

# Underground with Meursault: Myth and Archetype in Camus's *L'Étranger*

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The very errors of genius, so we are told, are fecund. There is, however, a corollary: the genius, through his errors, has often an inordinate ability to induce others to err. Seldom has this been more powerfully demonstrated than by the generation of literary criticism upon which has weighed so heavily Jean-Paul Sartre's analysis of Camus's *L'Étranger*. None can ignore this article from *Les Temps Modernes* with its famous "telephone booth" image.<sup>1</sup> To the extent that *L'Étranger* is indeed a somewhat satirical comment upon the superficiality and pointlessness of these daily rituals and taboos, Sartre is quite correct—this *dégage* reflector whose very glance desanctifies is the instrument of our malaise inasmuch as we recognize ourselves in the actions of the other characters.

Yet an interpretation of *L'Étranger* which stops there or which makes of Meursault merely some sort of superman by virtue of his recognition of absurdity, his acceptance of the benign indifference of the world, and his refusal to play our games—such an interpretation impoverishes the novel immeasurably. It dehumanizes Meursault and unavoidably robs him of his relevance to any reader who, while lucidly acknowledging his own solitude, insists all the same upon maintaining somehow the noble fiction of solidarity with his fellows. It is my intent here to proceed with a rehumanization of Meursault by demonstrating that the underlying structure of *L'Étranger* is a closely woven inference pattern based on repeated reference to the classical myths as well as to a symbolism uniquely personal to Camus. The novel thus opens itself to interpretation by analysis of myth and archetype, a method leading to a view of the reflector-protagonist as one who is truly "comme tout le monde, absolument comme tout le monde,"<sup>2</sup> a man with hidden dimensions who suffers and struggles with himself as we do, a victim of profound ironies.

The very title of *L'Étranger* suggests parallels with the myths of Oedipus and Orestes, for both of the latter characters return to their homeland after prolonged absences. Oedipus thinks himself a stranger to Thebes and discovers that he is not; Orestes returns consciously to his homeland bent upon his act.

Surely the clearest suggestion of parallel to these myths issues ironically from the mouth of the prosecutor during the trial; claiming that Meursault is morally guilty of his mother's death, he refers to the next case on the docket—that of a young man accused of killing his father:

Toujours selon lui, un homme qui tuait moralement sa mère se retranchait de la société des hommes au même titre que celui qui portait une main meurtrière sur l'auteur de ses jours. Dans tous les cas, le premier préparait les actes du second, il les annonçait en quelque sorte et il les légitimait. "J'en suis persuadé, Messieurs, a-t-il ajouté en élevant la voix, vous ne trouverez pas ma pensée trop audacieuse, si je dis que l'homme qui est assis sur ce banc est coupable aussi du meurtre que cette cour devra juger demain. Il doit être puni en conséquence." (pp. 1195-96)

Patricide is, of course, the crime of Oedipus, matricide that of Orestes. This passage of the novel has puzzled many readers; the words of the prosecutor have so little to do with the matter at hand and it certainly is not clear how even the most reckless and florid of prosecutors could call for a man to be convicted of a crime committed by another. Concerning this parallel with both Greek myths, Meursault's reply to his lawyer that "Tous les êtres sains avaient plus ou moins souhaité la mort de ceux qu'ils aimaient" (p. 1170) seems a conscious restatement of Freud's theory.

Certainly the Arab is not Meursault's father in any literal sense, but these parallels invite the reader to see in Meursault's situation elements bearing implicit meaning on a symbolic level. Orestes, like Meursault, is tried for the crime of matricide; yet, after being pursued by the Furies, Orestes is acquitted by the Areopagus—a court renowned for strict objectivity—and eventually returns to Argos as king. Here the parallel seems ironic by contrast, for the court trying Meursault is anything but objective and the outcome is quite different. Oedipus, too, is subjected to a trial, but his quest for the truth about himself leads him to act, albeit unwittingly, as his own examining magistrate and sentencing judge. This could not happen to Meursault, for he is ill inclined to introspection, telling his lawyer, "j'avais un peu perdu l'habitude de m'interroger" (p. 1170).

