suage the foolish man. But this is not done with the wise man. Never would Romulus, who founded Rome, have conquered his enemies if he had promised without giving. And this still happens often because there are many powerful men today who promise much without giving. May God not forgive them any longer, so that they lose their power, honors and domains, and thus the loyalty of their men!"

[9] In a paper entitled "Narrative Strategy as *Auctoritas* in the Thirteenth-Century Prose Version of the *Roman de Thèbes*," given at the 29th International Congress on Medieval Studies at Kalamazoo, MI, May 7, 1994.

[10] "Some say that Pollicines and Tydeus and Parthenopeus came into Thebes to accompany the queen and stopped at the palace, and that upon their return the people of the city attacked them in order to kill them. But I don't find this in the true story that I want to tell you."

[11] "Look how the people were foolish and ignorant then, because they believed that the sun was a god and the moon a goddess. Thus they did not worship the creator of all things, but the things that he had created."

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Albert Camus' Don Juan: Class and Sexuality

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"Tout vient," Camus wrote, looking back on his life, "de mon impossibilité congénitale à être un bourgeois et un bourgeois content. La moindre apparence de stabilité dans ma vie me terrifie" (*Carnets*, III, 150).[1] The inclusive "tout" in this passage offers readers the opportunity to extend Camus' confession to include his portrait of Don Juan in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* and to examine how this important figure casts light on the questions of class and sexuality in Camus' early works. Hardly has the word "bourgeois" appeared in his notebook when Camus writes, almost automatically, "stabilité." Stability acquires a negative connotation when it signifies intellectual conformism or, in more personal, intimate terms, emotional atrophy. Love and marriage, as social imperatives and as concepts of stability preempted by the middle class, might also be factors in the mind or heart's demise. Camus' first two novels, *La Mort heureuse* and *L'Etranger*, as well as his essays *Noces* and *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* specifically examine these factors.

There is a brief but significant passage in *L'Etranger* that illustrates the relationship between a man's sexuality and his reaction to certain social assumptions about love and to codes of behavior regarding fidelity. Meursault is walking through the streets of Algiers with Marie whom he has just agreed to marry:

> Nous avons marché et traversé la ville par ses grandes rues. Les femmes étaient belles et j'ai demandé à Marie si elle le remarquait. Elle m'a dit que oui et qu'elle me comprenait. Pendant un moment, nous n'avons plus parlé. (*Théâtre, Récits, Nouvelles*, 1156-57)[2]

The silence following this brief exchange amplifies and prolongs what both characters have said and gives the reader time to reflect upon its importance. Its importance becomes even more apparent when we realize that this walk is a reprise of a similar walk that Patrice Mersault takes with Marthe in *La Mort heureuse*, a novel written prior to *L'Etranger* but never published in Camus' lifetime:

> Quand Mersault se promenait dans les rues, le soir, et qu'il était fier de voir les lumières et les ombres briller également sur le visage de Marthe, tout lui semblait merveilleusement facile, sa force même et son courage. Cette beauté qu'elle lui versait tous les jours comme la plus fine des ivresses, il lui était reconnaissant qu'elle l'affichât en public.... Elle marchait devant lui, parmi les regards admiratifs, avec son visage de fleurs et de sourires et sa beauté violente. (*Cahiers Albert Camus*, I, 51)[3]

A woman walks in front of a man because the man is her protector as well as the guarantor of her fidelity; we have too a man's public display of a female companion whose beauty increases her sexual value and his sexual vanity. Camus has given us a psychological and sociological portrait of a macho, Mediterranean man. To dwell on the theatrical aspects of Mersault's sexual prowess, sex as public spectacle, would take us beyond the immediate parameters of our subject, except to note that Camus is describing a lower class couple and that middle class customs and mores here have no purchase. These same elements, considerably condensed, are also present in the description in *L'Etranger*. They are condensed because Camus shifts the emphasis to what he considers another important subject.

