

**AN EXISTENTIAL READING OF CAMUS AND DOSTOEVSKY**  
**FOCUSING ON CAMUS'S NOTION OF THE ABSURD AND**  
**SARTREAN AUTHENTICITY**

A Thesis

by

JI HYUN PARK

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of  
Texas A&M University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

December 2005

Major Subject: Comparative Literature and Culture

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## ABSTRACT

An Existential Reading of Camus and Dostoevsky

Focusing on Camus's Notion of the Absurd and Sartrean Authenticity. (December 2005)

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Albert Camus (1913-1960) describes morally corrupted society in his later fiction, The Fall (1956), yet, seeks to find authenticity to share the suffering of others to establish communal bonds and responsibility, specifically revealed in "The Growing Stone" (1957). Camus frequently denies his alignment with existentialism; yet, in his major novels, he frequent portrays a dark side of human existence: a sense of weariness with the habitual aspects of daily life and a keen awareness of the absurd lead Camusian heroes to complete nihilism and utter despair, which shows Camus's strong affinity with existentialist ideas.

Further investigation of Dostoevsky's anti-hero, the underground man, and the demigod Kirilov reveals that Dostoevsky's vision of kingdom is not so optimistic in spite of dominant thematic concern of Christian resurrection and eternal life in Dostoevsky's major works. Only moral anarchy and spiritual sterility coexist in his kingdom. I, thus, investigate Dostoevsky's unique approach to existence without God, in which he eventually declares himself to be a forerunner of existentialism.

Camus does, in fact, recognize Dostoevsky as an important predecessor. In particular, Camus examines Dostoevsky's depiction of alienated characters rebelling against the world as they

understand it. Thus, in Chapter I, my focus lies in a discussion of the theory of the absurd, with Camus's The Myth of Sisyphus as a valuable supplement that opens the way for an existential approach to Camus's literary production. Having identified our condition of absurdity as a dilemma requiring a response, Camus (and our study) turns to Dostoevsky's reflections on modern antiheroes. In Chapter II, keeping my attention on The Myth of Sisyphus, I explore Dostoevsky's fictional character, Kirilov, of The Demons. Along the same lines, in Chapter III, I investigate Jean-Baptiste Clamence of The Fall (1956), with respect to the underground man in Dostoevsky's Notes from Underground (1864). Dostoevsky's two pre-existential works, however, fail to provide protagonists who possess authentic selfhood. Their rebellions are ultimately failures. Thus, I analyze D'Arrast of "The Growing Stone," in Exile and Kingdom (1958), who ultimately glimpses a potential for human solidarity and freedom in the fundamental structure of the human personality and social existence. This marks Camus's fullest expression of a response to a fundamental human dilemma which Dostoevsky's fiction helped him to grasp more fully.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I owe a debt of gratitude to Dr. Ralph Schoolcraft for his thoughtful guidance and tremendous support throughout this project. This project is a result of his extensive knowledge of French Literature, critical thinking, and valuable council. I'm also grateful to Dr. Patricia Phillippy whose generous advice for my academic progress has been a great help to me. I'd like to thank Dr. Olga Cooke whose expertise with Dostoevsky proved invaluable. I'd also like to thank Dr. Golsan for his sincere participation in my project. Finally, I'd like to thank my loving husband, Taehan, whose patience with the times this project distracted me from other pursuits has been the most valuable support of all. I would offer personal and heartfelt thanks to my two kids—Jeongyeon and Byongjoon. I could not have done it without my family.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The Myth of Sisyphus (1942) is a philosophical work resulting mainly from Camus's personal experience of an incoherent world.<sup>1</sup> Camus's vague ethical positions and extremely personal view of history and politics were a later target for many left-wing critics such as Jean-Paul Sartre and his disciple, Francis Jeanson. Yet, as a representative voice in the anxiety-ridden Europe of the 1940's due to World War II, Camus, though he had no rigidly systematic philosophy, was at once a morally committed French writer as a defender of individual rights, and a leading existentialist philosopher as an advocate of a "saint" without God.<sup>2</sup>

Camus's earlier investigation of the absurd traces back to his successful pursuit of lyrical meditation in earlier essays describing the eloquent nature of Algiers. The intensity of physical joy and personal happiness expressed by the same recurrent imagery pervade Camus's earlier production. We go from an appreciation of Algeria's natural beauty to regretting the brevity and absurdity of human existence. The lucid awareness between the truth of human transience and the

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This thesis follows the style of MLA Style Manual and Guide to Scholarly Publishing.

<sup>1</sup> Ronald Aronson simply states, "The Myth of Sisyphus was the work of a dabbler in philosophy and not a systematic builder of ideas" and immediately adds, "Camus stayed on the terrain of experience and its frustrations rather than pursuing 'the learned and classical dialectic'" (15). However, Camus's perception of the absurd and his several suggestive consequence of the insoluble dilemma of the absurd make him distinct from the traditional philosophers, which will be discussed on page 5-6.

<sup>2</sup> Camus frequently denied any alignment with existentialism. In an interview with Jeanine Delpuch, he remarks, "No, I am not an existentialist. Sartre and I are always surprised to see our name linked [ . . . ] When we did get to know each other, it was to realize how much we differed. Sartre is an existentialist. The Myth of Sisyphus was directed against the so-called existentialist philosophers" (See Les Nouvelles Littéraires, November, 1945 in Lyrical and Critical Essays (1969)).

desire for absolutism is one of the major philosophical themes underlying the first section of The Myth of Sisyphus. This emotional state of mind led Camus to recognize the manifold problems that people encounter in their daily lives.

Though Camus's religious skepticism are not able to seek a solution in the context of Dostoevsky's ethics and religious faith, evidently, no twentieth-century writer has experienced Dostoevsky's influence more viably than Camus. Most of his major works explicitly or implicitly evoke Dostoevskian isolated characters and their philosophy in daily routine, among which, the adaptation of Demons (1959) representatively culminates his lifelong project. Though Camus's thematic approaches to the absurd—the protagonists' extreme loneliness cast into the world and the state of mind at the experience of the collapse of human spirit—follow Dostoevsky's central thematic concerns, Camus's frequent disagreement with Dostoevsky's religious faith implies Camus's challenge against a powerful predecessor and a constant struggle to prove his own artistic ability to create his own aesthetics.

This study, thus, investigate the profound influence of Dostoevskyan hero, Kirilov in shaping Camus's early thought. Kirilov seems to have been the Dostoevskyan character who most interested first stage of Camus's works in nineteenth thirties and early forties and thus, provided Camus with an influential guide in The Myth of Sisyphus. As Ray Davidson indicates, many remarkable parallels between Camus and Dostoevskyan hero, Kirilov are detected in their attitudes to death and suicide.

Thus, in Chapter II, my major focus lies in a discussion of the theory of the absurd, with Camus's The Myth of Sisyphus as a valuable supplement that opens the way for an existential approach to Camus's literary production. In Chapter III, keeping my attention on The Myth of



Sisyphus, I will explore Dostoevsky's profound influence on Camus, specifically focusing on Dostoevsky's fictional character, Kirilov, of Demons. Along the same lines, in Chapter IV, I will investigate Jean Baptiste Clamence of The Fall (1956), the underground man in Dostoevsky's Notes from Underground (1864) and finally D'Arrast of "The Growing Stone," in Exile and Kingdom (1958). An existential reading of these three works will serve to discuss authentic selfhood on the basis of Sartre's concept of authenticity.

## CHAPTER II

### THE ABSURD

In Camus's terms, recognition of the absurd emerges from a sudden "consciousness" of the monotonous, tedious, and mechanical pattern of life's routines:

The scenery suddenly collapses. Getting up, tramway, four hours in the office or factory, tramway, four hours work, meal, bed and Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday at the same regular pace, this is a road readily followed most of the time. One day, the 'why' confronts us and everything begins with weariness tinged with bewilderment. 'Begins,' this is important. Weariness is at the end of a life of mechanical actions but it initiates, at the same time, the moment of awareness [. . .] for everything starts with awareness and nothing counts without it (The Myth of Sisyphus 12-13).

Inferred from this passage, a sudden, yet full awareness of the "absence of a deep reason for living" (6) is a point of departure in generating the consciousness of existence. For Camus, the absurd man perceives the world as irrational: the individual and the universe are incompatible with each other, and thus, this disparity creates the absurdity: "In a universe suddenly divested of illusion and lights, man feels like an alien, a stranger. His exile is without remedy since he is deprived of memory of a lost home or the hope of a promised land. This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, is properly known as the feeling of absurdity"(6). The absurd man lucidly recognizes that his "ordinary structures imposed on existence"(Aronson, 12) is subject to collapse at any moment and, nevertheless, struggles, in a state of alienation, to continue to live after "the sense of anguish" (The Myth of Sisyphus 12) that arises after that collapse.

In simplistic terminology, the absurd comes from the confrontation between the individual's "deepest desire" (17) for the absolute truth and the limitations of reality; thus, the absurd always involves a contradiction and presupposes the inevitability of our death. In fact, Camus's failure to find the absolute god-- partly because, as Nietzsche declares, the god does not exist in the contemporary human society and partly because we cannot experience god empirically leads him to explore the absurd state of mind. Thus, the contradiction between his desire for clarity and unity and the world's irrationality, disunity, and fragmentation was the first point of departure in arguing his concept of the absurd: "my appetite for the absolute and for unity and the impossibility of reducing this world to a rational and reasonable principle" (51), and Camus immediately adds to explain that the reconciliation between the two is almost impossible.