Meursault tells the court that "c'était à cause du soleil" (p. 1196), and certainly the heat and light of the sun had much to do with his killing the Arab on the beach. We are reminded that the divine agent behind the fate of Oedipus is the sun god, Apollo. Meursault kills the Arab in consequence of a dispute over the right of way, as Oedipus slew Laius. Twice during the long last paragraph of Part I, Meursault tells us that he is blinded, reminiscent of Oedipus's fate, even telling us that the Arab's knife "rongeait mes cils et fouillait mes yeux douloureux" (p. 1166). In view of the foregoing it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Camus invites us to compare and contrast the situations of Oedipus and Orestes and Meursault. Before we do this, however, let us explore possible parallels to the myth of Orpheus.

That Camus was impressed with the symbolism of the myth of Orpheus is incontestable; specific mention is made in *La Peste* where the actor playing Orpheus falls grotesquely stricken upon the stage.<sup>3</sup> One of the key features of this myth is the descent of Orpheus into the underworld in search of Eurydice. In *L'Etranger* Meursault's visit to the rest home is preceded and followed by bus trips during which he falls asleep. The vigil itself he describes in terms which create an atmosphere of irreality or surreality:

Devant moi, il n'y avait pas une ombre et chaque objet, chaque angle, toutes les courbes se dessinaient avec une pureté *blessante pour les yeux*. C'est à ce moment que les amis de maman sont entrés. Ils étaient en tout une dizaine, et ils glissaient en silence dans cette *lumière aveuglante*. Ils se sont assis sans qu'aucune chaise grinçât. Je les voyais comme je n'ai jamais vu personne et pas un détail de leurs visages ou de leurs habits ne m'échappait. Pourtant je ne les entendais pas et j'avais peine à croire à leur réalité.<sup>4</sup>

When these elderly people having no eyes—only a little glow in a nest of wrinkles, like a certain sightless prophet—sit around him dandling their heads, Meursault has the impression that they are sitting in judgment of him. May they not indeed be figurations of the dead judging the living? In contrast to Orpheus whose criminal glance returns Eurydice to the underworld, Meursault

declines to gaze once more upon the face of his mother, a refusal which will earn him condemnation during his later trial. Following the funeral procession and burial—once again a description in nearly hallucinatory terms—Meursault sleeps again on the bus trip back to Algiers and one may view the whole sequence as a dreamlike descent into the underworld framed by two sleeps.

Without insisting too heavily, I would like to suggest that the enigmatic “robot woman” encountered by Meursault at a café offers a parallel with Eurydice. Her mania for detail and her machine-like movements lend her an unreal quality suggestive of the inhuman; she seems a bit like a zombie. Intrigued, Meursault follows her into the street, but, incapable of keeping up with her, loses sight of her. The woman might seem less significant if she did not show up later, faithfully attending his trial, staring silently at him. In a novel so tightly written, the presence of the “robot woman” seems gratuitous unless her place in the economy of *L'Étranger* is guaranteed by an implied meaning at some level other than the literal.

Enough is known of Camus's personal life to point out some of the autobiographical details of the novel. Like Camus, Meursault lost his father at an early age, was obliged to give up his studies, spent some time in Paris, and took a job as a shipping clerk in Algiers. Many other traces of Camus's life show up in *L'Étranger*: Meursault shares Camus's love of sun and sea; the smiling soldier in World War I (does his query as to whether Meursault has come from afar have any significance?); the blue-eyed journalist at Meursault's trial is apparently a reflection of Camus himself who as a journalist attended a similar trial; the last names of Maria Cardona and Raymond Sintès are taken from Camus's own maternal family line. Such parallels with the life of the author complicate any reading of *L'Étranger*, for one must avoid the fallacy of too closely identifying author and character. Yet it is difficult to avoid the feeling that the silent stare of the “robot woman” at the trial and the equally silent and yet intense “eye” communication of the parricide and his mother across the visiting room in the prison echo strongly the silent, staring communion which Camus tells us often took place between him and his own mother. At any rate, enough has been said here to hint that Meursault, whatever these things may or may not have meant to him, seems to be following the itinerary of some myth personal to Camus, as well as that of some labyrinthine amalgam of classical Greek myths.

