de ferveur, d’exaltation. Des larmes généreuses te jaillissent des yeux, ou le rire t’ébranle tout entier. Cette salutaire exaltation, on l’attribue à la présence miraculeuse de la beauté (p. 129).

This is also the message of *Refuges de la lecture* (1954), a collection of essays written by Duhamel during the Occupation. Here, Duhamel laments the decline of the book in favour of “les distractions choisies,”<sup>257</sup> such as cinema, radio and newspapers. Once again, Duhamel urges a rediscovery of the masters and their works in times of revolt.

In *L’Homme révolté* (1951), Camus again distinguishes between rebellion and revolution in the context of the work of art: “On observera pourtant l’hostilité à l’art qu’ont montrée tous les réformateurs révolutionnaires” (p. 317). Camus points out that there is only one revolutionary form of art, namely that devoted entirely to the aims of the revolution: “Il y a donc qu’un seul art révolutionnaire qui est justement l’art mis au service de la révolution” (p. 318). There can be no finer illustration of this concept than in the burning and banning of many of Duhamel’s works by the Gestapo.

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<sup>257</sup> Georges Duhamel. *Refuges de la lecture*. Paris: Mercure de France, 1954, p. 10.

Leal suggests that not long after *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, Camus began to move away from his initial conception of the work of art as a vehicle “to reproduce reality” (p. 72). Leal notices a significant shift in Camus’ notebooks and in *L’Homme révolté*, towards an art which attempts to “idealize this reality” (p. 72). It is in *L’Homme révolté* that Camus suggests that every metaphysical revolt contains the elements of the desire for unity, the inability to attain it and the construction of a substitute universe. The last of these ingredients, suggests Camus, defines the act of creation:

Dans toute révolte se découvrent l’exigence métaphysique de l’unité, l’impossibilité de s’en saisir, et la fabrication d’un univers de remplacement. La révolte, de ce point de vue, est fabricatrice d’univers. Ceci définit l’art, aussi (*HR*, p. 319).

According to Camus, the artist, not content with the world in which he finds himself, now attempts to reconfigure the world according to his own plan: “L’artiste refait le monde à son compte” (*HR*, p. 320).

Once the fact of death has been brought home to him, the rebel becomes “l’artisan responsable de sa vie” (East, p. 139). Accordingly, for Camus, creating and living are analogous: “Il n’y a pas un talent de vivre et un autre de créer” (*Carnets III*, p. 20).

In Duhamel’s earlier work of *Remarques sur les mémoires imaginaires* (1933), everyday acts are invested with creative qualities. For example — “Choisir, c’est œuvre d’art” (p. 21). “Écouter est œuvre d’art” (p. 55). Thérive highlights this process in the context of the preparation of Duhamel’s own works of art:

La faculté de choisir, n’est-elle pas le grand mystère que nous offre la nature même? La vie est perpétuellement une adaptation par sélection et discrimination, un choix, elle aussi (p. 23).

As it will be for Camus, art is the fabricator of universes for Duhamel. Ouy notices this technique in Duhamel: “Recopier la vie, sans doute, «mais en la rectifiant sans cesse»” (p. 32). As Duhamel remarks: “On ne peut dire que le poète poursuit la vérité, puisqu’il la crée” (*RMI*, p. 32). Further: “Il faut recréer le réel” (*RMI*, p. 49).

### ***THE NOVEL***

In *L’Homme révolté*, after dwelling briefly on painting and sculpture, Camus comes to discuss the novel, which he considers born from the spirit of rebellion: “Le roman naît en même temps que l’esprit de révolte” (p. 324). The secret of the novel, Camus argues, is that it competes with creation and, as long as it remains faithful to its origins, temporarily defeats death: “Le roman fabrique du destin sur mesure. C’est ainsi qu’il concurrence la création et qu’il triomphe, provisoirement, de la mort” (p. 330).

As part of his discussion on art in *L’Homme révolté*, Camus compares what he considers to be the typical American and French novels. He suggests that those belonging to the first category are essentially concerned with the life of the body by reproducing without comment, the acts and words of the character as though the reader is observing the protagonist from behind a pane of glass. Devoid of any notion of interior life, Camus considers the American novel as “celui des hommes sans mémoire” (p. 333). This explains, suggests Camus, the number of average men, or *innocents*, who are the subjects for such novels, for such characters can only be defined by their behaviour. According to Camus, the classic manifestation of the American novel is the simpleton subsumed into a world dominated by machines, a world in which “des automates malheureux vivent dans la plus machinale des cohérences” (p. 332).

However, when Camus suggests that such novels amount to a “protestation pathétique, mais stérile” (p. 332), one might justifiably treat such a comment with a degree of scepticism, for Camus, in his description of innocents without a past, has effectively summarised large chunks of *L'Étranger* (1942) and *La Chute* (1956).

The French novel, which Camus thinks is aptly exemplified in the works of Proust, focuses on the life of the mind and delves into the memory of the protagonist to find a nostalgia for times past. Camus considers the French work a superior form of unity because, in rejecting “la dispersion du monde tel qu’il est” (*HR*, p. 333), it combines “le souvenir perdu et la sensation présente” (p. 333). Camus believes that such a work is attractive because: “Il s’allie à la beauté du monde ou des êtres contre les puissances de la mort et de l’oubli. C’est ainsi que sa révolte est créatrice” (p. 334).