However, Camus's denial of suicide as an alternative value for solving the problem of the absurd demonstrates his total disbelief of salvation in future life. He believes a total negation of present life and thus, a fatal hope for transcendence is recognized as no more than a threatening to the positive affirmation of the absurdity. For Camus, lucid awareness of, or a "definitive awakening" (13) to a strong attachment to the present life, can be a resolute solution for the absurd man to overcome his complete despair. Thus, through his denial of eternal life, he conversely finds a greater intensity of life in the present and suggests a possibility for happiness, which functions as a philosophical extension of Camus's earlier lyrical meditations in Lyrical and Critical Essays (1969).

Camus's denial of suicide leads him to suggest three subsequent affirmations of the values within the absurd--freedom, revolt, and passion, and these elements provide ample reasons for not committing suicide. For Camus, revolt is the first affirmative value in overcoming a

“constant confrontation between man and his own obscurity”(The Myth of Sisyphus 54): “It is essential to die unreconciled and not of one’s free will [ . . .]. The absurd man can only drain everything to the bitter end, and deplete himself. The absurd is his extreme tension, which he maintains constantly by solitary effort, for he knows that in that consciousness and in that day-to-day revolt he gives proof of his only truth, which is defiance” (55). Thus, in demanding face-to-face struggle with the absurd, Camus found “one of the only coherent philosophical positions” (54) through revolt.

The second solution in overcoming the absurd situation is freedom: man is no longer concerned with the future, for “death is there as the only reality” (57). The absurd, in its denial of a future, offers independence and freedom from constraints that human hearts can experience and live. The word “absurd,” for example, in all its connotations from current daily usage to more specialized meanings, was familiar to a generation brought up on Dostoevsky, Nietzsche, Kierkegaard and Kafka, a generation which felt comfortable with the basic assumptions of the phenomenological and existentialist philosophers.

Investigating Martin Heidegger, Karl Jaspers, Leon Chestov, Soren Kierkegaard, and Edmund Husserl, Camus perceives a similar recognition of an absurd universe and a basic similarity between his philosophy and theirs. He recognizes, however, that once faced with the absurd all of these thinkers, except Heidegger, deifies the antinomy between human need and the unsatisfactory reality: “Through an odd reasoning, starting out from the absurd over the ruins of reason, in a closed universe limited to the human, they deify what crushes them and find reason to hope in what impoverishes them” (32). That is, these philosophers adopt unjustifiable leap of faith, committed “through a blind act of human confidence.” For Camus, the act of deification (or, “the

leap of faith”) is irrational since it is human beings’ detrimental obstacle in achieving lucid consciousness to resolve the antinomy between human beings and the world: “The moment the notion [of the absurd] transforms itself into eternity’s springboard, it ceases to be linked to human lucidity” (33). Thus, Camus names this death of human consciousness as “philosophical suicide.”

Camus’s renouncement of hope for eternal salvation does not negate the possibility of happiness; it is, on the contrary, a complete refusal of resignation to an absurd situation. In summary, Camus, as a philosopher of the absurd, formulates a way of living within the absurd, or more accurately, he wanted to imagine life within the absurd and wants to be remaining faithful to the vision of the absurd to the very end.

### CHAPTER III

#### CAMUS'S INTERPRETATION OF KIRILOV

Camus's investigation of the philosophical questions raised in Demons can be noted at many points in his earlier literary career. Camus refers to it in his Notebooks as a frequent, potential reference in his meditation on death, suicide, and religious skepticism. By adapting Dostoevsky's Demons for presentation as a play (The Possessed), he culminates his creative genius. Camus's investigation on the absurd in The Myth of Sisyphus is in many points based on his occupation with Kirilov. In this work, Camus's interpretation on Dostoevskyan character—choosing death for the proof of man's supremacy over the god—provides ample references in shaping Camus's personal reflection in his philosophical essay: “propound the absurd question. They establish logic unto death, exaltation, ‘dreadful’ freedom, the glory of the tsars become human. All is well, everything is permitted, and nothing is hateful—there are absurd judgments” (81).

My analysis in this section is closely related with Camus' deep interest in Dostoevskyan absurd hero, Kirilov. Kirilov prefers lucidity to Christian faith; Camus was totally fascinated with these faithless characters: “Camus's worlds, in a very basic way, are structured emotionally and conceptually like the worlds of Dostoevsky's rebels: they are determined to live in a world without faith, although they believe that world to be without ultimate meaning and absurd” (Davidson 44). Camus, as a writer who “seek[s] a foundation for existence outside a framework of religious beliefs” (Davidson 45), says of Kirilov: “Kirilov is right. To commit suicide is to prove your

freedom.”<sup>3</sup>

Camus’s illness, tuberculosis, and his confrontation of death can function as the major reason of such a frequent thematic approach to “death” in his early literary career. For this, Roger Quilliot’s observation is quite pertinent: the theme of suicide functions as an “affirmation of life.” Davidson argues that Camus’s insistent treatment of the theme of suicide in his early works proclaims an intense love of life.

For Camus, the choice of suicide is an insoluble quandary as well as a detrimental obstacle for the individual confronted with absurd reality. Thus, in spite of Camus’s passionate investigation on Dostoevsky, he refuses to follow Dostoevsky’s religious faith and thus The Myth of Sisyphus virtually serves as Camus’ critical response to Dostoevsky’s “life is immortality” (Davidson 78). Camus sees his precursor’s belief in god as an irrational leap of faith. On the other hand, Dostoevsky remarks that religious faith (or, recourse to Christianity) and physical suicide can be a logical solution for the confrontation of the absurd. Dostoevsky’s belief in after life leads him to proclaim that an individual can still be aware of the absurd even after death: he states, “the immortality of the soul is the principal source of truth for the human race” (Demons 28).

The disagreement between the two writers, though, does not provoke an aversion to Dostoevsky. On the contrary, Camus shows a strong attachment to the Russian writer: Dostoevsky’s statements are frequently mentioned in Camus’ analysis on suicide, logic and the

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<sup>3</sup> However, again, Camus continues to say, “And the problem of freedom has a simple solution. Men have the illusion of being free. Men condemned to death do not have the illusion. The whole problem is in the reality of this illusion” (Davidson 45). Camus seems to be ambiguous on the notion of freedom; he initially remarks that the suicide is a fruitful by-product of freedom but later freedom is nothing but an illusion.

meaning of life. Camus' deep involvement in Dostoevsky can be seen in phrases like these: "without a doubt nobody like Dostoevsky has managed to give the world of absurdity such close and tormented brilliance"; and, Camus continues, "Here is a work where, in a twilight more dazzling than the light of the day, we can seize the struggle of man against his hopes" (The Myth of Sisyphus 186). Furthermore, Camus recognizes Dostoevsky as a true modernist: "All Dostoevsky's heroes ask themselves questions about the meaning of life. This is what makes them modern" (142).

Thus, Camus and Kirilov share a similar concern for religious skepticism. To them, tomorrow does not exist; only death is the unavoidable obstacle faced with the absurdity. In a sense, both Camus and the Dostoevskian absurd hero betray Dostoevsky in that their emphasis on life in the present world rejects Dostoevsky's essentially irrational, religious solution. Though, in Demons, Kirilov's suicide does not evoke any pivotal turning point or serve as a momentum in the entire plot, Camus converts Dostoevskyan peripheral character, Kirilov, into a positive absurd hero who willingly commits suicide for saving the entire human beings from the fear and pain of death as well as the illusion of religious faith. For Camus, Kirilov's logical deduction—each person should be responsible for their own destiny-- is justifiable and thus, Kirilov is recognized as the salvation of humanity: "Kirilov must then kill himself for the love of humanity but once he is dead and people are fully enlightened, the earth will be peopled with tzars and bathed in human glory [ . . . ] Thus it is not despair which drives him toward death but love of humanity for his own sake" (The Myth of Sisyphus 144-5). For Camus, Kirilov demonstrates man's unrestricted freedom from the fear of death and man's supremacy over God, which results in human happiness and glory.

Some of Camus's major characters in his earlier works also fall into despair and commit



suicide: Martha, of The Misunderstanding, one of the plays in Caligula & Three Other Plays, and Caligula take their lives after experiencing the irrationality of the world and life's meaninglessness. On the contrary, Kirilov's suicide was not conceived as, in Camus's reading, an act of despair, but as an ultimate truth which can lead mankind to a new glory (Davidson 143). In this sense, Camus embraces Kirilov's basic philosophy of a vision of the potential possibilities of existence without God (or, agsitrn god) or salvation in the afterlife: "If there is God," claims Kirilov, "then the will is all his, and I cannot get out of his will. If not, the will is all mine, and it is my duty to proclaim self-will" (Demons 617) and immediately says, "It is my duty to shoot myself because the fullest point of my self-will is—for me to kill myself" (617). For Kirilov, "no idea is higher than that there is no God" (617). As Davidson puts it, Camus "rescues [Kirilov] from Dostoevsky's all-embracing Christian messianism and allows him to triumph over his creator and affirm the possibility of a coherent atheism and hedonism" (82).

