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GLADSKY, RITA HOLMES. An Analysis of the Use of Height in the Prose Fiction of Albert Camus. (1974) Directed by: Dr. Roch Smith. Pp. 100.

In Le Mythe de Sisyphe (1941), Camus introduced the metaphor which most aptly and succinctly expressed his view of the human condition. Both his thought and his art can be at least partially measured through his use and refinement of the Sisyphus metaphor which unites all his work. Within this basic image of ascent, height, and descent, Camus incorporates the romantic elements of the solitary figure, height, and the landscape to symbolize the dilemma of modern man. In fact, his adoption of these basic patterns, postures, and themes invites a comparison with romanticism.

Camus' use of the height motif reveals the development of his philosophy and indicates his departure from romanticism. In the early work, L'Etranger, the height motif is incomplete and somewhat inconclusive. But by the time of La Peste, La Chute, and L'Exil et le royaume, the Sisyphus metaphor is in the foreground and the structure of his fiction is centered around it. Moreover, in the early fiction, most notably La Peste, height assumes a positive significance when it becomes not only the occasion for the confrontation with the absurd but also the occasion for the critical moment of friendship between Rieux and Tarrou. As Camus develops his philosophical response to the absurd, it becomes unquestionably clear that high places no longer suffice. The height

of the romantics is a fantasy, a hiding place. Camus undercuts the illusions of Clamence and Daru by contrasting their feeling of false grandeur and their isolation with those who humbly descend and reject the grandeur of isolation in favor of the solidarity of man. Camus' departure from the traditional romantic use of height is a sign-post of his own developing moral vision.

In his final short story "La Pierre qui pousse" Camus' vision reaches full clarity of expression when the Sisyphus metaphor attains dramatic proportions. D'Arrast's descent from the balcony into the life on the streets poignantly illustrates Camus' ideal. In a moment of awareness he chooses to leave the exile of isolation and go down into the streets, to rejoin the world of men and human suffering. Through this symbolic gesture, d'Arrast moves toward the kingdom of man. Camus' kingdom, his ideal, therefore, is not a celestial one, but an earthly one in which man can view the world and those around him from a less exalted position.

AN ANALYSIS OF THE USE OF HEIGHT

"
IN THE PROSE FICTION OF

ALBERT CAMUS

by

Rita Holmes Gladsky

A Thesis Submitted to
the Faculty of the Graduate School at
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APPROVAL PAGE

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	v
INTRODUCTION	1
<u>L'ETRANGER</u> : EARLY APPEARANCE AND USE OF THE HEIGHT MOTIF	22
<u>LA PESTE</u> : EVOLUTION OF A PHILOSOPHY AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE HEIGHT MOTIF	37
<u>LA CHUTE</u> : THE IRONIC USE OF THE HEIGHT MOTIF	54
<u>L'EXIL ET LE ROYAUME</u> : THE HEIGHT MOTIF AND THE QUEST FOR THE KINGDOM	66
CONCLUSION	94
BIBLIOGRAPHY	99

ABBREVIATIONS

ET L'Etranger

LP La Peste

LC La Chute

ER L'Exil et le royaume

The above abbreviations are used in parenthetical textual notes to refer to the various works. All page references to these works are to:

Albert Camus, Théâtre, récits, nouvelles (Paris:1967).

The following abbreviations will also be used for those works which appear under separate publication:

MS Albert Camus, Le Mythe de Sisyphe (Paris:1942).

E Albert Camus, Essais (Paris:1965).

HR Albert Camus, L'Homme révolté (Paris:1951).

N Albert Camus, Noces, L'Eté (Paris:1959).

CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

The prose fiction of Albert Camus attempts to define and describe the fundamental problem besetting twentieth-century man: that of the meaning of existence in a universe in which death, suffering, and injustice are a part of the reality of life. These aspects of the human condition have been dealt with in much of western literature since the Renaissance. For example, Voltaire, envisioning men as mice in the Divine Architect's creation, articulates through *Candide* the question of the presence of evil in the world. The dervish answers: "Qu'importe . . . qu'il y ait du mal ou du bien? Quand sa Hautesse envoie un vaisseau en Egypte, s'embarrasse-t-elle si les souris qui sont dans le vaisseau sont à leur aise ou non?"¹ Voltaire's conclusion is clear: provided that the great machine of the universe continues to function, human lives are of little importance. The number of sufferers is limitless and nature diminishes the individual. With *Candide* and the work of Voltaire especially in mind, René Pomeau remarks that "Voltaire, et particulièrement ce conte . . . vont dans le sens de civilisation qui, depuis la Renaissance, écarte Dieu de l'homme . . . la grande affaire

¹Voltaire, *Candide* (Paris:1939), p. 65.

n'est plus le rapport de l'homme à Dieu, mais de l'homme au monde."² Voltaire's inability to reconcile logically the presence of evil and suffering with the existence of a providential God illustrates the prevalent anti-theistic philosophy of the eighteenth century. The heroic attempt of the early romantics to connect man and God through the grandeur of nature soon succumbed to the revelations of science so that, just a few decades later, writers would proclaim that not only was God dead but that the universe was itself hostile.

Inheriting a dead God and an unresponsive and inscrutable universe from the nineteenth century, Albert Camus in his writing deals with the clash between the inexplicable universe and man's desire for clarity. To describe this encounter he uses the word absurd. For Camus the absurd is the conflict between man's awareness of death and his desire for life. It is an opposition between the demand for explanation and the mystery of all existence.

The problem of the absurd had been dealt with by other writers before Camus, as Philip Thody points out: "As early as 1926 André Malraux had dealt quite fully with it in La Tentation de l'Occident and, in 1928 had made of Garine, the hero of Les Conquérants, a man who rejected normal society

²René Pomeau, La Religion de Voltaire (Paris:1956), pp. 312-313.

because of its absurdity in his eyes. In 1939 Sartre's La Nausée had been devoted to the expression of the absurdity of all existence."³ Thody further remarks, however, that Camus' uniqueness lay in his refusal to consider the absurd strictly as an affirmation of man's hopeless condition. "Camus showed . . . that the absurdity of the world was, paradoxically enough, an invitation to happiness."⁴

An examination of the underlying themes in Camus clearly illustrates his contention that it is man's role in nature to be happy. Man's only certainties are his joy in nature, the total enjoyment of the present, and the conjunction of happiness and absurdity. Camus repeatedly reaffirms that revolt in the name of life leads to an awareness of a happiness that can belong to man only through his allegiance to life on this earth.

The absurd, manifested in various forms, serves as the unifying theme in the fiction of Albert Camus. Through the recognition of the divorce between man and the inscrutable universe Camus attempts to extract values and a ground for action which give meaning to an absurd existence. However, for Camus, the description of the absurd is not an end in

³Philip Thody, Albert Camus: A Biographical Study (London:1961), p. 54.

⁴Ibid.

itself, but a point of departure. His thinking reflects a quest for new values suitable to the needs of twentieth-century man who no longer can accept traditional Christian morality and truth, and who rejects a rationalistic humanism which leads to totalitarian enslavement.⁵ Ultimately, Camus attempts to come to terms with the absurdity of existence through man himself without the help of religion or rationalist thought.

Conscious awareness, confrontation, and the subsequent reaction to the absurd are the three elements which comprise a pivotal structure around which Camus develops the plots of most of his narrative works. The combined factors of height, ascent, and descent, and the accompanying epiphany or confrontation are concomitant with this basic fictional technique. Each of these elements reinforces thematically the basic Camus formula of awareness, confrontation and reaction.

The structural importance of the spatial aspects of height, ascent, and descent in Camus' writing has received little attention, with the exception of the observations of Denis Baril and Georges Pomet. Denis Baril has cited the

⁵Camus, in L'Homme révolté criticizes both Christianity and the nihilist doctrines which he sees as doctrines of injustice. He argues that Christianity is founded upon the sacrifice of the innocent and the passive acceptance of this situation. He further points out that Hegelianism abolishes all values, thus sacrificing the individual to history. Camus attempts to recreate a humanism which recognizes respect for the integrity of the individual.

frequent use of the balcony in Camus as a means by which the characters experience a state of well-being by opposing the balcony to its counterpart, the stifling, confining cave image of the closed room.⁶ Baril notices that the feeling of pleasure which the balcony offers is associated with a closer contact with the natural world of sky, space, sun, night, and wind. The balcony represents a refusal of the secure, closed refuge and a physical means by which the individual rejects closeness with humanity. Baril further maintains that the balcony is often "une tentation, toujours une illusion, rapidement dissipée,"⁷ and that Camus criticizes "la situation privilégiée de l'observateur, de l'acteur, de l'écrivain, de l'homme qui croit se ménager une position supérieure."⁸

Georges Pomet, limiting his discussion of Camus to the opposition of closed and open spaces in L'Etranger, establishes, on the other hand, the significance of the balcony as an extension of the secure, closed space.⁹ For Pomet the balcony becomes the closed space that

⁶Denis Baril, "La cave et le balcon, note sur un aspect de l'imagination spatiale dans les récits d'Albert Camus," Circé, no. 2 (1971), pp. 293-304.

⁷Ibid., p. 304.

⁸Ibid., p. 303.

⁹Georges Pomet, "La structure de l'espace dans L'Etranger," Etudes Françaises (Nov. 1971), pp. 359-372.

can be penetrated at will, an extension to the exterior which still remains a part of the interior. He adds, too, that it is only in this kind of spatial structure that Meursault is at ease. But, Pomet considers the closed space as the only milieu conducive to an awareness and an affirmation of the self. He emphasizes that the oppositions of closed and open spaces "conduisent Meursault à opérer cette rentrée en lui-même, cette appropriation de soi qui est le but de sa quête et la justification de l'oeuvre."¹⁰

Concerned primarily with the isolated factor of the balcony in opposition to the closed space, neither critic examines the height motif in association with a three-fold structure. Nor do they consider the height element as part of a thematic turning point in the structures of the novels and short stories in which it appears. The frequent appearance of the balcony and other elevated places suggests that they are a part of a planned framework in Camus' narratives. An analysis of the height motif together with the movements and epiphany which complete the structure will show that the height element is closely tied to the confrontation of the absurd and that the movement or lack of movement is crucial to the statement of Camus' themes.

The frequent and explicit use of height in Camus is similar to the use of the same motif by romantic writers of

¹⁰Pomet, p. 370

the nineteenth century. An examination of the use of the motif in western literature, with emphasis upon the romantic movement will serve as a point of comparison with Camus. While there are similarities between the romantic and the Camus usage, there are, however, distinguishing features in both presentations. These differences are brought about by the evolution from a romantic literature to a more realistic, ironic literature which deals with a less innocent world of experience.

The image of man, elevated and placed against the landscape finds its initial expression as far back as the Old Testament. The melancholy insignificance and littleness of man and the plenitude, sublimity, terror, energy and overwhelming power of God and the universe are contrasted in Job's comments in the climax of the Book of Job:

Who has cleft a channel for the torrents
of rain, and a way for the thunderbolt,
to bring rain on a land where no man is,
on the desert in which there is no man;
to satisfy the waste and desolate land,
and to make the ground put forth grass?
(38:25-27)¹¹

The relationship of man to God and to the universe has been a major human preoccupation and consequently a major literary theme throughout the ages. The use of the image of man positioned against the landscape seems to be coincident with

¹¹Old Testament--Revised Standard Edition.

modern literature's increased probing of the heretofore fixed relationship between man and God. The wider the separation between man and God, the more frequent the use of the image.

From Job's observation that the universe is inscrutable to Sisyphus' mute but lucid reconciliation to the world and his fate, man's attitudes toward existence and God have undergone considerable alterations. The image of man in juxtaposition with the landscape has also undergone significant change in meaning. Challenging the values of order, harmony, and structure espoused by the classical French mind, the romantic movement reintroduced into literature that element which defied these very principles--nature itself. The impetus for this new movement in which nature enjoyed a dominant role is found in Rousseau. Here the idea of nature reaches its most revolutionary and meaningful expression. Through Rousseau the natural landscape became not an incidental or occasional backdrop for the action, but a dominant and key force. Daniel Mornet, focusing on La Nouvelle Héloïse, explains Rousseau's new application of nature in literature.

C'est par cette puissance d'aimer que La Nouvelle Héloïse . . . a recréé le sentiment de la nature. Le goût de la campagne et même de la nature existe avant Jean-Jacques, chez La Fontaine, Mme. de Sévigné . . . mais c'est un goût, un des plaisirs de la vie comme la conversation. . . . La nouveauté du sentiment de la nature dans La Nouvelle Héloïse, c'est . . . qu'il est l'amour la communion. C'est que dans les montagnes . . . dans les clairs de lune,

Saint-Preux et Julie trouvent les confidences de leur âme. C'est qu'au lieu d'être un divertissement . . . la nature devient la conseillère, la consolatrice et que par elle le coeur et l'amour disposent de la diversité et de l'immensité du monde.¹²

According to Pierre Martino, it is with Rousseau that the classical doctrines are challenged. Offering sentiment, nature, religion, emotion and lyricism in opposition to what had been "rational, philosophical, and worldly,"¹³ Rousseau prepared the way for a literature of emotions which was finally to replace a literature of ideas.

The use of the landscape, of the panoramic view of wild and untamed nature was to become a distinctive feature of the literature of the romantic period. The thrust of the romantic movement was the emphasis upon inspiration and imagination leading to the individual's unique perception of the universe and its relationship to him. For the early romantic, the new awareness of the natural world was both overwhelming and terrifyingly powerful. In "L'Automne," Lamartine establishes the correspondence between nature and the soul of the poet:

¹²Daniel Mornet, La Nouvelle Héloïse de Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Etude et analyse (Paris:1957), p. 61.

¹³Pierre Martino, L'Epoque romantique en France (Paris:1944), pp. 18-19. Translation mine.

Oui, dans ces jours d'automne où la
 nature expire,
 A ces regards voilés je trouve plus
 d'attraits;
 C'est l'adieu d'un ami, c'est le dernier
 sourire
 Des lèvres que la mort va fermer pour jamais.

(lines 9-12)¹⁴

Generally, the power and beauty of the natural landscape was associated with God. In Atala, Chateaubriand provides Père Aubry with a mountaintop from which he can worship God: ". . . Il étoit allé contempler les beautés du ciel et pour prier Dieu sur le sommet de la montagne . . . c'étoit assez sa coutume . . . aimant à voir les forêts balancer leurs cimes dépouillées, les nuages voler dans les cieux, et à entendre les vens et les torrens gronder dans la solitude."¹⁵ The relationship between nature and God, between nature and the soul of man reaches its peak of intimacy with such writers as Lamartine and Chateaubriand. Nature, in effect, became the mystical mediator, the harmonious link between man and the Almighty. Marjorie Nicolson notes that: "The 'pleasure' man felt in mountain and ocean, in stars and space, lay in the enlargement of the soul to experience more completely the powers, desires, and aspirations given by its great Original, the true Infinite."¹⁶ This particular way

¹⁴A. de Lamartine, Méditations poétiques (Paris:1942), p. 61.

¹⁵François René de Chateaubriand, Atala-René (Paris: 1956), p. 70.

