

CAMUS: REFLECTIONS ON NATURE

"To feel wholly at home in this world is to partake of the nature of plants and animals. Man is an eternal stranger when he cut himself off from the rest of creation and became human. From this incurable strangeness stem our incurable uncertainty, our unfulfillable craving for roots..."¹

-Eric Hoffer

Numerous critics have discussed different aspects of Camus's treatment of Nature. Several critics, among them Roland Barthes ("L'Etranger, Roman Solaire"), Alain Robbe-Grillet ("Nature, Humanisme, et Tragédie"), and Jean-Paul Sartre ("Explication de L'Etranger"), have examined the role of the sun in Camus's world, especially its importance in Meursault's crime. Others such as Jacques Borel ("Nature et Histoire chez Albert Camus") and Alan Clayton ("Etapas d'un Itinéraire Spirituel") have taken a more general look at Camus and Nature. Amidst such studies, however, a basic question remains unanswered: Does Camus's treatment of Nature fit into some type of scheme or structure? In our study, we hope to show that it does. We shall attempt to prove that there is an essential duality--two different sides of Nature--portrayed in Camus's works. On the one hand, there is the docile and enticing side of Nature, the one seen

most clearly in Noces à Tipasa. On the other, there is the violent and destructive side, most clearly portrayed in Le Vent à Djémila. Both can be found in the first half of L'Etranger. Through a comparison of these two early essays, written in 1936-37, and Camus's best-known novel, written in the same formative period,² we hope to show that a clear and surprisingly fixed pattern in Camus's treatment of Nature does indeed reveal itself.

Before delving into Noces à Tipasa, it would be of value to try to define Nature as Camus envisages her. To begin with, Nature, for Camus, is simply a composite of such elements as water, wind, sun, flowers, and other non-human phenomena. One or more of these elements are found in almost each of Camus's literary creations, especially in his short stories. To mention just two well-known works, in L'Hôte we find a cold wind, snow-covered plains, and rocky mountains, and in La Pierre qui pousse there are damp marshlands, misty forests, a river, and an intensive sun. In Noces à Tipasa, there is an astonishing mixture of many of Nature's elements, as Jacques Borel keenly notes: "Ces mots: soleil, mer, ciel, lumière, terre ou pierres, chaleur, monde aussi--presque toujours préféré à nature, même là où le mot monde n'apparaît pas comme plus signifiant--il n'est pas une page de Noces à Tipasa qui, inlassablement, ne les reprenne."³ In defining Nature in Camus's terms, however, we must note that the author never speaks of trees and lakes in isolation, but rather always in combination with a protagonist. The presence of man in Nature poses a serious problem: in Camus's mind, there is an irresolvable conflict between man's desire to be a part of the world of Nature and his distance from that world. Camus describes his own desire to be a part of the external world in these terms: "Si j'étais arbre parmi les arbres...cette vie aurait un sens...car je ferais partie de ce monde."⁴ He

defines his distance from that world as "l'absurde": "L'absurde est essentiellement un divorce... (il) n'est pas dans l'homme, ni dans le monde, mais dans leur présence commune."⁵ Yet if Camus's character feels a certain "étrangeté" with the natural world around him--the result of the "divorce"--this does not mean the environment is beyond his perception. The separation between man and Nature does not keep Camus's protagonist from being a keen observer of the external environment. Acute visual perception of Nature on the part of man must be included in our definition. In describing Meursault, Natalie Sarraute writes, "Cet étranger a l'acuité vigoureuse du trait, la richesse de palette d'un peintre."⁶ That man is able to observe Nature may seem obvious, yet not every author endows his characters with nearly the same sharp visual perception Camus does.⁷ To accompany this visual awareness, there is also an intensive emotional awareness found in the protagonist. Nature is interpreted in a subjective manner, in Camus's world, by an extremely sensitive protagonist, whether it be Meursault, d'Arrast, Daru, Janine, or Camus himself. The subjectivity Camus attributes to his characters is often expressed through an anthropomorphization of Nature. The description of Nature in human terms is only one stylistic tool used by the author to convey to the reader the emotional reactions of his characters to Nature. Our intention, in defining Nature as Camus sees her, is not to enter into the domain of style (which has been exhaustively treated elsewhere⁸), but rather merely to point out subjectivity as a determining factor in man's interpretation of Nature, in opposition to the objectivity of the characters of Robbe-Grillet, Claude Simon, Natalie Sarraute, and others. Finally, Camus envisages the relationship between man and Nature as one-to-one, in which the protagonist feels himself isolated, in "exile," as it were.⁹ Though d'Arrast constantly finds himself surrounded by natives in Africa, and though

Janine is almost always at the side of her husband, these and other characters in Camus's world must face Nature alone. Whether Nature isolates man or man isolates himself, in order to resolve his relationship with Nature on his own, is often difficult to perceive. In Camus's world, both processes take place. To sum up our introductory remarks briefly, a definition of Camus's conception of Nature involves a protagonist among "natural" objects, a separation between the protagonist and Nature, keen visual awareness on the part of the protagonist, the protagonist's subjective interpretation of Nature, and a one-to-one relationship between man and Nature. All of these factors will come into play in Noces à Tipsana, Le Vent à Djémila, and L'Etranger.