A profound distinction separates Camus from Kirilov: that is, though Camus is acutely sensitive to the irrational world and thus the absurd is an emotionally inevitable response to this world, his negation of God does not mean the inexistence of God; a lucid awareness of the absurd does not mean man's superiority over God (Davidson 70). For Camus, the absurd man perceives his life as finite; thus, he lives only for the joy and happiness of the present and ultimately achieves the freedom of action, which "comes from not having to sacrifice the present to future consideration" (The Myth of Sisyphus 139-42). Furthermore, Camus's absurd heroes seek the way for unity and reconciliation and thus, the thirsty desire for achieving absolute freedom is the essential element; Kirilov, however, attempts to triumph over God as a proof of man's will.

Thus, the earlier cycle of Camus's literary production was preoccupied with personal

ethics and the individual's inner conflict; the experience of the absurd and suicide was a by-product of personal internal conflict. After World War II, Camus experienced a great shift of thematic concern in his literature. The climate of his life and thought had changed dramatically since the late 1930s.

### **Camus's Political Stance**

Camus, throughout his life, was committed to political action. Most notably, he was a "major postwar voice" (Aronson 38) one of a gallant group of Frenchmen who actively resisted the Nazis and their Vichy pawns. In the light of his theory of the absurd, Camus prefers to live within awareness of absurd situation rather than attempt to overcome it. Believing more powerful influence of pens and radical ideas, rather than of nonnegotiable bullets and bombs, Camus nevertheless undertook enormous personal risk, hiding combatants, assuming aliases, serving as a courier for important documents, and acting as editor-in-chief of clandestine journal, Combat during the Nazi occupation of France. He also joined the more general battle against totalitarianism. Camus guided the newspaper, *Le Soir Republicain*, "to its death in a hopeless battle against the military censors and even against its owners" (Aronson 27). Indeed, he was one of the first and most resolute voices in decrying the rise of fascism.

A Frenchman born in Algeria, Camus wrote newspaper articles and essays about the plight of Arab North Africans and the injustice of the French colonial system long before it was fashionable. However, during the Algerian war, his refusal to side completely with the Arab North Africans prompted many to accuse him of French chauvinism or politically idle passivity. However, Camus, "the child of European immigrants" (Judt 116), gained much literary ideas and infantile experiences from Algeria and thus, the Algerian war, whatever the political/moral issues

it raised, left Camus to disagree with both political parties, French and Arabs. In the face of attacks from virtually all sides (Arabs, colonists, Communists, and Algerian nationalists), he persistently sought compromise, or a middle course. In English Showalter's words, "The crisis over France's relationship with Algiers was growing more serious every day. Camus refused to endorse any simple solution, to give unqualified support to either side, or to condone random violence in the name of justice" (4).

"Camus's principled leftist rejection of Communism" (Aronson 5) and his subsequent break with the traditional French left were deeply painful, yet provided him with the unshaken conviction of choosing the middle way. Thus, "the growing evidence of the impossibility of compromise, brought him from reason to emotion, and from emotion to silence" (Judt 116). A leftist himself who radically condemned the French government's use of "torture and terror against the Arab nationalists," was not only a major voice, but also "a well-informed critic of colonial discrimination against the Arab population ever since the thirties" (Judt 117). Thus, Aronson states, "Camus did, in fact, report for military service out of solidarity with those young men, like his brother, who had become soldiers" (27).

At the same time, he would not be silent about the oppression and injustice in the Soviet Union. After voicing his philosophical and moral concerns in The Rebel, Camus became target of choice for the political and artistic left because he came to treat Communism as a "civilizational disease, or a modern madness" (Aronson 82).<sup>4</sup>

As the ideological climate surrounding the Cold War has subsided, Camus's political

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<sup>4</sup> According to Aronson, Camus "began to reflect on the tension between two terms central to his understanding of Communism, freedom and justice" and thus, Camus "sought socialism with freedom, but the Communists sought justice without freedom" (82).

positions, on the historical stages of topics from the atrocities of the Soviet Union to the conundrum that is indigenous Algeria's politics, have largely been vindicated. Thus, Tony Judt states, "From the early postwar years, at the height of his public visibility and influence, through the late fifties, when the Algerian tragedy reduced him to silence, his published and unpublished writings are shot through with reflections on the pressures upon the artist to perform a public role" (92). Longing for political unity but recognizing that it is unattainable, Camus, nevertheless, refused to ignore the contemporary existence and suffering of others. In a word, Camus, by borrowing Tony Judt's remarks, "became an isolated defender of absolute values and nonnegotiable public ethics in an age of moral and political relativism" (125).

### **Camus's Ethical Stance**

For Camus, art should be in the middle between "form and content," and thus, "undue emphasis on either is dangerous" (Bronner 130). For this, Bronner argues: "when art ignores the real conflicts experienced by people, it results in little more than empty formalism. Yet an exclusive preoccupation with engagement leads only to dogmatism and monotony. Art must, according to Camus, take a third path between formalism and realism" (Bronner 84). Similarly, Rima Drell Reck argues, manifesting Camus's notion of the "liberty of art," "The artist must take a stand with respect to his world—refusal or consent" (131).

Camus, as I mentioned above, avoided a total engagement to unilateral extremism: neither dogmatism (or, an unqualified involvement) nor indifference (or, complete negation of engagement to community) captured him. Camus's attempt to reconcile two extreme desires tormented him since Camus, as an artist, did not completely oblige himself to intervene in the melee of history; yet, he, as a man, felt a deep responsibility for the repulsive aspects of the human

condition, specifically the Nazis' violation of human and artistic freedom and the sacrifice of the innocent. For Camus, the realm of the artist's proper project can be found in his denunciation of all "utopic political and philosophical forms of messianism that sacrifice living and suffering to their idealized ends" (Sanyal 31).

For Camus, therefore, the artist's ultimate role is to advocate for human beings in their present mortal life, refuse to sacrifice human beings to absolute values such as religious faith and political doctrines of injustice. Camus willingly shares the suffering and happiness of all human beings; he also tries to establish a perpetual dialogue with future generations.

Camus's conception of revolt is a creative effort that makes absurdity meaningful, or rather enables us to transcend absurdity. It creates a moral value rooted in the idea of moderation and the respect of limits. Furthermore, murder—the concentration camps and various other Nazi atrocities had been discovered when he was writing and some people felt a desperate necessity to take a communal responsibility for this human loss-- cannot be justified for any reason; it completely deprives the possibility of an other's welfare. Camus suggests that a new way to respond to an established order is with a moderate temper, instead of stubborn dogmatism. The latter must be rejected because it produces a tremendous amount of innocent victims in order to justify totalitarian political regimes: "Politics are made for men, and not men for politics [ . . . ] In the world of violence and death around us, there is no place for hope. But there is room for civilization, for real civilization, which puts truth before fables and life before dreams. And this civilization has nothing to do with hope. In it, man lives on his truth."<sup>5</sup>

Camus's tempered moderation creates the emergence of a model of "Mediterranean

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<sup>5</sup> Albert Camus, "The New Mediterranean Culture" (1937) in Lyrical and Critical Essays, 197.

thinking,” which makes it possible to decrease the gap between the alienated individual and the absurd universe (or, to recover the separation between the individual and the world) by accepting the reality and, at the same time, demonstrating his essential dissatisfaction with it by refusing the reality. As Reck states, Camus was “solidaire,” and at the same time managed to find the “creative isolation” necessary to the artist (129).

In short, Camus’s political/ethical stance can be summarized as a mixture of moderation and humanism, which was formulated from his younger days in his native land on the personal level and remained constant in (or laid a foundation for) his later art and thought on the public domain.

## CHAPTER IV

### TEXTUAL ANALYSIS: CLAMENCE, UNDERGROUND MAN, AND D'ARRAST

#### General Survey of Existential Heroes

Sartre says, “in a universe suddenly divested of illusions and lights, man feels an alien, a stranger”(Aronson 13). In spite of individuals’ solitude among the chaotic and anarchic state of existence and the physical limitations, the existentialists recognize that man cannot avoid his/her engagement with the reality; thus, men’s existence is inevitably combined with their social/political milieu. Camus, in this respect, shares the existential view: Camus’s theory of the absurd is based on his awareness of the gap between one’s aspirations and one’s physical limitations. Similarly, Clamence’s monologues assume an existentialist perspective: “We play at being immortal, and after a few weeks, we can hardly drag ourselves through to the next day” (The Fall 159). Thus, Camus’s basic structure of existence and fundamental human projects, as we have discussed already, stem from his physical/mortal vision and his emphasis the here and now.