¹⁶Marjorie Nicolson, Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory (Ithaca:1959), p. 321.

of perceiving the natural world came to be, for the romantic, as Morse Peckham describes, "a unique, superior, transcendent mode of experience, to be achieved only after long preparations, great difficulty, and profound introspection."¹⁷

But this experience, however mystical and pleasurable, proved only to be temporary and thus not quite satisfactory. Those writers who followed Lamartine and Chateaubriand began to view nature in another way. Vigny, most notably, sees nature as endowed with powers and qualities unsympathetic to man. The use of the landscape does not decrease but its relationship to man is now described in hostile terms. Vigny, acutely aware that nature is indifferent to man and that the natural world diminishes him, rejects the idea of a consoling universe:

Vivez, froide Nature, et revivez sans cesse
 Sur nos pieds, sur nos fronts, puisque c'est
 votre loi;
 Vivez et dédaignez, si vous êtes déesse,
 L'homme, humble passager, qui dût vous
 être un roi;
 Plus que tout votre règne et que ses
 splendeurs vaines,
 J'aime la majesté des souffrances humaines:
 Vous ne recevrez pas un cri d'amour de moi.

"La Maison du Berger" (lines 316-322)¹⁸

¹⁷Morse Peckham, The Triumph of Romanticism (Columbia: 1970), p. 25.

¹⁸Alfred de Vigny, Poésies choisies (Paris:1935), p. 35.

Not only is nature unresponsive, but her very beauty and powers are an insult to mortal man. Nature is eternal and has no soul; man, on the contrary, is condemned to feel, to suffer, and to die.

For Vigny, the natural world is viewed as a hostile reality. His stoic refusal to love nature leads to a defiant silence before an indifferent God and an unyielding universe. The mystical union of man, nature, and God has vanished. Nature becomes the object and man is the subject. Between the two a breach has developed that will last into the twentieth century. In Vigny, this divorce between man and nature is related to the separation between man and God. To emphasize this separation Vigny utilizes the image of man positioned against the landscape. Moses is placed high on a mountain top, which offers him a panoramic view of the natural world and underlines his separation from his people:

Du stérile Nébo gravissant la montagne,
Moïse, homme de Dieu, s'arrête, et, sans
orgueil,
Sur le vaste horizon promène un long
coup d'oeil.

"Moïse" (lines 7-9)¹⁹

Moses' complaint to God emphasizes his isolation and exile and his desire to rejoin his people, to re-enter the world of human joys and sufferings:

¹⁹Vigny, p. 18.

Il disait au Seigneur: "Ne finirai-je
pas?
Où voulez-vous que je porte mes pas?
Je vivrai donc toujours puissant et
solitaire?
Laissez-moi m'endormir du sommeil de
la terre.

(lines 47-50)²⁰

Again in "Le Mont des Oliviers," the figure of Christ appears alone on a hillside. Against a natural backdrop he entreats God to answer his cries of anguish:

Il se courbe à genoux, le front contre
la terre:
Puis regarde le ciel en l'appellant:
"Mon Père!"
--Mais le ciel reste noir, et Dieu ne
répond pas.

(lines 11-13)²¹

The unresponsive, mute landscape as well as a silent God reaffirm the human condition--man is alone in a hostile universe. The final stanza of "Le Mont des Oliviers" expresses the ultimate grandeur of Vigny's defiant silence:

S'il est vrai qu'au Jardin sacré des
Ecritures,
Le fils de l'Homme ait dit ce qu'on
voit rapporté;
Muet, aveugle et sourd au cris des
créatures,
Si le ciel nous laissa comme un monde
avorté,

²⁰Ibid., p. 19.

²¹Ibid., p. 100.

Le juste opposera le dédain à l'absence,
 Et ne répondra plus que par un froid
 silence
 Au silence éternel de la Divinité.

(lines 143-149)²²

The same stoic attitude anticipates Camus' Dr. Rieux in La Peste who declares that since the order of the universe is ruled by death and suffering, "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 le ciel où il se tait" (LP, 1323).

In Stendhal, the power and grandeur of the natural world, which Vigny has seen as diminishing man's importance refreshes the hero's aspiration to a power and greatness in the moral sphere. Stendhal uses the natural landscape in Le Rouge et le noir as a contrast to the stifling effects of society and its restrictions. He places Julien Sorel against the panoramic landscape to allow his hero to articulate his desire for greatness--a greatness that is matched by the beauty and power of the natural world which he confronts and admires: "Julien . . . monta dans les grands bois . . . il avait besoin d'y voir clair dans son âme, et de donner audience à la foule de sentiments qui l'agitaient. . . . Bientôt il se trouva debout sur un roc immense et bien sûr d'être séparé de tous les hommes. Cette position le fit sourire,

²²Vigny, p. 107.

elle peignait la position qu'il brûlait d'atteindre au moral."²³ With Stendhal and Vigny, the individual is freed from his melancholy search for spiritual affirmation in the noumenal world. It is now the objective reality of the phenomenal world, however hostile, that provides the stimulus for a search for value within. Later, however, in the last half of the nineteenth century, Nietzsche proclaims that ". . . this is neither a world which once held value nor a world which holds value now or will ever hold it. It is without value, without meaning. The world is nothing."²⁴ Man deprived of God in the universe no longer seeks proof of a divine presence in the natural world. Left to struggle without traditional laws and to create new responsibilities for himself the Nietzschean hero embodies a total will to power. The use of the landscape in literature, the way in which the individual perceives the reality of the natural world undergoes a profound change.

One of the dominant landscape images of the twentieth century is that of the wasteland in which nature is reduced to a barren, lifeless desert. The symbolic desert in such writers as T. S. Eliot, Beckett, Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and the young Malraux is used to reflect the inner desert of man who is deprived of his God. T. S. Eliot in his poetry maintains that the wasteland exists because we are not able to

²³Stendhal, Le Rouge et le noir (Paris:1972), p. 69.

²⁴cited in Peckham, p. 32.

see the natural world in any other way. We have taken God out of the world. Eliot urges man to "come in under the shadow of this red rock"²⁵ where there is water and all will change.

To summarize, the image of man, elevated and fixed against the panoramic landscape, appears as early as the Old Testament, when Job utters the first cry of existential anguish. Later, in the nineteenth century, the image becomes almost a cliché in romantic literature. For the romantic hero God was a fundamental link between man and the universe. In Vigny, the unresponsiveness and indifference of God and the natural world changes man's perspectives: man no longer searched for meaning and spiritual truth in the natural world. The breach between man and God and between the individual and nature becomes finalized when Nietzsche proclaims that the world holds no value.

Utilizing this same image of elevated man positioned against the natural world, Camus adapts and alters it to suit the themes of a literature which is not romantic but ironic. In Camus, the absurd hero is also the ironic hero who, separated and exiled, guilty and yet innocent, confronts the wasteland. To the original image Camus adds dimensions of ascent and descent which are as important to the statement of his themes as the confrontation with the absurd.

²⁵"The Waste Land" in The Complete Poems and Plays of T. S. Eliot (New York:1962), p. 38.

The use of the height motif, the wasteland image, and the movement of ascent and descent find their initial expression in Camus in the absurd hero, Sisyphus. In Le Mythe de Sisyphe, Camus brings together the three elements that make up the metaphor: the absurd hero Sisyphus, the height motif and the landscape. This central metaphor recurs in all of Camus' work and expresses his major preoccupation with the human condition.

Sisyphus is a typically ironic hero--he knows that he is foredoomed to defeat and condemned to bondage. Northrop Frye points to the isolation of the ironic figure from his society, and also remarks that the ironic hero is neither guilty nor innocent, "for he is innocent in the sense that what happens to him is far greater than anything he has done provokes," and "he is guilty in the sense that he is a member of a guilty society or living in a world where such injustices are a part of existence."²⁶

Sisyphus knows his task is futile, but he seeks no divine revelation, no cosmic explanation to provide him with hope of future deliverance. He has overcome his condition and he is master of his destiny because he lucidly rejects hope. It is significant that Camus does not allow Sisyphus one moment at the summit to look beyond the mountain: "Tout au bout de ce long effort mesuré par l'espace sans ciel et

²⁶Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays (Princeton:1957), pp. 41-42.

le temps sans profondeur, le but est atteint. Sisyphe regarde alors la pierre dévaler en quelques instants vers ce monde inférieur d'où il faudra la remonter vers les sommets" (MS, 49). For Sisyphus, the reality of the universe is his stone, his mountain, and the underworld. He does not look to the heavens, but only to himself and the task at hand. Sisyphus, unlike Job, knows that it is futile to engage in dialog with the universe. Aware of the contradiction between the beauty and mystery of the physical world, and longing for coherence, he maintains a tension, born of the conflict between the irrationality of the universe and the desire for coherence, which allows him to accept the reality of his existence. Sisyphus embodies the ideals of an absurd existence: it is the triumph of a moral independence.

The wasteland imagery of the twentieth century is a fitting backdrop for many of Camus' novels and short stories. Most notable is the desert landscape which dominates in L'Etranger, La Peste, La Femme adultère, Le Renégat, and L'Hôte. However, Camus' use of the desert landscape is unique in that he extracts from an otherwise barren and sterile nature an abundance of pleasure and joy. He describes in "Le Vent à Djemila" the particular type of pleasure the desert offers: "Dans cette splendeur aride . . . le vent à peine senti au début de l'après-midi, semblait grandir. . . . Sans arrêt il sifflait avec force à travers les ruines. . . . Je me sentais claquer au vent comme une mâtore. Creusé

par le milieu, les yeux brûlés, les lèvres craquantes, ma peau se desséchait jusque'à ne plus être la mienne. Par elle, auparavant, je déchiffrais l'écriture du monde" (N, 49).

This intimate relation of the human figure to the force of nature affirms the particular joy and pleasure derived from the touch of the wind. Nature reveals a part of itself through the sense of touch. Similarly, Tarrou's and Rieux's swim in La Peste and that of Meursault in L'Etranger are a source of happiness and another way of uniting man with nature. In Camus, tactile response is the only way through which man can "know" and interpret the world: "Entre ce ciel et ces visages tournés vers lui, rien où accrocher une mythologie, une littérature, une éthique ou une religion mais des pierres, la chair, des étoiles et ces vérités que la main peut toucher" (N, 49).

Camus does not attempt to "know" the world in any other way for he is aware of its contradictions. In Le Mythe de Sisyphe he explains the strangeness and indifference of the landscape and nature: ". . . s'apercevoir que le monde est 'épais,' entrevoir à quel point une pierre est étrange, nous est irréductible, avec quelle intensité la nature, un paysage peut nous nier. Au fond de cette beauté gît quelque chose d'inhumain et ces collines, la douceur de ciel, ces dessins d'arbres . . . perdent le sens illusoire dont nous les revêtions . . . l'hostilité primitive du monde . . . remonte vers nous" (MS, 28). Further, he affirms that although the

physical world can be described in scientific terms, its ultimate reality remains veiled and therefore inaccessible to human understanding: ". . . Je comprends que si je puis par la science saisir les phénomènes et les énumérer, je ne puis par autant appréhender le monde" (MS, 36). Nature to Camus is ambiguous: it placates and denies man simultaneously. He further states that "Si l'homme reconnaissait que l'univers lui aussi peut aimer et souffrir, il serait réconcilié" (MS, 32). To be aware that the natural world denies man is to know that man is not the measure of the universe. But to be able to extract physical pleasure from the natural world is Camus' affirmation that man does have his place. In the preparation of the manuscript for La Peste, Camus noted that "Chacun cherche son désert et dès qu'il est trouvé, le reconnaît trop dur. Il ne sera pas dit que je ne saurai pas supporter le mien."²⁷

The use of the height motif in Camus is associated with the particular way in which he interprets the natural world. Appearing as either the concrete, visible reality of the balcony, or as a memory, symbolic of a past grandeur, the height motif is closely tied to the confrontation of the absurd. The reality of the absurd, revealing itself through the inscrutability and irrationality of the natural world, death and suffering, injustice, the inability to communicate

²⁷Albert Camus, Théâtre, récits, nouvelles, ed. Roger Quilliot, (Paris:1967), p. 1955.

or the loss of creative genius, is experienced during a moment of epiphany: the moment of focus when the objective world of forms, sounds, and smells suddenly reveals its inward being and discloses its secret and mystery. The ironic and absurd hero experiences a certain intellectual sensitivity and emotional intuition in a vision of himself and the universe. Northrop Frye in discussing the point of epiphany notes that "its most common settings are the mountain-top, the island, the tower, the lighthouse, and the ladder or staircase."²⁸ In Camus, the point of epiphany is the balcony, the hill, the ramparts of a fort, a bridge or a constructed loft.

In Camus' fiction then, the hero undergoes an important moment. Ascending to a position of height, facing a sterile landscape Camus' protagonist experiences an epiphany and becomes conscious of, confronts, and reacts to the absurd. Descending to the everyday world, he better understands and accepts the fact that each man must search for, find, and bear "son désert."

²⁸Northrop Frye, p. 203.

CHAPTER II

L'ETRANGER: EARLY APPEARANCE AND
USE OF THE HEIGHT MOTIF

Camus' first novel, L'Etranger published in 1942, is usually seen as the conclusion of the absurd experiment while yet containing the germ of the philosophy of revolt which he was later to develop. Generally criticism points out that, up to this point in Camus' career, his primary orientation was toward an explanation and illustration of the absurd experience and of absurd man. L'Etranger, as well as Caligula (1938), do however reveal the concept of limitations in an undeveloped form which was eventually to evolve into the philosophy of revolt of the later novels and essays.²⁹

Correspondingly, this transitional novel shows the beginnings of the three part pivotal structure of ascent, height, and descent. In L'Etranger the crucial element of height occurs in two important scenes. It first appears in Part I in the balcony scene where Meursault is a spectator of the events of a typical Algerian Sunday afternoon. The second appearance of height occurs in Part II when Meursault is incarcerated in a prison situated in an elevated position.

²⁹Philip H. Rhein in his study Albert Camus, (New York: 1969), deals fully with this aspect of Camus' development of the concept of limitations.

Although the height element is present in L'Etranger, the remaining two elements of ascent and descent which complete the structure are absent because Camus had not yet worked out the thematic scheme that would come to dominate his later works. L'Etranger was already a finished work (1940) before Camus had fully developed the Sisyphus metaphor which appears for the first time in Le Mythe de Sisyphe (1941).

When Camus reworked La Mort heureuse, his first attempt at the novel and the basis from which L'Etranger was to emerge, he retained the balcony scene and initially introduced the height motif which reappears in each of his novels and short stories that follow. The retention of this particular scene from La Mort heureuse suggests that Camus had begun to consider quite early the height motif as essential to his themes.

Although Camus made major revisions from the manuscript of La Mort heureuse to L'Etranger, the balcony scene remained essentially intact. A comparison of the two scenes shows them to be substantially similar in content. The detailed description in L'Etranger of the view from Meursault's balcony, the expression, dress, and comportment of the crowd, the changing attitude of the sky, and the progression of the day all find their parallels in La Mort heureuse.

The important differences generally can be labeled stylistic ones. Most striking of course, is the change from

a third-person narrative in La Mort heureuse to the first-person of L'Etranger. This results in less distance between Meursault and the reader and, at the same time, renders more authentic the "journal" technique which Camus was developing here. In addition, Camus further refines the passage by dividing what had formerly been one long paragraph into eight shorter ones. This deliberate division of the passage alters its mood and establishes a sense of movement and progression as the reader follows, through Meursault's eyes, the advancement of the day and the physical changes which occur on the street.