Meursault, far from having achieved a dispassionate serenity, is in reality a profoundly troubled man. His consciousness, rather than the transparent surface described by Sartre, is almost opaque. The reader's position is somewhat like that of a person standing on the blind side of a two-way mirror—he sees only the curiously drained reflection of himself and his society unless he approaches the mirror very closely and, shading out the backlighting, catches the ghostly outlines of the phantom presence hidden on the other side. To catch such a glimpse of the subsurface Meursault close attention must be paid to the references made by the character to his own past and to his affective state. These clues are of necessity quite subtle, for Camus, in adopting the first-person narrator, is obliged to hint at his reflector's depths through that reflector's own utterances and without the latter seeming to be aware of them. Meursault's statement that “Il y a des choses dont je n'ai jamais aimé parler” (p. 1175), is an understatement of extraordinary proportions.

Told by his boss that he lacks ambition, Meursault reflects that “Quand j'étais étudiant, j'avais beaucoup d'ambitions de ce genre. Mais quand j'ai dû abandonner mes études, j'ai très vite compris que tout cela était sans

importance réelle” (p. 1154). Camus, we know, was forced by illness to give up his own studies, but no cause is given in Meursault’s case. More important is the revelation that before some unspecified event Meursault’s mode of existence was fairly similar to ours—he was ambitious so he must have cared about the same conventional goals, rituals, taboos which occupy others. It is reasonable to infer that his dispassionate attitude dates from that possibly traumatic experience and may well be a defensive response designed to protect him from again being hurt and frustrated. If so, it indicates not that Meursault is devoid of feelings, only that he represses them systematically. This interpretation is supported by numerous indications.

When Meursault hears Salamano weeping alone on the other side of the wall, we read: “Je ne sais pas pourquoi j’ai pensé à maman. Mais il fallait que je me lève tôt le lendemain. Je n’avais pas faim et je me suis couché sans dîner” (p. 1152). Well might the sound of Salamano weeping from loneliness (his dog has abandoned him) remind Meursault of his mother left to die alone in the rest home. That Meursault should immediately turn away from this painful thought is thoroughly understandable. We shall see that he was not without feelings of guilt in this respect. Perhaps he is even punishing himself by sending himself to bed without dinner.

When Meursault, during the vigil at the rest home, imagines for a moment that the old people are sitting in judgment on him, it seems to him an “impression ridicule,” that is to say, a gratuitous impression; the reader may well ask himself why it even enters Meursault’s head. Beneath his taciturnity Meursault may indeed be accusing himself of abandoning his mother. Later, having admitted to Marie Cardona that his mother had just died, Meursault is tempted to disclaim responsibility. Then he simply says that “De toute façon, on est toujours un peu fautif” (p. 1137). Behind the “on” is a “je” and we would be correct in reading *je suis* (un peu) *fautif*.

While Meursault expresses surprise that his neighbors fault him for putting his mother away, later, in prison awaiting his execution, he thinks of his mother in the rest home: “Là-bas, là-bas aussi, autour de cet asile où des vies s’éteignaient, le soir était comme une trêve mélancolique” (p. 1209). The words “trêve mélancolique” are an exact repetition of Meursault’s reflection while at the funeral. He goes on to make an explicit parallel between his own situation and that of his mother facing death in the “prison” of the rest home. During the trial Meursault learns from the testimony of the director of the rest home that his mother complained of being abandoned by her son. While Meursault expresses neither dismay nor feelings of guilt at that moment, it is reasonable that some sense of remorse result.

