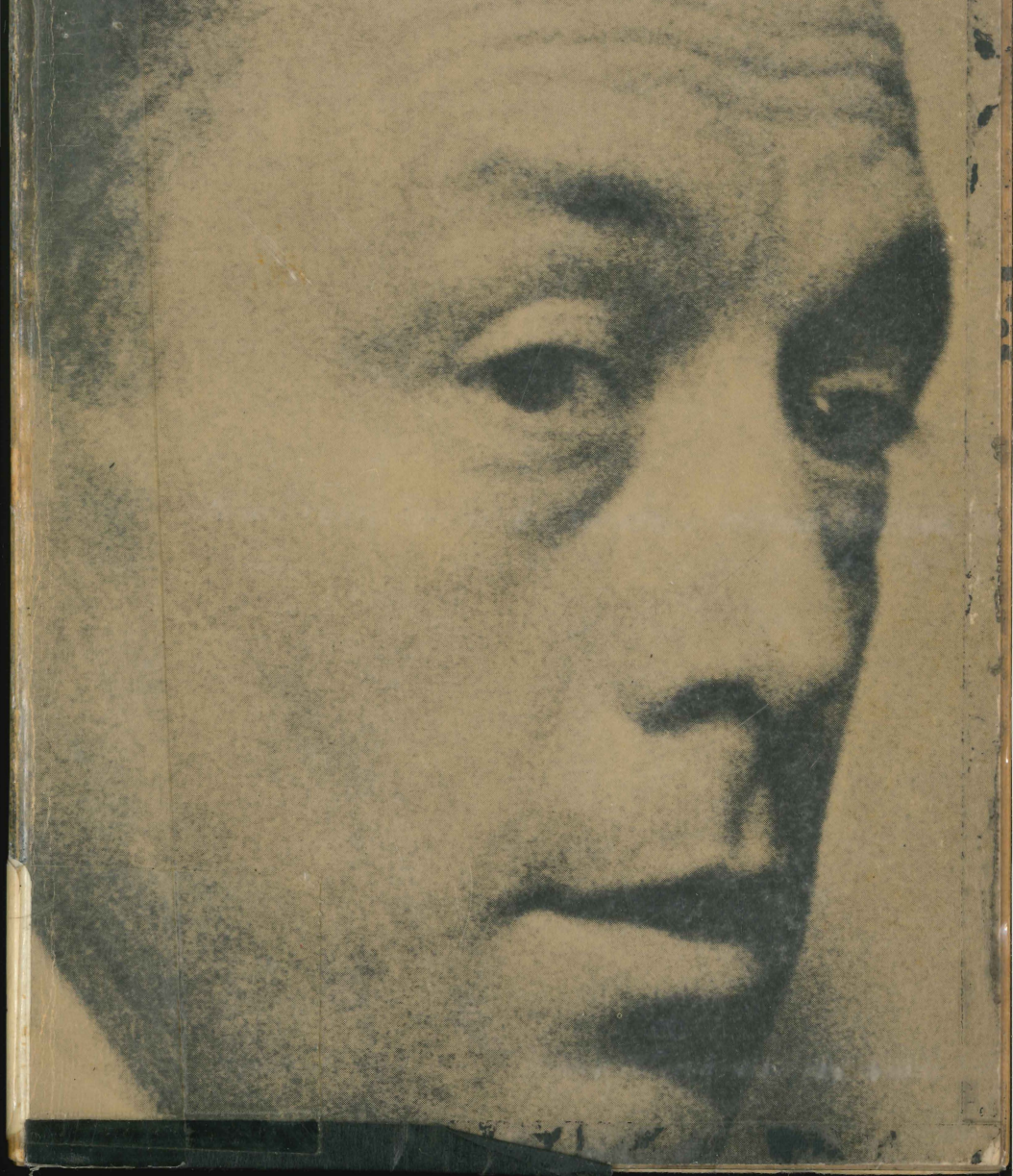


A HARBINGER BOOK \$2.25

CAMUS



GERMAINE BRÉE

CAMUS

R E V I S E D E D I T I O N



A Harbinger Book

HARCOURT, BRACE & WORLD, INC.
New York • Chicago • Burlingame

MONASTIC LIBRARY
Abbey of Gethsemani
Trappist, Kentucky

RQ ~~842~~

2605

.A 3734

.Z 62

TO FRANCINE, CATHERINE, AND JEAN

Copyright © 1959, 1961, 1964 by Rutgers, The State University

This edition is reprinted by arrangement with
Rutgers University Press.