Camus goes on, in *L’Homme révolté* (1951), to advocate balance, or measure, in the work of art. If the novel is to create a substitute universe, then the treatment that the artist gives to reality must be carefully weighed. Accordingly, if the artist completely rejects reality, then the work amounts to nothing more than escapism, or “l’évasion formelle” (p. 334). If, on the other hand, the artist dwells too much on the aspects of “la réalité brute” (p. 335), then the result is simply pure realism. We can see now how Camus’ conception of the novel has moved away from that of *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*.

According to Camus, to be legitimate, the work of art must neither reject all reality nor conform to nothing but reality. Measure, it seems, is once again the key. In his final analysis, Camus

considers that real literary creation remains faithful to reality but “ajoute quelque chose qui le transfigure” (p. 336). For Camus, this treatment is the mark of an author’s style:

La stylisation, qui suppose, en même temps, le réel et l’esprit qui donne au réel sa forme. Par elle, l’effort créateur refait le monde et toujours avec une légère gauchissure qui est la marque de l’art et de la protestation (p. 338).

In *Essai sur le roman* (1925), Duhamel discusses the various forms that the novel might take. In chapter six, we noted that Duhamel rejects the naturalist approach which sees the novelist recount nothing but that which he sees and hears. As will Camus, Duhamel rejects the novel of pure fantasy, where “tout est inventé” (*ER*, p. 64). For Duhamel, the true work of art must balance reality with mystery:

Si vous me demandez à quel genre de récit vont, théoriquement, mes préférences, je vous répondrai que je tiens l’alliance mesurée du réel et de l’imaginaire comme la meilleure et la plus féconde forme d’art en matière de romans (p. 65).

In this way, Duhamel prefigures the Camus of *L’Homme révolté* (1951).

Many of Duhamel’s works combine realism with the slight distortion that Camus thought the hallmark of protest and a powerful style. We know from his correspondence to Roger Martin du Gard that one of Duhamel’s purposes in casting Salavin as plain and simple was to broaden his appeal: “Je l’ai fait bien médiocre pour que le plus grand nombre possible d’hommes s’y reconnaisse” (Lafay, *Témoins d’un temps troublé*, p. 23).

At first glance, *Confession de minuit* (1920) seems to meet all the criteria listed by Camus for the *sterile* protest rendered by the typical American novel, for in the first instalment, Salavin is presented primarily as a simpleton without a past, subsumed by a world increasingly reliant on

machines. As Thérive suggests: “On a souvent comparé son œuvre, à cause de sa tristesse et de son audace véridiques, à celle des naturalistes” (p. 25).

If *Confession de minuit* was left to rest on this basis, it might well have fallen prey to the same criticisms. However, the episode in which Salavin reaches out to touch the ear of his employer changes the complexion of the first instalment, and marks it with the ‘légère gauchissure’ that would have undoubtedly found favour with Camus, one which thrusts the novel in the direction of an examination of Salavin’s heart.

Duhamel would employ the same technique throughout the series, exemplified well by the dream sequence involving Gigon in ‘Nouvelle Rencontre de Salavin’ (1921). Accordingly, the Salavin series is much more than the “école de reportage” (Thérive, p. 25) to which Thérive suggests the true naturalist belongs: “Personne n’est moins que lui obsédé par la réalité extérieure: c’est l’âme qu’il cherche sous les gestes et les paroles” (p. 25).

### ***REVOLT AND INDUSTRIALISED SOCIETY***

According to Camus, true civilisation is only possible if it rediscovers what he calls its *creative synthesis*: “La civilisation n’est possible que si, renonçant au nihilisme des principes formels et au nihilisme sans principes, ce monde retrouve le chemin d’une synthèse créatrice” (*HR*, p. 341).

One of the practical ways in which this synthesis can be achieved is through the abandonment of mindless work in favour of a greater involvement by the worker in the process of production:

La société industrielle n’ouvrira les chemins d’une civilisation qu’en redonnant au travailleur la dignité du créateur, c’est-à-dire en appliquant son intérêt et sa réflexion autant au travail lui-même qu’à son produit (*HR*, p. 341).

Over thirty years earlier, in *La Possession du monde* (1919), Duhamel described a number of men who have freely chosen a work in which they retain a creative input. The first of these is the metal worker, Chalifour, who discharges a rich and enviable task and is happy as a result of his retaining an input into the creative process:

O vieil ouvrier, ô grand homme simple, comme tu étais riche et enviable, toi qui n'aspirais qu'à une chose: bien faire ce que tu faisais, posséder intimement l'objet de ton labeur! Nul mieux que toi n'a connu le fer lourd et obéissant; nul ne l'a, mieux que toi, pratiqué avec amour et constance (p. 103).

Duhamel contrasts Chalifour with the man of finance, who rushes frenetically from phone call to phone call. This is “un malheureux homme rongé d'énervement et de mal d'estomac. Il vit crispé contre son téléphone et passe ses ordres à toutes les bourses du monde” (*LPM*, p. 103).

Later in the same work, in his ‘Essai sur le règne du cœur’, Duhamel prefigures Camus when he describes the future of work. If future laws of work, Duhamel suggests, do not turn back towards the soul and the creative process, then industrial society is doomed. He calls for “certaines modifications radicales dans l'éducation morale des peuples” (*LPM*, p. 225) so that “chacun s'apprête, avec une joyeuse énergie, à reprendre son poste et son outil” (*LPM*, p. 225). Duhamel bemoans modernised industrial society, a society which has “perdu une grande partie de ses attachantes vertus et de sa dignité” (*LPM*, p. 226), where “l'artisan, emprisonné dans une fonction presque mécanique, n'attend plus de sa besogne les satisfactions personnelles qu'il en obtenait jadis” (*LPM*, p. 226). This is a message that would be repeated in *Manuel du Protestataire* (1952) (p. 91).

