

ALBERT CAMUS BIOGRAPHY

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Camus (1913-43) Algeria years, birth to *The Stranger*

Albert Camus was born in Mondovi, Algeria on 7th November 1913, the second son of Lucien and Catherine Camus. His father worked as a cellarman and his mother was a cleaning woman. Albert lived with his father for just eight months, until the outbreak of World War I. Lucien was called up and was among the first to be wounded in the Battle of Marne. He died of his wounds on October 11th 1914.

Camus spent his childhood years living in a small three-bedroom apartment, on the Rue de Lyon in the working class suburb of Belcourt in Algiers. The apartment had no electricity or running water; the toilets were on the landing and shared with the two other apartments in the block. The household was run under the domineering hand of his maternal grandmother – a hand that carried a whip made from the neck ligament of a bull. Fierce, occasionally cruel, and prone to histrionics she ruled over the family living under her roof: her daughter Catherine and two sons Joseph and Etienne as well as Catherine's sons, Lucien and Albert.

In 1923, Camus went to school. He was a bright and eager student, whose abilities did not go unnoticed by his teacher Louis Germain. It was Germain who encouraged the young Camus to seek the scholarship that would allow him to continue on to high school. Camus' mother and grandmother were both illiterate, Catherine was also partially deaf and spoke so little that some people mistakenly believed her to be mute. The family expected Albert to follow in his brother's footsteps, leaving school as a soon as possible, getting a job, and bringing home some much needed income. Catherine's widow's pension was eight-hundred francs plus three hundred for each child, her cleaning job brought in about a thousand francs a month. Her brother Etienne worked as a barrel-maker in the nearby cooperage. Camus would draw on his uncle's experiences later in the short story, *Les Muets*. The other uncle, Joseph, had a job on the railway and Camus' brother took labouring jobs. However, Germain was able to convince the grandmother that if Albert had a secondary education he'd be able to get better paying jobs after graduation. With her permission, he included her grandson in the small group of students seeking scholarship that he tutored for a couple of hours every day. Camus took advantage of this

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opportunity and was rewarded with a scholarship in June 1924.

Scholarship children were entitled to a free breakfast. For Camus, this meant getting up at 5.30am in order to be at school before seven to eat his meal. A new school meant meeting new friends. Belcourt was a multicultural area; there were French settlers, Spaniards, Italians, Greeks and, of course, Arabs, but it was at high school that Camus first mixed with children from different economic backgrounds. On one occasion he was embarrassed to fill in his mother's occupation on a school form as a 'domestic' – and then felt shame at his embarrassment. Camus was never ashamed of his poverty but it was he who wanted to be the one to share this information, not be made to share details about his background. This strictly need-to-know attitude to personal information, Camus would carry with him his whole life. Later close friends were astonished, for example, to discover that Camus was married; a fact he'd never felt the need to share with people he didn't think needed to know.

School was a happy time for Camus: he loved swimming and playing football but he also enjoyed the intellectual challenge, reading Gide and Malraux in his spare time. These two authors would have a lasting impression on him. Little could the boy in Algiers have suspected that one day he'd be living in Gide's Paris Apartment and that his books would be recommended by Malraux.

In 1930 an attack of tuberculosis meant that Camus could not return to school. It also meant leaving the cramped apartment on the Rue de Lyon where there was too great a risk of him infecting his brother with whom he shared a room. He moved in with Gustave and Antoinette Acault, an uncle and aunt. The Acaults owned a butchers shop, which meant plenty of red meat for Camus, which was then believed to be good for TB sufferers. In a time before antibiotics, folk remedies were considered an important complement to the painful lung-collapse therapy that had to be endured. Uncle Acault's red meat certainly would have done Camus no harm but would have had no effect on his lungs. Another widely held belief at the time was that high altitudes were good for lung patients. Throughout his life, Camus would retire to the mountains in the hope of combating his illness.

Uncle Gustave was an unusual fellow, a local character who preferred holding court in the cafe across the road to chopping meat in his shop. He was self-educated, owned complete volumes of writers such as Balzac, Hugo and Zola, and professed anarchist politics. The charismatic butcher took care over his appearance, dressing like a dandy and reportedly adding a few drops of blood to his clothes to complete the look. Camus had come from a home with no books and little in the way of conversation, certainly

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not discussions of literature and politics. Gustave took a real shine to his nephew and having no children of his own had hopes that Albert would one day take over the shop. As business owners the Acaults were better off than the Camus and Gustave gave his nephew a generous allowance as well as occasional use of his car at a time when cars were relatively rare on the streets of Algiers.

Back at school Camus met the man who arguably had the greatest influence in his life. Jean Grenier taught philosophy, he had written a book, *Islands*, and was friends with Camus' idol André Malraux. Almost thirty years later Camus, in a preface for *Islands*, acknowledged the debt he owed Grenier's book for the overwhelming effect and influence it had on him. Thanks to his uncle's influence and money Camus started dressing like a dandy. This, coupled with an aloof, almost haughty attitude stood him apart from most of his classmates. He liked to quote Chestov and Proust, and to discuss literature, poetry and classical music with his friends Claude de Fréminville and André Belamich. However, although he was slightly smaller than some of the other boys, he was no weakling, ready to settle a score with his fists if needed. Nor was he foppish; pretentious quotes notwithstanding, he could be verbally aggressive, cold or sarcastic depending on the situation. Some of his circle of friends complained that he seemed always to be making fun of them. One such friend, Louis Benisti, who was ten years older than Camus, once shouted at him, 'We're all doing our best, so why be ironic?'¹ Taken aback by this outburst, Camus paled and the two became firm friends. There was another side of Camus that contrasted with the reserved manner and air of intellectual superiority, a congenial Camus ready to entertain others with a dirty joke or obscene song. The boys liked to go to cafes and bars to discuss literature, poetry and politics. Two places, representative of the two sides of Camus' character, that the friends liked to go were a cafe near the Kasbah that was frequented by Gide during his stays in Algiers, and a seedy bar called 'The Lower Depths' run by a dwarf called Coco, which was decorated in the corner with a guillotine and a skeleton fitted with a mechanical phallus.