First Harbinger Books edition 1964

Camus was originally published in 1959 and was revised in 1961.
For the Harbinger Books edition Chapter 4 has been revised
and the Bibliography has been expanded.

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 58-10829

Printed in the United States of America

COVER PHOTOGRAPH: Dalmas-Pix

Contents

1. <i>Camus and His Time</i>	3
2. <i>Algerian Summer, 1913-1932</i>	12
3. <i>Passion for Life, 1932-1939</i>	21
4. <i>Days of Wrath, 1939-1944</i>	36
5. <i>Trial by Solitude, 1944-1955</i>	48
6. "My Work Is Not Begun"	60
7. <i>The Black Sun of Death</i>	66
8. <i>The World of Poverty</i>	71
9. <i>Gods of This Earth</i>	80
10. <i>Cautionary Tales</i>	89
11. <i>Mid-Century Parables</i>	94
12. <i>Creation Corrected</i>	101
13. <i>Heroes of Our Time: I. The Stranger</i>	112
14. <i>Heroes of Our Time: II. The Plague</i>	118
15. <i>Heroes of Our Time: III. The Fall and The Renegade</i>	131
16. <i>Tragic Themes and the Theater</i>	140
17. <i>Poetic Fantasy and the Stage</i>	153
18. <i>Dialogues of the Mind</i>	168
19. <i>Essays in Meditation</i>	191

20. <i>Vies Absurdes</i>	198
21. <i>Good-by to the Minotaur</i>	212
22. <i>The Fall of Prometheus</i>	217
23. <i>The Invincible Summer</i>	231
24. <i>The Role of the Artist</i>	237
<i>Bibliography</i>	256
<i>Index</i>	268

it has become necessary to face the night,
the beauty of the day being naught but a memory.

4

Days of Wrath, 1939-1944

"Il avait fallu se mettre en règle avec la nuit,
la beauté du jour n'étant qu'un souvenir."

War has broken out. Where is the war? Outside of the news we must believe and the posters we must read, where can we find the signs of this absurd event? Not in the blue sky over the blue sea, the whirring of the cicadas, nor in the cypress trees on the hill. Nor in the youthful surge of the light in the streets of Algiers.

One wants to believe in it. One looks for its visage and it evades us. The world alone, with its magnificent visages, is king.

To have lived in the detestation of the beast, to be confronted with it and not be able to recognize it. So little has changed. Later, no doubt, will come the mud, the blood and an immense nausea. . . . But today one realizes that the beginning of a war is comparable to the beginning of a peace: the world and one's own heart are unaware of them.¹

Camus noted scrupulously yet with surprise that, in spite of his concern, the first days of the war were for him "days of prodigious happiness": like many others, he was astonished to find his life unchanged. Later, during the somber years of the Resistance, he was to equate the cause of justice with that of France,² but in these early days of the war he firmly believed

¹ Notebooks.

² In 1952, at the time of the controversy raised by *L'Homme révolté*, Francis Jeanson reproached Camus for having equated the cause of justice and that of France, but he failed to recall the particular circumstances that explain Camus's attitude at that precise time.

The Role of the Artist

"Je veux délivrer mon univers de ses fantômes et le peupler seulement des vérités de la chair dont je ne peux pas nier la présence."

"We all carry within us our prisons, our crimes, our destructiveness. But to unleash them in the world is not our duty. Our duty consists in fighting them in ourselves and in others."¹ Camus had an almost desperate sense of our immediate need to impose a tolerable pattern upon the violently haphazard development of our civilization. To him our greatest temptation, obsessed by powerful mechanical forces which we manipulate and do not control, is to abandon our ethical human standards and needs, identifying ourselves thereby with a world which denies us our rightful place. Between these superpowerful forces and the individual he could detect no present intent on the part of the conscious human community to defend a "kingdom of man" that embodies in its institutions the aspiration of the individual toward the undeniable "truths of the flesh."