Duhamel aims his words directly at American industrialised society, which he considers has perpetrated a clever deceit on the workplace, by justifying increased mechanisation with the

promise of a shorter working week. It is the catalyst of war that permits us to “mesurer toute l’humiliation de la civilisation morale devant l’autre, la civilisation scientifique et industrielle” (*LPM*, p. 120). When Duhamel declares: “Ce n’est point une heureuse trouvaille que d’écourter le temps du labeur en le vidant de toute joie et de tout l’intérêt professionnel” (*LPM*, p. 226), he speaks the same language as the writer of *L’Homme révolté* (1951).

The issue for Camus is that common sense and good faith, rather than revolt, may be all that is required to achieve this ‘creative synthesis’. At this point, we remind ourselves of the robust criticisms levelled at Camus at the time of *L’Homme révolté*, and which we noted in our introduction. Despite these criticisms, at no time in *L’Homme révolté* does Camus abandon the pre-requisite of revolt: “La révolte n’est pas en elle-même un élément de civilisation. Mais elle est préalable à toute civilisation” (p. 341). Revolt *reveals* the values at the core of civilisation, values that have always existed but which need the catalyst of intellectual lucidity and refusal to be rediscovered.

So, too, for Duhamel, the only way to rediscover the benefits of a creative input is through rebellion against a manufacturing process which increasingly relies on mechanisation. In *Problèmes de l’heure* (1957), he notes: “Devant une pareille offensive, les artisans devraient lutter, faire preuve de vigilance, recruter des adeptes et les initier” (p. 86). In so doing, the rebel restores a sense of personal effort and pride in the manufacturing process.

Ethical rebellion is not easily won and the temptation is strong to slip into the comfort of old habits and routines or to yield to the temptation of nihilism. Further, Camus’ primary concept of measure flows from lucidity and revolt: “La mesure envisagée par Camus est faite de lucidité, elle



rompt avec la monotonie de l'habitude et s'engage à travailler dans l'aujourd'hui de la vie" (East, p. 100).

### ***THE OBJECTIVE TEST OF ETHICAL REVOLT***

The absurd, born from the 'simple souci' of *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (1942), comes about purely as a result of subjective experience. However, when Camus' emphasis shifts from the absurd to revolt, he uses words like 'measure' and 'moderation', both of which contain the element of *reasonableness*. A human nature common to us all must logically exist independently of an individual's perception, and, when Camus' discussion moves from the absurd to revolt, his test shifts from a subjective analysis of the absurd, to an objective assessment of revolt and the behaviours which follow: "Dans l'expérience absurde, la souffrance est individuelle. A partir du mouvement de révolte, elle a conscience d'être collective" (*HR*, p. 37).<sup>258</sup>

However, as Rizzuto notes: "Since revolt, creating or responding to violence, often leads to killing, it must eventually come to terms with the notions of guilt and innocence" (Rizzuto, *Camus' Imperial Vision*, p. 87). There are a number of characters in the works of Camus and Duhamel who kill other human beings. The best examples in the works of Camus are Mersault, Meursault, Caligula, Marthe, Kaliayev and Stepan from *Les Justes* (1949). For Duhamel, Laudrel and Salavin<sup>259</sup> immediately come to mind, but we should also consider the Russian revolutionaries

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<sup>258</sup> Thérive highlights this same process in Duhamel. He notes Duhamel's objective approach brought about by the catalyst of war, and the difficulties inherent in a purely subjective view: "Il peut garder du moins la conscience vive et sensible de l'horreur des circonstances, et pourtant, si je puis dire, une conscience objectivée. Car, au sens exprès des mots, l'homme ne pense guère ce qu'il vit, et ne vit guère ce qu'il pense..." (p. 13).

<sup>259</sup> We have included Salavin because, as we have seen, his killing of Gigon in a dream is arguably a function of his deepest desire.

of 1917 and the French soldiers of both World Wars. Here, we will consider whether there are any circumstances in which ‘legitimate’ killing might be consistent with ethical rebellion.

Many of those listed above can immediately be disqualified on the grounds that when the killing is carried out, they were not ‘lucid’ and thus, could never be rebels. On this basis, we can disqualify Mersault, Meursault, Marthe, Laudrel and Salavin. There is no basis upon which their killings could be justified at all. Those who interest us here are those who carry out a killing after a ‘prise de conscience’, and who thus have the capacity for ethical revolt.

As we have seen, Camus argues that, in being prepared to sacrifice his own life, Kaliayev rises above nihilism and embodies the quintessential ethical rebel. However, as John Foley points out, “Kaliayev was only one of a number of such ‘scrupulous assassins’ [...]”<sup>260</sup> There are a number of features common to both Kaliayev and Stepan. Both are ‘lucid’ and are in the process of revolt against the unjust régime of the grand duke. Both are prepared to sacrifice their own lives as some sort of justification for their actions. The essential point of difference is that Kaliayev refuses to kill innocent civilians, whereas Stepan is prepared to sacrifice the means for some absolute end.