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In Noces à Tipasa, Nature's serenity and beauty make the protagonist, Camus himself, want to diminish the distance between himself and his external world. Tipasa is the land of harmony, where ruins and flowers grow together, where the sky seems to join the earth in a sort of marriage ("noces") in Nature. At Tipasa, Camus expresses a wish to participate in this serene world of Nature, and he succeeds in doing so in a unique way, a way which leaves him with an intense feeling of optimism about life.

Tipasa's harmony is the result of a calmness in Nature, the "blending" power of Nature, and movements of ascension and descension in Nature indicating the contact between the earth and the sky. The first line of the story sets the tone of serenity: "Tipasa est habitée par les dieux et les dieux parlent dans le soleil et l'odeur des absinthes,...la mer cuirassée d'argent, le ciel bleu écrit, les ruines couvertes de fleurs et la lumière à gros bouillons dans les amas de pierres."¹⁰ The

feeling of calmness in Nature is continually reinforced by such phrases as: "...la mer suce avec un bruit de baisers," "le vent léger," "le soleil qui nous chauffe," "la mer sans rides," "la brise fraîche," and so on (pp. 55-58). Camus certainly emphasizes the harmony in these terms: "...c'est la mélodie du monde qui parvient jusqu'à nous" (p. 57). At Tipasa, Nature is tame. In this world of harmony, there is an interesting phenomenon taking place: the blending and repurification of stones in Nature after their contamination by man. Camus explains how the stones grow together once again with the flowers. "Dans ce mariage des ruines et du printemps, les ruines sont redevenues pierres et, perdant le poli imposé par l'homme, sont rentrées dans la nature" (p. 56). This return to Nature of stones and subsequent loss of their "polish" is significant, because the author is returning to Tipasa to lose in Nature the same polish imposed on him by society. It is worth noting in passing that Camus's envy of stones would later find its natural resolution in his own re-creation of the Sisyphus myth, where man and stone join together in eternal happiness! Not only stones and plants grow together at Tipasa, but so too do the earth and the sky. This contact is indicated by a quantity of phrases reflecting vertical movements: a stairway of stones leads up to the ruins, and then the roadway plunges towards the fields. Camus writes: "...un escalier de pierres sèches mène aux ruines, parmi les lentisques et les genêts. Le chemin passe devant un petit phare pour plonger ensuite en pleine campagne" (p. 55). Still other phrases evoke stronger images of verticality: "...de la terre au soleil monte ...un alcool..." and "...cette force profonde qui ramène (les ruines) au centre des choses qui tombent" (p. 56). Perceiving this oneness in Nature, Camus would willingly blend into the attractive world surrounding him.