Max-Pol Fouchet, who would find notoriety as an art historian and fame as a television presenter, was a classmate and one-time friend of Camus. Fouchet was in a four year relationship with Simone Hié, whom he'd met when she was fifteen. Simone was good looking and vampish, seductive with a strong personality. She was also a drug addict, addicted to the morphine given to her for menstrual pain when she was fourteen. Among Camus' friends she was seen as wild and dangerous to know. And they were all, to varying degrees, attracted to her. When Camus seduced her, or she seduced him, Simone was

¹ Herbert R. Lottman, *Albert Camus: A Biography*, Axis Publishing (1997) p.52

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unofficially engaged to Fouchet, with some idea of getting married once his military service was completed. Suddenly, for Fouchet, Simone disappeared. Days went past without sign and then he received a message from Camus that he wanted to meet. Strolling along the beach, Camus told his friend, 'She won't come back. She has chosen.'² Fouchet took the news quite well and told his rival, and friend, that he was glad it was him rather than anyone else who had won Simone's heart. Camus replied, 'I was wondering if you had genius, and you're proving that you do.'³ Fouchet considered this way of seeing things as part of the game they played at that time, and indeed it smacks of self-justifying pretentiousness on Camus' part. To be fair to Camus, he and Simone were in their late teens, an age when pretentiousness can be forgiven. However, despite Fouchet's comments, gracious in defeat, it appears he could not forgive his friend; he and Camus would soon drift apart never to be reconciled.

During his last year at school, Camus began to get some of his articles published, encouraged by Jean Grenier, in a small literary magazine, *Sud*. If he hadn't before, Camus now had serious ambitions to write and be published. It was also around this time that his formidable grandmother died. Camus would draw on his experience of her death in *The Wrong Side and the Right Side*. In 1933, Camus entered the University of Algiers, studying once more under Jean Grenier who had joined the philosophy department. But things at home were not going well. Uncle Acault did not approve of Simone and Camus had clashed with his uncle over taking other girls back to his room. Perhaps this was the tipping point. Relations between Gustave and Albert had been slowly deteriorating, the younger man now beginning to view the older man's strong personality as domineering and patronizing with the result that Camus left the Acaults to live with his brother Lucien. Leaving the butcher shop meant saying goodbye to his allowance and Camus had to find odd jobs to support himself. A year after enrolling at University of Algiers, on June 16th 1934, he and Simone were married.

Camus studied for two diplomas and in 1935 received an honorable mention in History of Philosophy and Logic. It is around this time that he toyed with the idea of writing a play about the despotic Roman Emperor Caligula. However, many years would pass and there would be several rewrites before the play reached the final form we have today. One possible career choice for Camus, which had been a semi-plan ever since Louis Germain persuaded the boy's grandmother to let him go to high school, was teaching. Camus now actively pursued this goal, getting a student loan of 4500 francs. A requirement for the teacher's license was a written thesis of around a hundred pages. Camus chose the title

² Ibid, p.64

³ Ibid.

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‘Christian Metaphysics and Neoplatonism: Plotinus and Augustine’. The thesis was submitted on May 8th 1936 and on the 25th he was granted his diploma. Camus, however, would never become a teacher. Two years after being awarded his diploma and given a clean bill of health (although this was probably exaggerated by a sympathetic doctor) he was rejected on medical grounds.

Camus' marriage was in a precarious state. He had believed that Simone, once married, would settle down, get off the drugs and tone down her more eccentric behaviour. Still using drugs, still flirting with his friends, Simone proved impossible to control and Camus was a man who needed control in his life. Things came to a head in July of 1936, on a kayaking holiday with his wife and his friend Yves Bourgeois. Paddling across Europe wasn't the ideal activity for a man with a lung condition and a few days into the trip Camus awoke in severe pain. He had to leave his canoe behind and travel by bus and on foot while Simone and Yves paddled on without him. In Salzburg, Camus told his friend that he planned to split with his wife. It was possible to pick up mail along the way. On one pickup Camus discovered a letter addressed to his wife. It was from Simone's doctor, Camus read it and discovered that this doctor was also her lover. The loneliness and depression experienced by Camus at this time is written up in his essay ‘Death in the Soul’ and appears in his abandoned (and posthumously published) novel *The Happy Death*. It was also on this trip that he passed through the Czech city Budejovice, which would later become the setting for his play *Cross Purpose* (also known as *The Misunderstanding*).