In his article, Foley lists the criteria which he considers can be distilled from the work of Camus to determine if a killing is ‘legitimate’. According to Foley, the victim must be a tyrant, the act must be discriminate and carried out by a rebel in close physical proximity to the tyrant. Finally, there must be no democratic alternative to murder (p. 213). Stepan’s indiscriminate killing is what

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<sup>260</sup> John Foley. ‘Albert Camus and Political Violence’. *Albert Camus in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: A Reassessment of his Thinking at the Dawn of the New Millennium*. Eds. Christine Margerrison, Mark Orme & Lissa Lincoln. New York: Editions Rodopi B.V, (2008), p. 208.

disqualifies him on this analysis. Foley also discusses Camus' 'requirement' that the killer be prepared to sacrifice his own life in the course of carrying out the killing. Foley notes potential inconsistencies in the notion that the potential loss of one's own life somehow justifies the killing of another. For instance, suggests Foley, "Camus would hardly have suggested that French *résistants* ought to have given themselves up to Nazi justice" (p. 210).

We suggest that Foley's 'test' for whether a killing is legitimate is a classic objective test. He has simply had regard to all of the relevant, surrounding circumstances to determine whether each act is 'reasonable'. Kaliayev's ability to step back before the carriage which contained the children of the grand duke illustrates that he was able to act objectively. Stepan does not have this ability, but he, like Kaliayev, has lucidity.

In *Le Club des Lyonnais* (1929), Duhamel presents us with a group of revolutionaries. Legrain is the pure idealist, one who only participates in the revolution so that he might improve the lot of his people, including his daughter Hélène, who is critically ill with tuberculosis: "Et l'on la fera, la révolution, pour que les enfants ne soient plus jamais élevés dans ces capharnaüms sans lumière où ils respirent seulement l'odeur de la friture et la poussière des tapis" (*CL*, p. 169). He thinks not only of his own daughter, "mais pour toutes les Hélènes de tous les cordonniers du monde" (*CL*, p. 170).

At the other end of the spectrum, we find Bart and Fontaine, who prefigure Stepan of *Les Justes* (1949). Bart scoffs at Legrain's idealism, which he considers naïve: "Ce n'est pas ridicule, c'est gentil, c'est coco, c'est romance" (*CL*, p. 172). The role of the revolutionary, says Bart, "est, essentiellement, de renverser la société actuelle" (*CL*, p. 176). Bart is a true nihilist.

Somewhere between the naïve idealism of Legrain and the absolute nihilism of Bart and Fontaine, lies the measured approach of Beauvoisin, who probably best encapsulates the later attitude of Camus' Kaliayev. He is certainly lucid, and goes into the revolution fully prepared to sacrifice himself, accepting that "je serai tué le premier jour" (*CL*, p. 185). He accepts, as does Kaliayev, that the revolution has an absolute goal, but he is not prepared to sacrifice the means for that end:

En ce moment, nous n'avons qu'une pensée, qu'une fonction, qu'un but: mettre à néant un régime que nous avons condamné, qui, dans ses actes, se condamne chaque jour lui-même. Mais quand l'opération sera faite, il faudra bien que l'intelligence reprenne sa place au premier rang... (*CL*, p. 183).

For Beauvoisin, as it will be for Kaliayev, violence and murder are 'necessary but inexcusable'.

Essentially, there will always be those like Stepan, Bart and Caligula. As East explains, for Camus: "L'injustice qui vient de Dieu n'est pas la seule qui pèse sur l'humanité, il y a celle qui incombe à l'homme. S'il y a beaucoup à admirer chez l'homme, il y a aussi énormément de maux qui lui sont imputables" (p. 148). As Braun notes in relation to Caligula:

In an early outline of the play, after Caligula had been murdered, he was supposed to show his face between the curtains and recite the following words: Non, Caligula n'est pas mort. Il est là, et là. Il est en chacun de vous. Si le pouvoir vous était donné, si vous aviez du cœur, si vous aimiez la vie, vous le verriez se déchaîner ce monstre ou cet ange que vous portez en vous (p. 46).

Similarly, Roger Ikor suggests that for Duhamel, "tout homme, même le plus normal, est un monstre en puissance. De fait, à bien y réfléchir, il nous suffit de nous abandonner à nos pulsions pour devenir des monstres."<sup>261</sup> As Dan Levoyer recognises in *Les Compagnons de l'Apocalypse*

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<sup>261</sup> Roger Ikor. 'Le Jaillissement romanesque chez Georges Duhamel'. *Georges Duhamel: témoin du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle*. Eds. Robert Jouanny and Arlette Lafay. Paris: Minard, (1987), p. 141.

(1956): “L’Apocalypse... Je veux dire le malheur, la souffrance, la mort, l’Apocalypse est en nous” (p. 147).

Duhamel prefers to think of this problem in terms of Freud’s idea of an inferiority/superiority complex. In ‘Les mœurs et les événements’, one of the chapters for *Manuel du Protestataire* (1952), Duhamel describes both complexes as illnesses (p. 74). Duhamel’s description of the man possessed of an inferiority complex closely resembles Salavin: “Il se juge lui-même avec une âpre et douloureuse sévérité. Il prend, à s’humilier, une sorte de plaisir amer où l’observateur peut encore reconnaître une des formes de l’orgueil” (p. 74). What’s more: “Il sait que toutes ses entreprises aboutiront à des échecs [...] le malheureux qui souffre de ce mal est sûr que, par la *force des choses* (our italics), il finira par briser le vase...” (p. 74), or he will seek to escape his feeling of weakness through “quelque manifestation de violence, de brutalité” (p. 75). This is, at least in part, why Salavin feels the urge to reach out for Sureau’s ear.