In general terms, an individual’s existential patterns of behavior should seek an achievement of authentic personal being, a quest for true selfhood, which makes it possible to obtain one’s ultimate freedom and communal responsibility in choosing one’s decisions and actions<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> For Sartre’s concept of being-in-itself and being-for-itself, Linda A. Bell states “being-for-itself, the *pour-soi*, is primarily a matter of negating; it separates itself from the fullness of being-in-itself, the *en-soi*. The freedom of being-for-itself lies in its ability to negate. Sartre calls attention to this ability by his use of the word nothingness and by his denial of an essence to this being-for-itself”(13). Being-in-itself is the self-contained, non-conscious being of an entity, its material being. A stone is a stone, “simply there, wholly brute” (Being and Nothingness 506). Being-for-itself, on the other hand, is the

Jean-Baptiste Clamence, the protagonist in The Fall, is enslaved to his position of pseudo “judge-penitent.” His egoistic individualism--his hidden desire to evade communal responsibility and reluctance to embrace fellow citizens’ suffering-- leads him to indulge in debauchery and fall into endless nihilism. Through Clamence, Camus portrays a figure suffering from a tormented conscience after falling from the state of innocence. The underground man in Notes from Underground, segregated from the urban desert, Petersburg, ceaselessly protests against the unsatisfactory society, yet his inner anguish cannot provide any alternative moral value. Through these two existential heroes, both novelists fail to describe literary figures who are convincingly able to display authentic selfhood; yet, Camus in his later stage of literary career eventually succeeded in portraying a hero, D’Arrast in “The Growing Stone” who ultimately overcomes his exile in a totally alienated landscape of small town in Brazil and finally obtains his kingdom of human solidarity and fraternity. Through D’Arrast, Camus describes an individual’s positive engagement to the society in a quest for his true identity to gain what existentialists would term authentic existence, which will be discussed in the last section of this study. In this chapter, after analyzing two inauthentic beings, Clamence and the underground man, we can then investigate the authentic existential figure Camus desperately seeks to portray.

### **Freedom**

Numerous critics refer to freedom as the essence of man’s spiritual existence: Macquarrie observes, “There can be few themes, if any, nearer to the heart of existentialism than freedom. The theme is present in all the existentialist writers” (177). Similarly, Bohlmann ascertains that “freedom needs no proof: it is already there as a condition of our existence” (104). Sartre also says,

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mode of existence man achieves by separating himself from sheer being-in-itself.



“Freedom is identical with my existence” (Being and Nothingness 44).

An exploration of human freedom also dominates Camus’s and Dostoevsky’s works. As is mentioned above, Camus and Dostoevsky, in my analysis of The Myth of Sisyphus, commonly present fictional characters who deal with the achievement of human freedom by committing suicide. They portray an individual who struggles himself to be free from either the illusion of Christian faith or the absurd universe.

If the underground man’s rancorous remarks, as the representative of the minor of society, imply the author’s vehement attack on Chernychevsky who grasps the mainstream of rationalism and utilitarianism of the contemporary Russian society, Clamence’s cynicism based on egoistic elitism reminds us of the author’s criticism on the traditional French left wings such as Sartre, Raymond Aron and Jeanson.<sup>7</sup>

In The Fall, Camus describes Clamence who aspires to be free from guilt and is still obsessed with repentance. In Notes from Underground, Dostoevsky portrays the protagonist reacting with fury, yet fruitless defiance against the image of a dream of a perfect society and experiencing a painful rancor. Dostoevsky portrays the underground man’s desperate effort to emancipate from restricted reality, yet cannot suggest a gesture towards a more positive, compromised achievement and remains only debilitated and negative attack.

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<sup>7</sup> Camus and Sartre were the main voices of postwar French intellectual life, yet their ten-year friendship was broken after Camus vehemently declared his denial to embrace Marxism and communism in his philosophical essay, The Rebel. Ronald Aronson describes in detail that “although Camus was never a partisan of capitalism and Sartre was never a Communist,” the major split between the two stems from “the clichés of Communism and capitalism in all their sterile and self-interested bad faith”(5).

### **Comparison of Camus and Dostoevsky**

According to Victor Terras, Dostoevsky's fundamental, yet profound artistic project was to explore people under great stress due to suffering, frustration, rejection and despair. People in Dostoevsky's novels, he continues to say, despite the tragic situation, fight on both sides of the conflict of "good and evil," "sin and virtue," "truth and falsehood." Thus, people, in Dostoevsky's novels, leave traces either of good or evil and/or bear in themselves and to those around them either salvation or destruction (13).

According to Joseph Frank, Dostoevsky never denies "the existence of free will and the possibility of moral choice" (68). Indeed, in Notes from Underground, Dostoevsky presents a parody of the rational egoism of Chernyshevsky and attacks his unqualified denial of existence of any such human capacity as free will. The disturbance in the underground man's psychology is presented as the inevitable outcome of the theory of rational egoism taken to its logical conclusion. This, according to Frank, result in the underground man's "explosion of irrational egoism" (69). As M. M. Bakhtin states, general assessments of Dostoevsky and his artistic career have focused on Christ, an authoritative image of human beings, and a Christian message of resurrection and eternal life. There can be no doubt about Dostoevsky's religious convictions, however. "In the Dostoevskyan world, the image of Christ is the center of gravity," Steiner remarks.

In Dostoevsky (1821-1881), Edward Hallett Carr says Dostoevsky's religious faith comes from "his doubt of the irrationality of mankind" (238). Dostoevsky witnessed the radical socialism that was teeming in the nineteenth century of Russian society as a vision for new utopias; murder was justified by radical socialists for the freedom of human beings and the salvation of human society. For Dostoevsky, the idealists were conceived as an image of perfect man, and thus, they

would not tolerate “the ugly faces of imperfect man.” Confronted with the insoluble dilemma, Dostoevsky’s pessimistic perspective of human nature, according to Carr, forces some of his protagonists—such as Stavrogin and the underground man-- to plunge into “the abyss of moral anarchy and sterility” (248).

Thus, though Camus and Dostoevsky lived different time and place, both of them struggles to be free from moral anarchism, which is clearly revealed through some of their characters. Camus seeks to rescue human beings mired in the morally diseased modern civilization after experiencing the dehumanized and brutalized reality of two world wars. Faced with the growth of nihilism in the first half of the twentieth century, Camus proposes a remedy, which has been already discussed. His great conviction that it is necessary to redress the failure of humanism is the pervasive thematic concern in the later stage of his literary career.

Both Dostoevsky and Camus respectively endeavor to fully grasp their specific social/political situations by attempting to promote fundamental social values that might transcend the ineffectual idealism and enables us seek a social equality. Thus, both are acutely aware of the desperate need of moral / political renewal, which flexibly functions as a touchstone to engender a radical transformation of their contemporary societies. In their sharply contrasting ways, both The Fall and Notes from Undergrounds deal with the protagonists’ endless, destructive despair at the result of extreme solitude and egoistic individualism. By describing both protagonists’ ignorance of human solidarity and egalitarianism, the two authors warns the collapse of human beings’ moral spirit and the lack of human dignity based on mutual respect. Clamence’s illusion of self-importance leads him to fall into intellectual vanity and his emotional solipsism pervades his insincere patterns of life. In this sense, the critical survey of the Dostoevskyan and Camusian heroes

will provide a clue to investigate their critical recognition of crisis in humanism.

### **Textual Analysis: Clamence in The Fall**

Camus's refusal to adopt dogmatism in the Algerian War and the subsequent communist struggle in Cold War, according to Robert C. Solomon (45), leads him to create the Janus-faced protagonist, Clamence, who reflects Camus's own ambivalence regarding innocence and guilt. Camus's quasi-religious novel (41) is a tale that describes Clamence's inability to create normal human ties or embrace a vital solidarity with other fellow citizens in a world lack of moral judgment or principles that governs a human behavior.

Clamence works on a binary opposition of past and present, Paris and Amsterdam. In Paris, he is indeed a "truly virtuous, fully contented, enviously successful man" (Solomon 43). Clamence, as a highly esteemed lawyer, defended the poor and victimized; thus, he had enjoyed the pleasure of knowing that he was "on the right side" and assured "his peace of conscience" (The Fall 285). Yet, his preaching and his presentation of the fall are designed only to save himself. Once a noble and immensely successful "defender of widows and orphans," in a web of eloquently spun words (Solomon 41), quickly establishing his superiority in the relationship with the people he judged, and he demonstrates simultaneously his guilt and his innocence, The quintessential Parisian bourgeois and thus, the incarnation of respectability, he defended the victims, railing at the injustice of daily life, often sacrificing obvious personal advantages in the process. He was truly above reproach in his professional life. Having risen "to that supreme summit where virtue is its own reward," he "enjoyed [his] own nature to the fullest" (The Fall 230, 200).

Enslaved to his duplicity and his own innocence, Clamence falsely proclaims his superiority through the innocence of his earlier Parisian life at the "Mexico City" bar. In the slum

quarters of Amsterdam, a center of bourgeois hell, he has broken with his past and lives under the false name.

Overwrought by the hollowness of his existence, he refuses to love anyone except himself. His sole outlet to protect himself from the laughter is to be indulged in in various forms of debauchery: “there was nothing but debauchery, a substitute for love, which quiets the laughter, restores silence and, above all, confers immortality” (331). He even declares his liberation from the reality can be found in debauchery because “it creates no obligation” (331), so he freely enjoys that liberation. Thus, his treatment of women centers on the being-it-self.

Solomon argues that Clamence’s fall and move from Paris to Amsterdam reveals “the falseness of his sense of earlier superiority and his innocence” (42). He refers to The Fall as “a morality tale on the pathology of pride” (44). Clamence’s pride makes him exceptional and lofty; yet, his excessive pride, or narcissism renders him vulnerable to fall from the highly cultured, sophisticated state to complete despair.