Encouraged by his friends and his mentor Jean Grenier, Camus joined the Communist Party. This was a period of his life that he was later never comfortable elaborating upon (unsurprising considering his later animosity towards the Communists). Camus' role within the party was as a kind of touring propaganda agent. He would deliver lectures, run front organizations, and put together plays that at times were little more than blatant political propaganda. One such play, adapted from Malraux's novel *Le Temps du mépris*, had Camus' friend Marguerite Dobrenn acting the part of Lenin's widow standing in the audience proclaiming, ‘Vladimir Ilich loved the people deeply’⁴. In seeking permission to adapt the play, Camus was thrilled to receive a one word reply from his idol Malraux; it read simply ‘joue’ (‘play’ in the familiar tu form). The second effort, a play about striking miners in fascist Spain, *Révolte dans les Asturies*, was effectively banned by the right-wing mayor of Algiers, Augustin Rozis. With performance prohibited, the script was published instead. The original hand-written manuscript was

⁴ Ibid, p.102

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lost and how much was written by Camus is not known, although it is probable that he wrote most of it. Other duties for the Party included the tiresome newspaper selling and fly-posting, as well as the organization and running of study groups. Camus was part of an anti-fascist group at the university. The sketch drawn by Patrick McCarthy of Camus at this time is one of a hard-line militant: ‘... some students met to discuss how they could combat the right's overwhelming influence in Algiers. Camus frequently showed his intransigent character; then he would castigate them for their weakness and lay down the line to follow.’⁵ In later life Camus would search for a viable left-wing alternative to the Communist Party, so it is notable that one of his duties as a militant at this time was to speak at a meeting intending to persuade left-leaning students to join the Party. He was shouted down by the crowd and left the hall in a fury.⁶

It is unclear exactly when Camus left the Communist Party. What is known is that he waited to be kicked out rather than tear-up his Party card, unlike many of his friends who quit over the Party's position on the Arabs. The Algerian Communist Party held the kind of subordinate position to the French Party that the French Party held to the Soviets. Stalin, concerned about the threat posed by Hitler, favoured a strong France. Consequently, Communist opposition to militarism in France was played down, as well as the anti-colonial stance that might also weaken the French. This message was relayed to the Algerian Party and Arab nationalists, former allies, were now political enemies. Camus' failure to toe the Party line, in particular his continuing support for nationalists such as Messali Hadj, led to his expulsion in 1937.

Camus had long been concerned that his political activities might get in the way of his writing. So it must have taken the sting out of his expulsion from the Party that around this time his first collection of essays, *The Right Side and the Wrong Side*, was published by Charlot, the publisher of his play *Révolution dans les Asturies*. The run was limited to 350 copies and no-one in Paris took the slightest notice. There was a small reaction in Algeria; the *Oran Républicain* accused him of mimicking Grenier and considered the essays pessimistic and bitter. Camus, starting a pattern he would continue throughout his life, took the responses badly and blamed his critics for not understanding his work and himself for not making himself understood.

In 1937 Camus, along with friends, travelled from Algiers to Paris. In Avignon Camus was struck with

⁵ Patrick McCarthy, *Camus*, Random House (1982) p.77

⁶ *Ibid*, p.78

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anxiety, feeling ill with a 'nameless fear' that often overcame him when traveling. In Lyon, he was already feeling homesick. After visiting the World's Fair in Paris, he moved on alone to Embron, where he decided to stay for a month. Here Camus focused on his novel, *The Happy Death*, as well as making some notes on a new work that would become *The Stranger*. When the friends met up again, they travelled to Italy. Back in Algiers Marguerite showed him some pictures she took of him on the trip; Camus was appalled. Handing her back the photos he complained of looking like a barber's assistant and would 'prefer not to know the truth.'⁷ Camus was offered a job as a substitute teacher 60km from Oran but turned it down. This was a brave decision made with his mind set on a writing career; to make ends meet he took up a temporary post carrying out mundane tasks for the meteorology institute.

Those who resigned or were expelled from the Communist Party could no longer participate in their theatre company, and so a new group needed to be formed. In a manifesto published by Charlot the Théâtre de l'Equipe declared itself free of political and religious tendencies. One of the plays they chose to perform was written by André Gide, who as we have already seen was an early idol of Camus, and was an interesting choice as Gide's anti-Stalinism was currently being reviled by the Communists. Around this time Camus was losing hope in his novel, *A Happy Death*, realizing that the book just didn't work. The possibility of a different type of writing, one that could possibly solve his current job problems, was journalism. Camus, who would work on various papers in various roles throughout his life, did not consider journalism as any kind of vocation, in fact he complained to Grenier of the 'lowly pleasures' of writing for the papers. However lowly these pleasures were they were preferable to the mind-numbing jobs he'd taken so far. Whilst putting together an adaptation of Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* for the Théâtre de l'Equipe, Camus sought work on a new paper about to be launched, the *Alger Républicain*.