Having spent one Sunday on the balcony of his apartment watching the neighborhood routine, Meursault concludes chapter ii by saying, “J’ai pensé que c’était toujours un dimanche de tiré, que maman était maintenant enterée, que j’allais reprendre mon travail et que, somme toute, il n’y avait rien de changé” (p. 1140). Does the statement that “nothing has changed” imply some sort of surprise, perhaps even relief that things have not changed because of his mother’s death? Did he expect or fear some sort of change? Is he satisfied with himself for having been able to retain his equilibrium?

Meursault shows that he is subject to diverse emotions. When Céleste testifies on his behalf Meursault tells us that for the first time in his life he felt like kissing a man (p. 1189). Asked by Marie if he loves her, Meursault replies in the negative and further declares the question meaningless, just as he feels that marriage is not a serious subject, though he is willing to wed Marie

if she desires. Later, at Masson's beach cabin, Meursault sees how well Masson and his wife get along. Meursault tells us, "Pour la première fois peut-être, j'ai pensé vraiment que j'allais me marier" (p. 1160). Marriage seems more serious to him now and he seems rather to like the idea. Though what he feels for her may not correspond to the romanticized idea of love, surely Meursault is becoming attached to Marie. When she told him earlier that she could not go with him to dine at Céleste's restaurant, then asked him if he did not want to know why and where she was going, Meursault admits that he did indeed want to know, though it did not occur to him to ask her. Is this reaction not evidence of a rather conventional jealousy?

When Meursault returns with Raymond to the beach house and turns back for his fateful encounter with the Arab, he tells us that he seeks the cool spring because "J'avais envie de retrouver le murmure de son eau, envie de fuir le soleil, l'effort et les pleurs de femme, envie de retrouver l'ombre et son repos" (p. 1165). It is as though Meursault, through his growing attachment for Marie, is again reawakening to a feeling of commitment to others and to life itself. Now is he forcibly reminded that such a course entails strife (l'effort) and involvement in the sufferings, fears, and frustrations of others (les pleurs de femme). His response is to flee (fuir).

These then are but some of the more salient references to Meursault's affective states. They suggest that Meursault's consciousness, far from being transparent, functions as a screen for subconscious activities which the character either represses or disavows. Not only are there things about which Meursault does not like to talk, there are things about which he prefers not to think.

Such an interpretation of Meursault is thoroughly consonant with the assumption that Camus's use of a Hemingwayesque technique is designed to imply depths of motivation by understatement; that is, the specific function of both first-person narrators like Benjamin Constant's Adolphe and disincarnate narrators lacking psychological privilege such as those of Hemingway and, at times, Faulkner. When an author adopts a narrative voice so taciturn or unreliable, he must find other ways of conveying to his reader a sense of the implicit meanings.<sup>5</sup> One such way, we have already seen, is that of fairly obvious parallels to mythic structures with which the reader can be expected to be familiar. Another important technique involves the use of archetypal imagery. In this connection, two specific passages of the novel seem to be especially revelatory: 1) Meursault's first encounter with Marie Cardona, and 2) the last paragraph of Part 1 of the novel in which Meursault kills the Arab.

On the day following his mother's funeral Meursault meets Marie Cardona at the beach. They go swimming together. Having managed to "accidentally" touch her breasts—and thus indicate his erotic interest—Meursault climbs up with Marie on a floating raft: "Je me suis hissé à côté d'elle sur la bouée. Il faisait bon et comme en plaisantant, j'ai laissé aller ma tête en arrière et je l'ai posée sur son ventre. Elle n'a rien dit et je suis resté ainsi. J'avais tout le ciel dans les yeux et il était bleu et doré. Sous ma nuque, je sentais le ventre de Marie battre doucement. Nous sommes restés longtemps sur la bouée, à moitié endormis. Quand le soleil est devenu trop fort, elle a plongé et je l'ai suivie" (pp. 1136-37). Meursault and Marie make of the raft a sort of bed, and the image of Meursault somnolent with his head on Marie's stomach rising and falling with the rhythm of the sea seems to signal some sort of archetypal return to mother. The name "Marie" has obvious echoes of the archetypal Christian mother (la mère) and of the sea (la mer). The couple take refuge in the cool water when the sun—elsewhere associated with unbearable heat and