Edward Wasiolek offers a similar interpretation: “Clamence perceives [that] his life before the fall was a sham and a lie, that he was not as good as he had imagined himself be, [ . . . ] that he had turned virtue, humility, self-sacrifice, and social benefactions to the service of himself. He is courageous enough to act on his lucidity. Yet, his lucidity brings him to a devastating arraignment of man as capable of nothing but deception and slavery” (135). Clamence holds a transcendent view of himself before the fall. Before the fall he believed in an abstract good man, and after the fall, he believes in an abstract evil man (136).

In a sense, Clamence’s life in Paris as an eminent and successful lawyer, and the subsequent life in Amsterdam as a “judge-penitent” offer us a clear division of Clamence’s moral

transition: his Parisian life is devoid of reflection on himself, and thus, no self-condemnation and/or moral judgment can be detected, whereas Clamence in Amsterdam, though he still pretends to be innocent and does not take seriously “the possibility of failure and his vulnerability” (Solomon 45), is morally reflective and thus, opens an eye to self-condemnation. Solomon is right on the mark: “Clamence’s life in Amsterdam is caught up in reflection. He lives heavily, like the gloomy Dutch weather, through embittered and resentful thinking [ . . . ] he remembers and interprets his earlier seemingly innocent and noble life as too much of a sham” (46).

Camus remarks in The Myth of Sisyphus that the inevitable conflict between the individual and the irrational universe marks the onset of the feeling of the absurd: likewise, Parisian Clamence under the mask of justice and innocence is transfigured to Clamence in Amsterdam and thus he is gradually aware of his inner corruption. Clamence’s conflict between his narcissism and discovery of his dual-self provides him a significant moment of self-condemnation, and, at this moment, he is clearly aware of the absurdity of the dual-self.

Clamence’s existence is replete with dual identity, both as an ardent advocate of the poor and as a hypocrite who never assumes to be virtuous without the presence of others. He hides his duplicity in defense of “the fundamental duplicity of the human being” (84). Though Clamence is aware that “the keenest of human torment is to be judged without a law” (117), he still leads a dual life. “The apparent face of innocence and nobility” and, by contrast, “the face of the Amsterdam devil on the other side,” may be explained as his desperate effort to maintain his pride for his image in a member of the upper class. Thus, in spite of his ever-increasing humiliation, his duplicity shapes his behavior pattern; thus, his selflessness is, in fact, motivated by pure “self-interest and vanity” (Solomon 46).

Clamence exults: “I always lived free and powerful. I simply felt released in my relations with everyone else for the excellent reason that I recognized no equals” (301). Solomon’s illustration of Aristotelian ethics may explain the connection between Clamence’s selfishness and his elitism: “Aristotle presents his ethics ‘for the best’ without succumbing to egalitarianism—though he is keenly aware of the importance of equality within certain well-defined contexts—and he presents his list of virtues or excellence without defending them, as opposed to the ‘Why be moral’ obsession that defines modern ethics” (46-47). Thus, Clamence, as an elite who believes himself to possess a noble soul, fails to recognize, or does not take seriously, his inauthentic motivation in doing virtuous, heroic acts. However, Clamence’s several generous acts for the sole manifestation of his elitism are not understandable as such by his peers because nobody perceives him as highly superior. Thus, his sheer motivation of generous acts comes from his self-satisfaction, which only reveals his self-defensive and self-deceptive stance.

Solomon argues, “to feel pride is already to judge that one’s Self and one’s accomplishments are worthy of pride” (48). Thus, Clamence’s narcissism, or “pathology of pride” lays a foundation for the judgment. Clamence uses his success as a bourgeois lawyer to raise himself above others. He judges himself in advance to evade being judged from others; for this reason, Clamence adopts to use the prophetic language and declares the judgment both for himself and for others.

In Solomon’s analysis of the Christian viewpoint, only God, “the greater than whom none can be conceived” is highly noble and virtuous and thus, nothing about “our nobility, our virtues, or our accomplishments is worthy of pride” (50). In this sense, Clamence’s false pride is “the worst of sins” since it neglects the worship of God.

By revealing Clamence's duplicity and insincere life pattern, Camus intentionally criticizes people of bourgeois society and attacks their dual identity to maintain their status quo. Thus, Camus vehemently criticizes moral crisis of contemporary society prevalent with fraud and duplicity.

In a sense, Clamence can be compared with Stavrogin in Demons in that both of them problematize their patterns of existence by representing themselves as morally crippled figures in spite of their highly-prestigious position in their society. Both of them are indifferent to other fellow citizens and thus, demonstrate two novelists' deep concern of egoistic individualism.

Clamence diagnoses his strategy of confession and leads himself to recognize in common perception that he can observe from other fellow citizens. Eventually he confirms that he and his fellow citizens are the same species in essence: "I mingle what concerns me and concerns others. I choose the features we have in common, the experiences we have endured together, the failings we share—good form, in other words, the man of the hour as he is rife in me and in others. With all that I construct a portrait which is the image of all and of no one. A mask, in short, rather like those carnival masks which are both lifelike and stylized, so they make people say: 'Why, surely I've met him!'" (339).

In effect, Clamence's confession and acts of self-accusation can only be understood in terms of the fundamental ambiguity. His confession of guilt is an act of bad faith since it functions as a vehicle to avoid others' condemnation.

When the portrait is finished, as it is this evening, I show it with great sorrow:

"This, alas, is what I am!" The prosecutor's charge is finished. But at the same time the portrait I hold out to my contemporaries becomes a mirror. Covered with



ashes, tearing my hair, my face scored by clawing, but with piercing eyes, I stand before all humanity recapitulating my shames without losing sight of the effect I am producing, and saying: “I was the lowest of the low” (345).

Then, imperceptibly, the narrator passes from the “I” to the “we,” which reveals his attempt to coalesce all fellow citizens as accomplices: “When I get to ‘This is what we are,’ the trick has been played and I can tell them off. I am like them, to be sure, we are in the soup together” (351).

In the judge-penitent’s opinion, Clamence, his interlocutors and even readers are accomplices who willingly accept bad faith or inauthenticity in others as an inescapable truth of modern existence: “Every man testifies to the crime of all the others—that is my faith and my hope” (335). His rhetorical strategy of confession fundamentally presupposes, or creates a listener—that is, a reader-- whose passivity diminishes Clamence’s burden as an accuser.

I sensed that we were of the same species. Are we not all alike, constantly talking to no one, forever up against the same questions although we know the answers in advance? Then please tell me what happened to you one night on the quays of the Seine and how you managed never to risk your life. You yourself utter the words that for years have never ceased echoing through my nights and that I shall at last say through your mouth: “O young woman, throw yourself into the water again so that I may a second time have the chance of saving both of us!” A second time, eh, what a risky suggestion! Just suppose, cher maître, that we should be taken literally? We’d have to go through with it. Brr . . . ! The water’s so cold! But let’s not worry! It’s too late now. It will always be too late. Fortunately! (147)

Attempting to ascend to the position of ultimate arbiter, Clamence tries to rise above the crowd to distance himself from others. Clamence strives to reduce his suffering while neglecting others. Both interlocutor and the reader are, in this sense, victims to be preyed upon and thus, to be used as a tool to satisfy his need to “feel above” others like a “king’s son, or a burning bush” (123, 129). “I could live happily only on condition that all the individuals on earth, or the greatest number, were turned toward me, eternally in suspense, devoid of independent life and ready to answer my call at any moment, doomed in short to sterility until the day I shouted deign to favor them” (311). Throughout his monologue, he adeptly conceals his purpose of rhetorical strategy, or confession, through which he deceptively intends to dominate others, by using Sprintzen’s phrase, “with its frequent references to juridical terminology and deceptive forms of self-presentation”(189). His discourse only reveals egoistic individualism: what he requires is unrequited affection and unqualified obligation from others without reciprocating. Thus, he perfectly conceals his intention to dominate others. “Do you know why we are always more just and more generous toward the dead? The reason is simple. With them, there is no obligation” (333). His freedom has no limitation, no commitment.

Camus poignantly discovers, through Clamence, an isolated ego who seeks to objectify others to stage himself at center. Poised in Amsterdam and ready to pounce on unsuspecting visitors, Clamence is not sincere about achieving community. Clamence’s relationship with the silent interlocutor and, by inference, the reader, consists of a complex rhetorical strategy designed to allow him to dominate others in order to avoid being dominated himself. His only concern is to protect himself from the critical scrutiny of others. For this, Sprintzen argues that human beings’ fundamental relation revealed in The Fall is only on a “mastery and servitude” basis (201).

Clamence seeks accomplices, not friends. Believing everyone, including himself, to be forever and inexcusably guilty, and proclaiming that a “human being’s basic duplicity” is the inescapable guilt of all people, he perpetually judges others before they judge him.

### **Inauthentic Figures**

As I’ve already mentioned, Dostoevsky was one of the first European novelists to engage what would become known as existentialist themes.<sup>8</sup> In Notes from Underground, Dostoevsky’s protagonist vehemently attacks the rationalism and utilitarianism represented by “crystal-palace” civilization and reveals the unattainable freedom that unfolds before modern human beings’ existential condition to create anarchism himself. His experience of the process of dehumanization and the collateral disorientation leads him to attempt to manipulate the unsatisfactory society through his story telling and book reading, which demonstrates his struggle to free himself from the stultifying logical rationalism. Thus, as Terras says, “the underground man is stricken with the existential malaise.” He perceives humanism based on the traditional value collapse under the name of modernity, thus in spite of his desperate effort to reshape himself, all he has to do is to stay underground. He resorts to a passive strategy, book reading or storytelling, with all that hides himself beneath the ground. His inability to make distinction between reality and dream, or life routines and illusion is a great obstacle for him to overcome his passive existence.