Our institutions, as Camus saw them, tend either toward the inefficient routines of the somnolent bureaucracies, satirized in *La Peste* and *L'Etat de siège*, or toward the blind mechanisms of a world which, impervious to the dictates of human conscience, is, like the Grand Inquisitor of Dostoevsky, contemptuous of mankind in general. As individuals we are exiles, exiles in a universe in which we no longer claim our

¹ *L'Homme révolté*, p. 373.

and Montherlant. His admiration for these masters taught him to set his goals high. He did not feel the slightest self-consciousness in regard to his profession, which he thought of with "gratitude and pride."¹⁰ Indeed his conception of the function of the creative artist seems to have been a determining factor in the conscious construction of his own personality, compelling him to take action almost in spite of himself: "It is not the struggle that makes us artists, but art that obliges us to be combatants."¹¹ His stubborn, sometimes irascible defense of his political integrity was really a defense of his artistic integrity. But Camus, unlike Sartre, did not legislate for all artists nor make political commitment a *sine qua non* for artistic achievement in all ages.

"The first choice an artist makes," Camus writes, "is precisely to be an artist, and if he chooses to be an artist it is in consideration of what he is himself and because of a certain idea he has of art."¹² But, he ironically observes, we live in "a time when Racine would blush at having written *Bérénice*, and Rembrandt, in order to apologize for having painted the 'Night Watch,' would run to register at the local communist headquarters."¹³ Social consciousness when it is based on an unsufficient understanding of art is, according to Camus, the enemy of the artist and not his safeguard.

Though the first responsibility of the artist is to his art, Camus contended that he could meet it only in the measure that he first met his responsibilities as a man, an ordinary human being comparable to any, facing like any other the current problems of life within his given social framework. Any evasion eventually limits the writer's efficacy. But an artist need not necessarily run after unusual experiences or adventures. Camus disliked Sartre's contention that the artist must

¹⁰ *Actuelles I*, p. 263.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 264.

¹² "Le Témoin de la liberté," *Actuelles I*, p. 254.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 253.

scendency of which beauty is a promise, which may make us love, and prefer to any other, the limited and mortal world.”²¹

What is, in truth, the source of the beauty which moved Camus both in the work of art and in nature? Not revolt, certainly; not unity and coherence alone. Rejecting in part both the purely natural and the purely human, and yet at the same time considering each as an autonomous entity, Camus could not completely “reconcile” the elements of his universe: he seemed to be reaching toward that “living transcendency” he mentions and which might be a key to unity.

It is difficult to arrive at a just appreciation of the true significance of Camus’s aesthetic thought. *L’Homme révolté* and “*L’Artiste et son temps*,” with their emphasis on the ordering of an experience, on stylization of experience through art, and on human understanding as the main sources of art, seem to define a new classicism. The road Camus followed may appear unnecessarily complicated but this is precisely because—very much of his time—he shared in certain of its fashions, the prisoner sometimes of attitudes and a vocabulary which he himself in part created. To see all things, including the problem of art, even temporarily, in the light of *l’absurde* or *la révolte* is a limitation. One feels that Camus consciously and ferociously imposed this limitation on himself. For him, therefore, it was no doubt a necessity. It was also something more. Each stage in his thought was a struggle toward a certain intellectual grasp of life, an effort to dominate a disorder so great that it tended to reduce freedom to anarchy. And yet freedom was what Camus as an artist most needed, that freedom which is a leitmotiv of his work: freedom in respect to himself and to his age, freedom in respect to his art and to other human beings, a freedom which, at the time of his death, he was just beginning to enjoy.

Camus grappled with the forces that reject and menace

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 319.

freedom. He called these forces to life, incarnated them, and mapped out their violently destructive career. For a young man brought up "in the sunlight, the delight in life, the freedom" of long Algerian summers, the task was hard. "To think," he wrote, "is to learn how to see anew." The outer world thrust upon him a vision he abhorred. Camus recognized at the outset that the "tragic" element in our time was intellectual in character. To look unflinchingly at the world around him, "refusing to lie" to himself or others, was the task he set himself. From *L'Envers et l'endroit* to *La Chute* the existence of the "kingdom of man" that he had sought from the outset was more and more sharply challenged, and Camus felt that it was imperative to integrate into his vision his own violently disruptive experience. He thus delivered his world from the "phantoms" which invaded it, slowly establishing its fundamental unity and its limits in human terms.