A person afflicted with this feeling of inferiority often subsequently assumes a superiority complex. Zéphir agrees, describing Salavin as follows: “Tourmenté par le sentiment aigu de son infériorité personnelle, il va tendre de toutes ses forces vers un idéal de supériorité et de grandeur” (*Psychologie de Salavin*, p. 272). Zéphir suggests this is the reason behind Salavin’s continual desire to reinvent himself. (*Psychologie de Salavin*, p. 274). Until he knows he is to die, Salavin is incapable of judging himself objectively.

Duhamel’s own description of the person with a superiority complex is suggestive of the totalitarian, or the doctor in ‘L’origine et prospérité des singes’ (1921): “Il va partir à la conquête

du monde” (*MP*, p. 75). These are the men and women who, as Ouy describes, writing in relation to Duhamel, act out of a “méconnaissance invétérée des lois naturelles” (p. 72).

In *Positions françaises* (1940), Duhamel interrogates the plants in his garden, who all talk of their desire for domination: “Quand une plante de mon jardin parle de son espace vital, c’est qu’elle veut non pas un peu plus de place, c’est qu’elle entend posséder tout le jardin pour elle seule” (p. 49). For Duhamel, there is in man, the same propensity for violence and domination as he sees in the natural world. In the same way as the able gardener allows all varieties to prosper, true civilisation must “exerce sur les sociétés humaines une surveillance inlassable” (p. 50).

In *Nouvelles du sombre empire* (1960), Thomas notes with surprise that there are those in heaven who have tired of their situation and yearn for a return to the ‘sombre empire’. This, Thomas believes, “prouve que la purgatoire est en nous et que nous le portons dans le plus secret de notre être” (p. 118).

Ikor likes to think of this contest as one between “raison objective” and “sensibilité passionnée” (p. 141); in other words, an objective versus a subjective view of the world and one’s actions. In *Manuel du Protestataire*, Duhamel tells us that between these two extremes lies “l’homme raisonnable” (our italics) (p. 75). Immediately, the test of reasonableness imports an objective test, one which, as the very title *Manuel du Protestataire* suggests, requires the catalyst of ethical rebellion.

In summary, there will always be cases where lucidity and revolt lead down the wrong path. Caligula’s being complicit in his own assassination suggests that he too, might have been prepared to sacrifice himself as part of his murderous campaign, yet his revolt, following the

murder of Drusilla, takes no account of his fellow citizens and is certainly not a measured response. His is the indiscriminate response of the plague in *La Peste* (1947), of the floods in Duhamel's *Le Combat* (1913), or, in a modern context, of the "deliberate targeting of civilians" (Foley, p. 220) by suicide bombers.

It is also the indiscriminate response of fate in Duhamel's *La Lumière* (1911): "La force déchaînée frappe ceux qui voient comme ceux qui ne voient pas" (p. 122). When Catherine attempts to justify Blanche's temporary blindness, her language points towards her belief in a sort of religious punishment:

Aux gens qui présument d'eux-mêmes contre toute prudence, ce ne sont pas des accidents qui arrivent, mais des punitions, et quand la punition dépasse la faute, il y a une intention de la nature de faire un bon exemple (p. 102).

This statement from Catherine foreshadows the language used by Paneloux to justify the plague in *La Peste* (1947): "Mes frères, vous êtes dans le malheur, mes frères, vous l'avez mérité" (*La Peste*, p. 91).

We have already considered the Russian revolutionaries described by Duhamel in *Le Voyage de Moscou* (1927). There are suggestions in this work from Duhamel that over and above the violence and mayhem that accompanied the revolution, the rebels were also able to act reasonably: "La révolution «bolcheviste» [...] a réussi, mais en se limitant. Le nouveau régime s'enracine et drageonne avec certitude et lenteur. Il représente, dès maintenant, une puissance nationale, sociale, morale de premier plan" (*VM*, p. 240).

We have also examined the French soldiers described by Duhamel in *Positions françaises* (1940). They seem to satisfy Foley's objective test. They are certainly lucid and in a state of revolt against

a tyrant (Hitler). They have waited until all democratic options have failed and go into battle with the idea that their own lives are at risk. Their response is a measured one. Injured German soldiers are treated on the same basis as the French. Perhaps, for Duhamel, these French soldiers are the quintessential ethical rebels.

In answer to McCarthy's criticisms, identified at the beginning of this chapter, all that Camus asks of his rebels is to act reasonably, not heroically, even if 'acting reasonably amounts to the simple realisation that "we take ourselves largely for granted"' (Nagel, p. 18). In other words, the injustices which give rise to revolt, and the behaviours which flow from it, are to be judged by the ordinary, reasonable man and not the man charged with undertaking the rebellion:

La justice ne tolère pas l'existence de classes sociales dans lesquelles les individus sont maintenus dans des conditions indignes de l'homme, tandis qu'une minorité de privilégiés profitent abusivement de cet état de choses (East, p. 146).

Kaliayev refuses to slaughter innocent children. Rambert, Rieux and Tarrou do not flee the plague. They remain and work patiently, with all their resources of courage and intelligence. Simon's description of Rambert's return to Oran to fight the plague directly links his conduct to all that is reasonable in man:

Rambert [...] rentre dans la ville pestiférée pour reprendre son poste dans la lutte contre le mal: ainsi, représente-t-il, à côté de Rieux et de Tarrou, l'attitude excellemment humaine de la créature raisonnable et libre dans un univers absurde (*Le Combat contre les Mandarins*, p. 117).