Denied the chance of being a teacher and his work at the meteorology institute over he saw a new opportunity open with the opening of a new newspaper, *Algiers Républicain*. In 1937 Camus joined the staff of the left-wing newspaper run by the anarchic Pascal Pia. His job was to write editorials, political and literary articles. As court reporter he covers local miscarriages of justice, notably the Hodent and Sheik El Okbi trial and as an investigative journalist he writes a series of challenging articles of the poverty in Kabylia. He is upset that, when covering story about conditions on a prison ship he is unable to give a cigarette to one of the prisoners. The sight of fashionable ladies out to gawk at the imprisoned

⁷ Olivier Todd, *Albert Camus: A Life*, Vintage (1998) p.66

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men also gets to Camus. A theme that runs through his journalism is humiliation: men in chains, miscarriages of justice, and the degradation of extreme poverty. Camus was making notes for *The Stranger* at this time and his experiences as a court reporter will be put to use in this novel. Indeed, Camus even writes himself into the novel with a small cameo as a young reporter in a blue suit. One of his other responsibilities was a section of the paper called 'The Reading Room' for which he would write, sometimes self-serving, book reviews (his *Nuptials* received a favourable write-up). It is for the *Algiers Républicain* that Camus reviews Sartre's *Nausea* and *Le Mur*. Working on the paper got in the way of his theatre work, which was put on pause at this time, but Camus continued to chip away at his works. As mentioned, he made notes for *The Stranger* and published his second collection of essays, *Nuptials*. He is also working on his play *Caligula* and essay on the absurd that will become *The Myth of Sisyphus*. Camus was not a writer to start projects and then abandon them. Once he started on something, he would grind away at it until the job was done even if the finished manuscript was to end up put away in a drawer like *A Happy Death*.

The outbreak of the second world war brought about the end of *The Algiers Républicain*. Paper shortages didn't help matters but it was the left-wing, almost anarchic, position on war taken by the paper that couldn't be tolerated. Camus took the unusual position of being both anti-Hitler and anti-Stalin, accusing Hitler's Germany and Stalin's USSR of being predatory. At a time when being a pacifist was politically dangerous, Camus and Pia were publishing anti-war sentiments. The paper was heavily censored, even passages taken from the treaty of Versailles had to be cut. Attacks on the mayor, Camus' nemesis who had effectively banned *Révolte dans les Asturies*, meant that the paper has no friends in power. The paper was closed with only the evening edition, *Le Soir*, running; Camus, Pia and one other writer made up the staff. On January 10th 1940, this paper was also shut down with the police seizing any copies they could find. Camus was once again jobless.

From September 1939 Camus attempted several times to enlist. His notebooks are filled with entries on the humiliation of the men who didn't sign up. Ticket collectors are slapped, men out of uniform leave their apartments early in the morning and wait until late at night to sneak home. Camus was too ill to join the men he considered his brothers in battle and for a man's man like Camus this reality was deeply humiliating. At least he had time for what he was now referring to as 'his works'. In July of 1939, he thought he had completed *Caligula* but after reading through the type-written pages (Camus sent manuscripts away to be typed) he felt the work was not good enough and needed rewriting. He was also working through what he called his 'essay on the absurd' which would become *The Myth of*

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Sisyphus. Things were hard for Camus after his paper was shut down. He found himself lonely and depressed in Algiers. However, things looked up slightly after his back pay from the paper came through and, thanks to Pia, he managed to get a job in Paris working as an editorial secretary on *Paris-Soir*. He leaves for Paris in March of 1940.

Camus didn't like Paris. He didn't like most of the people whom he thought were phonies and dreadful thinkers. Work for *Paris-Soir* was uninspiring but it was a good job nonetheless; Camus was an editorial secretary on 3000 francs a month. There were no writing duties, which was no tragedy for Camus who wanted to work on his own writing, and the hours were short, just five a day. *The Myth of Sisyphus* was now half-written and he was estimating the end of summer for the completion of *The Stranger* and *Caligula*. At the same time Camus was filled with doubt. Unlike his character Meursault, who has no ambition and gave up analysing himself, Camus is plagued by self-doubt and is obsessed with the idea that he may end up wasting his life. He swung between hopeful optimism and dejected pessimism. At times he wondered if he hadn't been too ambitious, taking on more than he was capable of. And later he found himself almost marveling at his lucidity and power.⁸

There was, of course, a war on and by May of 1940 the Germans were bombarding Paris as Camus was finishing *The Stranger*. Holland was taken by the Germans and couple of months later Italy declared war on France. Camus attempted to enlist as a volunteer and was, yet again, rejected on medical grounds. A couple of days before the German army marched through Paris, Camus, along with the staff of *Paris-Soir*, evacuated to Clermont. The paper then got to work publishing anti-Semitic articles as well as pieces in favour of Marshal Pétain (Camus didn't contribute a single article). Camus was concerned at this time that due to his past, as a militant for the Communists and editor of a Jewish-owned anti-Hitler newspaper, that his name might be on some Nazi hit-list. In September, his divorce from Simone Hié was made final.

Camus had several girlfriends since the breakdown of his marriage, most of these relationships ran concurrently. For the rest of his life he would never commit himself to one woman. He and Simone split in late 1936, and in the January of 1937 he was in a relationship with Christiane Galindo, introduced to him by two of his female friends, Marguerite Dobrenn and Jeanne Sicard. It is Christiane's brother, Pierre, who will become Camus' inspiration for Meursault in *The Stranger*. Later