light, the male principle, and the scourge of Apollo—becomes too hot. Meursault sleeps that night with Marie. She has already left when he awakes the next morning, but he seeks on the pillow the odor of salt water left there by her hair. The association seems rather strongly made, especially when one considers that it must be hinted at through the narrator's words, without becoming evident to him, that Marie is symbolically a reincarnation of his mother with whom he has entered into a symbolically oedipal relationship, for the archetypal images make it clear that Marie is in some sense a replacement for his dead mother. The association between Marie and the sea is strengthened by the second swim they take together on the day Meursault kills the Arab. Everywhere in the novel the element water is associated with freedom, peace, and escape from strain, sorrow, and the harshness of the sun. We know too much now to second the rather naïve assumption that the sun and sea are here but reflections of Camus's love for those elements of his homeland.

During his mother's funeral, on the raft with Marie, and during his confrontation with the Arab, Meursault experiences the sun as harsh, burning, blinding. He killed the Arab, Meursault later tells the jury, because of the sun. Let us now turn to that capital scene of the seemingly "accidental" killing of the Arab.

Confronted by the Arab and consumed by the sunlight, Meursault tells us that it was "le même soleil que le jour où j'avais enterré maman et, comme alors, le front surtout me faisait mal et toutes ses veines battaient ensemble sous la peau" (p. 1166). Present then, too, were "le soleil, l'effort, et les pleurs de femme." Everything seems unbearable and unreal, the image of the Arab dancing before his eyes, the Arab who seems to be smiling. It seems that Meursault is fleeing reality, the truth about himself and others, especially the truth that involvement with and commitment to others—here Marie whom he is about to marry and Raymond whom he has befriended—leads inevitably to suffering and tears, to suffering with and through others. The cool and shade of the stream, on the other hand, are associated with other tendencies of Meursault to sleep, to forget, to avoid emotional involvement, an attitude which amounts to a refusal of life.

In terms of archetypal imagery, the sun, clarity, heat, and the sword are all closely grouped masculine images, as is the revolver in Meursault's hand. Silence, shade, coolness, water are archetypally female images here associated with escape. We read next:

Il m'a semblé que le ciel s'ouvrait sur tout son étendue pour laisser pleuvoir du feu. Tout mon être s'est tendu et j'ai crispé ma main sur le revolver. La gâchette a cédé, j'ai touché le ventre poli de la crosse et c'est là, dans le bruit à la fois sec et assourdissant, que tout a commencé. J'ai secoué la sueur et le soleil. J'ai compris que j'avais détruit l'équilibre du jour, le silence exceptionnel d'une plage où j'avais été heureux. Alors, j'ai tiré encore quatre fois sur un corps inerte où les balles s'enfonçaient sans qu'il y parût. Et c'était comme quatre coups brefs que je frappais sur la porte du malheur. (p. 1166)

The reading which I should like to suggest for this passage, this key passage, is that of birth or rebirth and of Meursault's reluctance, resistance, and perhaps rejection of rebirth. The opening of the sky reflects the issuance into light and life from the birth canal. The knife, here associated with light also, may evoke the doctor's scalpel as well as the paternal phallus which calls the infant into being, from nothingness. Note the apparent increase in the poetic charge

as we go from *couteau* to *acier*, *glaive*, and *épée* in the preceding passage. The sharp yet deafening report of the gunshot is a convulsive, involuntary reaction which evokes the infant's initial cry of protest at birth, while archetypally the "ventre poli" of the gun butt and the revolver itself are allied with phallic imagery.