One can easily find in the earlier works of Duhamel, evidence of the same shift in the comportment of his genuine rebels. In *La Lumière* (1911), Blanche's indifference melts away to reveal a vibrant, young woman ready to enjoy all that she had previously taken for granted. In *Le Combat* (1913), Gérard's resignation to death is dispelled, ironically, by the lucid acceptance of it.



The timid man who sat by the fire waiting to die now becomes the energetic leader of projects and men. Even Salavin finally abandons his hollow search for reinvention to become the best man he can be. For the first time, he realises that a simple life lived in his beloved Paris with his wife by his side is the recipe for a happiness that had always eluded him.

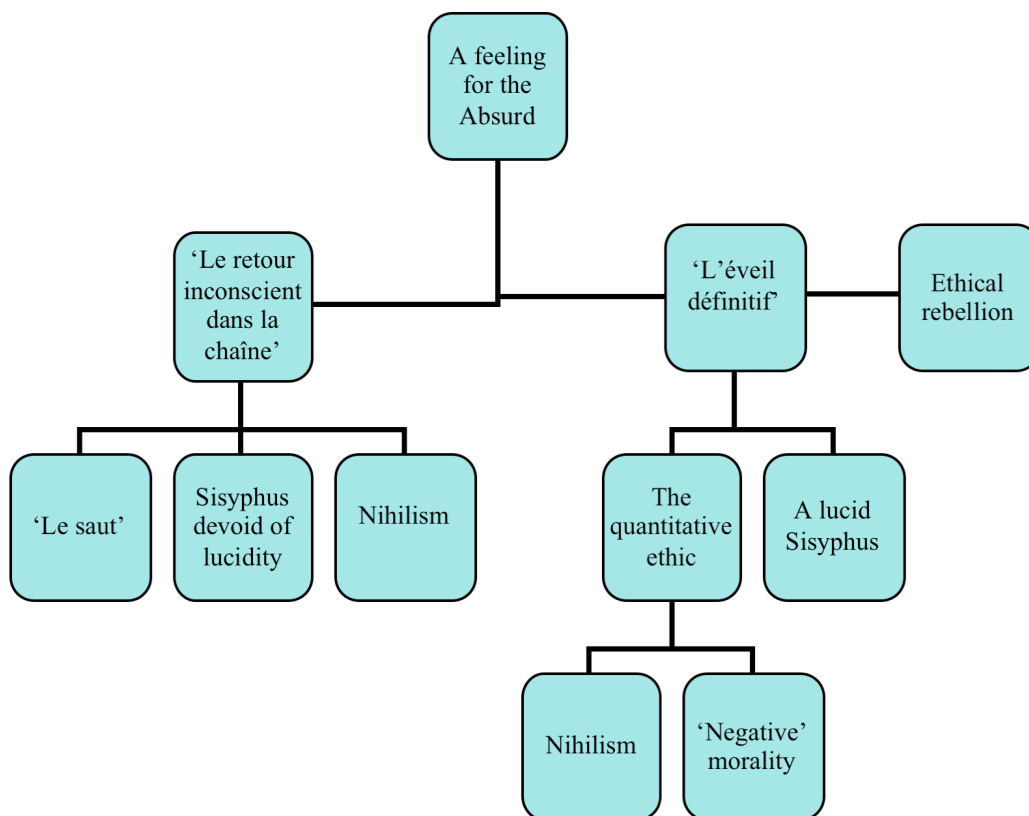
## ***CONCLUSION***

Our analysis has revealed strong evidence that Camus was influenced by Duhamel. In chapter II, we noted how, in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (1942), Camus' description of a man gesticulating while making a call from a telephone booth, mirrored Salavin's observations of M. Jacob in *Confession de Minuit* (1920). In chapter III, we saw how Jean-Baptiste Clamence and Salavin both adopted almost identical responses after failing to go to the aid of persons drowning in the Seine. Later in the same chapter, we identified the fact that Meursault and Duhamel's Fortuné Laudrel commit crimes which remain unexplained, and in respect to which neither protagonist seeks to defend himself.

Indeed, we also considered the possibility of Camus' influence on Duhamel, particularly in the final works of Duhamel's career. In chapter II, we considered the many references to Sisyphus in Duhamel's *Nouvelles du sombre empire* (1960), and to Duhamel's choice of surname for the hero of this work, Thomas Lestrangier.

In our final chapter, we noted Duhamel's use of the phrase '*esprit révolutionnaire*' in *Manuel du Protestataire* (1952), a phrase used much earlier by Camus in his notebooks of February 1938. Given that volume one of Camus' notebooks was not published until 1962, there can be no suggestion that Duhamel borrowed this phrase from Camus. However, the fact that both use precisely the same words when formulating their ideas of what is constituted by ethical rebellion, demonstrates just how closely aligned in their thinking these authors were.

The following framework extracts the fundamental principles from *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* and *L'Homme révolté*; it is equally applicable to the works of Duhamel. This same framework enables us to conclude, but not for the reasons suggested by Peuchmaurd, that Albert Camus was, in many ways, the Georges Duhamel of his generation. Let us now present this framework and summarise our conclusions with reference to it, taking specific examples from the works of both authors.