In a summary of the two novelists’ anti-heroes,<sup>9</sup> Dostoevsky’s underground man and

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<sup>8</sup> Walter Kaufmann once called Notes from Underground “the best overture for existentialism ever written” (Kaufmann 14).

<sup>9</sup> For the notion of the modern “hero” in the nineteenth and twentieth century, according to Andrew J. Swensen, the hero emerges from the modern city; the complicated situation –economic development and population growth—of the modern city rouses up the vicious element of human nature: greed,

Camus's *Clamence* will provide a significant departure in discussing the novels. Both of the protagonists, replete with self-doubt, are highly sensitive to the moral corruption of their contemporary world; yet, their reaction to the absurd is opposite. The underground man, self-enclosed, is completely withdrawn and thus, his reticent, yet radical revolt against his contemporary system is no better than a resentful and fruitless protest. On the contrary, *Clamence*, as a dual-self, hides his duplicity and assumes himself to be morally superior. From the existentialist viewpoint, their reactions stem from a lack of religious faith depriving them of transcendence, and from their inability to suggest a moral alternative to the unsatisfactory reality. Thus, Camus and Dostoevsky depict existential protagonists who, in confrontation with the irrationality of the world, fail to offer any resolution to that confrontation. In short, both protagonists exile themselves from their realities, yet they fail to suggest a new vision of kingdoms: they act as if exile were the only reality. With the general picture of desolation, both protagonists lock themselves out and ignore the kingdom they glimpse and become prophets at the cost of remaining an underground man and a pseudo-judge.

Camus and Dostoevsky elaborately sketch their extremely passive and morally crippled protagonists, both of whom are cut off from "the world of common humanity," (Walsh 54); thus, both protagonists, unless they make desperate efforts to pursue a spiritual recovery after their fall from the state of innocence, stand on the path to a descent into the destructive abyss of nihilism.

Furthermore, both novels display similar structural qualities: each first-person narrator

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cynical indifference. Thus, the modern hero is alienated from this mentally corrupted society and mental life becomes separate from social life. From this perspective, situated in the setting of Petersburg and alienated from his environment, the underground man can be classified as a modern hero (Swensen 267).

tells a story by using the technique of confession. By this artistic device, both of them launch their ceaseless discourses, in Swensen's term, in a metropolitan setting full of "spiritual bleakness, depravity and degradation" (274): sordid modern cities, Petersburg and Amsterdam, are symbolically represented as "earthly hell[s] in an age of a dying or already dead God" (Swensen 267).

### **Textual Analysis: Underground Man in Notes from Underground**

An anomalous urban narrator, underground man resides in a "dreadful, horrible hole"; in spite of detrimental climate and high cost of living, and most of all, in spite of his poverty, he obstinately stays in Petersburg, which, for him, is the sole way to relieve his anguish: "I am going to stay in Petersburg! I will not leave it—Bah, after all it does not matter in the least whether I leave or stay" (Notes from Underground 98). Underground existence—"secretly, inwardly gnaw, gnaw at [himself] for something loathsome" (97)-- only reveals his deeply rancorous, spiteful, and forlorn monasticism, with keenly developed state of consciousness. His hyperconsciousness is "a real positive disease" (96), direct result of which is nothing but inertia. Thus, he comes to think of himself as a fundamentally nasty, unfortunate, yet hyperconscious mouse (100). His contemplation on his society and the fellow citizens is purely mixed with rancor and fruitless anguish; thus, he cannot transcend his "tomb of consciousness." His lack of connection with other people intensifies his solitude: in reality, his only human connection is that between himself and the head of his department. His inability to communicate with other people even on the most basic levels seems only to intensify his solitude.

Though his isolation from the outside conversely leads him to, in a comical and exaggerated manner, create a desire to "embrace all my fellow-men and all humanity" (146), his

doleful, exaggerated, and unreasonable sense of human bondage, or distorted altruism echoes his extremely complex, yet solitary state of mind and implicit difficult situation to build his connection with others: in fact, his only human connection of any standing is that between himself and the head of his department.

Walsh refers to the underground man as “typical of the Russian intelligentsia of the nineteenth century,” who found nothing valuable in Russian society and thus, turned their attention to European liberalism to define meaning and purpose (54). However, Walsh’s political interpretation does not seem to be correct. The underground man, in fact, hardly abides by the laws of rational humanism, social mores, or the religious tenets of his faith, but instead, develops himself into a demonically self-deceptive personality.

In a broader sense, Camus’s picture of the absurd is foreshadowed in the underground man, which provides a landmark for a critical interpretation of Dostoevsky’s text. The underground man experiences absurdity: in the words of The Myth of Sisyphus, “the unfathomable [abyss] deprives [the underground man] of the sleep necessary for life” (101). Camus, criticizing escapism, or leap of faith, since the absurd men “defy what crushes them and find reason to hope in what impoverishes them. That forced hope is religious in all of them”(Aronson 60), refers to the phenomenon of the absurd as an awareness of the confrontation of several elements such as “the certainty of death; a realization of the density and malevolence of nature; a conviction of the inhumanity of other human beings; and a sense of weariness with the habitual aspects of daily life” (The Myth of Sisyphus 13-15). For Camus, any one of these factors can function as a detrimental obstacle in embodying human centeredness and engendering a collateral, brutal apprehension of the existential reality.

Dostoevsky also assumes a similar perspective to represent the process of a protagonist's isolation from society and his/her growing awareness of the absurd situation. The radical disjuncture between the underground man and society plunges him into a destructive, nihilistic state and thus, his mental state leads him not to flee from "nasty" and "squalid" physical space in spite of his abhorrence to stay there. The underground man's experience of inwardness leads him away from the ordinary life routine to nihilistic solitude, yet it also provides him eyeopening chance to a profound potential for discovery of the absurd. Isadore Traschen asserts that the underground man is an existential figure since he is clearly conscious of his solitude, accurately perceives the gloomy and desolate modern city of the nineteenth century, and seeks no divinity. Thus, "suffering is just as great [a] benefit to him as well-being" (365).

"Everything will be calculated and specified with such an exactness that there will be no more independent actions or adventures in the world" (Notes from Underground 115). His inability to build a human bond, or a sincere relationship with other people either as potential future companions or faithful friends in his present state of life leads him to shatter his idealized society purely built up through his daydreaming. Furthermore, he is growingly aware that he cannot possibly will a freedom of thought, whereas his unbalanced and inauthentic mode of existence only exposes his ever-increasing humiliation. At this point, the underground man's craving for freedom of thought and action is a great motive to create his resentful, spiteful attitude, and his willingness to be free from the rational formula governs his behavior. Kirilov commits suicide to declare man's freedom from the grace of God; similarly, the underground man struggles to be free himself from the subversive Western rationalism: thus, he declares that no one "would want to desire according to a mathematical formula" (117) and that "twice-two-makes-four is not life,

gentlemen. It is the beginning of death” (123).

The gap between artistic creation and weary reality constantly frustrates him: “how paltry, unliterary, and commonplace the whole affair would be” (156). Yet, at the same time, the incursions of reality into his dreaming causes hope to gain a foothold. “I really did believe that there was going to be some radical break in my life and that it would most certainly come that day. Whether it was because I was not used to change or for some other reason, but all through my life I could not help feeling that any extraneous event, however trivial, would immediately bring about some radical alteration in my life” (155). It is this desire for a formative event, an action that would elevate his existence onto a plane of meaning and fulfillment that impels the underground man to resolutely pursue an incident with an energy usually dissipated into dreams. Dreaming becomes a means of coping and a protest against the banality of mundane activity.

Though he aspires to freedom, he is still trapped in an unsatisfactory reality: “there was nothing in my surroundings which I could respect or to which I could feel attracted” (136). Thus, he denies any coherent logic of existence, the systematic order of science and mathematics, and the pressure of life routine. His highly developed consciousness for his battle against existence causes his alienation from reality. Clearly, his hyper-consciousness, or vigilant lucidity brings him to spiritual depravity and physical weakness, as it does with Clamence, too.

Yet, the underground man’s reaction toward existence is supremely passive. He simply hides from reality by indulging in reading, yet bookishness only intensifies his solitude: “At home I mostly spent my time reading [ . . . ] Apart from reading, I had nothing to occupy me. I was so accustomed to think and imagine everything from books, and to picture everything in the world to myself just as I had made it up in my dreams beforehand, that I could not all at once take in these



strange, that is real, circumstances” (Notes from Underground 323). For this, James M. Holquist remarks, “It [reading] is his way of organizing reality, of giving shape to the events which constantly threaten to overcome him” (230). Thus, in reality, he is “the lowest of the low”; in dreams, he becomes a hero. Indeed, he makes up a story to stay alive. Instead of compromising with reality, he sticks to the extreme opposition: “Either a hero or dirt, there was no middle way” (Notes from Underground 333). In a sense, for the underground man, the meaning of existence is only found in a state of complete withdrawal from reality.