While these two passages are similar in content, Camus does, however, make two significant additions to L'Etranger: Meursault describes his desire to remain in his apartment instead of going out to eat, and he reflects upon the apartment itself. In La Mort heureuse Camus describes the protagonist's actions prior to his placement upon the balcony.

En entrant chez lui il se coucha et dormit jusqu'à l'heure du dîner. Il se fit cuire des oeufs et mangea à même le plat (sans pain parce qu'il avait oublié d'en acheter), puis s'étendit et s'endormit aussitôt jusqu'au lendemain matin. Il se reveilla un peu avant le déjeuner, fit sa toilette et descendit manger. Remonté, il fit deux mots croisés, découpa minutieusement une réclame des sels Kreschen qu'il colla dans un cahier déjà rempli de grands-pères farceurs descendant les rampes de l'escalier. Ceci fait, il se lava les mains et se mit au balcon.³⁰

³⁰ Théâtre, récits, nouvelles, p. 1929.

In L'Etranger, Camus extends Meursault's preparatory activities to include the two additions previously noted.

J'ai fini ensuite des cigarettes toujours couché, jusqu'à midi. Je ne voulais pas déjeuner chez Céleste comme d'habitude parce que, certainement, ils m'auraient posé des questions et je n'aime pas cela. Je me suis fait cuire des oeufs et je les ai mangés à même le plat, sans pain parce que je ne voulais pas descendre pour en acheter.

Après le déjeuner, je me suis ennuyé un peu et j'ai erré dans l'appartement. Il était commode quand maman était là. Maintenant il est trop grand pour moi et j'ai dû transporter dans ma chambre la table de la salle à manger. Je ne vis plus que dans cette pièce, entre les chaises de paille un peu creusées, l'armoire dont la glace est jaunie, la table de toilette et le lit de cuivre. Le reste est à l'abandon. Un peu plus tard . . . j'ai pris un vieux journal . . . J'y ai coupé une réclame des sels Kruschen et je l'ai collée dans un vieux cahier où je mets des choses qui m'amuse dans les journaux. Je me suis aussi lavé les mains et, pour finir, je me suis mis au balcon. (ET, 1139-40).

This revised passage clearly establishes Meursault's tendency toward disengagement and withdrawal. Requiring very little, he has created a secure, enclosed nest by reducing the area of living space within the apartment to one room. As previously noted, Georges Pomet in his discussion of the balcony in L'Etranger indicates the important link between the secure, enclosed space and the extension of the balcony, pointing out

that the balcony serves as Meursault's link to the outside world while still permitting him to remain attached to the security of his room (sup., p. 5). Moreover, the ability to alternately withdraw or extend himself to the limits of participation which the balcony defines, brings into focus those qualities of disengagement and isolation which characterize Meursault, the stranger.

It is through Meursault, who typifies modern man in exile, that Camus explores the progressive journey from a spiritual isolation to a consciousness and awareness of the absurd. Placing himself outside the realm of the human, outside the ordinary relationships between men, Meursault functions in a state of self-imposed exile. The first half of the narrative which contains the balcony scene describes a detached Meursault who is committed only to a sensual participation in the physical aspects of life, and who places no inherent value upon memories of the past or the hope of the future. His life is totally immersed in the present. Camus establishes throughout Part I the feeling of the absurd which he defines in Le Mythe de Sisyphe and which describes Meursault's universe: " . . . dans un univers soudain privé d'illusions et de lumières, l'homme se sent un étranger. Cet exil est sans recours puisqu'il est privé des souvenirs d'une patrie perdue ou de l'espoir d'une terre promise. Ce divorce entre l'homme de sa vie, [sic] . . . c'est proprement le sentiment de l'absurdité" (MS, 18). The

exile of which Camus speaks here is the essence of the human condition. It is a spiritual exile and not necessarily a physical one, although it is often characterized by an isolation, as with Meursault. It is this feeling of the absurd, this divorce between man and his life, which provokes the exile. From the beginning of the narrative, Meursault is exposed to the irrationality, strangeness, and inhumanity of a world which negate man's hopes and rationality. Death, the inhumanness of nature, the separation between man and man are all manifestations of the absurd and therefore significant forces in the universe which Camus artistically creates for his protagonist.

An examination of the balcony scene clarifies the two key elements which are ultimately brought into confrontation in L'Etranger, man and the absurdity of existence. In this scene, Camus places his exiled and isolated protagonist in a strategically high position from which he observes the progression of events and human activities of a typical Sunday afternoon. The way in which Meursault perceives the world from his balcony is symbolic of his exile: his encounter with the world is a purely visual one. As detached observer, moreover, his perceptions have no consequences for him because they do not come from a conscious encounter with the world. Although Meursault is repeatedly exposed to the absurd, he is not yet ready to confront it with full awareness. The visual perception of the protagonist is strongly

emphasized in this passage. Once placed upon the balcony, he concentrates upon the dress of the Sunday strollers. No detail escapes him: ". . . deux petits garçons en costume marin, la culotte au dessous du genou, un peu empêtrés de leur vêtements raides, et une petite fille avec un gros noeud rose et des souliers noirs vernis" (ET, 1140). However, the significance of their particular mode of dress does elude him. He can only guess at their intention for he tells us, "J'ai pensé qu'ils allaient aux cinémas du centre" (ET, 1140). Extending his view to the sky above he understands that appearance or outward signs are often false. He notes that the overclouded sky that had surely signified rain suddenly clears: "Peu après, le ciel s'est assombri et j'ai cru que nous allions avoir un orage d'été. Il s'est découvert peu à peu cependant" (ET, 1140). Nature functions independently of man and therefore man cannot know nature. Camus explains in Le Mythe de Sisyphe that the world cannot be understood in human terms: "Pour une seconde, nous ne le [le monde] comprenons plus puisque pendant des siècles nous n'avons compris en lui que les figures et les dessins que préalablement nous y mettions, puisque désormais, les forces nous manquent pour user de cet artifice. Le monde nous échappe puisqu'il devient lui-même" (MS, 28-29). Later, with the return of the young people to the street, Meursault's gaze focuses upon their gestures and facial expressions. Deprived of the dimension of sound and conversation, their movements

are perceived as artificial and without sense. Meursault attempts to decipher their meanings: ". . . les jeunes gens avaient des gestes plus décidés que d'habitude et j'ai pensé qu'ils avaient vu un film d'aventures. Ceux qui revenaient des cinémas de la ville arrivèrent un peu plus tard. Ils semblaient plus graves. Ils riaient encore, mais de temps en temps, ils paraissaient fatigués et songeurs" (ET, 1140). In Le Mythe de Sisyphe Camus describes how the strangeness and absurdity of humanity reveals itself through pantomime and gesture: "Les hommes aussi secrètent de l'inhumain. Dans certaines heures de lucidité, l'aspect mécanique de leurs gestes, leur pantomime privée de sens rend stupide tout ce qui les entoure" (MS, 29).

With the approach of evening and the lighting of the lamps Meursault becomes aware of a physical discomfort and fatigue. He states that the lights of the city and the sidewalks filled with humanity tire his eyes. He leaves the balcony, closes the window in a definitive gesture which completes his isolation and re-enters once more the security of his room. His final remarks reveal to what extent the day and its activities have affected him: "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" (ET, 1142). With Meursault's closing remark that "il n'y avait rien de changé," we are aware that the visual confrontation of the

absurd has yielded no call to action. There is no epiphany, for the objective world which Meursault, the subject, has so long gazed upon, is perceived only visually. The world of gesture, dress, and comportment remains impervious, not revealing its meaning.

Meursault has been able to maintain an unconscious equilibrium between himself, as spectator, and the outward manifestation of the absurd. He has spent the greater part of the day in visual confrontation with the absurd, but the only significant result it has yielded is that of a discomfort which he associates with his eyes. It is the same discomfort and fatigue that he experiences at his mother's wake. In both instances, his tendency is to withdraw, to recoil from the reality of the absurd, to close his eyes and sleep.

Part I of L'Etranger ends with the climactic death of the Arab. With this seemingly unprovoked action on the part of Meursault, he is drawn from the perimeter of society where he had formerly existed as observer, and brought into society's midst where he will be exiled, judged, and condemned to die. The isolation of Part I evolves into the physical exile of Part II when he is separated first from his liberty and finally from his life. His last statement, at the close of the shooting, foreshadows his fate and signals the beginning of a slowly evolving change in his perspective: "J'ai compris que j'avais détruit l'équilibre du jour, le silence exceptionnel d'une plage où j'avais été heureux" (ET, 1168).

William M. Manley, views Meursault's awakening as "a coming to consciousness which corresponds in detailed thematic and imagistic ways to the adventure of the mind in Le Mythe de Sisyphe."³¹ Meursault's words that he had "détruit l'équilibre du jour" leave little doubt that the crucial beach scene gives impetus to a symbolic awakening. Meursault's knowledge that he had shattered the calm surface of a life in which he had been happy corresponds to Camus' explanation of the "premier mouvement" of the mind at the beginning of absurd awareness: "Tant que l'esprit se tait dans le monde immobile de ses espoirs, tout se reflète et s'ordonne dans l'unité de sa nostalgie. Mais à son premier mouvement, ce monde se fêle et s'écroule: une infinité d'éclats miroitants s'offre à la connaissance. Il faut désespérer d'en reconstruire jamais la surface familière et tranquille qui nous donnerait la paix du coeur" (MS, 33-34).

Part II describes the slow transformation of the once insouciant, comfortable stranger on the balcony to the lucid hero who faces the ultimate reality of the absurd, his own death. Once again, Camus utilizes the height motif to emphasize the protagonist's physical separation and exile from the outside world. In a description of the prison Meursault tells us: "La prison était tout en haut de la ville et, par

³¹William M. Manley, "Journey to Consciousness: The Symbolic Pattern of Camus's L'Etranger," PMLA, vol. 69 (1964), p. 321.

une petite fenêtre je pouvais voir la mer" (ET, 1178).

Ironically, the position of height affords Meursault a view of the sea. From his small window, the presence of the sea will be a constant reminder of the freedom from which he will henceforth be separated. Later, with the delivery of the final condemnation, he will be transferred to another cell, one that is yet higher and which looks out onto the sky:

"On m'a changé de cellule. De celle-ci lorsque je suis allongé, je vois le ciel et je ne vois que lui. Toutes mes journées se passent à regarder sur son visage le déclin des couleurs qui conduit le jour à la nuit" (ET, 1202).

Sentenced to die, the spectacle of the sea is also taken from him. His exile is complete. Abstract freedom and infinity, symbolized by the sea, give way to finite time and exile as Meursault observes the passage of time on the face of nature. Conscious of time, he not only notes its progression, but he also waits: "Couché, je passe les mains sous ma tête et j'attends" (ET, 1202).

Within the confines of his cell, elevated above the sea and open to the sky, Meursault will complete the final journey to consciousness. In the last chapter of the novel, Meursault, faced with the unalterable reality of his impending death, reaches a state of lucidity, confronts the absurd, and experiences a passion for life; liberated from hope of the future and regret of the past, he revolts in the name of life. Meursault's consciousness is most complete when he

clearly understands that he cannot avoid the mathematical inevitability of death. Realizing the enormous disproportion that exists between the irrational judgment of the court and his punishment, Meursault comes face to face with "les murs absurdes." Society's judgment has left nothing to chance. Camus writes in Le Mythe de Sisyphe that: "L'horreur vient en réalité de côté mathématique de l'évènement. . . . Ce côté élémentaire et définitif de l'aventure fait le contenu du sentiment absurde" (MS, 30). Moreover, Meursault comes to understand that, ironically, the victim must morally collaborate in his own death: he hopes that the death instrument functions efficiently so that he may be spared further anguish. Finally, he understands that he will be deprived of the honor of ascending to the scaffold to a glorious death, as he notes that the guillotine is at ground level: "Cela aussi était ennuyeux. La montée vers l'échafaud, l'ascension en plein ciel, l'imagination pouvait s'y accrocher. Tandis que, là encore, la mécanique écrasait tout: on était tué discrètement, avec un peu de honte et beaucoup de précision" (ET, 1204-5). Despite his impending execution, Meursault maintains a latent passion for life which will emerge finally in a defiant protest against hope, salvation, and the possibility of a spiritual life offered to him by the chaplain: "A ce moment, ce qui me gênait un peu dans mon raisonnement c'était ce bond terrible que je sentais en moi à la pensée de vingt ans de vie à venir" (ET, 1206). Paradoxically, it is the negation

of life which gives life its value.

Having already acquired the necessary lucidity, Meursault is ready to complete his journey. His final revolt is dramatized in the dialogue with the prison chaplain, the arch-eluder. Meursault now knows that illusion is philosophical suicide. Here he becomes the absurd reasoner who, in the face of his own death, is brought to the realization of truths which he had only glimpsed earlier. He revolts against the falseness of hope and salvation, and the notion of another life, a spiritual one, thereby affirming the validity and worth of the life which he now knows and has always known. Refusing to regret the past, Meursault is able to experience the few precious remaining hours to their fullest and to maintain the sovereignty of his self-knowledge: "Mais j'étais sûr de moi, sûr de tout, plus sûr que lui, sûr de ma vie et de cette mort qui allait venir" (ET, 1210). Confronting death, the final reality of the absurd, he knows that it is death, that very force which denies life, which renders life itself priceless.

From the height of his cell, the point of epiphany, Meursault, now an absurd hero, has arrived at the absurd experience. The moment of alignment is perfect: Meursault experiences an intellectual sensitivity and an emotional intuition in a vision of himself and the universe. His waiting has ended.

C'était comme si j'avais attendu pendant longtemps cette minute et cette aube où je serais justifié. Rien, rien n'avait d'importance et je savais pourquoi . . . Du fond de mon avenir, pendant toute cette vie absurde que j'avais menée, un souffle obscur remontait vers moi à travers des années qui n'étaient pas encore venues et ce souffle égalisait sur son passage tout ce qu'on me proposait alors dans les années pas plus réelles que je vivais (ET, 1210).

The dark wind of the absurd reaches him and reveals its inner reality. Meursault is aware of its truth: all men are condemned, and the knowledge of this removes all ideas except the only one which has meaning, death itself.

In the last hours of his life he has rediscovered once more the equilibrium, silence, and peace that he had once shattered on the beach. He is now able to open himself to the world. He is freed from the metaphysical exile of the human condition.

Comme si cette grande colère m'avait purgé du mal, vidé d'espoir, devant cette nuit chargée de signes et d'étoiles je m'ouvrais pour la première fois à la tendre indifférence du monde (ET, 1211).

The pivotal height scenes in L'Etranger illuminate Meursault's progress from temporary isolation to permanent physical exile. Retained from La Mort heureuse, the balcony in Part I simultaneously isolates the protagonist and positions him against the backdrop of the absurd universe.

The height motif in Part II in the form of Meursault's

elevated prison cell serves a dual purpose as well: it symbolizes Meursault's permanent exile and separation from society and it is also the point of epiphany from which Meursault confronts the absurd.