A feeling for the absurd comes easily to the protagonists of Duhamel and Camus. The old man of Camus' 'L'Ironie', who suddenly discovers the absurd after a long life of routine, is reflected in the works of Duhamel, by the surgeon of *La Possession du monde*, who shares a train carriage with Duhamel. So too, Patrice Périot senses the absurdity of the human condition as he comes to terms with his own customs and habits, which increasingly take him away from his family.

Meursault and Salavin are also entrenched in routines which contribute to a sense in both of the equivalent value of any and all acts.

The lost paradise of 'Entre Oui et non' is felt by Duhamel and manifested in his characters. 'La Chambre de l'horloge' presents us with the symbol of a huge clock that counts down the seconds towards an inevitable demise. Laurent Pasquier also experiences the absurd primarily as a function of the quickening of time, and longs for the unencumbered joy of his youth. When confronted by the image of youth in the form of his assistant Laure, Renault Censier suddenly discovers that he has missed his calling as a man, echoing the classic Camusian formulation of the absurd as a confrontation between the desire for life and the awareness of an inevitable death. Suzanne Pasquier returns from Nesles with a sense of nostalgia for the simple existence she lived there, a life which dissolves as soon as she resumes her old ways in the theatre. Even the calculating Joseph Pasquier experiences a feeling for the absurd which follows a visit with Laurent to the grave of their father.

Duhamel and Camus agree that man's subjective interpretation of his environment brings about a rift with the natural world and gives birth to a feeling for the absurd. When their mood is portrayed as at odds with the natural world, the protagonists of both authors are shown to experience a sense of being alone in a foreign environment. Camus suggests that from time to time, natural phenomena may seem alien or indomitable to the beholder. This is something that Salavin and also Sartre's Roquentin both experience when gazing at the roots of a tree. Meursault's drowsiness is so at odds with the heat of the day that nature even appears to become openly hostile and, ultimately, a party to murder. Thomas Lestrangier languishes in the starkly

foreign landscape of the '*sombre empire*', and is overcome with a sense of nostalgia for his life on earth and for the simple things he had previously taken for granted.

A sense of the absurd also afflicts Marthe in *Le Malentendu*, as she increasingly feels exiled from her mother. Salavin feels so alienated by the hum and whir of his work surroundings and by his colleagues, that he succumbs to a strange desire to reach out for the ear of his employer. As Mersault languishes in Prague, speculating upon the source of a strange malaise, he feels acutely aware of the lives of the strangers going on behind the walls. Salavin, too, wanders the streets of a city, this time Marseille, feeling the ebb and the flow of the human tide; he also feels the 'call to life and invitation to death' of the sea, as expounded by Camus in his *Journaux de Voyage*. Neither Mersault nor Salavin is capable of lasting human relationships. Mersault leaves the home he shares with friends out of a concern he might be loved. Salavin's intimate relationship with Loisel cannot endure when both protagonists are strangers to themselves.

Like Clamence, Salavin will carry within him, a permanently present alien world in the form of his thoughts. A feeling for the absurd will afflict both protagonists when reality fails to match the heroic vision that each has constructed of himself. Neither will have the courage to go to the aid of people drowning in the Seine.

A feeling for the absurd generally presents the Camusian protagonist with two alternatives, both of which Duhamel also offers to his own characters. Between 'le retour inconscient dans la chaîne' and 'l'éveil définitif', the road is long and perilous. The temptation to return to a life commanded by habit and routine is strong; working in an office or factory simply to support one's family is a dreary, life-denying route to old age and death. The suggestion from both authors is to

remain 'disinterested', to look for long-term joys rather than short-term pleasure. However, this is only a partial solution, since money is a necessity and so, therefore, is work.

The 'logical' solution to this problem is treated by both authors. Salavin realises with horror that he has speculated upon the death of his mother in order to inherit her modest estate. In his dreams (his reality?), he kills off Gigon to assume his place at work and divests a passer-by of his wallet. Mersault kills Zagreus and steals his money. Similarly, Joseph Pasquier crushes all in his pursuit of wealth.

Even if one is passionate about one's work, pitfalls remain. Family and social demands compete with one another. Camus' Jonas and Duhamel's Périot exemplify the risks in failing to find the right balance between 'solitaire et solidaire, or 'connu et ignoré'. After being reinvented by Poirier, Cyprien Ricord, too, would yearn for the simple days of his former life.

For the man who is not yet lucid, it is tempting to look for the 'second sens de notre vie', a rule of life or absolute that might give life a sense of order and unity that a feeling for the absurd has destroyed. Belief systems which propound the immortality of the soul offer one solution, but not one espoused by either writer. The absurd cannot exist if God does. How might one then explain the gratuitous feelings of overwhelming joy that one might experience from time to time, if not on the basis of some higher order? Camus experiences the 'pantheistic upsurge' when he is in intimate contact with the natural world, as in *Noces*. Duhamel experiences the same feeling of 'grace' when he gazes upon an osier bed.

On the basis of what they see as its inherent injustice, both Duhamel and Camus reject the comfort of religion. Similarly, science which proposes to explain all ends by mythologising and

technology has the potential to lead to the destruction of mankind. In the presumed absence of God, Salavin is Sisyphus without lucidity, continuously seeking a new rule of life when the last fails. He is denied at every turn; heroism, friendship and political action all fail to provide him with a sense of fulfillment.