Meursault's reference to the beautiful women walking though the streets of Algiers and what he means by that reference may appear somewhat oblique to the reader, but his meaning is perfectly clear to Marie. Meursault has no intention of honoring the vows of marital fidelity. Marie, just prior to this walk, had remarked that marriage was "une chose grave" and Meursault's quick response was a blunt, monosyllabic "non" (*TRN* 1156). We can decide for ourselves whether Marie's ability to "understand" Meursault is due to some seductive power in him or to some intellectual or emotional defect in her. Clearly, one of a woman's roles is to understand. It is true that Marie does have one moment of lucidity, when she realizes that she may one day hate Meursault for the very same reasons that she now loves him. For the present, given the many times she smiles, giggles, or laughs, she seems primarily a woman desperate to please. In this respect, I would disagree with Patrick McCarthy's assessment of Marie as a free spirit (50). She is certainly free to the extent that, breaking with middle class assumptions about appropriate mourning, assumptions made explicit during the trial and contributing to the condemnation of Meursault, she is willing to have sex with Meursault the day after his mother's funeral. But her rapid progress from intercourse to a proposal of marriage - and it is she who proposes and not the man - argues a conventional mind trying to deal with Meursault's unconventional spirit.

Meursault's oblique warning that he will not submit his sexual impulses to the restrictive institution of marriage and its theoretical assumptions of sexual fidelity should come as no surprise to readers familiar with Camus' works written prior to and immediately following *L'Etranger*, in particular *La Mort heureuse*, *Noces*, and *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*. One of Camus' goals in *Noces* was to remove from the sexual impulse all notions of hierarchy and differentiation, what society, and in particular middle class society, would deem acceptable or unacceptable sexual behavior, to remove all traces of religious or secular utility, for example sex as primarily procreative, above all to return sexuality to its primordial purity, that is to say sex divorced from morality, guilt, and, in psychological terms, from the very notion of personality. The following description from "L'Eté à Alger" is representative:

> Les caroubiers mettent une odeur d'amour sur toute L'Algérie. Le soir ou après la pluie, la terre entière, son ventre mouillé d'une semence au parfum d'amande amère, repose pour s' être donné tout l'été au soleil. Et voici qu'à nouveau cette odeur consacre les noces de l'homme et de la terre.... (*Essais*, 76)[4]

What Camus is describing here is what Avital Talmor calls a cosmic, not social marriage (79), one that anticipates Janine's transcendent experience in "La Femme adultère." However deeply we respond to the lyrical and sheer erotic power of such a passage, we need also be aware of its radical message, when what would appear to be a magnificent image, a privileged, poetic moment is extended over an entire lifetime and becomes not only a description of nature but a prescription for a man's authentic sexual life. Certainly no social marriage could compete with Camus' epic images of sun and earth. By comparison, what takes place between people, however pleasurable, is mere coupling, a coupling, moreover, that works no permanent union. But that is precisely the point. The impersonality of coupling offers the only possible human approximation of the impersonal forces at play in the world. Camus laments: "Ce qui distingue le plus l'homme de la bête, c'est l'imagination. De là que notre sexualité ne puisse jamais être vraiment naturelle, c'est-à-dire aveugle" (*C* II 94). That lucid attention Camus would bring to the powerful sexual forces he responds to in nature requires a compensatory blindness to those individuals, women in particular, who may temporarily embody them. When Marie asks Meursault whether he would accept a marriage proposal from any other woman to whom he was similarly attached, he responds literally and without a trace of irony: "Naturellement" (*TRN* 1156). Marie is perhaps dimly aware that her views of love, clichés though they may be, are some-

how related to personality, that love may well be a force pressing us towards the perfection or completion of personality insofar as one person is now two. This is not the case for Meursault. In prison he exclaims to the priest: "Qu'importait que Marie donnât aujourd'hui sa bouche à un nouveau Meursault?" (*TRN* 1211). This outburst appears to be or may well be egotistical, in that Meursault cannot imagine Marie's new lover by any other name but his own. It is also the opposite, an expression of undifferentiated and impersonal sex, of human indifference.