Significantly, Camus' use of height is in direct contrast to the usual romantic use of the same motif. The romantic exhilaration, joy, power, and spiritual revelation is reversed to exile, fear, suffering, and the confrontation of the absurd. However, in Camus, the absurd paradoxically does not diminish man, but frees him from the human bondage that death holds over his life. Much like Vigny's Christ, Camus' hero confronts the silence of the universe which denies him, accepts the silence, and extracts from it meaning and a ground for action worthy of man's dignity.

In L'Etranger, a transitional novel, the three-part structure of which height is an important element is not complete. The novels and short stories which follow clearly illustrate that Camus, in developing his philosophy of revolt as a response to the absurd, extends the height motif to encompass ascent, height, and descent. With the addition of these movements, Camus also extends his vision of the absurd to a call to action in the form of revolt despite and because of the absurd.

CHAPTER III

LA PESTE: EVOLUTION OF A PHILOSOPHY
AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE HEIGHT MOTIF

From L'Etranger to La Peste, published in 1947, Camus moves from an examination of the absurd to an investigation of man's permissible actions within an absurd universe. In La Peste, the emphasis is shifted from intellectual problems, the insignificance of man, and the absurdity of his existence to the more personal problems of individual man. In the final pages of L'Etranger Camus presents the notion of revolt as a consequence of man's encounter with the absurd, but it is a revolt which is sterile, without hope, and which ultimately aspired to nothing. In La Peste, Camus modifies the nihilistic view as it is expressed in L'Etranger, and acquires a new outlook which focuses upon man in society, justice, love, and respect for mankind.

Camus was ultimately to reject the consequences of absolute freedom and total disregard for the welfare of others which are inherent in the nihilistic view of the world. Prior to the publication of La Peste, he had already indicated in Lettres à un ami allemand the new direction of his thoughts on revolt. Still adhering to the basic nihilistic premise of a world devoid of moral principle and value, he states here that it is possible nevertheless to proceed beyond nihilism. Contained within the last of four letters is

a proposal for a re-examination of revolt and of the relations that should be established between absurd thought and action. Admonishing those who uphold violence and ruse and who would destroy the dignity of the individual, accepting despair and injustice as part of the human lot, Camus here proposes that man himself must, through human solidarity, affirm a human justice and happiness in order to oppose the eternal suffering and irrationality of the universe: "Et moi, refusant d'admettre ce désespoir et ce monde torturé, je voulais seulement que les hommes retrouvent leur solidarité pour entrer en lutte contre leur destin révoltant" (E, 240). In an effort to go beyond the nihilistic view, Camus insists upon the integrity of the individual: "Ce monde a du moins la vérité de l'homme et notre tâche est de lui donner ses raisons contre le destin lui-même. Et il n'a pas d'autres raisons que l'homme et c'est celui-ci qu'il faut sauver l'idée qu'on se fait de la vie" [sic] (E, 241). If the world is in itself meaningless, Camus persists in extracting from it that element which does have meaning, and which can give meaning to life, man himself.

In La Peste Camus turns to collective suffering and revolt in the absurd experience. He here focuses upon the idea of revolt in which man becomes conscious of what he is, of what the world is, and realizes his solidarity with the human race. Through the plague which invades the city of Oran, and which elicits a collective response to a common

problem, Camus concentrates on the theme of separation and exile. It is the plague that enforces the separation and threatens the fulfillment of human aspirations and of life itself. Finally, it is the plague which gives rise to the movement of revolt and reveals the commonality of the condition which links all men in an effort to overcome its evil.

La Peste, then, which Camus labeled a chronicle, is the account of a struggle against the overwhelming forces of the plague and a confrontation with the absurd which the plague represents. Further, the novel is notable for Camus' continuing examination of his idea of revolt. As part of this development, the three-part structure of ascent, height, and descent begun in L'Etranger is more clearly defined and signals a thematic turning point in the novel. Reduced to the essential, the action of La Peste consists of an imposed exile, efforts to escape and regain the lost unity of the past, and the restructuring of values. The action of the novel conforms to the Camus formula of awareness, confrontation, and revolt.

Basically, La Peste can be divided into three stages, each stage corresponding to one phase of the formula. The first stage of awareness is precipitated by the imposed exile of the city and the resultant separation experienced by each of the inhabitants. The people of Oran are separated from the past and the future. In their thoughts and actions, they are concerned only with the present. This exile evolves into

an acute awareness of the meaninglessness of existence and leads to a confrontation between human longing for coherence and the irrational universe.

In La Peste Camus deals explicitly with this human desire for coherence and focuses upon four distinct approaches to the problem. He first examines the tendency toward habitual despair and resignation which manifests itself in the attitude of the general populace. Separated from their loved ones and past lives, deprived of the future, the people of Oran can no longer find meaning in the world. There is no significant confrontation, only one which is sterile and leads nowhere. Next, a religious response to the misery and suffering of the plague is articulated through Père Paneloux who sees the plague as a sign of divine punishment. He insists on the notion of collective guilt and demands repentance. Refusing to face the absurd in a meaningful way, Paneloux attempts to explain the irrational by deifying it. The third approach to the absurd is that of complicity as embodied in Cottard's desire that the plague should continue to thrive. Carina Gadourek remarks that "la vraie peste, pour Cottard, est la solitude qu'il a connue du temps de la paix."³² Paradoxically, the misery of the plague frees him and in doing so allows him to thrive and profit in its shadows.

³²Carina Gadourek, Les Innocents et les coupables (The Hague:1963), p. 130.

All three of these forms of confrontation are of course untenable for Camus, for all three deny the inherent value and integrity of the individual. Revolt, which marks the third stage of the novel, opposes resignation, deification, and complicity. This revolt, embodied in the efforts of Rieux, Tarrou, Rambert, and Grand who confront directly both the reality and the abstraction of the plague, gives rise to a restructuring of values and the possibility of love, friendship, and human solidarity which characterize the Camus ideal.

In Chapter IV these ideals are developed. Here, the movement toward solidarity reaches its most meaningful and poetic expression in the balcony conversation between Rieux and Tarrou. To frame this scene, Camus utilizes the developed structure of ascent, height, and descent. This motif, a transposition of the Sisyphus metaphor, is in fact, a concentrated paradigm of the major movement of the novel.

Like all the inhabitants of Oran, Rieux and Tarrou experience the solitude and separation of exile. Their particular exile, however, far exceeds the bounds of the physical isolation imposed by the plague. Both Rieux and Tarrou have acquired a lucid awareness of the human condition long before the appearance of the plague in Oran. Rieux, as a doctor, has known and fought against the sickness and death which negate life. Tarrou has spent a good deal of his life opposing a society which imposes the death sentence. They both have recognized the forces in the universe which deny

man his life. For Rieux, the problem is a man-centered one and concerns the physical suffering and death which the innocent must bear. Tarrou, on the other hand, sees the problem as essentially the loss of innocence and the inescapable guilt that all men carry within them. Camus places these two men on the balcony of the old asthmatic and contrasts two distinct forms of revolt: one which recognizes the innocence of men and the other which recognizes an inherent guilt in society. During the conversation the contrast emerges and parallels a mutual movement toward understanding, friendship, and solidarity.

Rieux and Tarrou ascend to the balcony, urged by the asthmatic and the old woman who describe "une belle vue" and "le bon air" which the balcony offers. In "Carnets" Camus noted in preparation for the manuscript of La Peste: "Il est bon qu'il y ait des terrasses au-dessus de la peste."³³ The balcony serves as a physical means of isolating the men from the plague and also provides the solitude necessary for self-examination and reflection. The tranquility of the balcony causes Rieux to remark that, "Il fait bon. . . . C'est comme si la peste n'était jamais montée là" (LP, 1419). The silence of the sea and the wind-swept sky, the twinkling of the lighthouse and the stars, the odors of herbs and stones combine to provide a peaceful contrast with the sounds of the plague-ridden city which persist and interrupt the perfect silence.

³³Théâtre, récits, nouvelles, p. 1998.

Camus juxtaposes the tranquility of the landscape with the clamor of the street: "Trois fois la lueur reparut dans le ciel. Un bruit de vaisselle choquée monta jusqu'à eux des profondeurs de la rue. Une porte claqua dans la maison" (LP, 1419). The elevation of the balcony does not succeed in shutting out the plague and, thus, the absurd. The sounds of people struggling against the plague soon become the dominating force: "Quelques rues plus loin, une auto sembla glisser longuement sur le pavé mouillé . . . des exclamations confuses rompirent encore le silence" (LP, 1420). With the return of silence, Tarrou reveals his past: "Disons pour simplifier, Rieux, que je souffrais déjà de la peste bien avant de connaître cette ville et cette épidémie. C'est assez dire que je suis comme tout le monde. Mais il y a des gens qui ne le savent pas, ou qui se trouvent bien dans cet état et des gens qui le savent et qui voudraient en sortir. Moi, j'ai toujours voulu en sortir" (LP, 1420). Tarrou's will to escape and transcend the misery of the human condition is the force which initiates his personal revolt. Despairing of his loss of innocence, placing himself among the ranks of all men, who, he maintains, are guilty, he seeks to find inner peace. His revolt is focused upon the desire to purge himself of all guilt, thereby, permitting him to transcend the exile of the human condition. Tarrou sees the death penalty as affecting all men, and which individual men can struggle against, learn from, and survive, but which

they cannot defeat. His longed-for condition of absolute innocence remains an ideal which is unattainable. His reaction against capital punishment is a revolt against a world where murder is legalized and human life is rendered worthless. His revolt undertaken in the name of mankind underlines his commitment to the value of human dignity. However, his desire to transcend the human condition and attain a state of pure innocence places him in contrast to Rieux who states: ". . . mais vous savez, je me sens plus de solidarité avec des vaincus qu'avec des saints. Je n'ai pas de goût, je crois, pour l'héroïsme et la sainteté. Ce qui m'intéresse, c'est d'être un homme" (LP, 1427). Rieux's revolt embodies the desire to alleviate suffering and misery. Unlike Tarrou he does not search for an ideology that would permit him to escape and transcend the exile that it imposes. Rieux limits his efforts by acknowledging and working for those values which can emerge from suffering. He knows that to ignore those values is to remain forever exiled.

Their conversation ends. The street noises grow in volume and number. Camus again juxtaposes these sounds with the serenity of the landscape: "On entendit en même temps quelque chose qui ressemblait à une détonation. Puis le silence revint. Rieux compta deux clignements de phare. La brise sembla prendre plus de force, et du même coup, un souffle venu de la mer apporta une odeur de sel. On entendait maintenant de façon distincte la sourde respiration des vagues

contre la falaise" (LP, 1427). Although the ascent to the balcony has physically isolated the men from the plague, the noises from the street persist, gain in strength, and remind Rieux and Tarrou that the plague is ever present. Unlike Meursault who is unaware and can only guess and distinguish the physical appearance of the absurd, Tarrou is able to decipher the meaning of the street sounds: "Dans une panne de vent, on entendit distinctement des cris d'hommes, puis le bruit d'une décharge et la clameur d'une foule" (LP, 1427). Tarrou explains: "On s'est encore battu aux portes" (LP, 1427). This violent protest against imposed exile stands in direct contrast to the revolt of Rieux and Tarrou who, through mutual friendship and reciprocal exchange, achieve a moment of intimacy and happiness in spite of and because of their suffering.

Their conversation ends with an affirmation of fellowship and a proposal to consummate this comradeship by sharing a moment of physical enjoyment in nature. Tarrou proposes a swim and Rieux accepts: "A la fin, c'est trop bête de ne vivre que dans la peste. Bien entendu, un homme doit se battre pour les victimes. Mais s'il cesse de rien aimer par ailleurs, à quoi sert qu'il se batte" (LP, 1428). Camus here restates his basic premise, that the will to confront and struggle against the absurd loses all meaning, if one denies those pleasures which allow man to be happy.

To reaffirm their friendship and the happiness that life offers, they descend from the balcony and plunge into the sea in a symbolic gesture of baptism. They then depart and return to the plague-ridden city, ready to begin again:

"Habillés de nouveau, ils repartirent sans avoir prononcé un mot. Mais ils avaient le même coeur et le souvenir de cette nuit qui leur était doux. Quand ils aperçurent de loin la sentinelle de la peste, Rieux savait que Tarrou se disait, comme lui, que la maladie venait de les oublier, que cela était bien, et qu'il fallait recommencer" (LP, 1429).

This scene, framed by the ascension to the balcony, the presence of the absurd, and the affirmation of friendship, culminates in an epiphany in which Rieux and Tarrou descend from the balcony, plunge into the sea, share a union with the natural world, and depart ready to confront once more the absurd world of the plague. Here, Camus has presented the thrust of his thought and the point of his novel in capsule form. He affirms the possibility of a revolt undertaken within limitations that are strictly human, against the most crushing and humiliating forces of the irrational universe.

The role of the balcony here as in L'Etranger serves a dual purpose. It physically liberates and isolates the men from the plague. This isolation, however, offers the lucid mind the opportunity to place the absurd in proper perspective. It is important that the absurd is not completely shut

out. It is interesting that Tarrou early in the novel establishes the balcony as one of several means by which it is possible to be fully aware of the passage of time. He writes in his notebook:

Question: comment faire pour ne pas perdre son temps?

Réponse: l'éprouver dans toute sa longueur.
Moyens: passer des journées dans l'antichambre d'un dentiste, sur une chaise inconfortable; vivre à son balcon le dimanche après-midi; écouter des conférences dans une langue qu'on ne comprend pas, choisir les itinéraires de chemin de fer les plus longs et les moins commodes et voyager debout naturellement; faire la queue aux guichets des spectacles et ne pas prendre sa place, etc.
(LP, 1237-38).

By extension, the balcony is a means by which one can be consciously aware of the absurd. In Le Mythe de Sisyphe Camus remarks that man "appartient au temps, et à cette horreur qui le saisit, il y reconnaît son pire ennemi" (MS, 28). Paradoxically, the balcony, while seeming to offer the possibility of distraction, provides for Tarrou and all who are aware of the absurd a means to avoid distraction. Later, in his conversation with Rieux, Tarrou states that distraction must be avoided if man is to maintain a lucid consciousness of the injustice and suffering that he is capable of imposing upon others. He further states that in order to combat diversion "il faut de la volonté et de la tension pour ne jamais être distrait" (LP, 1426). Rieux and Tarrou are aware of the

presence of the plague and of the absurd which surrounds them. Carina Gadourek has remarked of the balcony scene that it is "L'intermezzo de bonheur . . . l'heure de l'amitié entre Rieux et Tarrou."³⁴ While this may be true, her contention that this scene "se distingue par les images d'où la malveillance est absente,"³⁵ is untenable. The plague and the absurd that it symbolizes do in fact persist in the street sounds from beneath the balcony, in the heaviness and thickness of the silence, the heavy breathing of the waves, and the warm, fetid gusts of air that finally urge the two men to the sea.

Camus, in juxtaposing the serenity of the landscape with the oppressive, absurd-filled air that hangs over the balcony, reaffirms the dual order of the universe; suffering man and indifferent nature. The separation between the world of Oran and the landscape beyond is more than physical. The twinkling of the lighthouse and the stars which seem to intermittently beckon to the men on the balcony is an ironic reversal of the romantic light which reveals the spiritual truth and promises to unveil nature's secrets to the romantic dreamer. The lighthouse in Camus' landscape invites Rieux and Tarrou to a physical union with the natural world. Michel

³⁴Gadourek, p. 120.