With *L'Exil et le royaume* Camus seemed deliberately to have been moving toward the projection of this carefully limited and sharply defined "kingdom of man," and of the "free and naked way of life" which defines an "art of living" with dignity in our time and face to face with ourselves. More than ever, in Camus's eyes, the artist was committed to his task of expressing "the sufferings and joys of all" in the language of all mankind. He is, he must be, on the side of freedom, and of justice against the "dark wind of death" which already blew over the ruins of Djémila. The images of freeing, of breaking open the prison bars, the great sustaining movement of the sea, the confrontation with the terrible enigma of the "dark" sun of life continued to sustain his universe.

Camus slowly came to know a man attuned both to the inner Africa of his youth and to the symbolic, spiritual Europe which he had once discovered with so much misgiving; a man like himself, "vulnerable and stubborn, unjust and eager for

justice, constructing his work without shame or pride within sight of all, constantly torn between pain and beauty, and devoted to extracting from his dual nature the creations he obstinately strives to elevate in the destructive fluctuations of history.”²²

In his Notebooks, the Promethean cycle of revolt, which followed the cycle of Sisyphus or “l’absurde,” was to be followed by the cycle of Nemesis, or measure. A fourth cycle of works was mentioned: the cycle of “a certain kind of love.” *L’Exil et le royaume* and *Les Possédés*, each in its way, seem to foreshadow the direction Camus’s work was taking. Among the works Camus was planning to include in the cycle was “a vast novel.” In a manner very reminiscent of Gide, Camus, in the last editions of his works that appeared during his lifetime, listed no novels. *L’Etranger*, *La Peste*, *La Chute*, and *L’Exil et le royaume* are grouped together under the heading: “récits” (tales) or “récits et nouvelles” (tales and short stories). The “vast novel” was therefore to be different from the preceding fictional tales.

He announced the title of this novel, *Le premier homme*; a novel which, taking him back to his point of departure, would, it seemed, do what *La Mort heureuse* had attempted—and failed. Camus was setting out to “rewrite” that fragment of his first novel, *L’Envers et l’endroit*. “If after so many efforts to build a language and to make myths come alive, I do not succeed, someday, in rewriting *L’Envers et l’endroit*, I shall not have attained anything, that is my obscure conviction,” he wrote in 1957.²³ “Nothing in any case prevents me from dreaming that I shall succeed, that I shall still place in the center of this work the admirable silence of a mother and

²² Camus’s speech accepting the Nobel Prize for literature, Dec. 10, 1957, p. xii, translated by Justin O’Brien (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1958).

²³ *L’Envers et l’endroit* (Paris: Gallimard, 1958), Preface, p. 33.

the effort of a man to rediscover a justice or a love which could counterbalance that silence."

Camus, after a difficult and long detour imposed upon him by historical events, and more still by his generosity and exacting code of dignity, was returning to the initial source of his writing, the richest, according to some critics, in his work—the world of his Mediterranean childhood. He felt that he still had a long road ahead of him. But, as the work accomplished stands, in its entirety now, before our eyes, although dated perhaps in some of its themes, as is natural and inevitable, it bears all the signs of a literary landmark.

"The most penetrating study of Albert Camus published to date."

—*Saturday Review*

Germaine Brée

CAMUS

REVISED EDITION

"Germaine Brée's remarkable study is not likely to be surpassed for many years. It is a lucid and comprehensive presentation of the life of Camus, resting on a solid basis of facts, some hitherto unknown or little known The criticism is sympathetic and vibrant with admiration, but it remains unbiased, and it wisely eschews the pitfall of much commentary on Camus Germaine Brée . . . definitely establishes herself with this volume as the foremost interpreter of twentieth-century French literature in America."

—HENRI PEYRE, in *The New York Times Book Review*

GERMAINE BRÉE is the author of several books, including *The French Novel from Gide to Camus* (a Harbinger Book), written with Margaret Guiton, and studies of Proust and Gide. Miss Brée has taught at Bryn Mawr and was for several years Head of the Romance Language Department of the Graduate School at New York University. She is now a member of the Institute for Research in the Humanities at the University of Wisconsin.