We should add that the radical message of these passages from *La Mort heureuse*, *Noces*, or the notebooks is implicit, not explicit. Camus does not provide us with any theory of sex and its relationship to social class, however much we might glean such a theory from his descriptions or the dramatic confrontations of his fictional characters. Nor is *L'Etranger* explicit, at least not in the first half. This is no doubt the reason Raymond Gay-Crosier in his important study of Don Juan can refer to Meursault as a "Don Juan inconscient" (818). We must wait for *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* for Camus to provide the intellectual framework to explain - and justify - his views on sexuality and class.

Camus' command in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* "tout épuiser, et s'épuiser" (E 139) derives from his conviction that the world in which we live either has no inherent, objective meaning, or has no meaning that we might apprehend given the imperfection of our faculties, reason included, our inadequate human constitution. This conviction, what Camus calls "la pensée absurde," leads not, as we might expect, to modesty, to a scaling down of what is now humanly possible, but instead to a celebration of a world in which anything is now possible. Objective meaning limits, meaninglessness is apparently limitless. Don Juan, to whom Camus devotes an entire chapter, has his place in this new order because he replaces the notion of sexual quality - inextricably linked to hierarchy and differentiation and the moral judgments that attend them - with a doctrine of sexual quantity. Quality and quantity are not necessarily antithetical; the former may or may not condition the latter. Quantity, for Camus, basically represents the abolition of all inner restraint or external social constraints. There is no objective reason why anything or anyone should check the libidinal force of a now unleashed sexual impulse, as long as a young body is equal to the task, as long as the mind is free of all prejudice and all illusions. Several years later, a changing and evolving Camus, a Camus thinking against himself, makes the following worrisome observation in his private notebooks: "Avec Sade l'érotisme systématique est une des directions de la pensée absurde" (*C* II 111). This too takes us beyond our subject. Suffice to say that Camus condemns Sade in *L'Homme révolté* because Sade is not company he is willing to keep. "Systématique" has two negative implications for Camus: sexual passion is intellectualized on the one hand and on the other is in danger of being reduced to an unthinking, automatic response.

A young Camus, however, is proposing Don Juan as a model of the modern, liberated lover. His relationship with women is summed up as follows: "Il les aime avec un égal emportement et chaque fois avec tout lui - même" (*E* 152). Such a statement would not be possible if Camus at this time believed in anything resembling a past or a future or even an inner life. Present pleasure is neither enriched nor diluted by past experience or future anticipation. Psychologically, yesterday's Don Juan is perfectly synchronized with today's, so much so that "égal emportement" and "tout lui - même" are easily realized, unencumbered by doubt or mind, heart or soul, by psychology itself. Don Juan's total, although temporary, investment of his self in a woman, consistent with *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*'s central theme of male lucidity, prevents his erotic attention from collapsing into a mere biological automatism. That lucidity, nevertheless, goes hand in hand with a simplification of erotic language where women are concerned. Camus refers, for example, to "cette même phrase qui sert pour toutes les femmes" (*E* 153). This verbal shorthand may strike the contemporary reader as abominably condescending, cynical, and sexist. It is all these things but such a judgment is also entirely beside the point. The anonymity of women, all of them aroused and seduced in precisely the same manner and by the same combination of words that have apparently proven their efficacy, also corresponds to the anonymity of the male seducer who repeats that sentence, unable or unwilling to modify one syllable. The situation is reversed when Camus' male characters speak to each other in his novels and plays. Until that time when Camus set himself the conscious and deliberate task of writing a love scene, first in *L'Etat de siège* and then in *Les Justes*, we find the conversations between men more nuanced, much more complex. Clamence in *La Chute*, for example, brags how he is able to adjust his speech to his male listener, picking up every possible nuance in the other's conversation and physical mannerisms, calling upon all his intellectual and psychological resources to keep his listener in his seductive grasp.