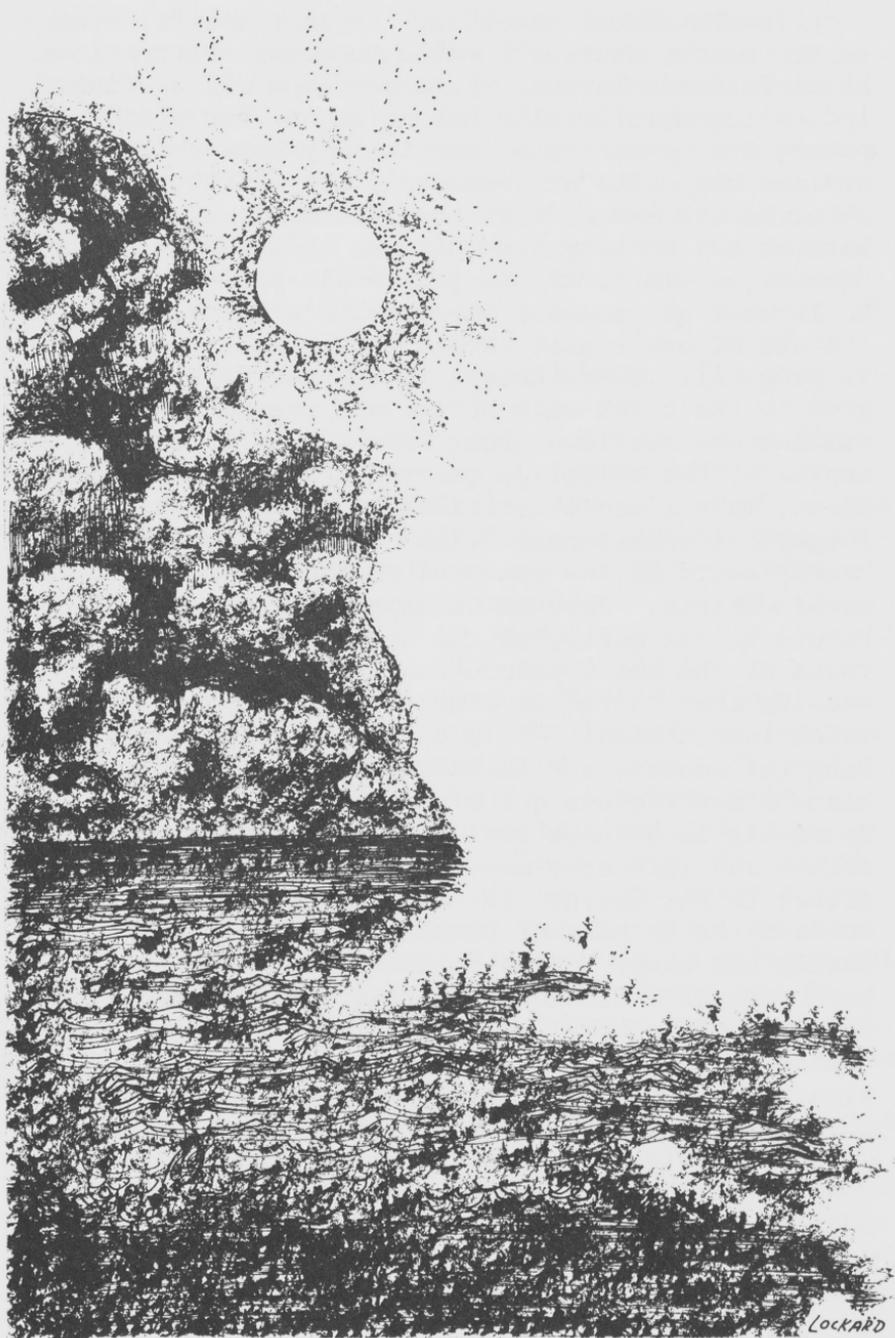
Camus desires an "accord" or union between himself and the sea, the earth, and the sky. Outside of Nature everything seems futile to him: "Hors du soleil...tout nous paraît futile..." (p. 56). In duplicating the movements of verticality he sees in Nature, Camus succeeds in creating a sensual union with the three elements of Nature. Camus describes his harmony with the sea in terms of sensuality and verticality: "Il me faut être nu et puis plonger dans la mer...et nouer sur ma peau l'étreinte pour laquelle soupirent lèvres à lèvres.... Entré dans l'eau, c'est le saisissement, la montée d'une glu froide et opaque, puis la plongeon dans le bourdonnement.... Sur le rivage, c'est la chute dans le sable.... Etreindre un corps de femme, c'est aussi retenir contre soi cette joie étrange qui descend du ciel vers la mer" (pp. 57-58). This return to the sea may symbolize a return to the womb and rebirth of the author. What is of more importance, however, is the fact that Meursault would later embrace Marie in the sea in an "étreinte" similar to the one described by Camus. The next stage in Camus's union with Nature takes place on the earth, amidst the flowers. Here, the author discovers happiness through his ability to blend, in effect, into the world around him: "Que d'heures passées à écraser les absinthes, à caresser les ruines, à tenter d'accorder ma respiration aux soupirs tumultueux du monde!...J'apprenais à respirer, je m'intégrais, et je m'accomplissais" (p. 56). This sensual accord with Nature is perhaps "le moment suprême" of Camus's happiness. The author seems to lose himself in union with the sun. He lets himself dry in the sun, describing how the water slides off his skin: "Sur le rivage...(je suis) abruti de soleil avec un regard pour mes bras où les flaques de peau sèche découvrent, avec le glissement de l'eau, le duvet blond et la poussière de sel" (p. 57). The sun is totally beautiful to Camus: "...j'ouvre les yeux et mon coeur à la grandeur insoutenable de ce ciel

gorgé de chaleur." (p. 56) The author's union with Nature is a success. And the result is an expression of optimism perhaps unexpected from the author who would later become famous for his pessimism.

Camus's optimism is expressed through a love for life, a confidence in the stability of Nature, and a feeling of being part of Nature's "race". The author's love of life--of his own life--comes from his love of Nature at Tipasa. Camus is able to write, after his union with Nature, "J'aime cette vie avec abandon..." (p. 58). The author has experienced the life of the stones, of the sea, of the fresh breeze: "Dans un sens, c'est bien ma vie que je joue ici, une vie à goût de pierre chaude, pleine des soupirs de la mer et des cigales qui commencent à chanter maintenant, La brise est fraîche et le ciel bleu," (p. 58) Camus has attained the same feeling of serenity he sees in Nature: "J'avais une joie au coeur, celle-là même qui naît d'une conscience tranquille," (p. 60) The author feels himself able to identify with the durable, stable quality of Nature. The gods will be ever-present at Tipasa: "Les dieux éclatants du jour reviendront." (p. 60) To Camus, the harmony between the elements in Nature has existed "depuis si longtemps ..." and will continue eternally. But the author realizes that he too belongs to this natural race, and his love of life has been "born" from his accord with it. The last sentence of the story makes this point clear: "Non, ce n'était pas moi qui comptais, ni le monde, mais seulement l'accord et le silence qui de lui à moi faisait naître l'amour, Amour que je n'avais pas la faiblesse de revendiquer pour moi seul, conscient et orgueilleux de la partager avec toute une race, née du soleil et de la mer..." (p. 60).