³⁵Ibid.

Benamou sees their swim as " a lived metaphor uniting man with nature."³⁶ But their swim embodies another form of confrontation, because they derive physical pleasure from a source which denies them in every other way. Rieux's final mute observation is significant here, for he states that "la maladie venait de les oublier" (LP, 1429). They have not forgotten the plague and fallen prey to distraction, rather the plague had forgotten them.

The appearance of height in La Peste is not limited to the balcony scene of Chapter IV. Camus very early in the novel emphasizes the factor of height in a description of Oran: "Mais il est juste d'ajouter qu'elle s'est greffée sur un paysage sans égal, au milieu d'un plateau nu, entouré de collines lumineuses, devant une baie au dessin parfait" (LP, 1221). This initial setting prefigures the action of the novel. Through this description Camus establishes those physical characteristics of Oran which make it a victim of the absurd plague. He initially introduces the city's indifference to the beauty of the natural landscape. Perched atop a plateau Oran is oblivious to the sea: "On peut seulement regretter qu'elle se soit construite en tournant le dos à cette baie et que, partant, il soit impossible d'apercevoir la mer qu'il faut toujours aller chercher" (LP, 1221). Not only is Oran indifferent to the natural world outside its walls, it

³⁶Michel Benamou, "Romantic Counterpoint: Nature and Style," Yale French Studies no. 25 (Spring, 1960) p. 48.

has also eliminated its presence within: "Comment faire imaginer, par exemple une ville sans pigeons, sans arbres et sans jardins, où l'on ne rencontre ni battements d'ailes ni froissements de feuilles, un lieu neutre pour tout dire" (LP, 1219). High elevation, indifference to the natural world, absence of beauty, and a dedication to material profit combine to make of Oran a vulnerable target for the absurd experience.

It is interesting to note further that the element of height in the form of Rieux's window which looks out onto a panoramic view of the city and the landscape plays an important role in the doctor's growing consciousness of the presence of the plague. At the moment when Castel states without pronouncing the word that the plague has invaded the city Rieux turns to his window: "Rieux réfléchissait. Par la fenêtre de son bureau, il regardait l'épaule de la falaise pierreuse qui se refermait au loin sur la baie. Le ciel quoique bleu, avait un éclat terne qui s'adoucissait à mesure que l'après-midi s'avançait" (LP, 1245). The doctor pronounces the unutterable word: "Oui, Castel, dit-il, c'est à peine incroyable. Mais il semble bien que ce soit la peste" (LP, 1245). Turning once more to the window, he sees no visible proof of the presence of plague: "En regardant par la fenêtre sa ville qui n'avait pas changé, c'est à peine si le docteur sentait naître en lui ce léger écoeurement devant l'avenir qu'on appelle inquiétude" (LP, 1248). Because of his long

experience with suffering and death, Rieux is aware of the absurdity of the human condition and of its inherent though invisible presence in the world. He notices the apparent contradiction between the seemingly peaceful and oblivious springtime outside the window and his knowledge of the human misery to come: "Le docteur regardait toujours par la fenêtre. D'un côté de la vitre, le ciel du printemps, et de l'autre côté le mot qui résonnait encore dans la pièce: la peste" (LP, 1249). The normality of the city refutes the presence of evil, but Rieux looks beyond the city to the sea which reminds him of the incoherence and irrationality the people of Oran will come to know in the form of plague: "De l'autre côté de la vitre, le timbre d'un tramway invisible résonnait tout d'un coup et réfutait en une seconde la cruauté et la douleur. Seule la mer, au bout du damier terne des maisons témoignait de ce qu'il y a d'inquiétant et de jamais reposé dans le monde" (LP, 1249). Rieux recognizes that the sleeping threat of plague is tantamount to the absurdity of the human condition. Prepared to confront the plague he states: "Ce qu'il fallait faire, c'était reconnaître clairement ce qui devait être reconnu, chasser enfin les ombres inutiles et prendre les mesures qui convenaient" (LP, 1250). Rieux's revolt begins with a determination to recognize with complete lucidity the real implications of the plague, and to deal directly with it. His final gesture of opening the window which had up to now remained closed is noteworthy:

"Le docteur ouvrit la fenêtre et le bruit de la ville s'enfla d'un coup. D'un atelier voisin montait le sifflement bref et répété d'une scie mécanique. Rieux se secoua. Là était la certidude, dans le travail de tous les jours. Le reste tenait à des fils et à des mouvements insignifiants, on ne pouvait s'y arrêter. L'essentiel était de bien faire son métier" (LP, 1250). Unlike Meursault who closes out the sounds and the life of the street and withdraws to his room, Rieux, lucidly aware of the human condition, opens the window prepared to face it, to revolt against the overwhelming suffering it brings, and to maintain a revolt within the limits of human ability and understanding.

The final pages of La Peste present Rieux once more surveying the panoramic view of the city and the landscape from the balcony of the old asthmatic. He notes that this night is not so different from the night he spent here with Tarrou with the exception that this particular occasion is one of deliverance while the other was one of revolt. The plague, departed, is forgotten by most. But Rieux, on the balcony, is just as conscious of the human condition on this joyous night as he was during the time of acute suffering. He knows that "cette allégresse était toujours menacée" (LP, 1474) and that the plague will never completely disappear. It will return again one day "pour le malheur et l'enseignement des hommes" (LP, 1474). Camus' final remarks here reiterate the paradox of the human condition: it is from suffering and

exile that men can learn to extract the values of friendship, love, and human solidarity which ultimately give meaning to revolt in the name of man.

The use of height in La Peste coincides with the consciousness of the absurd. Although appearing to isolate the major protagonists, it is this height which brings them closer to an awareness of the absurd. The physical location of the city of Oran, though seeming to protect it, renders the city vulnerable to the invasion of the plague. Rieux, from his window, realizes what the plague implies and how it must be combatted. Rieux and Tarrou who seem to escape the plague by ascending to the balcony, actually come closer to it abstractly, place it in perspective, and descend to the streets ready to maintain their revolt against it. By their return to the city, Camus presents the thrust of his novel: through exile and suffering human solidarity is possible. Further, it is through this solidarity that Camus expresses the optimism inherent in his philosophy. Both Rieux and Tarrou have maintained a revolt which has lead them ultimately to glimpse the kingdom of man which Camus will explore in L'Exil et le royaume.

CHAPTER IV

LA CHUTE: THE IRONIC USE OF THE HEIGHT MOTIF

In Camus' continuing examination of the human condition the height motif has undergone modification and adaptation to complement the development of the author's themes. Appearing first in L'Etranger, the height motif coincided with Meursault's awareness of the absurd. Later, in La Peste, Camus extended and completed the three-part structure of ascent, height, and descent to correspond to his developing philosophy of revolt. In La Chute, Camus moves beyond the use of mere physical height. In this, his third published novel, he further extends the motif and adapts it to the state of mind and attitude of his protagonist. Height, now ironic, becomes a contradiction for the protagonist as Camus investigates another facet of the human condition: guilt.

The narrative form of La Chute is essentially that of the monologue, although it is presented as a one-sided dialogue. Divided into six parts, the novel describes the past and present life and attitude of Jean-Baptiste Clamence, judge-penitent. Through the first-person point of view, Camus is able to contrast the innocence of the past with the guilt of the present while at the same time illustrating the fall of his protagonist. However, the focal point is still the relationship between ideas and actions. More precisely,

the novel, through Clamence, attempts to illuminate the problem of the human conscience and to show the extent to which the individual is responsible for the increase in human suffering.

Previously, Camus had viewed the absurd as an abstraction that manifested itself in the makeup of the universe. In both L'Etranger and La Peste, the absurd emerges as a force which is external to man. But in La Chute the source of the absurd is of human origin and embodies the guilt which men must bear but cannot overcome. Further, Camus shows in La Chute that this form of the absurd, if not placed in its proper perspective, gives rise to a tyrannical revolt, increasing instead of alleviating the misery of existence.

In La Chute, Camus confronts the negative characteristics of modern man. The individual is no longer the innocent victim of events for he becomes the very source of suffering and evil. Adele King identifies the tone of pessimism exuded by the novel and notes that Camus had depicted this problem of the human conscience in "a disturbing and ironic picture of modern man caught in a hell of his own making."³⁷ She further briefly characterizes the novel as "a psychological study of an individual who cannot live without clear moral absolutes, whose loss of an easily accepted feeling of innocence makes him turn to a belief in universal guilt."³⁸

³⁷Adele King, "Structure and Meaning in La Chute," PMLA, vol. 77 (December 1962), p. 660.

³⁸Ibid.

The idea of universal guilt which issues forth unceasingly from Clamence's "monologue" is not new to Camus. He had originally introduced this idea through Tarrou in La Peste. Camus admits to the possibility of inherent guilt in the earlier novel, but it is tempered by revolt in an effort to maintain the tension necessary to combat it. La Peste, which deals quite one-sidedly with the positive actions of man and shows him as innocent, is in direct opposition to La Chute which examines man's negative side and portrays him as the perpetrator of his own undoing. The optimism and idealism of La Peste, consequently, give way to a pessimistic and ironic statement in La Chute.

La Chute investigates the progression of Clamence's fall from the edenic paradise of assumed innocence to his awareness of self-doubt, his ensuing rebellion and attempt to regain his lost equilibrium, and his subsequent exile in a false kingdom where guilt reigns supreme and to which only the guilty are admitted. The contrast between Clamence's past innocence and present guilt is revealed through his description of present actions and attitudes, and his memory of past ones. Memory is crucial as Camus traces the protagonist's fall from the heights of his assumed innocence to the underworld of his guilt and exile in Amsterdam.

Through Clamence's recollection of the past, Camus introduces the height motif. The novel abounds in references to height but, significantly, they generally belong to a

time of assumed innocence before the fall: a state of well-being prior to the discovery of guilt. During this period in Clamence's life, balconies, towers, bridges, and all places of elevation afford him the opportunity to look down upon the world from the heights of his own perfection. Very early in his confession he reveals his former predilection for height: "Vous comprenez maintenant ce que je voulais dire en parlant de viser plus haut. Je parlais justement de ces points culminants, les seuls où je puisse vivre. Oui, je ne me suis jamais senti à l'aise que dans les situations élevées. Jusque dans le détail de la vie, j'avais besoin d'être au-dessus. Je préférais l'autobus au métro, les calèches aux taxis, les terrasses aux entresols" (LC, 1487). Clamence clearly emphasizes this need as a means for satisfying a feeling of power and superiority. This is contrasted with a genuine repugnance for and avoidance of subterranean locations: "Les soutes, les cales, les souterrains, les grottes, les gouffres me faisaient horreur" (LC, 1487). The horror which the cave image elicited is further contrasted with the feeling of well-being which the balcony provided: "Un balcon naturel . . . au-dessus d'une mer . . . était au contraire l'endroit où je respirais le mieux, surtout si j'étais seul, bien au-dessus des fourmis humaines" (LC, 1487). For Clamence, the balcony afforded the opportunity to play out his chosen role of a self-satisfied and virtuous bourgeois. In this attitude of observer he can be classified as what Gaston

Bachelard calls a "philosopher of domination." Bachelard comments: "From the top of his tower, a philosopher of domination sees the universe in miniature. Everything is small because he is so high. And since he is so high he is great. The height of his situation is proof of his greatness."³⁹ This tendency toward domination is further revealed as Clamence elaborates on the virtues of elevation, describing the particular pleasure he had previously derived from height:

Je m'expliquais sans peine que les sermons, les prédications décisives, les miracles de feu se finissent sur les hauteurs accessibles . . . on ne méditait pas dans les caves ou les cellules de prison (à moins qu'elles fussent situées dans une tour, avec une vue détendue) . . . à toute heure du jour . . . je grimpais sur la hauteur, j'y allumais des feux transparents, et une joyeuse exaltation s'élevait vers moi. C'est ainsi . . . que je prenais plaisir à ma propre vie et à ma propre excellence (LC, 1488).

For Clamence, height with a view of the panoramic landscape was conducive to profound meditation. Bachelard further remarks that the image of man meditating upon an infinite universe indicates the desire for confrontation.⁴⁰ It is clear that before the discovery of his guilt he had equated height

³⁹Gaston Bachelard, The Poetics of Space, Trans. Maria Jolas (New York:1964), p. 173.

⁴⁰Bachelard, p. 173.

with his self-image and, in order to secure and affirm that image, he sought out and climbed to high places.

Camus, however, creates an ironic and ambiguous reversal of the height motif in La Chute. Formerly representing a place of security and well-being which permitted Clamence to revel in his romantic yearnings, physical height comes to represent a source of guilt as the height of the bridge becomes the occasion for his undoing. Similar to Camus' heroes of past novels who become aware of the reality of the absurd from strategically high positions, Clamence confronts the vision of his own guilt and duplicity from atop a bridge. Unlike the other heroes, however, Clamence's confrontation yields a negative call to action. The vision of his guilt motivates an emotional and physical malaise and the eventual refusal of physical height.

Clamence's position on the bridge above the Seine and the occurrence of laughter initiate his fall from innocence. At first the intrusion of laughter disturbs his sense of well being: "J'étais monté sur le Pont des Arts . . . Face au Vert-Galant, je dominais l'île. Je sentais monter en moi un vaste sentiment de puissance . . . quand, au même moment, un rire éclata derrière moi. Surpris, je fis une brusque volte-face: il n'y avait personne" (LC, 1495). Clamence gives in to a feeling of disquietude and malaise: ". . . je percevais les battements précipités de mon coeur . . . J'étais étourdi, je respirais mal" (LC, 1495). By evening's end, Clamence

experiences the second result of the encounter with the absurd laughter. Gazing at his reflection in the mirror, he becomes aware of the double image reflected there: "Mon image souriait dans la glace, mais il me sembla que mon image était double" (LC, 1495). The disembodied laughter, which as Clamence prophetically declared, "remettait les choses en place" (LC, 1495), forces him to begin to recognize his duplicity. Eventually he recalls past events, attitudes, and actions; he evaluates and judges them in terms of guilt and innocence and finally comes to realize that he is and always has been guilty. The harmony and equilibrium of former days begin to disintegrate. At this point, when a decided change begins in Clamence's life, Camus stresses that Clamence's mood fluctuates between depression and elation brought about by medication. This upward and downward movement suggests the Sisyphus metaphor and is related structurally to the fall which Clamence undergoes: "Je remontais, et puis redescendais. La vie me devenait moins facile: . . . il me semblait que je désapprenais en partie ce que je n'avais jamais appris et que je savais pourtant si bien, je veux dire vivre. Oui, je crois bien que c'est alors que tout commença" (LC, 1497). Clamence's guilt is the vision of his inauthentic existence: he confesses that although he was alive he did not know real life, and he reflects on the new direction his life was then to take.

Perhaps the most striking outcome of Clamence's encounter with his guilt is his refusal of physical height. Early in the novel he reveals his fear of height when he says to his companion, ". . . je vous quitte près de ce pont. Je ne passe jamais sur un pont la nuit. C'est la conséquence d'un vœu" (LC, 1483). Then, later in the course of his confession he states, "Je dois reconnaître cependant que je ne mis plus les pieds sur les quais de Paris" (LC, 1497). Moreover, the former exaltation of the elevated position turns to an ironic exaltation of the flatness of Amsterdam, his present place of exile: ". . . le plus beau des paysages négatifs! . . . Rien que les horizontales, aucun éclat, l'espace est incolore . . ." (LC, 1513).