Ultimately, it is the exact, undifferentiated equality of each sexual experience with a woman that leads Camus to praise "toutes ces morts et toutes ses renaissances" (*E* 155). Each erotic encounter dies completely and is reborn completely, signifying that there is no linkage, no memory, no sense of experience as a cumulative process, above all no marriage or fidelity, insofar as these reflect social commandments requiring moral attention. Certainly such views explain the cynical attitude towards love and marriage so evident in young heroes such as Patrice Mersault who states:

> J'ai envie de me marier, de me suicider, ou de m'abonner à *L'Illustration.* Un geste désespéré, quoi. (*CAC* I 62)

> Mais à notre âge, on n'aime pas, voyons. On se plaît, c'est tout. C'est plus tard, quand on est vieux et impuissant qu'on peut aimer. (*CAC* I 62)

Such statements, however much they accurately translate the macho swagger of a young Mediterranean male, merely drift on the surface of Camus' meaning, like superficial reflections of a more powerful and disturbing source of light. It is certainly true that these remarks by a fictional character correspond closely to views Camus himself expressed in his notebooks and in his preface to *L'Envers et l'endroit*:

> Un homme qui a cherché la vie là où on la met ordinairement (marriage, situation, etc.) et qui s'apercoit d'un coup, en lisant un catalogue de mode, combien il a été étranger à sa vie.... (*C* I 61)

> Avoir ou n'avoir pas de valeur.... Créer ou ne pas créer. Dans le premier cas, tout est justifié. Tout, sans exception. Dans le second cas, c'est L'Absurdité complète. Il reste à choisir le suicide le plus esthétique: mariage + 40 heures ou revolver. (*C* I 89)

> Le bonheur dit bourgeois m'ennuie et m'effraie. (*E* 8)

Jean Sarocchi is clearly on the mark when he states that Camus views marriage and middle class propriety as "limitrophe de la mort" (67). And as Alan Clayton points out, marriage is "exclusif" and therefore, in Camus' opinion, "une injustice" (17), a denial of the body's infinite capacity for pleasure. The essays in *Noces*, as well as the characters Mersault, Meursault, and Don Juan are no doubt offered to the willing reader as sexually vital and viable alternatives to middle class ideology. Note, for example, how Mersault describes his acquaintance Noël: "Noël... croit à la femme, aux enfants et à la vérité patriarchale dans une vie concrète et pesante" (*CAC* I 140). In contrast, he says to his doctor Bernard: "Vous êtes avec moi le seul homme dans ce pays qui vive sans compagnie. Je ne parle pas de votre femme et de vos amis. Je sais bien que ce sont des épisodes" (*CAC* I 182). This satire of the middle class values of marriage and family has its biographical roots. We know that Camus, unlike Sartre, was not of the middle class. He was a poor boy from Algeria. But through his steadily increasing fame and wealth Camus is also aware that he is moving inexorably into the upper middle class whose strict sense of economy was not only financial but sexual as well. Don Juan is the antidote. He is an aristocrat. Camus too will be an aristocrat if not by birth then through that merit conferred by sexual achievement. Hence the emphasis we see in Camus on "générosité." He writes in *Le Mythe*: "Il n'y a d'amour généreux que celui qui se sait en même temps passager et singulier" (*E* 155). We read in "Le Désert": "Dans ces fleurs comme dans ces femmes, il y avait une opulence généreuse...." (*E* 84). Middle class sexual economy with its emphasis on marriage and children, on clearly defined and socially prescribed sexual roles and, above all, on delayed gratification, self-control, and mutual responsibility will be replaced by boundless energy and munificence and by immediate, individual gratification over the restrictive institutions of collective society. Cultural and sexual economy will yield to "tout épuiser, et s'épuiser" (*E* 139). Don Juan does not live his life in culturally prescribed doses. He spends it and saves nothing.