At Tipasa, Camus has revealed to us in some detail his own vision of Nature's harmony, his union with Nature, and his optimism resulting from this experience. If we now turn to L'Etranger, we will discover an interesting similarity between Meursault's experiences in Nature and Camus's,¹²

In the scenes preceding the last fateful visit to the beach, Meursault makes numerous observations about Nature's harmony, just as Camus did at Tipasa, indicating specifically her calmness, her blending power, and movements of verticality between the earth and the sky. The protagonist's very first remarks about Nature are made at the rest-home. Here, Meursault notices one morning the enticing calmness in Nature: "Quand je suis sorti, le jour était plein de rougesurs. Et le vent qui passait au-dessus d'elles apportait ici une odeur de sel. C'était une belle journée qui se préparait..."¹³ Later, in Chapter Four, Meursault goes to the beach with Marie, and there he makes similar observations about Nature's serenity. He explains, "Le soleil de quatre heures n'était pas trop chaud, mais l'eau était tiède, avec de petites vagues longues et paresseuses." (pp. 53-4) Meursault is keenly aware of the power of reintegration of elements within Nature. Just as Camus saw the ruins at Tipasa return to the earth, so too does Meursault see the roots of the earth become one with his mother's tomb, causing the "bière" to lose its polish just as the ruins lost theirs: "Il y a eu...la terre couleur de sang qui roulait sur la bière de maman, la chair blanche des racines qui s'y mêlaient..." (p. 29). Meursault is perhaps envious of his mother's return to Nature and this envy may in part explain his indifference to her death. In any case, Meursault also notices the harmony of vertical contact in Nature. During his early visits to the beach with Marie, we have several indications of this movement between the earth and the sky, just as at Tipasa: A plain descends toward the sea: "...un petit plateau...dévale vers la plane," (p. 75) White asphodels seem to reach up to the blueness of the sky: "(Le plateau) était couvert...d'asphodèles tout blancs sur le bleu déjà dur du ciel," (p. 75) And earlier, at the rest-home, the odor of the earth rises just as the sun does: "Je respirais l'odeur de la terre fraîche...Le soleil était monté un peu plus dans le ciel..." (pp. 20-21).



The contact between the earth and the sky is seen in this remark as well, where the heat from the ground rises to meet the sun: "Le ciel était déjà plein de soleil. Il commençait à peser sur la terre et la chaleur augmentait rapidement...c'était toujours la même campagne lumineuse gorgée de soleil." (pp, 24-7) Meursault will join in union with the harmonious Nature surrounding him.

Meursault feels an "accord" with the sea, the earth, and the sun during his beach visits in Chapters Two, Four, and Six. Just like Camus at Tipasa, Meursault's union with the sea occurs while he is duplicating Nature's vertical movements and is associated with a sensual embrace. Meursault's plunge into the sea indicates vertical movement: "J'ai plongé," (p. 77) So too does his spitting foam from the sea into the air and letting it fall upon him. Meursault explains, "Il fallait, en nageant, boire à la crête des vagues, accumuler dans sa bouche toute l'écume et se mettre ensuite sur le dos pour la projeter contre le ciel. Cela faisait alors une dentelle mousseuse qui disparaissait dans l'air ou me retombait en pluie tiède sur le visage." (p. 54) Just as Camus did at Tipasa, Meursault feels himself a part of Nature while swimming in the sea: "...et je suis rentré en nageant régulièrement. et en respirant bien," (p. 78) Meursault's sensual embrace with Marie takes place in the water, and it brings to mind Camus's description of his union with Nature ("Etreindre un corps de femme..."): "Sa langue rafraîchissait mes lèvres et nous nous sommes roulées dans les vagues..." (p. 54) After leaving the sea, Meursault lies upon the warm sand. Here, once again, the protagonist duplicates Camus's union with the earth. Meursault explains, "Sur la plage, je me suis étendu à plat ventre...et j'ai mis ma figure dans le sable." (p. 78) To complete his union with Nature, Meursault also feels at one with the sun. Meursault tells how the heat of the sun (and of Marie's body) makes him sleep: "(Marie) s'est allongée flanc à flanc avec moi et les deux chaleurs de son corps et du soleil m'ont un peu

endormi." (p. 78) In these early pages of the novel, the sun is indeed therapeutic to the protagonist: "...le soleil me faisait du bien." (p. 77) As at Tipasa, Nature is tame, and Meursault feels in union with her. Like Camus, Meursault's reaction to this experience is one of optimism.

Meursault feels an optimism expressed through a love of Nature's serenity, a certain confidence in Nature's durability, and an identification with Nature's "race." Meursault is far from "indifferent" to Nature's calmness, as the following remark indicates: "Avant d'arriver au bord du plateau, on pouvait voir déjà la mer immobile...Un léger bruit de moteur est monté dans l'air calme jusqu'à nous." (p. 75) At another point, Meursault says, "J'avais laissé ma fenêtre ouverte et c'était bon de sentir la nuit d'été couler sur nos corps bruns," (p. 54) Meursault, accustomed to the uneventful and stable life of the "autodidacte", feels a certain confidence in the permanence of Nature, Meursault finds the sea and sky eternally calm and docile. He constantly gazes at the unchanging sky: "Je suis resté longtemps à regarder le ciel." (p. 36) And he feels happy in doing so: "Le ciel était vert, je me sentais content." (p. 41) Similarly, the sea represents happiness to the protagonist. Meursault's optimism is apparent when he says, "L'eau était froide et j'étais content de nager." (p. 77) Later he says, "J'ai dit (à Masson) que c'était bon et il était de cet avis," (p. 78) Meursault's optimism is also the result of his identification with Nature's "race", specifically with the salt of the sea. Almost every expression of happiness on his part involves contact with salt. At the rest-home, Meursault remarks, "Et le vent... apportait ici une odeur de sel (de la mer)." (p. 20) At the beach, Marie is covered with salt: "Elle était toute fisqueuse d'eau salée et elle tenait ses cheveux en arrière." (p. 78) Just as Camus described himself as a member of Nature's race at Tipasa, so too is Meursault a member of the race of the sea, Of course, the ultimate paradox of Meursault's optimism

about the salt of the sea is that the salty sweat-beads dripping down his forehead during a later visit to the beach would eventually bring about his downfall.