The scene atop the bridge clearly marks the beginning of Clamence's fall from innocence. From this point on he relates the progression of events that eventually culminate in self-imposed exile in the horizontal hell of Amsterdam. The movement of descent is implicit in the protagonist's fall. Further, the fall relates to Clamence's rebellion which as Adele King points out, parallels "the historical pattern of rebellion that Camus analyzed in L'Homme révolté."⁴¹

The movement of descent begins on the bridge and follows Clamence's attempts to regain his lost equilibrium and the harmony of the past. Faced with irreparable guilt, he searches for coherence and clear absolutes in an irrational and disordered universe. Unable to find intellectual and

⁴¹King, p. 660.

physical satisfaction in the world as it is, but still desiring to regain the feeling of domination and superiority of former days, Clamence is led ultimately to an espousal of universal and absolute guilt. He states: "J'ai accepté la duplicité au lieu de m'en désoler. Je m'y suis installé, au contraire, et j'y ai trouvé le confort que j'ai cherché toute ma vie" (LC, 1548). Clamence glorifies guilt not because it purifies but because it offers the relief that comes from having reached bottom: he is only happy when he is utterly miserable. His revolt is a negative and absolute one which Camus clearly criticizes. In the quest for coherence, his protagonist disregards the inherent value and dignity of mankind. Clamence's revolt yields the same enslavement as nihilistic revolt and the Hegelian theory of history: "Quand nous serons tous coupables, ce sera la démocratie. Sans compter cher ami, qu'il faut se venger de devoir mourir seul. La mort est solitaire tandis que la servitude est collective. . . . Tous réunis, enfin, mais à genoux, et la tête courbée" (LC, 1545). The feeling of isolation which Clamence initially felt upon discovering his guilt has been resolved by a false solidarity with those who share a common guilt. He has regained a new sense of harmony and equilibrium, but at the cost of exile and enslavement. To express this regained harmony Clamence speaks in terms of a feeling of elevation: "Depuis que j'ai trouvé ma solution, je m'abandonne à tout. . . . Je règne enfin mais pour

toujours. J'ai encore trouvé un sommet, où je suis seul à grimper et d'où je peux juger tout le monde" (LC, 1548). Clamence has in spirit returned to the heights where he becomes once more the philosopher of domination. Preaching the doctrine of universal guilt, he imagines himself to be more powerful than ever as he equates himself to God: "Alors je grandis . . . je respire librement, je suis sur la montagne, la prairie s'étend sous mes yeux. Quelle ivresse de se sentir Dieu le père et de distribuer les certificats définitifs de mauvaise vie et de moeurs. Je trône parmi mes vilains anges, à la cime du ciel hollandais, je regards monter vers moi, sortant des brumes de l'eau, la multitude du jugement dernier" (LC, 1549). In this parody of the final judgment, Jean-Baptiste Clamence becomes at once prophet and judge. Unlike his namesake, this prophet of the twentieth century points to his own coming and becomes the Christ who judges but does not forgive.

Rejecting height since it has come to signify a place of confrontation, Clamence in his delirium is able to summon forth from memory a lost feeling of grandeur. Since the only relation to life that he can accept is one of complete dominance, he can have no real connection with existence. Instead, he contents himself with his fantasies in which his omnipotence reigns unchecked. At his imagined height, Clamence is no longer vulnerable to confrontation. The use of the height motif has become negative as Clamence enters into absolute complicity with the guilt which he cannot overcome.

His avoidance of physical height in favor of the spiritual is significant inasmuch as it removes the possibility of renewed contradiction. In this way Clamence relinquishes the tension born of confrontation which would enable him to return to positive existence. Unlike Sisyphus, he surrenders to the absurd and denies that tension which empowers the Greek to daily confront the absurdity of his condition. Clamence chooses instead to remain in exile, in a false and negative kingdom, founded upon inauthentic values which destroy the individual and increase human suffering.

Camus relies heavily upon the description of the underworld landscape of Amsterdam to emphasize the negative aspects of Clamence's revolt and exile. The use of the landscape has always figured prominently in Camus' work. However, in La Chute, its treatment suggests that Camus was influenced by the major image of the twentieth century, the wasteland. In this third novel, the sterile and negative landscape provides the proper setting for Camus' pessimistic treatment of modern man. Amsterdam, presented as a wasteland by Camus emerges here as a dominant and all-pervading force which visually and spiritually complements the sterility of Clamence's exile. The warmth of the sun, the brilliant twinkling of the stars, and clarity and purity of the life-giving seas all of which served as fitting backdrops for the previous novels, are notably absent in La Chute. Instead, they are replaced here by stagnant and dead seas, fog and drizzle, and the glare of

neon lights. Clamence, exiled in this wasteland, understands it and thrives upon all that its sterility and negation imply. He ironically exalts the bizarre beauty of Amsterdam and the surroundings: "Voilà n'est-ce pas le plus beau des paysages négatifs! Voyez, à notre gauche, ce tas de cendres qu'on appelle ici une dune, la digue grise à notre droite, la grève livide à nos pieds et devant nous, la mer couleur de lessive faible, le vaste ciel où se reflètent les eaux blêmes. Un enfer mou vraiment!" (LC, 1513). The beauty of this flat, dull landscape is, of course, a perverted one which significantly denies all life-giving forces, and celebrates sterility and death. Correspondingly, this horizontal hell, tainted and sullied by man is the place of exile of those who would condemn mankind to collective guilt and servitude. Camus deprives his protagonist of the natural beauty of the universe which can lead man to an awareness and an affirmation of human dignity and of life itself. Because Clamence has chosen to accept complicity and exploit the misery of existence, he is exiled to the lowlands, a fitting universe for a false prophet.

CHAPTER V

L'EXIL ET LE ROYAUME: THE HEIGHT MOTIF
AND THE QUEST FOR THE KINGDOM

In his final literary effort, L'Exil et le royaume, Camus addressed himself squarely to those themes which he had made particularly his own. For approximately twenty-five years he had struggled to describe separation, loneliness, and defeat, and man's alternatives in face of this seemingly hopeless situation. In 1957 with the publication of L'Exil et le royaume he offered his last and fullest expression of man's dilemma. Exile had been his major theme but the kingdom had been a growing, though distant possibility. As Camus' thought and art developed, the kingdom eventually became the only alternative to the theme of exile which he had wrestled with for so long.

The constancy of the theme of exile, which lies at the heart of his creative activity and which is the common bond uniting all his work, confirms Camus' assertion that "aucun artiste n'a jamais exprimé plus d'une seule chose sous les visages différents" (MS, 131). From his first literary efforts in 1936, notably L'Envers et l'endroit, to this last collection of short stories, L'Exil et le royaume, Camus describes the exile and alienation of modern man who "dans un univers soudain privé d'illusions et de lumières . . . se

sent un étranger" (MS, 18). Each of Camus' heroes shares this common though varied destiny of exile. Correspondingly, all are "rivés au temps et à l'exil" (MS, 125) and live out their destinies in the barren wasteland of the twentieth century. They are all creatures whose existences are limited in space and time and who know it; they long for coherence and explanation and they come to know that this is ultimately denied.

In his collection of six short stories, Camus presents six varying but related examples of the theme of exile which to a large extent is dealt with less metaphorically than previously. Here, exile is portrayed through a housewife's awareness of the sterility of her marriage, a schoolteacher's and a laborer's failures to communicate, an artist's loss of inspiration, a priest's failure to restrain his desire for the absolute, and an engineer's disenchantment with post-war Europe. Although the source of their particular exile differs from character to character, they all reflect the problems of modern man.

Camus, however, offers an alternative to the despair and misery implicit in exile. In a prefatory comment to the 1957 edition of L'Exil et le royaume, he re-establishes the optimistic direction of a philosophy which had oscillated between the guarded hopefulness of La Peste and the despair of La Chute. In his remarks, Camus suggests that the exile need not be a blind alley which offers no hope or progress.

Instead, he insists that through the misery and suffering of exile man can find a way to regain the lost harmony of the past: "Quant au royaume dont il est question aussi, il coïncide avec une certaine vie libre et nue que nous avons à retrouver, pour renaître enfin. L'exil, à sa manière, nous en montre les chemins à la seule condition que nous sachions y refuser en même temps la servitude et la possession."⁴² Camus' remark on the exile reiterates his stance that there are values inherent in the misery of existence which, if properly evaluated, could lead to the realization of the kingdom of man.

Stylistically the six stories that make up L'Exil et le royaume differ considerably from Camus' previous work. Whereas Camus had formerly depended on a largely metaphorical, almost allegorical approach, L'Exil et le royaume shows a movement toward more realism. The presence of the author is less felt and there is less reliance on abstract situations and metaphorical representation. Instead of a stranger and a guilt-ridden judge, etc., the main characters are a housewife, a schoolteacher, an artist, a priest, a laborer, and an engineer. Camus' movement toward a more realistic fiction in which the story must speak for itself is particularly important with respect to the Sisyphus metaphor. As the metaphorical devices diminish Camus comes to rely even more heavily upon the height motif and realistic setting to reinforce and clarify his themes.

⁴²Théâtre, récits, nouvelles, p. 2039.

Each of the short stories contains an explicit use of physical elevation or a sense of elevation which relates to the state of mind of the protagonist. Only in "Le Renégat" is the physical manifestation of height lacking, but here it is replaced by a sense of elevation which is a part of the renegade priest's recollection of the harmony and glory of the past. In the other five stories height is not only present, but an integral part of the setting as in "L'Hôte" where the entire action takes place on a high plateau. In the case of Jonas in "L'Artiste au travail," the absence of height in the horizontal setting of his Parisian apartment is replaced by the protagonist's construction of an elevated loft in his attempt to reach the verticality of isolation. Each time the height motif, whether in the form of the balcony, the ramparts of a fort, the plateau, and the constructed loft, provides a physical means of isolation. Thematically, height becomes the point of epiphany where each protagonist confronts the vision of his absurd existence. The subsequent movement of descent (or the lack of movement, as in "L'Hôte") is also a thematic complement. It is through the final movement downward that Camus evaluates the result of his protagonist's encounter at the heights.

In the first short story, "La Femme adultère," the ramparts of a fort are the setting for the point of epiphany where Janine, the protagonist and adulterous woman, glimpses only momentarily the "étrange royaume" which "de tout temps

lui avait été promis et que jamais pourtant . . . ne sera le sien . . ." (ER, 1570). Janine's brief glimpse and still briefer entry into the kingdom is carefully prepared by Camus who describes a precise sequence of circumstances, perceptions, and sensations which lead up to her entry into a state of grace.

Janine's exile is clearly established through descriptive narration and implied metaphor at the beginning of the story. The introductory description of the trapped fly, which "allait et venait sans bruit d'un vol extenué" (ER, 1559) in an effort to escape the coach invites a comparison with Janine who also feels stifled in the coach: "L'autocar était plein d'Arabes. . . . Leur silence, leur impassibilité finissaient par peser à Janine: il lui semblait qu'elle voyageait depuis des jours avec cette escorte muette" (ER, 1560).

This sense of confinement and discomfort is characteristic of her existence. Camus reveals that Janine is conscious of her aging and thickening body, of the meaninglessness of her childless and loveless marriage, and of the feeling of isolation and loneliness which become more difficult to bear as she approaches middle age. All of these circumstances contribute to her exile. Her past hopes, dreams, and desires, and her recollection of the freedom of youth are contrasted with her marked awareness of the limitations of her immediate present: "Non, rien ne se passait comme elle avait cru" (ER, 1561). Separated forever from her past, she appraises her life as one characterized by fatigue, boredom, and routine.

Aware of the meaninglessness and aimlessness of her absurd existence, longing for coherence and the lost unity of her past, Janine is ultimately led to a consciousness of her own identity with the world. The height motif and the Sisyphus metaphor structurally parallel her revolt against the exile of the present. Fascinated by the fortress and its ramparts, she urges Marcel to accompany her to the summit to view the expanse of the desert. There she surveys the impenetrable and purposeless universe around her. Her attention focuses upon the nomadic tribesmen in their tents: "sans maisons, coupés du monde, ils étaient une poignée à errer sur le vaste territoire qu'elle découvrait du regard" (ER, 1570). The nomads are a fitting symbol of an absurd existence: tied to the desert and stripped of a seemingly purposeful life, they have reached an accord with the emptiness of the desert: "Depuis toujours, sur la terre sèche, râclée jusqu'à l'os de ce pays démesuré, quelques hommes cheminaient sans trêve, qui ne possédaient rien mais ne servaient personne, seigneurs misérables et libres d'un étrange royaume" (ER, 1570). Janine becomes at once conscious of the parallel between the absurdity of her existence and that of the nomadic tribesmen: ". . . dans une ligne pure, là-bas, lui semblait-il soudain, quelque chose l'attendait qu'elle avait ignoré jusqu'à ce jour et que pourtant n'avait cessé de lui manquer" (ER, 1570). The nomads in their seemingly aimless traveling, in accepting a life which lacks a

definite direction, become equal to their destiny in the same way that Sisyphus becomes equal to his rock. Janine, seeing the vision of her own existence reflected in that of the nomads, becomes aware of her own identity.

Descending to the streets she is more conscious than ever of her alienation and exile. Camus writes: "Son exaltation l'avait quittée. A présent, elle se sentait trop grande, trop épaisse, trop blanche aussi pour ce monde où elle venait d'entrer." The force of the absurd seems to overwhelm her. Her thoughts now reveal a tendency toward resignation: "Qu'y ferait-elle désormais, sinon s'y traîner jusqu'au sommeil, jusqu'à la mort?" (ER, 1517).

Resignation ultimately gives way to revolt. Haunted by the vision of the desert and the nomads, she is impelled to leave her husband's bed and return to the ramparts. This second visit culminates in a momentary glimpse of the kingdom. Turning her vision to the expanse of the night, revolving with the stars which "la réunissait peu à peu à son être le plus profond" (ER, 1574), Janine, like Meursault, opens to the emptiness and indifference of the desert, becomes aware of the final equality of all things, and feels a primitive and serene indifference to everything and even to herself: "Elle respirait, elle oubliait le froid, le poids des êtres, la vie démente ou figée, la longue angoisse de vivre et mourir. Après tant d'années, où fuyant devant la peur . . . elle s'arrêtait enfin" (ER, 1574). She has briefly transcended the

confines of her exile in a moment of communion and exaltation with the universe.

Although Janine has glimpsed the kingdom, it too, like her youth, will become a memory of the past. The final scene of the story describes her descent and her return to Marcel and the exile of the present. Here, in the last lines of the narrative, Camus re-awakens Janine to the vision of her exile. In a symbolic gesture, Marcel lights the lamps, the shock of which "la gifla en plein visage" (ER, 1575). With this symbolic punishment, the adulterous woman, whose symbolic betrayal embodies nothing more than a mystical communion with the natural world, is condemned once more to the exile of the present.