⁸ Ibid, p.108

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that summer, Camus meets Francine Faure, whom he will later marry, and then in December he meets, through the theatre group, a pharmacology student and part-time actress, Lucette Meurer. It was very rare for Camus to discuss his work with men; he preferred to share this burden with the women in his life and was regularly exchanging letters with Christiane, Francine and Lucette. He wrote to Lucette about Sartre's *Nausea* shortly before he published his 1938 review for 'The Reading Room'. With Francine he shared, in 1939, his worries and doubts over his novel (*The Stranger*) and essay (*The Myth of Sisyphus*). Earlier that year he had written to Christiane about his dissatisfaction over the current state of his play *Caligula*. In Paris, while he was working for *Paris-Soir*, Camus writes to another girlfriend Yvonne Ducailar, a woman he'd met during his time at the *Alger Républicain*, about his concerns over 'wasting his life'⁹ and his probable decision to marry Francine. This letter is more than just a sharing of woes; it's a 'dear John' or in this case, a 'dear Yvonne'. However, their relationship doesn't finally end until September of 1940; his divorce from Simone was now through and he had promised to marry Francine when he was free to do so. She arrived in Lyon that November and the two were married on December 3rd 1940. Camus is let go by *Paris-Soir* shortly afterwards and he and his new wife return to Algeria. However, by January of 1941, Camus already felt suffocated and wanted to leave. He would write several letters to Yvonne about his unhappiness. In one letter, dated February 21st, 1941, he writes that Sisyphus is completed and so are his three absurds. On a trip to the beach with friends he reads in the newspaper about a crime: a man turns up to a hotel run by his family, they don't recognise who he is and murder him for his money. This story will be used for his darkest play, *Cross Purpose*. Much to the understandable annoyance of Francine's family, Camus goes camping with Yvonne and Christiane. He is still in communication with Lucette, and now that his absurds are over, he writes to her asking for books on the plague from university libraries in Algiers.

In April of 1941 Camus sent the completed manuscripts of *The Stranger* and *Caligula* to Pascal Pia and Jean Grenier. Pia likes them both whereas Grenier is unsure about the play. Through their connections these men get Camus' manuscripts passed on to André Malraux who likes the work but believes that Camus will be compared to Sartre (he wrote to Camus advising him 'not to give a fuck'¹⁰). Based on recommendations by Malraux *The Stranger* is accepted for publication by Gallimard. Encouraged by the warm reception, Camus then sends out his essay. He wants the works to be published together and Malraux thinks he can persuade Gallimard to publish *The Stranger* and *The Myth of Sisyphus* together. Just months before the publication of his first novel in May 1942, Camus fell ill. He wanted to go to

⁹ Ibid, p.106

¹⁰ Ibid, p.132

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Paris where the action was but the poor condition of his health prevented it. Francine had family in the Le Panelier, a small village not far from Lyons, and Camus was advised to spend the approaching winter there. Meanwhile, *The Stranger* was causing a stir in Paris. In September Sartre wrote his, now famous, 'Explication on The Stranger' and Gallimard was confident of the book's success. Camus, however, was not satisfied with the reviews. He felt he'd been misunderstood just as he had been in Algeria when his essay collections were under, the far more limited, spotlight. Francine stayed with Camus for while in Le Panelier but had to return to her work in Oran when the summer was over. In November 1942 the Allied landing in North Africa cut Camus off from Francine; the two would not be reunited until after the Liberation of Paris. Separated from his novel in Paris and his wife in Oran, Camus spend his time visiting St. Etienne for lung treatments and working on his new play *Cross Purpose*. Finally, three days before the new year, Camus' travel permit was approved which allowed him to travel to Paris and a hero's welcome.

Camus (1943-51) Early Paris years, *Combat to The Plague*

Camus worked for Gallimard as a manuscript reader on 4000 francs a month. He lived at the Hotel Mercure, a short walk from his office, and thanks to his job and the royalties from his published books, was financially comfortable but not wealthy. His reputation as the author of *The Stranger* and *The Myth of Sisyphus* meant Camus was welcomed into the Parisian intellectual circle. He met his idol Malraux, mixed with Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir as well as people like Georges Bataille and Pablo Picasso. It was during a reading of a play written by Picasso that Camus first met the actress Maria Casares. She would become his mistress and one of the most important women in Camus' life. 1943 to 1945 was the period of Camus' genuine friendship with Sartre, after '45 feelings between the two men had cooled considerably. Much has been made of their quarrel and falling out, a chapter of this book is focus entirely on this quarrel, its causes and repercussions. However, the friendship itself was relatively short-lived. Sartre had heard about Camus' history in the theatre and asked him to direct and act in his play, *No Exit*. The plan came to nothing but the two men became friends of sorts. The two had little in common and avoided conversations on philosophy or politics whenever possible. Sartre was drawn to the rough, working-class Camus. He liked Camus' ease and success with women and admired his hard-drinking, quick-witted nature, ever-ready with a joke or a song. Sartre was a drinker and womanizer himself and Camus liked this in him however he never saw Sartre as a close friend, preferring the

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company of Michel Gallimard and the eccentric Father Bruckberger. As well as working for Gallimard, and on his second novel *The Plague*, Camus worked clandestinely for the Resistance.