Thus the phrase, "tout a commencé" seems symbolically fitting. There seems to be an expression of guilt feelings associated with birth itself expressed in Meursault's admission that he has destroyed the balance, the equilibrium of existence. He has, by being born, by being forced into life, destroyed a state of happiness, of stasis, of silence. This beach where he had been happy swimming with Marie calls for nostalgia. His resentment at the loss occasions the vengeful, nihilistic act of firing four more shots into the Arab, here allied with the father figure; Meursault, we are reminded, is an orphan. These four shots, which seem to disappear harmlessly, ineffectual as protest, are expressed in the text through an active verb and a highly moralistic evaluation: ". . . quatre coups brefs que je frappais sur la porte du malheur." It is as though Meursault in rejecting the father figure, symbolically rejects life itself and seeks to recover the dark, silent repose of the womb or grave. Meursault's rejection of emotional involvement is not the disdain of one who has achieved a serenity superior to the petty concerns of mundane life, but rather the defensive gesture of a man who is unable to face life as it is; it is an attempt to find security in silence and noninvolvement. Those who speak of this as Meursault's act of suicide may well be correct, with, of course, the qualification that the act be subconsciously motivated.

Seen in this way, *L'Etranger* presents a protagonist who literally stumbles through a dense forest of myths—classical, personal (to Camus), and archetypal—without ever becoming aware of them. No one should be surprised that these myths are confused, intermingled, without adhering to any one particular classical myth in the correspondence of all details. I do not claim that *L'Etranger* is an allegory. After all, Camus did tell us that he had no interest in redoing the myths of antiquity.<sup>6</sup> His interest lay in forming new myths. By "redoing" Camus clearly meant mere parroting, for his subsequent use of classical mythology makes it clear that he felt the formation of myth was to be done by reinterpreting and combining myths.

Meursault's involvement with Raymond Sintès bears another look. Meursault's connection with the Arab is rather indirect before the killing, but Raymond's is direct, for the Arab is attempting to punish him for the rather brutal treatment his sister received at Raymond's hands. Many a reader has wondered how Meursault could let himself become so involved in the affairs of this crapulous person. Even in Marie's presence he does nothing to intervene when Raymond is beating the girl. He even allows himself to become indirectly associated with that act when he enters a false deposition in Raymond's favor. May one not theorize that subconsciously Meursault subscribes to and underwrites this mistreatment of women? Is Raymond not in this sense a disavowed alter ego of Meursault himself? This suggests an ironic parallel with the relationship between Orestes and his archetypal friend Pylades.

Moreover, there seem to be various parallel incidents in the novel involving replacement of an absent person. Once rid of his mistress, Raymond desires to go to a bordello, an idea which Meursault seems to find repugnant. We are told that Salamano, though he got on badly with his wife, found it necessary after her death to replace her with a dog, which he similarly mistreats. It has already been pointed out that Marie is a symbolic replacement for Meursault's

dead mother. Meursault's mother, widowed and abandoned by her son, had taken up with Pérez. This parallel suggests that some relationship—even a fruitless, antagonistic, or perverted one—is a fundamental necessity. Interestingly enough, in *La Peste* it is Rieux's mother who comes to replace his wife whom he will never see again.

I am personally led to concur with Donald Lazère that "there . . . is a suggestion that the death of mother and/or son would allow him permanently to repossess her. This redemptive link between death and mother love is common in subliminal fantasies."<sup>7</sup> I find it plausible to think of the wake scene as a dream-like descent into the underworld during which Meursault, in ironic contrast to Orpheus, refuses to make the final descent—that into his own feelings; even to redeem her memory he will not look upon the face of his dead mother, he will not allow the deepest of his feelings for her to surface. Meursault is indeed condemned for not having wept at the funeral of his mother, for not allowing himself to feel, for repressing love, hate, and remorse. He shoots the Arab four more times because he feels he has been tricked into living again. Like Jan in *Le Malentendu*, Meursault suffers the consequences of pretending to be a stranger.