The underground man recreates reality in his imaginative plot: he will become a millionaire; everyone will love him; he will preach new ideas; a general amnesty will be declared; the Pope will agree to leave Rome and move to Brazil; Lake Como will be transferred to the outskirts of Rome. In his pattern of story, “Everything always ended most satisfactorily in an indolent and rapturous transition to art, that is, to the beautiful forms of existence” (350).

James M. Holquist argues that Dostoevsky systematically subverts the traditional Aristotelian plot of “a neat beginning, middle, and end” (225). Aristotelian plot consistently conforms to logical order and rules out any irrational component. On this account, Dostoevsky in Notes not only collapses the conventional structure of linear plot; the underground man’s revolt against rationalism in logic, science, and mathematics, and frequent intrusions of absurd situations betray the conventional method of storytelling: “Twice-two- makes –four is farcical [ . . . ] I quite agree that twice-two-makes-four is a most excellent thing; but if we are to give everything its due, then twice-two-equals- five is a most charming little thing, too” (Notes from Underground 351).

The underground man rejects the formula “Twice-two- makes –four” because, in James

Holquist's terms, it only emphasizes the whole over the parts (59), or the product over the process. In a similar context, the underground man detests a piano key, which, for him, is indicated as a mere part among other piano keys in keyboard. Thus, by using these two metaphors, the underground man establishes the validity of the part he conceives himself to be.

The underground man's inability to know true love compels him to debauch himself without affection. He, like Clamence, objectifies women: he sees women as, in Sartrean terms, "being in-itself." His intellectual superiority only functions as "a means of subjugating others" (Traschen 370).

Yet, his encounter with the prostitute, Lisa, awakens him from his daydreaming. He initially tries to incorporate her into his story in order to gain power over her: he tells the story of how happy Lisa would be "if she had a rosy little baby boy sucking at her breast." He continues to spin out a plot for her future: "she will die a horrible death of consumption, and be buried in a grave of wet blue clay with dirty snow" (367). Lisa is no better than a character he invented in his story; thus, like Clamence, he still gazes at her as a "being-in-itself."

Lisa epitomizes "the salvation of a prostitute victimized by society" (Swensen 268). Thus, his emotions are complicated by a growing romantic attachment—and all is at odds with his habitual distrust of life and his incapacity to experience anything simply. He declares: "For if you love, you can live even without happiness. Life is sweet even in sorrow. It's good to be alive, however hard life is" (Notes from Underground 177).

The underground man says, "we are all divorced from life, we are all cripples, everyone of us, more or less. We are so divorced from it that we feel at once a sort of loathing for real life, and so cannot bear to be reminded of it. Why, we have come almost to look upon real life as an

effort, almost as hard work, and we are all privately agreed that it is better in books” (212). Yet, he is hyper-aware of imaginative deficiencies, and so tries to live by his own internal sense of the real, but finds that his critical capacity, while able to detect falsity, is unable to provide positive criteria for the authentic self. He senses that he can find the real only through the other, yet the other seems deficient. Lisa represents his most viable opportunity for discovery, but he cannot believe it and cannot risk giving his freedom to the beloved.

Thus, we illustrate, by analyzing The Fall and Notes from Underground one after another, two facets of the absurd existence. The former places Clamence in his original metaphysical state of existence in his self-defensive cynicism, from which he fell; whereas the latter intellectually and emotionally abandons the underground man’s dependence upon a system of reason and science, and thus denies the original state of his existence. Yet, both protagonists have insulated themselves from the outside world and experience their own limitless freedom in the midst of complete solitude. In short, their existential freedom is eventually proved ineffectual since, though they give us a glimpse of paradise, they are incapable of showing us the way to realize it.

### **An Authentic Figure: The Sartrean Concept of Authenticity**

We have seen two existential heroes who close themselves off from the common spiritual truth of humanity and ignore human beings’ authentic value. Camus evolved “from the engaged intellectual of the Resistance to the disabused and frustrated artist of the later fifties” (Judt 91), and, after experiencing this transition, Camus depicts, through D’Arrast in “The Growing Stone” in Exile and Kingdom, the existence of an individual whose inner struggle is played out through seeking to bring benefits to others.

As we have already seen, Sartre’s concept of “bad faith,” a negative attitude toward

himself, emerges from an escape from freedom, responsibility, and anguish. However, for Sartre, bad faith entails “the unity of single consciousness” (Santoni 29); by lying to oneself, one hides the truth from oneself, which, according to Santoni, should be differentiated from falsehood or a general lie. From the concept of bad faith, Sartre again defines the authentic person, who experiences a radical conversion by recognizing his or her responsibility, anguish, and freedom.

For the existentialist, authentic selfhood can be established not only through the efforts to achieve one’s complete freedom, but also from the responsibility to share others’ suffering. Camus seeks to portray what we can consider to be an authentic existential figure through D’Arrast, and demonstrates that responsibility is crucial in exercising one’s freedom. “When a man commits himself to anything,” says Sartre, “fully realizing that he is not only choosing what he will be, but is thereby at the same time a legislator deciding for the whole of mankind—in such a moment a man cannot escape from the sense of complete and profound responsibility” (Humanism 30). Even though Camus has chosen not to use Sartre’s terminology, D’Arrast’s freedom of choice for action is exercised in the Sartrean spirit of responsibility, which holds that any action must be undertaken with all men in mind. When we make choices in “a project of sincerity” (Nothingness 79), “what we choose is always the better; and nothing can be better for us unless it is better for all” (Humanism 29).

As I have briefly mentioned above, Sartre argues that freedom is inseparable from human existence. Going one step further, Sartre simply adds to suggest one’s sense of communal responsibility as the most influential element on when one should decide to act, since we are eventually, in Sartre’s terms, contingent “existence-in-the-world-in the presence-of-others.” Thus, we exist authentically or inauthentically with our fellow human beings.

Camus opens the short story by portraying D'Arrast's solitude: he cannot be fully welcomed by the nobles or by the townspeople and thus, the long passage describing the unfamiliar landscape of Iguape conveys D'Arrast's profound physical solitude. However, his personal efforts to fulfill his legal responsibility and, at the same time, his deep respect for human beings to recover fraternity, eventually alters his position from "solitaire" to "solidaire."

In an existentialist perspective, "authentic being-with-others" is seen as a mode of an individual's relation to another which promotes existence in the full sense and thus it allows one to stand out as human in freedom and responsibility. Conversely, "inauthentic being-with-others" is represented as depersonalized and dehumanized. In our textual analysis of "The Growing Stone," the culminating short story of the collection Exile and Kingdom, we can envision D'Arrast's efforts to escape exile and enjoys an authentic vision of kingdom, a kingdom which is ultimately achieved by his authentic selfhood.

### **Textual Analysis: D'Arrast in "The Growing Stone"**

People in Iguape—a town constantly flooded when the river rises in the incessant rain—are exiled, isolated and oppressed by the hostile forces of nature. D'Arrast, a French civil engineer who is totally unfamiliar with Brazil, arrives in this poor quarter on the eve of a religious festival to build a dam that will prevent seasonal flooding. The story opens with an extended account of the trip to Iguape, in a car driven by a native of the region, named Socrates. Traveling through the unfamiliar space of Serra—striking in its desolation and misery—on winding, muddy roads, crossing a river by means of a ferry in the middle of night, and then traversing again the lush forest in the dark, this desolated landscape is enough to bewilder D'Arrast. He says to himself: "Where were we? In Tokyo?" (167). Pretty soon D'Arrast realizes his geographical exile.

Besides, he finds himself exiled from the entire population of Iguape. As a representative of European developed civilization, and by his superior skill to “command the waters and dominate the rivers” in a less-advanced society, he is welcomed by the ruling class. In the town, D’Arrast meets the notables, the Mayor, the Judge, the Harbor Captain--who show sincere hospitality since he is seen at once as one of the notary-- and the Chief of Police. His introduction to the latter turns sour when the Chief drunkenly challenges D’Arrast to produce proper identification. The Chief threatens, in other words, to block D’Arrast’s entry in their community.

He then visits the poor community near the river, where he is to design a flood control dike; yet, he is not welcomed by this destitute population. Indeed, at first the impoverished citizens, or the Black inhabitants, view him with “mute hospitality” (Valerie 53) full of suspicion. His image of an educated European, a professional, and a bourgeois is considered to be a notable; thus, this image implicitly reminds the townspeople of Brazil’s colonial background and thus, he is segregated from them. Simply confessing to the cook he befriends, D’Arrast states that “I used to be proud; now I’m alone” (187). D’Arrast is exiled psychologically as well as physically.

However, D’Arrast does not settle comfortably into it, but instead, moves on to the challenge of gaining the acceptance of the poor people. At the celebration for Saint George, D’Arrast, though initially positioned as an outsider and quite detached from the celebration, begins to lose control of his senses: “Then he notice[d] that he himself, though without moving his feet, had for some little time been dancing with his whole weight” (193). Not only D’Arrast, but also the entire townspeople, through their participation in this ceremony, discover a strong unity and community which makes it possible to overcome their physical exile. Thus, they form strong emotional bonds, which evidently supersede any single individuality. The villagers have

experienced their own rituals of renewal and with this, they discover their united spirit. The *macoumba*, the central religious ritual, provides the inhabitants to discover their hidden spirit of wholeness, to display the power of the community to renew life and buttress it against danger, and ultimately to throw off their long rooted habit of submission to the dominant image of christianity.