On the recommendation of Pascal Pia, Camus was summoned to meet the National Resistance Committee in late 1943. His experience as editor, of *Le Soir* back in Algeria, is put to use as he is put in charge of *Combat*, the resistance newspaper. Although Camus will neither carry a gun as a member of the Resistance his role was not without danger. The punishment for writing anti-Nazi articles was deportation to a concentration camp. Camus wrote numerous articles for *Combat* however his most important contribution from this time are his series of *Letters to a German Friend*. Exactly how was great Camus' contribution to the Resistance is subject to debate. Certainly, he ran risks and could have paid with his life if caught. His involvement with the resistance was, and is, part of the Camus legend and he has been criticized, then and now, for allowing his exploits to be somewhat exaggerated. Patrick McCarthy has pointed out that Camus came to the party quite late, which is true. He didn't join up until late 1943 when there were much earlier opportunities to get involved. And his time with *Combat* was short, Paris was liberated in 1944. Three incidents illustrate the risks Camus ran. After the arrest of a Resistance member whose apartment contained sensitive documents, Camus accompanied Dionys Mascalo to retrieve these papers and photographs before the Nazis could raid the flat. Mascalo was armed and ready for trouble, Camus, unarmed, stood lookout. Camus also helped Mascalo move a clandestine printing press. On another occasion the French Communists printed a denouncement of those they considered to be lying about their involvement with the Resistance, with Camus' name printed on the document. When Camus was informed of this, that he was been publicly named as a supporter the Resistance, he merely shrugged. It wasn't just the Communists he had to worry about. One another occasion, after a tip-off from an informant, the police went looking for Camus. He was walking down the street with Maria Casares when he discovered that both ends of the road were blocked by the police. In his pocket he carried a layout intended for an edition of *Combat*. Camus and Maria were asked for the papers but the police failed to discover the layout. Camus returned home and destroyed documents he had in his apartment and went to stay with a friend. After discovering that he was not targeted randomly by the police Camus, along with Pierre and Michel got out of Paris. He traveled 60km on a bicycle to Verdelot where he stayed until things cooled down.

Although he had written *Caligula* before *Cross Purpose*, it was the latter than was the first to be performed. Dress rehearsals for the play were in June 1944 with Maria Casares in the role of Martha. The play itself received mixed reviews. Casares put in a fine performance but the critics generally felt

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that while the subject matter was good the play itself was of limited quality. Camus, as ever, was depressed by the bad reviews. Opening night had been on the eve of Liberation and the 59th edition of *Combat* was published openly, with Camus' name on the masthead. Loyal Frenchmen from 18-50 were encouraged to take up arms and take to the streets. Sartre was assigned to occupy the Comedy-Francaise and Camus dropped by to see him only to discover his friend asleep. Sartre was awoken by a laughing Camus who told him 'Your armchair is facing in the direction of history!'¹¹ After the quarrel that ended their friendship Camus would often hint at this embarrassment for Sartre, accusing him, and his acolytes, of being 'armchair revolutionaries'.

Now that *Combat* was published openly, Camus became a household name as a journalist. The collaborationist press was banned which limited the competition for his paper. Pia had been concerned that the Allies would start their own paper and so acted quickly in getting him and the rest of the group legally recognized as *Combat's* owners. This was a time for ambitious men to rise quickly filling the vacuum left by the German retreat. With the end of the War in sight, Camus had to face a problem he'd been worrying about since he and Maria got serious, the reunion with his wife Francine. He had confided in Marcel Herrand, the director of *Cross Purpose*, that after the War he intended to leave Paris with Maria. However, in October Francine arrived from Algeria and Camus stayed. The two moved into a cold apartment situated behind that of one of Camus' early idols, André Gide. Though reunited with his wife, Camus carried on seeing Maria. He told his mistress that he and Francine were more like brother and sister than husband and wife but nevertheless in 1945 Francine became pregnant with twins. This was too much for Maria and she broke off the relationship with Camus.

Camus' writing for *Combat* was moralistic and formulaic. He liked to use the 'royal we' when expressing ideas even if the opinions expressed were held by only a minority at the paper. The biggest test of his morality came with the subject of what to do with collaborators. Camus was initially in favour of swift justice and argued, via his editorials, with those who advocated forgiveness. Camus had friends who were killed by the Nazis and in January 1945 wrote 'Until our last moment we will refuse a godly charity that cheats men of their justice.'¹² The references to 'godly charity' were aimed at Francois Mauriac, a Catholic thinker who advocated... godly charity. Camus, however, wanted a fair punishment for his countrymen who had supported the Nazis and soon became appalled at how 'justice' was meted out. He opposed the death penalty and when the writer Robert Brasillach was sentenced to

¹¹ Ibid, p.188

¹² Ibid, p.199

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death Camus, after much soul-searching, signed a petition against the sentence. Brasillach was not pardoned and was shot dead in February 1945. Camus would later admit that Mauriac, his adversary at the time, had been right. At this time Camus broke all ties with the Communist Party. For many being on the left meant siding with the Communists and very few thought of the USSR as a totalitarian regime. *Caligula* opened in September and is generally well-received but Camus, as usual, is not pleased with the reviews. 'Thirty articles [about *Caligula*]. The reasons for praise were as bad as the reasons for criticism.'¹³ Camus is becoming famous but fame doesn't sit well with him. Asking himself the question, what is a famous man? He answers, 'someone whose first name doesn't matter. Everyone else's first name has an individual meaning.'¹⁴

An invite to visit New York from his US publisher in March 1946 gave Camus the chance to get out of Paris for a while. During the trip Camus was preoccupied with morbid thoughts. During a lecture given at Columbia University he offered four brutal anecdotes from the war. The first was about a concierge who while cleaning around the bodies of two men who had been tortured said in reply to a request for help, 'I don't get mixed up in the affairs of my tenants'. The second was about a friend of Camus' who had his ear torn off by an interrogator and was later asked by the man, 'how are your ears?' The third was about a mother in Greece who begged a German officer, about to shoot her three sons, for mercy. He relented and allowed her to pick one son to save. The fourth was about freed concentration camp inmates who on seeing from their train window a funeral laugh hysterically saying, 'so that's how dead people are treated around here!' In New York Camus met Germaine Bree, Justin O'Brien and Nicola Chiaromonte, and a young woman named Patricia Blake. They became lovers and Patricia would become the 'other woman' to his other women, Maria and Francine. Despite starting a new relationship with Patricia, Camus was maudlin. His health was not good, coughing up blood, and he was obsessed with a fear of dying. He told friends he was soon to die, including Patricia to whom he predicted he only had a year or two left. Death constantly on his mind he would recite the last words of dying men to his friends. In his pocket he carried a copy of a suicide note written by one of Trotsky's friends. American funeral customs and practices fascinated him and on his return to Paris he wrote to Patricia asking her to send him magazines such as *Embalmer's Monthly*. Camus' biggest fear was dying before he had time to complete his works. Progress was slow; he had already been working on *The Plague* for five years.