From the exile of the adulterous woman, Camus moves to an examination of the exile of a divided and confused renegade priest. Here the setting is the wasteland of the desert, and the main character is a symbol of a negative revolt seeking the absolute; physical height is notably lacking. As in La Chute, height is confined to the protagonist's recollection of the past. Moreover, both Clamence and the priest are exiled to a negative, inhuman wasteland and separated from the balconies and high plateaus which are retained only in the form of memories.

In "Le Renégat" Camus criticizes the extremes of religious fanaticism: as in La Chute, height is again associated with power and glory. Clamence's balconies, however, have here been replaced by the sun. Using the stream-of-consciousness

technique, Camus succeeds in portraying the incoherence and confusion of the priest's monologue. It is through Camus' narrative technique that the reader is able to distinguish the dual nature of the priest who, obsessed with power, is torn between a past allegiance to a Christian faith and blind allegiance to his present captors' pagan idol. Significantly, the sun remains a consistent focal point amidst this confusion: it continues to represent the absolute power which is the object of the renegade's quest. Thus he has come to associate the sun with the paganism of his captors, although he reveals through his recollections of the past, that he once equated Catholicism with the sun and, by extension, with power. Camus writes that "le catholicisme c'est le soleil" (ER, 1580). The priest further describes himself in terms of that sun: ". . . une recrue du pays protestant, ils m'ont vu arriver comme le soleil d'Austerlitz" (ER, 1580). He also remarks that as a missionary "je subjuguerais ces sauvages comme un soleil puissant" (ER, 158).

It becomes clear that religion for the renegade priest is a mask for pride and power-worship. He easily denies Christianity and turns to a blind allegiance to the savages' idol, Râ, whom he now proclaims to be all-powerful. The sun eventually becomes an ambiguous symbol for the priest just as places of high elevation became a source of contradiction for Clamence. The desert sun, still retaining its earlier symbolic meaning, becomes a source of pain and torture. Correspondingly, the priest equates the force of the sun with the evil

of his captors, for he states that "ils sont comme le soleil qui n'en finit pas, sauf la nuit, de frapper toujours, avec éclat et orgueil . . ." (ER, 1582). A victim of the tortures and violations of the savages, the priest is also a victim of the sun. However, in his need and in his desire to worship might, he easily and willingly submits to the cruelty which the savages and the sun inflict upon him.

Thus, like Clamence, the renegade priest accepts the enslavement and servitude inherent in the quest for absolute power. Moreover, as with Clamence, Camus offers no alternative existence to these rebels whose search for coherence culminates in the espousal of the absolute. They are both condemned to wastelands of the twentieth century which come to be their negative kingdoms. Maimed and mutilated, the renegade priest exalts his new kingdom:

Prisonnier de son royaume, la ville
sculptée dans une montagne de sel,
séparée de la nature, privée de
floraisons fugitives et rares du
désert, soustraite à ces hasards ou
ces tendresses, un nuage insolite, une
pluie rageuse et brève, que même le
soleil ou les sables connaissent, la
ville d'ordre enfin, angles droits,
chambres carrées, hommes roides, je
m'en fis librement le citoyen haineux
et torturé, je reniai la longue
histoire qu'on m'avait enseignée.
. . . Seul le mal peut aller jusqu'à
ses limites et régner absolument,
c'est lui qu'il faut servir pour
installer son royaume visible . . .
(ER, 1589-90).

His conversion to an apostle of hate and violence completed, the renegade is doomed to exile in this false kingdom. His final triumph, like that of Clamence, is bitter. Although he has succeeded in protecting this kingdom of hate from the priest who has come to replace him, his exaltation turns to sad defeat: "Ô, nuits d'Europe, patrie, enfance, pourquoi faut-il que je pleure au moment du triomphe?" (ER, 1592).

The absence of physical height and the Sisyphus metaphor distinguishes "Le Renégat" from the other five stories in L'Exil et le royaume. In this examination of an extreme fanaticism, Camus seems to deny this protagonist the opportunity to rediscover his lost identity and regain that part of his human dignity that he long ago relinquished. Unlike Janine, he is too weak to accept the limitations of existence; in fact, he betrays the Camus ideal of limitations which governs revolt in the name of human dignity. This rebel is thus denied those propitious moments which allow one to reintegrate and become whole. Imprisoned in the fetish's cubicle, he is denied the splendor of the night. Exiled in the city of salt, he is denied the natural world. There is no possibility of movement, no height from which he can see beyond Tâghaza. The only height that Camus seems willing to provide his protagonist is the sun which ironically corresponds to those very attitudes which Camus criticizes: the thirst for power, and the quest for the absolute. Like Clamence, the renegade priest is a condemned man. Forfeiting his right

to the kingdom, he must accept the sterility of a negative kingdom which, in the end, he dies to protect.

The incoherent babbling which characterized the renegade priest's monologue is immediately contrasted with an examination of the exile of "the silent men." In the final pages of L'Homme révolté, Camus described the consequences of "la muette hostilité qui sépare l'opresseur de l'opprimé"; emphasizing the outcome of separation that emerges from injustice, Camus declared that this mute hostility "tue le peu d'être qui peut venir au monde par la complicité des hommes entre eux" (HR, 340). In his third story, "Les Muets," Camus realistically examines the mute hostility which separates the head of a cooper's shop from his employees who demand higher wages.

"Les Muets" is a study of the failure of human solidarity in which Camus portrays through Yvars, an aging cooper, the intensified feeling of separation and exile which emerges from this failure. In this story, which continues the progression toward the realization of the kingdom, the height motif in the form of Yvars' terrace is of central importance to the development of the plot.

The significance of Yvars' terrace is established early. Through the third-person narrative Camus emphasizes the feeling of well-being that Yvars attaches to the terrace, and sets it up as a place of restful contemplation:

L'heure était douce sur la terrasse de sa maison où il s'asseyait après le travail, content de sa chemise propre que Fernande savait si bien repasser, et du verre d'anisette couvert de buée. Le soir tombait, une douceur brève s'installait dans la ciel, les voisins qui parlaient avec Yvars baissaient soudain la voix. Il ne savait pas alors s'il était heureux ou s'il avait envie de pleurer. Du moins, il était d'accord dans ces moments-là, il n'avait rien à faire qu'attendre, doucement, sans savoir pourquoi (ER, 1598).

In this description of the terrace, Camus identifies Yvars' contentment with the feeling of solidarity between family and friends and with the beauty and softness of the landscape. The terrace is clearly a place of accord, of harmony among men, and between man and the universe. Moreover, the balcony provides a moment of relief for Yvars from his life in the shop. Here, facing the sea and the infinite universe, he is conscious of his mortality and of the sad truth of existence. Significantly, Yvars feels the same sense of expectancy which Janine felt before her mystical union and identification with the universe.

As the plot of "Les Muets" develops, the terrace becomes increasingly important as a point of contrast with the coopers' shop, the scene of the failure of human solidarity, and a place of exile. Yvar's experience with failure is preceded by a feeling of uneasiness as the conflict between the owner and the workers develops into an oppressive, but silent hostility. This uneasiness, however, is somewhat

alleviated by the solidarity of the workers who, in silent unity, share each other's suffering. Failing to communicate with Lassalle, the owner, Yvars is able to alleviate his feeling of separation by the act of sharing a meagre lunch with Saïd, a fellow worker: "Le malaise qui ne l'avait pas quitté depuis l'entrevue avec Lassalle disparaissait soudain pour laisser seulement place à une bonne chaleur. Il se leva en rompant son pain et dit, devant le refus de Saïd, que la semaine prochaine tout irait mieux. 'Tu m'inviteras à ton tour,' dit-il. Saïd sourit" (ER, 1605). Through the common bond of suffering, the unity of the workers is strengthened. But it is a false solidarity and one which increases the suffering of Lassalle who, of course, is excluded. Unable to free themselves of the resentment which they feel toward the owner, the coopers maintain a conspiracy of silence when they learn that Lassalle's daughter is gravely ill. Yvars' feeling of separation increases. Overwhelmed by a feeling of uneasiness and malaise, his thoughts turn to his terrace and home: "Yvars ne sentait plus que sa fatigue et son coeur toujours serré. Il avait voulu parler. Mais il n'avait rien à dire. . . . Parfois, en lui, le mot malheur se formait, mais à peine, et il disparaissait aussitôt comme une bulle naît et éclate en même temps. Il avait envie de rentrer chez lui, de retrouver Fernande, le garçon, et la terrasse aussi" (ER, 1607). His desire to return home, to escape the confines of the shop, and to leave the scene of failure become uppermost

in his mind. En route to his home, "il allait vite, il voulait retrouver la vieille maison et la terrasse" (ER, 1608).

Sitting on his terrace with the infinite landscape once more before him, Yvars is unable to forget the sick child and his failure to communicate his sorrow to Lassalle. Disclosing the events of the day to his wife, "il resta immobile, tourné vers la mer où courait déjà, d'un bout à l'autre de l'horizon, le rapide crépuscule" (ER, 1608). The moment of détente which the terrace formerly offered yields to a feeling of melancholy regret and the desire to escape his present exile. Face to face with the infinite universe and the sea which remind Yvars that he is forever separated from the past, he nevertheless yearns to begin life again. The uneasy feeling of expectancy which had remained with him throughout the day has vanished. From his terrace Yvars understands and knows the nature of his exile. The kingdom is presently out of reach. Yet he is now acutely aware of how deeply each of his acts involves him with the feelings of other people. This awareness suggests that some sort of contact has been re-established, and that the kingdom of human solidarity may be a not-too distant possibility.

In "L'Hôte" the isolated "kingdom" of the high and barren desert plateau becomes the setting for Camus' fourth examination of the quest for the kingdom. The elevated desert setting serves two purposes: it reinforces Daru's chosen

isolation and it suggests that the path to human solidarity and to Camus' kingdom is difficult. In "L'Hôte" the height motif and the Sisyphus metaphor are, in fact, so obvious that they almost pass unnoticed. But the setting serves a much larger purpose than that of mere incidental backdrop. The plateau and Daru's hill are an ambiguous symbol; at times a place of physical and spiritual exile, at others the possible site of the kingdom, and finally the place of Daru's definite exile. Moreover, the movement of ascent and descent which marks the Sisyphus metaphor, controls and frames the action of the story. The ascent of the Arab prisoner and his captor opens the narrative and initiates the action: "L'instituteur regardait les deux hommes monter vers lui. L'un était à cheval, L'autre à pied. . . . Ils peinaient, progressant lentement dans la neige, entre les pierres, sur l'immense étendue de haut plateau désert" (ER, 1611). It is this intrusion into Daru's universe that upsets the equilibrium and puts into motion a series of events that change his world. Correspondingly, the Arab's final descent determines the outcome of the story and underlines the exile of Daru who becomes a prisoner in his "kingdom" on top of the plateau.

Camus establishes the sterility and solitude which characterize Daru's plateau and makes it clear that, despite the landscape's negative and inhuman qualities, Daru looks upon it as a type of kingdom: "Devant cette misère, lui qui vivait presque en moine dans cette école perdue, content

d'ailleurs du peu qu'il avait, et de cette vie rude, s'était senti un seigneur. . . . Le pays était ainsi, cruel à vivre, même sans les hommes, qui, pourtant, n'arrangeaient rien. Mais Daru y était né. Partout ailleurs, il se sentait exilé" (ER, 1613). Cut off from the human contact and the authority of the outside world, Daru has paradoxically chosen a self-imposed isolation as his kingdom. Camus eventually reveals Daru's mute protest against the willing and unreasoning nature of violence. This protagonist is squarely opposed to the brute immorality of men and to the process of dehumanization which that immorality implies.

The Arab's intrusion into Daru's world upsets the balance the schoolteacher had heretofore maintained. Both the intrusion and the nature of the man's crime initiate a feeling of anger in Daru. Camus explains: "Une colère subite vint à Daru contre cet homme, contre tous les hommes et leur sale méchanceté, leurs haines inlassables, leur folie du sang (ER, 1615). Daru, moreover, is equally disenchanted with the false ethical standards of his own kind: "Le crime imbécile de cet homme le révoltait, mais le livrer était contraire à l'honneur: d'y penser seulement le rendait fou d'humiliation. Et il maudissait à la fois les siens qui lui envoyaient cet Arabe . . ." (ER, 1621). In an earlier version of the story, Camus further elaborated upon Daru's renunciation of society. Camus here explains: "Il ne reconnaissait pas non plus les lois de sa propre tribu et ne voulait saluer que la loi ou

le Dieu qui serait celui de tout . . ."43 For Daru no man has the right to infringe upon the personal liberty of another. Again in his earlier manuscript Camus explicitly identifies this principle as responsible for Daru's withdrawal to a desert post: "Peut-être le silence seul lui répondrait, . . . mais il ne voulait plus dire non, ni juger, ni détruire, ni humilier personne ou lui-même."44

Daru refuses to treat the Arab as a prisoner and hopes at the same time that he will run away to freedom. The Arab, however, remains and in so doing becomes a foil for Daru. Up to this point the isolation of the hill has shielded the protagonist from any situation that would test his convictions vis-à-vis another human being. Although Daru refuses to inflict further humiliation upon the Arab, he fails to make a meaningful and definitive contact with him. Instead, Daru remains faithful to his self-imposed isolation and maintains a detached and uncommitted stance; he finally escorts the Arab toward the ambiguous freedom of a self-determined fate. Furnishing the prisoner with food and money, Daru leads him to the crossroads. Pointing out the two alternative directions, one leading to society and prison, the other to the nomadic tribes and freedom, Daru abstains from accepting any responsibility for the Arab's choice and leaves him with the words: "Maintenant, je te laisse" (ER, 1623).

⁴³Théâtre, récits, nouvelles, p. 2052.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 2052.

The final two paragraphs contain a double irony that ultimately bring this story to its seemingly contradictory end. Daru is made aware of the first contradiction as he reaches the security of his hill and turns to survey the landscape: "Quand il parvint à la petite colline, il ruisselait de sueur. Il la gravit à toute allure et s'arrêta, essoufflé, sur le sommet. Les champs de roches, au sud, se dessinaient nettement sur le ciel bleu, mais sur la plaine, à l'est, une buée de chaleur montait déjà. Et dans cette brume légère, Daru, le coeur serré, découvrit l'Arabe qui cheminait lentement sur la route de la prison" (ER, 1623). Ironically, Daru's actions have aroused the Arab's sense of honor. In giving the Arab the freedom to choose his fate, Daru has become inextricably involved in the consequences of the Arab's choice. Daru's return to the hill is no longer a return to the kingdom. Misinterpreting their brother's return to prison, the Arab tribesmen hold Daru responsible for the prisoner's fate at the hands of the authorities. Their cryptic message foretells what will happen to Daru: "Tu as livré notre frère. Tu paieras" (ER, 1623). The ultimate irony is revealed in the closing words, "il était seul" (ER, 1623). The kingdom of solitude now becomes an exile of solitude. Alone once again, Daru is left to confront the absurd universe and to suffer the consequences of an absurd misunderstanding.

Although "L'Hôte" is essentially Daru's story, the ambiguous nature of the title suggests that the role of the Arab and his actions within the story deserve more than a superficial glance. In addition to being a foil for Daru, the Arab and the movements of ascent and descent which characterize his actions stand in direct contrast to Daru who remains in a relatively stationary position throughout the story. Moreover, the Arab's final descent from the hill and his subsequent movement toward the world of men is a movement toward re-integration. Clearly, the Arab's experience at the hilltop has resulted in a change. Daru, on the other hand, refuses to come down from his hill. When the Arab asks him to accompany him in his descent, his reply is a mute refusal.