During Meursault's last fateful visit to the beach, Nature would bear no resemblance to the one Camus had found at Tipasa and Meursault had found earlier in the novel. Instead, Nature would become violent and bear a close resemblance to the one Camus experiences in Le Vent à Djémila. A detailed comparison of this essay and Meursault's last encounter with Nature will provide the other half of Camus's double view of Nature,

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In Le Vent à Djémila, the author is subject to Nature's will, and the distance between Camus and his external world is not diminished by the author, but rather by Nature. Djémila is the land of death; here, when Nature engulfs Camus in her whirlwind, he feels a "désaccord"--a type of disintegration--within himself. After this contact with Nature, the author feels an intense pessimism about life and the world around him.

The feeling of death at Djémila is accentuated by the silence in Nature, the solitude of the land, and the violence of circular movement in Nature. The first line of the story gives a clear indication of death: "Il est des lieux où meurt l'esprit..." (p. 61). Then, Camus mentions the silence in Nature at Djémila: "Ce qu'il faut dire d'abord, c'est qu'il y régnait un grand silence lourd et sans fêlure...Et l'on se trouve là, concentré, mis en face des pierres et du silence..." (p. 61). Each mention of silence, however, is coupled with the word "désolation" or "solitude", Camus writes, "Des cris d'oiseaux...un piétinement de chèvres... faisaient le silence et la désolation de ces lieux." (p. 61). The concept of exile is underlined by the fact that Djémila is surrounded by ravines on all sides, Camus writes, "... (il y a des) ravins qui bornent de

toutes parts Djémila." (p. 61) To this picture of death-like silence and desolation, Camus adds an element of turbulence in Nature. Nature is described at Djémila as a "bain violent de soleil et de vent...", and as a "grande confusion du vent et du soleil..." (p. 61) Whereas at Tipasa, verticality had seemed to indicate a harmony between the earth and the sky, here the wind and the sun combine to produce circular, violent motion. Camus observes, "Sans arrêt, (le vent)...tournait dans un cirque de pierres et de terre...et entourait chaque colonne..." (p. 62) The wind engulfs the author "peu à peu" in its whirlwind, until he feels an interior disintegration, a "désaccord", within himself.

Camus's sensation of disintegration is characterized by a feeling of separateness between the author and his own body, a feeling of Nature's control over his body, and a feeling of being lost in time. Whereas at Tipasa, an accord had been felt with Nature expressed by Camus through a sensual embrace, here there is no accord, and the wind is described as a "fugitive étreinte". At Djémila, the violence of the wind is such that Camus feels that his own skin is no longer a part of his body: "Creusé par le milieu, les yeux brûlés, les lèvres craquantes, ma peau se déséchait jusqu'à ne plus être mienne." (p. 62) Camus also writes, "...jamais je n'ai senti, si avant, ... mon détachement de moi-même." (p. 62) The author describes himself as being "usé jusqu'à l'âme," (p. 62) Camus feels himself totally controlled by Nature. He writes, "J'étais un peu de cette force selon laquelle je flottais...Le vent me façonnait à l'image de l'ardente nudité qui m'entourait." (p. 62) In fact, the author finally feels as if he were the wind itself: "oublieux, oublié de moi-même, je suis ce vent..." (p. 62)¹⁴ Of course, the tragedy of this control by Nature over the individual, is that Nature makes man feel lost in time. Camus describes this sensation: "Oui, je suis présent ... Comme un homme emprisonné à perpétuité... qui sait que demain sera semblable et tous les autres jours." (pp. 62-63) The author will have to find a way to

break out of the prison of time. He states quite clearly how he will do it: "(Les hommes) regagnent leur jeunesse, mais c'est en étreignent la mort." (p. 64) A confrontation with death becomes the only answer.