¹³ Ibid, p.212

¹⁴ Ibid, p.213

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Later that year Camus became friends with Arthur Koestler. He approved of Koestler's anti-communist stance but found his behaviour objectionable. On one occasion, during a night of heavy drinking, Camus found himself in the usual position of being attacked by the *Darkness at Noon* author for supporting Communism. Camus then came to Koestler's defence after discovering him under attack from Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Later that evening, after turning up at party, also attended by Sartre, and discovering Merleau-Ponty Camus picked up the argument where they'd left off. Sartre, who was close to the man, joined in on Merleau-Ponty's side and the row ended with Camus storming out. Camus, a man to bear a grudge, didn't speak to Sartre for months. Later, after the publication of *The Plague*, an incident occurred that brought an end to Camus' friendship with Koestler. Having made up with Sartre, the three went out for a night of hard drinking. The subject of politics came up and ended with Koestler throwing a glass at Sartre's head. Out on the street Camus attempted to intervene and, for his trouble, received a punch in the face from Koestler. Camus had another friend to lose, next on the list was Pascal Pia.

The publication in 1947 of *The Plague*, Camus' biggest commercial success, coincided with the demise of *Combat*. Camus had been a rare sight around the paper's offices since his return from the US and Pascal Pia had lost patience with his old friend and colleague. Even receiving a series of articles, *Neither Victims nor Executioners* from Camus did nothing to improve relations. He believed Camus was prepared to step in now and again to contribute this and that but was unwilling to stick around and help with the daily grind of running a paper. The friendship was over and the two men would never be reunited. On the left but against the Communists, interested in God but without faith, Camus felt intellectually alienated and alone. He involved himself in political affairs, including the Garry Davis 'World Citizen' affair as well as The Group For International Liaisons In The Revolutionary Union Movement but ended up disillusioned with both. When the Communists stood for election, Camus accused those who voted for them of voting for the 'enemy'. Having distanced himself from his Parisian friends, Camus turned to Algerians for friendship and became close to the burly poet, Rene Char. In 1948 he convinced Gallimard to publish a volume of Char's poetry.

In 1948 Camus escaped Paris briefly visiting Algeria with Francine in April and then taking a trip to the UK in May. In Algeria Camus met up with friends and expressed an interest in returning there to live, his friends however, were skeptical. Camus was never going to move back to Algeria. After returning to Paris he bumped into Maria Casares by chance in the street and the two resumed their affair. He had been working on his play *State of Siege* which opened and bombed that October.

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Everyone hated it. He would fare better a year later in December with *The Just Assassins*. Camus' mood was, unsurprisingly, low and he planned a trip to South America. Despite his pessimism, he began planning a new and ambitious work, *The Rebel*. Camus' state of mind during his lecture tour of South America could best be described as fragile. He told Maria that he 'sensed evil floating in the air.'¹⁵ and struggled to appear 'normal' in the midst of a depression he referred to as 'a kind of Hell.'¹⁶ In Rio, after discovering that a man had made a special trip to present him with a packet of cigarettes, Camus burst into tears. During this trip Camus took notes for that would be used later for his short story *The Growing Stone*. Suffering from eczema, depression and unable to sleep, he returned to Paris. As he was during his previous trip to New York, Camus was obsessed with the fear that he would die before completing his works. Financially, Camus was prospering. He still worked for Gallimard as reader, discovering and promoting Simone Weil, and receiving handsome royalties from *The Plague* and his other books. Camus however was depressed by his popularity, 'What makes my books a success is the same that makes them a lie for me.'¹⁷ He commented on the success of *The Plague*, 'my book is selling like a sob story for young girls,'¹⁸

Camus (1951-60) Later Paris years, *The Rebel* to Death

Camus finished writing *The Rebel* halfway through 1951. The book had been a slog and towards its completion he'd been writing ten hours a day. As ever, Camus was unhappy with the finished piece. A perfectionist who knew perfection was not possible, he would work away at project until he felt there was nothing more he could do. To his friend Char, he confided that *The Rebel*, his baby, had been a difficult birth and that the child was ugly.¹⁹ Despite finishing the work, Camus was in a low mood, a state of 'airborne depression' was how he explained it.²⁰ He knew that the book was going to be controversial and would cost him friends. Grenier, to whom he showed the manuscript cautioned his former student that *The Rebel* would actually make him enemies. Not only did Camus take the unusual position for someone on the left. criticizing the USSR, he also took a pop at cherished icons of the French left-wing such as Robespierre and St. Just. Shortly before *The Rebel* was released Camus asked to shake the hand of a friend with whom he'd just eaten lunch; he knew that in a few days few men would be willing to take his hand. Although Camus was prepared for criticism and the loss of friends

¹⁵ Ibid, p.276

¹⁶ Ibid, p.277

¹⁷ Ibid, p.294

¹⁸ Patrick McCarthy, *Camus*, Random House (1982) p.231

¹⁹ Olivier Todd, *Albert Camus: A Life*, Vintage (1998), p.295

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(he was no stranger to losing friends over political and philosophical disagreements) he was completely unprepared for the deeply personal nature of the backlash. The onslaught when it came was directed as much, if not more, at him personally, as a man, than at the ideas expressed in his book.