Daru's refusal to descend from the security of his isolation in a movement toward commitment and solidarity prevents him from entering the kingdom and poignantly underlines the true meaning of his chosen isolation. The ironic turn of events which ends the story firmly establishes that Daru's kingdom is nothing more than an exile in which isolation and confrontation have yielded no positive call to action.

In contrast to the elevated world of Daru, the world of Jonas in "L'Artiste au travail" is notably flat and horizontal. In this short story Camus turns to a consideration of the themes of artistic regeneration and the artist's responsibility toward his fellow-men. Jonas, like Daru, appears

to live in a euphoric kingdom. Despite the chaotic conditions of his existence, he maintains a delicate balance and equilibrium, successfully dividing his time among creative, social, and family commitments. Little by little Jonas' equilibrium and harmony yield to a distinct imbalance as he is impelled to devote more of his time to social commitments and less time to his art. Camus tells us, "La production de Jonas, au contraire, ralentissait dans la mesure où ses amis devenaient plus intéressants" (ER, 1640).

In his movement toward human solidarity, Jonas' creative inspiration and production diminish. He experiences a kind of inner division as he becomes more and more separated from his art which, in effect, comprises an essential part of his very being. Fully aware of this separation and of the forces which contribute to it, Jonas attempts to resolve the problem through isolation. Realizing that his attempt to accommodate his life with his art has resulted in a failure to achieve success in either domain, Jonas withdraws from the realities of his immediate world in an effort to regain the lost unity and harmony of the past.

In his efforts toward re-integration, Jonas constructs a loft within the horizontal confines of his Paris apartment. Significantly, the construction of the loft is a movement toward vertical isolation. Camus describes Jonas' attempt: "A mi-hauteur des murs, il construisit un plancher pour obtenir une sorte de soupenette étroite, quoique haute et

profonde" (ER, 1651). Within the loft, a quiet place removed from the storm without, Jonas transforms the space immediately around him. In his new universe the tools of the artist are noticeably lacking. The loft, in fact, consists only of a stool and a lamp which Jonas does not light. Estranged and now physically separated from the outside world, Jonas withdraws in an active endeavor to recreate the world within his own consciousness. He forces himself through meditation and discipline to search for the symbolic light that will allow him to reconstruct his world: "Brille, brille, disait-il. Ne me prive pas de ta lumière" (ER, 1652). Subjecting himself to the darkness and solitude of the loft, Jonas, like Janine on the ramparts of the fort, patiently waits for the absurd world to reveal once more to him the secret of existence: "Il fallait qu'il découvre ce qu'il n'avait pas encore compris clairement, bien qu'il eût toujours su, et qu'il eût toujours peint comme s'il le savait. Il devait se saisir enfin de ce secret qui n'était pas seulement celui de l'art, il le voyait bien. C'est pourquoi il n'allumait pas la lampe" (ER, 1652).

During his exile in the loft which, significantly, does not completely separate him from his family and friend, Rateau, Jonas becomes more conscious of the reality of the world outside. He begins to see things as if for the first time. He becomes aware of his and all men's mortality as he looks upon his wife's aging face: "il vit soudain à quel point

elle avait vieilli, et que la fatigue de leur vie avait mordu profondément sur elle aussi" (ER, 1652).

In the next stage of his experience he lights the lamp and asks for a canvas. At the end of two days of intense meditation he is exhausted and announces that "il ne travaillerait plus jamais, il était heureux" (ER, 1653-54). With this statement, the sounds of the world outside and of the life inside the apartment reach him with full and vibrant clarity: "Il entendait les grognements de ses enfants, les bruits d'eau, les tintements de la vaisselle. . . . Le monde était encore là, jeune, adorable: Jonas écoutait la belle rumeur que font les hommes" (ER, 1654). Camus explains further that the world of men, their noises and their presence, would not interfere with the joyous force within Jonas, and that, moreover, this force, "son art, ces pensées, qu'il ne pouvait pas dire" (ER, 1654), places him above all hindrance "dans un air libre et vif" (ER, 1654). The work which had begun as a refuge and escape from the terrors of reality has led the artist back into life, not compromised by it but somewhat superior to it.

Jonas symbolically extinguishes his lamp realizing that his creative star has returned: "C'était elle, il la reconnaissait, le coeur plein de gratitude, et il la regardait encore lorsqu'il tomba, sans bruit" (ER, 1654). The return of his star marks his descent from the loft and the return to his family.

The movement in "L'Artiste au travail" is once again a paradigm of the Sisyphus metaphor. From the imperfect kingdom in which his inspiration disappears, Jonas moves upward toward the isolation of his loft and self-imposed exile. He remains there awaiting inspiration, haunted by the antithesis of "solitariness" and "solidarity." His fall from the loft is the movement downward to re-enter the world of men. The fruit of his suffering and exile, the enigmatic inscription on Jonas' canvas ("solitary" or "solidary," one could not be sure) poignantly places the dilemma of the artist before the reader and invites him to interpret the outcome of Jonas' experience. Clearly Camus suggests that the artist must maintain distance in order to be able to create. But at the same time he must be able to find the necessary inspiration which springs from the sources of life. The artist may need to withdraw, meditate, and be spiritually reborn, but he must retain a concern for the problems of the world. Camus seems to indicate that a tension and a balance between two extremes, solidarity and solitariness, is the key to the dilemma which may lead to the artist's kingdom.

"La Pierre qui pousse," the final short story of L'Exil et le royaume satisfies the quest for the kingdom and presents through d'Arrast the fulfillment of Camus' ideal. The problem of exile and isolation, of human solidarity and belonging, is at least temporarily resolved as this protagonist preserves his own individuality and at the same time

commits himself to sharing the problems and struggles of other men. D'Arrast succeeds in traversing the distance between the exile and the kingdom.

In this short story Camus' thought and art combine to present a literal image of the modern-day Sisyphus. Heretofore Camus had relied upon the implicit and sometimes uncompleted image of ascent, height, and descent to convey the message of the "unsuccessful" Sisyphus. In "La pierre qui pousse," however, Camus' hero d'Arrast, an engineer who works with stone, descends from the balcony, places the rock of penance on his head, assumes and fulfills a somewhat absurd task for his friend Le Coq, and overcomes the state of exile which had previously characterized his existence.

Camus creates both a protagonist and a setting which are compatible with this presentation of a humble attempt at the realization of the kingdom. D'Arrast belongs to that group of characters in Camus who are deeply committed to this earth and to combatting those forces which threaten to overwhelm and diminish man. Like Rieux, d'Arrast utilizes his scientific knowledge to aid the oppressed. His efforts focus upon what is tangible and concrete; he deals with problems whose solution is within the bounds of human limitations. In this case, it is a river which he, as an engineer, has come to control. Like Daru, d'Arrast is physically and voluntarily exiled from a country that he remembers, but to which he refuses to return. Moreover, he has witnessed the violence and

injustice that men inflict upon one another which Daru had found repugnant. Finally, he refrains from inflicting additional humiliation upon his fellow-men who, he knows, suffer enough in a universe ruled by death. D'Arrast is also linked to Janine, Yvars, and Jonas in that in his exile he waits patiently in expectation of an undefinable and undistinguishable event or vision to provide a resolution to his predicament. Placing him in a primitive, almost virgin land, exiled and conscious of the absurdity which permeates the very air, Camus allows this protagonist to glimpse and enter the kingdom.

The origin of separation and exile which d'Arrast experiences is twofold. The jungle in itself is a source of the absurd and hence a cause of discomfort for d'Arrast who at times is overwhelmed by it: "Il lui semblait qu'il aurait voulu vomir ce pays tout entier, la tristesse de ses grands espaces, la lumière glauque des forêts, et le clapotis nocturne de ses grands fleuves déserts" (ER, 1678). He is further exiled and separated from the natives whose religious fervor is foreign and repugnant to him: "Ici l'exil ou la solitude, au milieu de ces fous languissants et trépidants, qui dansaient pour mourir" (ER, 1678). He is, however, able to overcome the exile through meaningful contact with another human being, Le Coq, not on a religious level, but on a more profound human one.

In the final pages d'Arrast in effect becomes a modern-day Sisyphus who overcomes the absurdity of his exile by

becoming equal, if not superior, to it. To depict this movement out of exile and the discovery of the kingdom, Camus utilizes the height motif of the balcony followed by the hero's descent into the streets. D'Arrast is placed on the balcony in the role of spectator to the religious procession which takes place below. The balcony, however, is clearly a place of discomfort for d'Arrast. Camus writes that "Ils attendirent si longtemps que d'Arrast à force de regarder la réverbération du soleil sur le mur d'en face, sentit à nouveau revenir sa fatigue et son vertige" (ER, 1682). Unable to see his friend, Le Coq, who is to carry upon his head a huge rock in order to fulfill his promise to God, d'Arrast is overcome with concern and abruptly, "D'un seul mouvement, sans s'excuser, il quitta le balcon et la pièce, dévala l'escalier et se trouva dans la rue, sous le tonnerre des cloches et des pétards" (ER, 1682). He finds Le Coq in the crowd of natives, unable to lift and carry his stone. In a gesture of friendship and love, d'Arrast accepts the burden of the task and proceeds to fulfill Le Coq's promise to God to carry the stone to the church: "Légèrement tassé sous le poids de la pierre, les épaules ramassées, soufflant un peu, il regarda à ses pieds, écoutant les sanglots du Coq" (ER, 1683). D'Arrast underlines the meaning of his gesture by carrying the rock not to the church in tribute to God but to Le Coq's hut. D'Arrast's task, which at first seemed to be absurd, embodies a service to man and not to God. In the

act of placing the stone upon his head, d'Arrast commits himself to humanity. He is freed from exile and is filled with a new force and joy: "D'Arrast, debout dans l'ombre, écoutait sans rien voir, et le bruit des eaux l'emplissait d'un bonheur tumultueux. Les yeux fermés, il saluait joyeusement sa propre force, il saluait, une fois de plus, la vie qui recommençait" (ER, 1686). Without God, d'Arrast discovers the meaning of fraternity. His exile ended, he is ready to sit down with the others.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Albert Camus is perhaps best understood within the context of his literary tradition. In particular, Camus is a product of the romantic revolution. His works depend in many ways on certain basic patterns, postures, and themes which are a part of the mainstream of romantic literature. Rayner Heppenstall for example, has remarked: "We must not ignore the amount of sheer literary romanticism in his [Camus'] work. The stoicism of De Vigny, the cult of failure in Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and Verlaine, the baffled Titanism of Victor Hugo, the elegant religious despair of Chateaubriand, the despairing mundanity of Stendhal and De Musset have all contributed to The Myth of Sisyphus. The freshness and the vigor of conviction have gone, but if we scrape off the top dressing of modernity these are the roots which lie exposed."⁴⁵

In part romanticism was and continues to be the expression of the sometimes anguished search for new values in a world where traditional concepts had been bereft of meaning. Separated from the romantic past by the cruel reality of war, the loss of idealism, and the rise of totalitarianism and

⁴⁵Rayner Heppenstall, "Albert Camus and the Romantic Protest," Penguin New Writing no. 34 (1948), p. 112.

cynicism, Camus persists in this quest for the meaning of existence within an ironic and realistic framework. His departure from romantic tradition is not, however, a complete one in that he relies heavily upon and utilizes three key elements that are basic to romantic literature: height, landscape, and the solitary figure.

Taken together, the composite image of solitary man, elevated and facing the infinite landscape came to be a cliché in romantic literature and generally reflected the romantic writer's attempt to connect man to God through the natural landscape. Camus' use of this image within the ironic mode reveals the break from the romantic past. He places his solitary figures in elevated positions, facing a negative landscape, in an effort to reveal to them the very meaninglessness and absurdity that mortal existence implies. While the romantic hero searches for meaning by attempting to integrate himself into the world, Camus' hero, seeing only the reality of an inhuman and inscrutable universe, is ultimately forced to search for value within himself and through the common bond of human nature which unites all men.

Camus' development as an artist, moreover, can be at least partially measured through his use and refinement of the Sisyphus metaphor. Initially expressed in Le Mythe de Sisyphe, it is an elementary and consistent metaphor which unites all of Camus' prose fiction. In his developing philosophy, which began with an examination of the absurd

and extended to a statement of man's permissible actions because of and in spite of the absurd, the Sisyphus metaphor continued to be a thematic complement. In this basic image Camus incorporated the elements of height, the solitary figure, and the landscape in an effort to symbolize the dilemma of modern man.

As Camus' art developed, his point of view became more clear, his vision more precise, and his fiction less abstract. In a sense, Camus grew more optimistic, more positive in his belief that man's only hope lay in the common bond of human nature that unites him with his fellow-man. In conjunction with his developing vision, Camus' use of the height motif and the Sisyphus metaphor underwent similar changes. In the early work, as in L'Etranger, for example, Camus' use of the height motif was incomplete and somewhat inconclusive. By the time of La Peste, La Chute, and L'Exil et le royaume, the Sisyphus metaphor was in the foreground and the structure of his fiction was clearly centered around it. But the most important feature was height.

All of Camus' prose writing incorporated height in connection with the Sisyphus metaphor. In the early fiction, particularly La Peste, height assumed a positive significance when it became not only the occasion for the awareness of the absurd but also the occasion for the critical moment of friendship between Rieux and Tarrou. In later works, most notably La Chute, it became unquestionably clear that high places no

longer sufficed. The height of the romantics was a fantasy, a hiding place. Camus undercut the illusions of Clamence and Daru by contrasting their feeling of false grandeur and their isolation with those who humbly descended in a committed effort to move close to and make contact with the rest of humanity. Camus had completely departed from the traditional use of height. These changes were sign-posts to his own developing moral vision.

In his last short story, "La Pierre qui pousse," Camus' vision reaches full clarity of expression. Correspondingly, the Sisyphus metaphor, which had been steadily growing in importance and precision, attains dramatic proportions and in a sense comes to life in the character d'Arrast. In this story, the movement of descent which characterizes both the futility and the nobility of Sisyphus' task becomes the focal point. Height, in the form of the balcony, becomes unbearable for d'Arrast, who quickly descends, not to withdraw, as Meursault did, but to plunge into the life of the street below. This modern-day Sisyphus refuses the isolation of high places and chooses instead to respond to the human cry of distress.

In speaking of the life on the streets, Camus in "Le Minotaure" says: "Là, du moins regne le naturel. Après tout, il existe une certaine grandeur qui ne se prête pas à l'élévation. Elle est inféconde par état. Et ceux qui désirent la trouver, ils laissent les 'milieux' pour descendre dans la rue" (N, 84). The particular grandeur of which he speaks, here and throughout his works is the grandeur of man,

of humanity. Elevated places, though they serve a particular and significant purpose, are nevertheless sterile. Also they are illusory, for the grandeur of humanity and the joy of life cannot be experienced and discovered there. It is true that through the exile of isolation, which height provides, man will find the way to the kingdom, but to remain there is to remain forever exiled. The kingdom ultimately must exist at ground level, where man can view the world and those about him from a less exalted position.

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