Camus once declared that Meursault might indeed be viewed as a sort of modern Christ figure, "le seul Christ que nous méritons."<sup>8</sup> This calls to mind one fairly obvious parallel in the mythic structures of the tales of Christ, Oedipus, and Orestes: all three are figurations of the archetypal scapegoat, the figure in whom is bound up the fate of the race, who takes upon himself the burden of the guilt of the race, who must be purged or immolated in order to raise the divine curse from the race.<sup>9</sup> On one level Meursault is indeed condemned as a scapegoat, for the people of Algiers see in him the representation of their own inability to suffer limitless sorrow and guilt at the loss of their loved ones. They punish in him what they hate in themselves. Meursault imagines them greeting him on the dawn of his execution with cries of hatred; those cries will be the indirect and somewhat perverted expression of their solidarity with him; for in his supposed guilt they see mirrored their own, yet his innocence is theirs too, and his execution is their death raised to the level of theatre and ritual.<sup>10</sup> The essential difference between Meursault and Oedipus is that the latter participates willingly and actively in the unveiling of the truth about himself while Meursault suffers his fate more as a consequence of refusing to seek and accept the truth about himself.

The fundamental discovery made by Meursault which reconciles him to his death is a commonplace: we must all die; we are all condemned to death; that common fate reduces to absurdity the importance we might give to the time and manner, to choices made and possibilities rejected, past, present or future. Whether or not Meursault dies as a result of the obscure mechanism of subliminal motivations—his and those of his jury—is ultimately unimportant. "Qu'importait si, accusé de meurtre, il était exécuté pour n'avoir pas pleuré à l'enterrement de sa mère? Le chien de Salamano valait autant que sa femme. La petite femme automatique était aussi coupable que la Parisienne que Masson avait épousée ou que Marie qui avait envie que je l'épouse" (p. 1209). It is that certainty and finality of death which gives intrinsic value to existence in the present moment. Nor is Meursault any less solitary or any more *solidaire*. In a fundamental way, therefore, a reading which takes into account the presence of myth, both classical and personal, as well as Jungian archetypes, does little to alter the meanings attributable to the book on a metaphysical level. Such a reading does, however, point out a degree of complexity, compactness, and a level of implicit meanings which enhance rather than detract from *L'Etranger*.



It renders consonant a great number of elements which otherwise appear largely gratuitous. While human existence may well be gratuitous, the elements of a work of art cannot be, must not be.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Jean-Paul Sartre, "Explication de *l'Étranger*," *Situations I* (Paris: Gallimard, 1947), pp. 99-121. Sartre drew this image from Camus' *Mythe de Sisyphe* (Paris: Gallimard, Collections Idées, 1942), p. 29.

<sup>2</sup>Albert Camus, *L'Étranger*, in *Théâtre, Récits, Nouvelles*, ed. Roger Quillot (Paris: Gallimard, Editions de la Pléiade, 1962), p. 1171. Subsequent quotations from *L'Étranger* will be indicated in the text.

<sup>3</sup>Albert Camus, *La Peste*, in *Théâtre, Récits, Nouvelles*, ed. Roger Quillot (Paris: Gallimard, Editions de la Pléiade, 1962), p. 1380.

<sup>4</sup>*L'Étranger*, p. 1129. My italics are meant here to emphasize the "blinding" power of light, as in the myth of Oedipus.

<sup>5</sup>This is an idea central to Wayne Booth's *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961).

<sup>6</sup>See John Cruickshank, *Albert Camus and the Literature of Revolt* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1960), pp. 192-93.

<sup>7</sup>Donald Lazère, *The Unique Creation of Albert Camus* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1973), p. 84.

<sup>8</sup>Albert Camus, "Preface" to *L'Étranger* (American University edition, 1944; rpt. Paris: Gallimard, Editions de la Pléiade), pp. 1920-21.

<sup>9</sup>It is interesting to note that Jean-Paul Sartre's Orestes (*Les Mouches*) moves closer to Christ in this respect; he is an existentialist scapegoat who consciously takes upon himself the burden of guilt of the people of Argos by dirtying his hands for their emancipation and thus departs pursued by the Furies, who then symbolize his acceptance of the responsibility of and for all men. Kaliaiev of Camus' *Les Justes* will do likewise, then insist upon his own immolation, for he has become impure.

<sup>10</sup>Tarrou of Camus's *La Peste* is a more fitting Christ image, for he will sacrifice all, even his own life, to alleviate the suffering of other men but will do nothing to add to it.