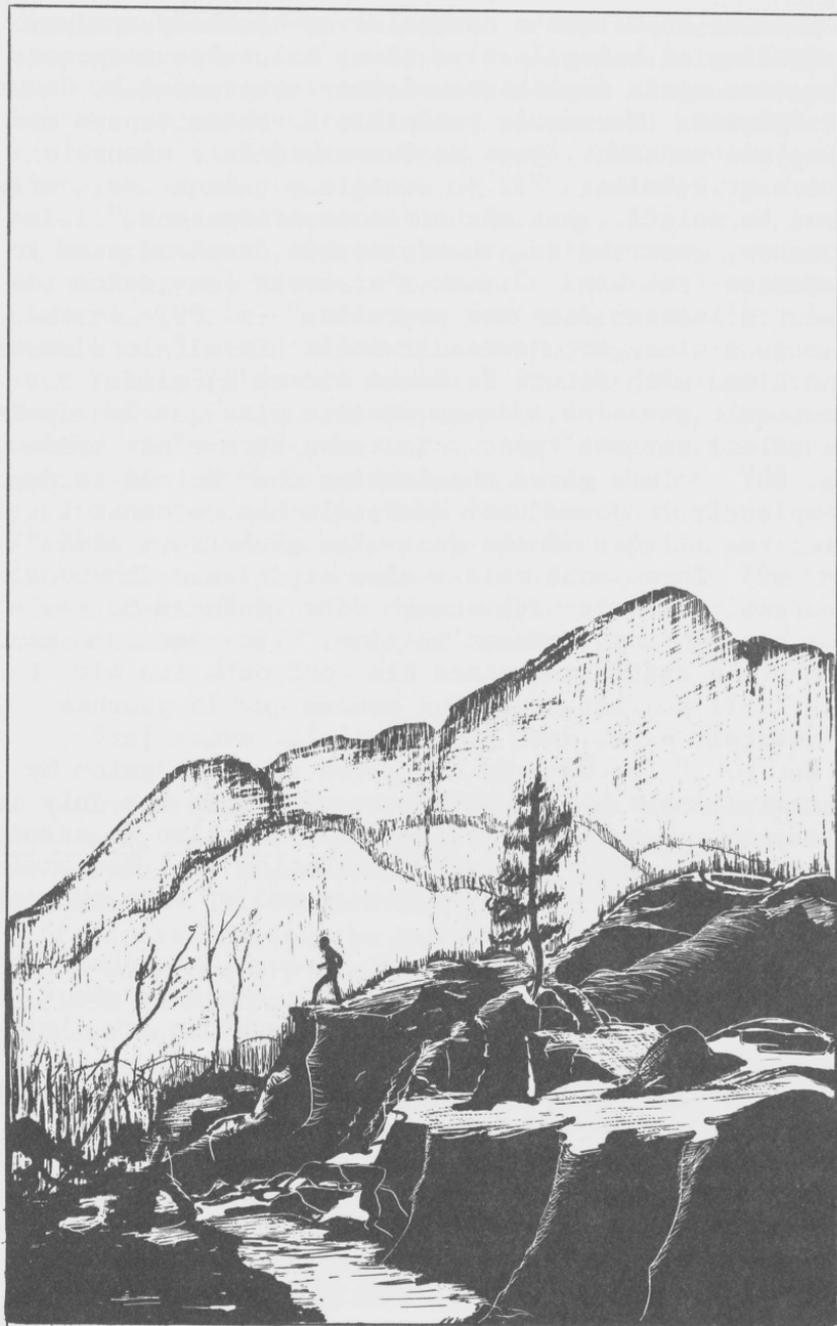
Extreme pessimism, then, becomes the final result of Camus's confrontation with Nature at Djémila. This pessimism is coupled with a loss of energy to live, a feeling of the instability of Nature, and a feeling of being a "stranger" in the world of Nature. Camus only re-enters the realm of time when he contemplates death without hope: "Il ne me plaît pas de croire que la mort ouvre sur une autre vie." (p. 63) Somehow the author has lost his energy to live after his confrontation with Nature: "Ce bain violent... épuisait toutes mes forces de vie." (p. 62) Camus feels himself powerless to battle against a natural universe in which the wind and the sun join together to destroy man. Camus perceives Nature at Djémila as totally unstable, where the stones cry out and the sun falls: "...devant ce paysage raviné, devant ce cri de pierre lugubre et solonnel, Djémila, inhumaine dans la chute du soleil..." (p. 64) Camus's vision borders on the apocalyptic here. Finally, the author expresses his pessimism in terms of being an alien in Nature. Unlike Nature at Tipasa, Nature at Djémila makes the author feel outside of her "race". Camus's use of the word "inhumaine", seen in the above quotation, is significant in this regard. Moreover, he tells us, "Et je suivais tout le long de ce pays quelque chose qui n'était pas à moi, mais de lui..." (p. 63) Perhaps Camus's most clear description of Nature in which he is an outsider is to be found in these words: "Et la fugitive étreinte (du vent)... me donnait...la solitude." (p. 62) Camus is alone in Nature at Djémila.

If we now turn once again to L'Etranger, specifically to the episode of Meursault's last minutes on the beach, we will see that Nature there is nearly a perfect duplicate of the one Camus found at Djémila. Indeed, Nature will exhibit similar forms of violence, Meursault will undergo a process of interior

disintegration, and a resulting despair will be seen in the protagonist.