D'Arrast is now welcomed by the local people. Yet, a barrier still blocks him to completely feel united with the townspeople: he cannot follow the "superstitious" faith of the ship's cook, and, as the celebration for Saint George becomes more ardent, D'Arrast is again unable to unite himself fully, exiled by the townspeople: "They don't want you to stay now" (197). Excluded from the religious ceremony, D'Arrast passively responds at his dismissal and displays his tolerance and endurance: "I don't know how to dance," he tells Socrates. Disheartened, D'Arrast urges the cook to leave with him—it is not long before the cook will have to carry the stone to fulfill his promise; but the cook will not leave and keep on dancing. Thus, as Valerie remarks, "their intellectual gulf deepens when D'Arrast witnesses the local religious rituals" (356). Truly, the author intensifies the tension between the indigenous townspeople and the European prestigious technician by portraying "D'Arrast's negative response to the local rites" and the Cook's diminished responsibility (359).

During the religious procession D'Arrast accepts the invitation to join the town notables on a balcony of the judge's house facing the church. But D'Arrast willingly "descends to the ground level" (Walker 57) among the people and finds the cook, who is staggering under the rock he has once sworn to carry to the church: "He had to struggle against the joyful crowd, the candle bearers, the offended penitents. Slowly but surely, bearing all his weight against the human tide, he opened up a path" (352). When he finds the cook, he perceives that the cook's companions keep

replacing the rock every time he staggers. D'Arrast intuitively shares the burden of the stone and begins to follow the path to the church, which is a symbolic moment of his denial of the prestige (or, the privilege) of the upper class and, instead, accepts "the role of Saint George" (Walker 57).

In choosing the way to either church or to the slum section, D'Arrast defies the will of the people. Ignoring the cries of "to the church, to the church" (358), he turns his way to the left to carry the stone down instead. By "delivering the stone to the shantytown instead of the church," (Valerie 363) D'Arrast wants to destroy the townspeople's reticent submission and resignation deeply rooted in the colonial background. For this, as Walker points out, D'Arrast, after achieving the "fundamental" solidarity, still wants to overcome "those habits of servitude and resignation which compound the community's misery" (58).

D'Arrast turns toward the cook's hut, amid the other residence of the poor quarter, and upon arriving at it "hurled the stone onto the still glowing fire in the center of the room" (359-60). Then, D'Arrast experiences a transformation, "a unity with the physical world and reaffirmation of human solidarity" (Valerie 363); "drinking in with desperate gulps the familiar smell of poverty and ashes, he felt rising within him a surge of obscure and panting joy that he was powerless to name." D'Arrast, standing with eyes closed, "joyfully acclaimed his own strength; he acclaimed once again, a fresh beginning in life" (360). For this, Valerie remarks, "D'Arrast's exhilaration and sense of metaphysical unity are described as an almost sacramental experience of baptism and rebirth" (363). The cook's brother invites him to make a space in the circle of family and friends, and says D'Arrast: "Sit down with us" (361). D'Arrast willingly accepts this offer and finally has overcome his exile. He, thus, "throws off his burden of guilt" (Valerie 59) engendered by his seemingly indelible image of the member of the prestigious ruling class.



D'Arrast's "positive, sympathetic response to the ethnic group he encounters" (Valerie 357) leads him to try to destroy the apparent class division prevalent in this community -- the irreconcilable division between the European prestige represented by the judge and the chief of police; and the impoverished townspeople—and involves himself willingly to help the townspeople. Yet, D'Arrast cannot suggest the reconciliation between the class division existing between the notables and the townspeople. He, as a central figure of this story, willingly embraces the pain of the community; other people's religious faith; and their sense of responsibility. Yet, these gestures cannot provide a hopeful message to completely clear away the residue of the evident class division between the two extremely polarized group, the indigenous inhabitants and the ruling class.

D'Arrast, "the descendent of an aristocratic family"(Walker 52), was thought, from the townspeople, to be a representative of the colonialist from the start. Thus, the gap of the cultural/social backgrounds prevents him from achieving the townspeople's immediate acceptance. However, he, though he wants to escape from the spiritual alienation, does not demand too much. Instead, he is willing to participate whenever the people will allow him; and tries to be free from the obstacle which blocks him to proceed to form the mutual recognition of affinity with the inhabitants. In the face of such disturbances as the drunken police chief's threats and his exclusion from the dance, "he characteristically accepts rebuffs and frustrations with equanimity and cool tranquility and offers no resistance" (Showalter 12).

Camus, thus, not only portrays the evident class division, a dominant image from the start, but also, going one step further, seeks the way to overcome this classification between D'Arrast and the townspeople: thus, D'Arrast ultimately devotes himself to find an affirmation of human

wholeness based on fraternity and solidarity. As Showalter remarks, D'Arrast seems to provide the hope that "humanism may yet prevail" (13).

D'Arrast, like the other existential figures mentioned above, shows an aversion to religious belief: he cannot fully adopt the cook's superstitious faith, nor can he, as a member of the notable class, blindly follow Christian belief. His great concern is, instead, to bypass the binary opposition of oppression and submission into one system of communal fraternity. From building the dam to shouldering the boulder for the cook, all of D'Arrast's activities are designed to alleviate suffering. Without crucial cognizance of absurd solitude, he still pursues freedom of thought and action by willingly embracing the communal suffering.

Camus insightfully suggests that human solidarity can transcend the alienation imposed by reality – in this case, a harsh environment of seasonal flooding, different cultural and class backgrounds, and socio-economic barriers.<sup>10</sup>

Camus mentions absurd happiness by portraying Sisyphus's conscious engagement in his ritual of defiance. D'Arrast, then, is in a Sisyphian situation without being aware of the absurd. "The Growing Stone" provides us a solution to Camus's question raised in The Myth of Sisyphus: people can be like Sisyphus, who is "powerless and rebellious, but fully embraces his wretched condition" (196).

Thus, Susan Tarrow declares: "D'Arrast overcomes the apparent class division prevalent in this community -- the irreconcilable division between the European prestige represented by the judge and the chief of police; and the impoverished townspeople—and involves himself willingly

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<sup>10</sup> For a political interpretation, see Tarrow.

to help the townspeople” (159).

Thanks to his endurance and tranquility, he can overcome several disturbing events in meeting the drunken police chief’s threats and his solitude from the religious ceremony. Clearly, Camus’s earlier preoccupation with a metaphysical revolt against absurd existence was confined within the personal sphere; his insightful exploration of communal responsibility and human solidarity in this story serves to illuminate his new vision of human dignity, which differs from his deep attachment to lyricism in his earlier days or to an individual’s moral convictions devoid of religious faith.

Thus, Exile and the Kingdom was not conceived as a passionate, abstract literary production, or esoteric theory, but a fruitful labor of Camus’s matured meditation on some of “the practical consequences of his ideas,” or on “the difficulty of translating ideas into behavior” (Showalter 135). Showalter’s study mentions Camus’s moral as “a perfect lucidity about one’s relations with the universe; honesty in one’s relations with other people; and solidarity with other human beings, based on respect for their freedom and awareness of a common fate” (143).

Unlike several other existential characters in Camus’s novels, D’Arrast is not indulged in his personal despair, nor is he preoccupied with “the sense of broken community or the resultant distress of the human condition”(Sprintzen 159). Although surrounded by evidence of the absurd—for instance, the different religious faiths or the class barrier between the townspeople and the nobility --, he does not arrive at a profound sense of the meaninglessness of his life.

Thus, D’Arrast never experiences the moment in which “the ‘why’ looms up and everything has its beginning in this despondency” (The Myth of Sisyphus 107). He never experiences “the chain of broken daily motions,” or “the despondency which is at the end of the

acts of a mechanical life” (106). D’Arrast cannot attain the “metaphysical state of the conscious man” (128).

In short, D’Arrast is an authentic existential figure. His awareness of the absurd is not depicted in detail; yet his temperament is, without fail, generous and tolerant enough to move townspeople’s unwillingness to accept him as a member of the group, which results from “his comprehensive interest in humanity” (Showalter 108). Thus, undeniably, Camus achieves, through D’Arrast -- who willingly rebels against his status quo to fulfill a meaningful world from meaningless reality-- his optimistic vision of nature and humanity.

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY

Camus, as a representative voice in an anxiety-ridden Europe of the 1940's and as a philosopher of the absurd, denies absolute dogmatism, but instead adopts humanism and moderation to embrace other's suffering. Camus, confronted with the growth of nihilism in the first half of the twentieth century, sought to redress the failure of humanism and ultimately find human dignity and hope. This quest to find an appropriate response to the problems of absurdity leads Camus to engage with Dostoevsky's fiction at several stages of the French-Algerian's career. Perhaps no prominent twentieth-century writer has experienced Dostoevsky's presence more acutely than Camus.

Camus seeks to find, through Dostoevsky's major literary figures, an authentic image who is able to assume a communal responsibility, yet, he, not succeeding in it, ultimately creates D'Arrast who willingly embraces others' suffering and achieves his kingdom of fraternity.

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