One further temptation remains; that of indifference. If Roblès is right, then Camus used his own indifference as a shield against an unforgiving world. In *La Lumière*, Bernard identifies this ‘abnormality’ in Blanche, one which sees her turn away from the world in favour of the darkness of the home she shares with him. So too, Salavin retreats to the safety of his canapé, to be alone with his thoughts when the world rejects him.

Indifference leads to nihilism when values lose meaning. The works of both Camus and Duhamel confirm that nihilism may precede absolute lucidity, although Caligula confirms that, *a fortiori*, it may result *from* lucidity. The best examples of nihilism preceding lucidity are conveyed by the characters of Meursault and Salavin; Duhamel’s Fortuné Laudrel is also relevant in this context.

Overwhelmed by a feeling that all things have assumed an equal value, Salavin reaches out for his employer’s ear and Meursault shoots an Arab; Laudrel lodges an axe in the throat of his friend Ginest. Not one of the characters seems to understand that he has done anything wrong.

Salavin has previously felt the impulse to think of himself as God-like, although he is a God of whom his acquaintance Delauney can ask nothing. In *Nouvelle Rencontre de Salavin*, things take on more sinister overtones, when he dreams of killing Gigon and assuming his place at work. When Salavin seeks to deny his past and to begin again from point zero, he is as convincing as the emperor in *Caligula*.

Taking advantage of a community in the grip of the plague, in *La Peste*, Cottard profits from the suffering of others. We have seen how, in the works of Duhamel, Cottard is reflected by Joseph Pasquier and Félix Tallemand. Joseph takes advantage of war by selling arms to the participants, and Tallemand, with the encouragement of the Occupier, fraudulently acquires Winterburg's interest in the business.

The works of both authors imply that the principal benefit to be gained from a feeling for the absurd is that it invites further reflection, and may lead to what Camus calls 'l'éveil définitif', a profound awareness of the truth of the universal death penalty. Lieutenant Dauche illustrates for us the gulf which separates an emotional and intellectual appreciation for the absurd. With the death of Dauche, the protagonist moves from 'knowing' that he will ultimately die, to having that fact 'truly register' within him.

Camus only needed illness and the wind of Djémila for his own 'crise de conscience'. Both authors accept that, for others, a catalyst may be required. Thus, they both set out to 'créer des morts conscientes' in their works. Caligula endures the death of his sister and Dr Rieux comes into intimate contact with the plague. The Fromond family survives an atomic blast. Patrice Périot endures the suicide of his son Hervé. For Meursault and Salavin, nothing less than an awareness of their own imminent deaths can grant them lucidity. Similarly, in *Le Combat*, Gérard needs to be told that he is dying in order that he might rebel against fate and against the inherent injustice of the human condition.

The 'quantitative ethic' of *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* also lies in wait for the lucid being. If the quantity of experiences matters, rather than their quality, then morally sustainable deeds have the same



value as murder. This is the ‘negative morality’ of characters such as Raymond Pasquier, who, with his love of women and a passionate existence, exemplifies Don Juan. However, he lacks ‘disinterest’; when seeking to reinvent himself as a grand writer or doctor, he is motivated purely by money and a wish to attain prestige.

Prior to achieving lucidity, Suzanne Pasquier embodies the quantitative, passionate existence of the actor of *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*. She loves the game which, each night, is a substitute for reality.

Camus’ ‘new conqueror’ is the intelligent man who ‘consents to serve the masses’. When we read Duhamel’s description of the experiment at Créteil, and we see his own ‘conquérant’ in *La Possession du monde*, we can speculate that he, too, conceives of a similar being. In his works, the new conqueror is best represented by Laurent, who, despite being lucid, initially surrounds himself with ‘les hommes en qui l’étincelle est une vraie lumière’, in the hope that one day he might join them.

A lucid Sisyphus could also be said to be represented in the works of Duhamel by Patrice Périot, who, after the suicide of Hervé, assumes the burden of the human condition without any overt revolt.

Looking beyond the ‘accidental morality’ or ‘defiance’ of *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, Camus turns to metaphysical rebellion, which serves as the archetype for rebellion against all political régimes which countenance murder. We have seen how the theme of rebellion is also frequent in the works of Duhamel. As in Camus, the act of rebellion reveals to the rebel things valuable and common to humanity. With war as his own catalyst, Duhamel rediscovers the value of sympathy and of a respect for human dignity. Like Camus, in the course of his revolt, Duhamel also

rediscovers the joy of communion with the natural world. *La Lumière* and *Le Combat* provide the finest examples.

A sense of solidarity born from revolt enables Camus to rebel against the injustices in Spain and Algeria. Duhamel assumes the role of ‘avocat de la vie’ for wounded and dying soldiers. Laurent Pasquier uses a rebellion born from war to move beyond his status as a ‘new conqueror’ to formulate his life’s motto of ‘miracle n’est pas œuvre’. This is also the governing principle of Dr. Rieux in *La Peste*.

We have seen how revolt enables the protagonist to view himself objectively and to achieve a morally sustainable course of conduct. Imbued with ‘*l’esprit révolutionnaire*’, Duhamel’s ‘*homme raisonnable*’ is surely the quintessential Camusian rebel. By refusing to take their worlds for granted, Salavin and Meursault become, in Camus’ terms, ‘reasonable’ men. The deepened understanding provided by this thesis of the similarities in personality and world-view of these two major characters, and of other characters in the works of both authors, as well as the convergences of plot and the preoccupations of Camus and Duhamel themselves, open up new fields of understanding which deserve to be further explored.

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