The beach becomes a land of death several hours before the moment of the crime, for silence, solitude, and violence replace the serenity Meursault previously found there. Meursault notices suddenly how quiet it is on the beach: "pendant tout ce temps, il n'y a plus eu que le soleil et ce silence..." (p. 85) The stillness in Nature is only interrupted by the noise of a small creek nearby and by the "trois notes" from the small reed instrument of one of the Arabs. It is significant that there are suddenly no more people on the beach: "Il n'y avait plus personne sur la plage." (p. 80) Just as the silence and desolation of Djémila had left Camus face to face with the wind, they similarly leave Meursault in confrontation with the sun. The sun is no longer tame as it was at Tipasa; rather, the sun has become violent as the wind was at Djémila. In fact, every description of the sun underlines its violent character: "le soleil tombait presque d'aplomb sur le sable et son éclat sur la mer était insoutenable," (p. 80) "Le soleil était maintenant écrasant." (p. 84) What is interesting, above all, is that the sun seems to engulf Meursault from all sides, duplicating the movements of circular violence described by Camus at Djémila. Meursault describes his feelings: "...tout s'était refermé autour de nous." (p. 86) The sun pushes Meursault from behind: "Toute une plage vibrante de soleil se pressait derrière moi," (p. 89) And it seems to bear down on him from in front: "Toute cette chaleur s'appuyait sur moi et s'opposait à mon avance." (p. 87) Meursault describes the air around him as being "enflammé" (p. 88), which again conveys an image of the protagonist surrounded on all sides by the sun, just as Camus had been engulfed by the wind at Djémila. Like Camus, Meursault will soon feel a disintegration within himself.

Meursault's internal "désaccord" is characterized by a feeling of separateness from his own body, by



a feeling of Nature's control over his body, and by a feeling of being lost in time; all these responses are once again duplicates of those expressed by Camus at Djémila. Meursault feels his forehead expand and his jaws contract, just as Camus had felt his skin crack at Djémila: "...je sentais mon front se gonfler sous le soleil...mes mâchoires se crispaient."

Somehow, even the sweatbeads on his forehead seem to separate from him: "...et j'ai senti des gouttes de sueur s'amasser dans mes sourcils." (p. 89) As the sun gets stronger, Meursault feels himself lose control and blend with Nature as Camus did at Djémila.

Meursault explains, "Je ne sentais plus que les cymbales du soleil sur mon front...Tout mon être s'est tendu..." (p. 90)

We are given the feeling that Nature is so completely in power that Meursault has no control over the trigger of the gun: "La gâchette a cédé." (p. 90)

Throughout this entire experience, however, Meursault is left with enough consciousness to realize his own imprisonment in time. Time seems to have come to a standstill since his confrontation with the sun: "Il y avait déjà deux heures que la journée n'avancait plus, deux heures qu'elle avait jeté l'ancre..." (p. 88) We are given the impression by Meursault that his shooting the pistol is not only an attempt to rid himself of the sun, but also an attempt to accelerate time. It is interesting that Meursault breaks out of the grips of Nature and of time through a confrontation with death.

Though the protagonist is given little chance by the author to express a pessimistic attitude about his confrontation with Nature, his actions are clearly indicative of a man in despair.

Meursault's despair seems to be characterized by a loss of energy, an awareness of the instability of the universe, and by a feeling of alienation from Nature. As Camus did at Djémila, Meursault describes his own loss of energy under the influence of Nature, Meursault speaks of "...cette ivresse opaque que (le soleil lui) déversait." (p. 87) Meursault is

even immobilized--he is unable to move more than a step or two forward or backward--as a result of the sun. Meursault describes with a note of true despair his own stupidity at thinking he can rid himself of the sun in taking one step forward: "Je savais que c'était stupide, que je ne me débarrasserais pas du soleil en me déplaçant d'un pas," (p, 89) In spite of his paralysis, Meursault is fully aware of the instability of Nature. Meursault remarks just before his crime, "C'est alors que tout a vacillé...Il m'a semblé que le ciel s'ouvrait sur toute son étendue pour laisser pleuvoir du feu." (p, 90) Meursault feels himself alien to this world in chaos, especially to the violent sun; he identifies instead with Nature's quiet side, with her streams and her shade: "Je pensais à la source fraîche derrière le rocher. J'avais envie de retrouver le murmure de son eau, envie de fuir le soleil...envie enfin de retrouver l'ombre et son repos," (p, 87) Meursault's despair results from his being an "étranger" to Nature's violent side.

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The previous thematic comparisons between Noces à Tipasa, Le Vent à Djémila, and L'Etranger reveal, we believe, a fixed structural mold into which Camus's treatment of Nature can be fitted. In spite of obvious differences between the two early essays and L'Etranger, there is virtually none in the realm of the author's outlook on Nature. Between 1936 and 1940, Camus was without doubt maturing as a creative writer. Yet, his view of Nature--of a two-sided Nature--seems to have already been fully developed, leaving little room for change over the years. We are able to postulate, based upon our analysis of Nature in Camus's early works, that the author would hardly veer from his established blueprint in later years.

Somehow upon re-reading many of Camus's later works, we cannot help but discover clear reflections

of Noces à Tipasa and Le Vent à Djémila there too. It would be beyond the scope of this paper to trace the treatment of Nature throughout all of the author's literary creations. To prove our point, however, that Camus's treatment of Nature over the years may have remained invariable, as it did in his early years, we need only cite two passages from L'Exil et Le Royaume,¹⁵ written towards the end of the author's career. Janine's union with Nature in La Femme Adultère bears a striking resemblance to Camus's in Noces à Tipasa:

...Janine s'ouvrait un peu plus à la nuit. Elle respirait, elle oubliait le froid, le poids des êtres, la vie démenté ou figée, ...il lui semblait retrouver ses racines, la sève montait à nouveau dans son corps qui ne tremblait plus. Pressée de tout son ventre contre le parapet, tendue vers le ciel en mouvement, elle attendait...que le silence se fît en elle. Les dernières étoiles des constellations laissèrent tomber leurs grappes un peu plus bas sur l'horizon du désert, et s'immobilisèrent. Alors, avec une douceur insupportable, l'eau de la nuit commença d'emplir Janine, submergea le froid, monta peu à peu du centre obscur de son être et déborda en flots ininterrompus jusqu'à sa bouche pleine de gémissements. L'instant d'après, le ciel entier s'étendait au-dessus d'elle, renversée sur la terre froide.
(p. 34)

And the following passage from Le Rénégat seems to be an exact duplicate of Nature at Djémila:

Quelle bouille quand la chaleur monte, je transpire...je sens le soleil sur la pierre au-dessus de moi, il frappe, frappe comme un marteau sur toutes les pierres et...j'entends le silence. J'étais là, les yeux rongés par les épées de sel et de feu qui sortaient de tous les murs, pâle de fatigue, l'oreille saignante du coup que

m'avait donné le guide...La journée était dans son milieu. Sous les coups du soleil de fer, le ciel résonnait longuement...c'était le même silence et...je haletais de plus en plus fort, j'ai pleuré enfin... (pp. 45-46)

Janine, le Rénégat, and Meursault, in fact Camus's whole literary family were, in a sense, born at Tipasa and at Djémila. All of these characters find themselves in confrontation with one or with both sides of Nature.

In conclusion, our study has allowed us to perceive a clear scheme in Camus's treatment of Nature in his works. We have examined the two early essays in order to discover Nature's duality in Camus's universe, and we have then seen how this duality is re-duplicated in L'Etranger. We have examined, in some detail, certain responses expressed by the author during his experiences in Nature at Tipasa and at Djémila and we have discovered a similarity between these feelings and Meursault's responses to Nature. Noting the clear reflections of Noces à Tipasa and Le Vent à Djémila in L'Etranger, we have been led to hypothesize similar reflections in Camus's later works. In delving into the subjective world of Camus and Nature, we have above all learned exactly how structured one man's subjectivity can be. Even the most creative and skillful writers often strictly follow, perhaps unconsciously, certain trends developed in their early years. Camus's literary universe may be vast and varied in some aspects, yet in the realm of Nature, his world seems to find its limits within the rigid confines of structure.

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Notes

¹Cit. by Calvin Thompkins, Eric Hoffer, an American Odyssey, (New York: Dutton and Company, 1968), p. 104.

²See Albert Camus, Carnets (Paris: Gallimard, 1962), p. 215. In May, 1940, Camus writes, "L'Etranger est terminé."

³Jacques Borel, "Nature et Histoire chez Albert Camus," Critique, 169 (June, 1961), pp. 507-21.

⁴Albert Camus, Le Mythe de Sisyphe (Paris: Gallimard, 1942), p. 74.

⁵Ibid., p. 48.

⁶Natalie Sarraute, L'Ere du Soupçon, (Paris: Gallimard, 1956), p. 20.

⁷We may recall Stendhal's parents in La Vie de Henry Brulard, who cannot perceive the real beauty of Nature, or Gide's blind girl in La Symphonie Pastorale, to realize the importance Camus places upon visual acuity.

⁸See Alain Robbe-Grillet, Pour Un Nouveau Roman, (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1963), pp. 56-58. Robbe-Grillet's remarks about L'Etranger are perhaps typical of the "Choisistes", who revolted against such stylistic devices as anthropomorphization; Stephen Ullman, The Image in the Modern French Novel (Cambridge: University Press, 1960); Ben Stoltzfus, Alain Robbe-Grillet and the New French Novel (Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1964), pp. 20-22; Robert Loy, "Things in Recent French Literature", PMLA, 71 (1956), p. 30.

⁹See Kurt Weinberg, "The Theme of Exile", Yale French Studies, 25, p. 34.

¹⁰ Albert Camus, Essais, Edition de la Pléiade (Paris: Gallimard, 1965), p. 55. All quotations from Noces à Tipasa and Le Vent à Djémila will be taken from this edition, and page numbers will be noted in the text.

¹¹ See Alan Clayton, "Etapes d'un Itinéraire Spirituel, Albert Camus de 1937 à 1944", Archives des Lettres Modernes, 122, 1971. Chapter Two is entitled "Un Moment d'Equilibre: Le Thème de L'Accord."

¹² For the purpose of simplicity, we shall refer to Camus and Meursault as two different people in our study. Meursault is of course a creation of Camus, and to the extent that every character reflects certain traits in the personality of the author, the two could be considered one-and-the-same. However, Meursault is not Camus, and we have therefore taken the liberty of referring to them as totally different people.

¹³ Albert Camus, L'Etranger (Paris: Gallimard, 1957), p. 20. All quotations will be taken from this edition, and page numbers will be noted in the text.

¹⁴ The same acceptance of Nature's total control over one's body--the loss of oneself in Nature--would later be duplicated by Jean-Paul Sartre in La Nausée (Paris: Gallimard, 1938), p. 185. Roquentin, sitting in front of the "marronnier", declares, "J'étais la racine de marronnier."

¹⁵ Albert Camus, L'Exil et le Royaume (Paris: Gallimard, 1957). Page numbers will be noted in the text.



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