Camus, however, wrote *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* not only to explain his radical program for a new life, but also to justify it. Here we can follow the lead of Teodisio Vertone who reminds us that Camus stresses the body as the ultimate vehicle for shaping human happiness because the body is fundamentally "innocent" (78). Camus does not consider innocence to mean the absence of experience. He refers rather to a state of mind and a life upon which experience has no impact. "On ne peut conserver l'amour," Camus writes, "que par des raisons extérieures à l'amour. Des raisons morales, par exemple" (*C* II 124). Love, in other words, is a social construct. Love purged of all "external" attributes now reappears in the authentic form of a purified and pure sexuality. Camus is explicit: "Mon amour même, s'il n'est pas innocent et sans objet, n'a pas de valeur pour moi" (*C* I 73). "Sans objet" carries forward and explains "innocent" because it views the sexual partner not as a delimiting personality but as one more occasion or episode in the ongoing pursuit of happiness. "Innocence" is a recurring litany everywhere in Camus' early writings and Camus, describing the absurd man in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, sums up its centrality: "On voudrait lui faire reconnaître sa culpabilité. Lui se sent innocent" (*E* 137). Camus may have decided to use "se sent" instead of "est" for phonetic reasons, to avoid the awkward combination of i-e-i. The more likely reason is intellectual consistency. Since Camus had already claimed that there was no objective truth, to use "est" would therefore be out of the question. "Se sent" puts the question of innocence where it now belongs, in individual, subjective perception, but a perception so absolutely subjective as to be impervious to interpretation or negotiation. There is no social contract.

We could, if we wish, bring ourselves up short, and agree with Roger Quilliot who feels that Camus and Don Juan develop their sexual strategy

in order to get back in touch with "un appétit sincère" (90). There is no doubt that Camus' view of sex as a "jeu" or game supports such a view. "Jeu" too is synonymous with innocence because there are simple rules understood in advance by everyone involved and freely accepted as such. Don Juan, for example, in his relationship with women, accepts "toute la règle du jeu" (*E* 156). Similarly in his *Carnets*, Camus writes: "Un homme qui a le sens du jeu est toujours heureux dans la société des femmes. La femme est bon public" (*C* I 102). Quilliot's reference to "un appétit sincère" is, I think, an honorable attempt to bring Camus a little closer to the cultural mainstream where sex may be accepted as play, as a matter of mental and physical hygiene, a necessary antidote to middle class insincerity or hypocrisy. Camus' intellectual stance at this point in his life, however, is far too radical to be thus diluted. By grounding his thought in the notion of our absolute innocence Camus places himself in opposition to the entire Judeo-Christian tradition, at least that part of the tradition which equates sexuality with the fall of man, with his essential guilt. In *Noces* Camus attempted to reinvent pagan Greece on the shores of North Africa. Camus' early writings up to and including the chapter on Don Juan are powerfully seductive and subversive because they propose an image of our sexuality that is prelapsarian, before the fall. Class and class divisions, guilt and self-denial were the driving forces of a tragic society. It is tragic in the sense that social contraints upon male and female sexuality would result in human beings crippled by guilt and cheated of their potential for unfettered sexual happiness. Meursault, after all, is condemned to death for three reasons: he killed the Arab; he did not cry at his mother's funeral; and he had sex with a woman the day after his mother's burial. For Camus, there is only one tragedy and that is death, the body's demise and after which nothing.

At the end of his chapter, Camus places Don Juan, now grown old, in a monastery. We can appreciate Camus' irony since monasteries are devoted to chastity, but we need not be too shocked. Given Camus' scheme of things at this point in his life, he is merely offering the church as the appropriate sanctuary for Don Juan's old age, his spent life, and his now impotent body.

• NOTES

[1] Henceforth abbreviated *C*.

[2] Abbreviated *TRN*.

[3] Abbreviated *CAC*.

[4] Abbreviated *E*.

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