That the Communists would not like *The Rebel* was no surprise to Camus. He could hardly have expected a favourable review from them. Positive write-ups from some the right were disturbing but could be predicted. Political correctness was rife at the time and publishing anything deemed to give aid to the enemy was held in an extremely dim light by writers on the left and the right. Leftists would avoid criticizing the USSR, turning a deaf ear to tales of forced labour and death camps. The views was that any public acknowledgment that all was not well in the workers paradise would be seized upon by the right. Camus wanted a fair reading and expected Sartre to give him one. Sartre on the other hand hated the book. Not only did resent the sentiments expressed but he thought *The Rebel* was simply not a good book. Even Camus had his doubts on this score. Before the book went to press he had complained in private, 'I always choose tasks that are beyond my powers. And that's what makes me live in continual effort and what exhausts me.'²¹ However, on other occasions he'd believe that *The Rebel* was his greatest work. Sartre put off publishing a review in his journal *Modern Times*, not wanting to have to savage his friend. In the end he fobbed the job off on another writer, Francis Jeanson, in the belief that Jeanson would take it easy on Camus. He was mistaken. Jeanson went to town, trashing both *The Rebel* and its author. There followed a furious exchange of letters, Camus refusing even to acknowledge the writer of the damning review and addressing his letters to Sartre with 'To the editor'. In return, both Sartre and Jeanson avoided replying to Camus on the subject of his book but choose to discuss him personally instead. For the spectators, reading these exchanges, the fight was something of an entertainment. The right particularly enjoyed watching their ideological enemies air their dirty laundry in public. In the end, the general consensus was that Camus had lost the battle. He was deeply hurt, whereas to Sartre such battles were all part of the game. When he went looking for friends and sympathizers, Camus found some, but nowhere near as much as he would have liked. To his Algerian friends he resorted to a kind of macho frustration at not being able to knock Sartre's teeth out because the philosopher was too small. To Marie, he arrived on her doorstep, suffering from a panic-attack and on the verge of tears. Camus and Sartre would never be reconciled.

In the aftermath of *The Rebel* furore Camus managed to put out a collection of press articles written

²⁰ Ibid, p.296

²¹ Ibid, p.295

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between 1948 and 1953, published as *Actuelles II* (*Actuelles I* consisted of articles from *Combat*). He also rewrite some old essays published as a collection entitled *Summer*. Albert wasn't the only Camus to suffer from depression. Francine became severely ill, starting in 1953, and had to be hospitalized. Her depression, which manifested itself in crying and obsessive talking about Maria Casares. That her husband had mistresses was no secret, to Francine and her family, or friends in Paris. Camus felt powerless to help his wife, just as he did with the first wife Simone over her drug addiction. In hospital Francine received over twenty electric shock therapies and, in what may have been a suicide attempt, threw herself off a balcony. The 'fall' of the women of a bridge in *The Fall* is usually taken to be a reference to this event. The setting of this novel is Amsterdam, inspired by Camus' 1954 trip to Holland. On another trip in 1954, this time to Italy, Camus fell ill. While recuperating he saw in a newspaper that Simone de Beauvoir's *Mandarins* had just won the prestigious Goncourt Prize. The 'hero' of that novel was based heavily on Camus and the portrait is not kind. Camus commented in his notebook:

A newspaper falls into my hands. The Parisian comedy that I had forgotten. The joke of Goncourt. This time, *The Mandarins*. It appears that I am the hero. In fact, the author has taken a situation (the director of a newspaper originally from the Resistance) and all the rest is false: thoughts, feelings, and actions. Better: the questionable acts of Sartre's life are liberally heaped on my back. Garbage anyway. But not intentionally, just sort of as one breathes.²²

In 1955 Camus returned to journalism accepting a job at the newspaper *L'Express*. Just prior to starting on the paper he took a three week holiday to Greece. Here he takes notes for two short stories, *The Guest* and *Renegade*. He also put down ideas for *The First Man*. Camus' last novel to date was *The Plague*, published years before in 1947. Back in Paris he befriends a fellow writer at *L'Express*, Jean Daniel, and they often go out drinking together. One place they frequented was a brothel in which Camus had earned the nickname 'Albert the Pest'²³ (referencing his novel about the plague published in French as *La Peste*) From May 1955 to February 1956 Camus produced thirty-five articles for *L'Express*. In March Camus send a manuscript of *The Fall* to Vivienne Perret, wife of Jean Bloch-Michel who had worked with Camus on the paper. Originally, *The Fall* was intended to be one of the short stories destined for *Exile and The Kingdom* but Camus found it taking on a life of its own and

²² Albert Camus, *Notebooks (1951-1959)* Ivan R. Dee (2008) pp.130-1

²³ Todd, p.328

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deserving to stand alone in its own right as a novel. He hadn't yet come up with a title, possible candidates included: *A Hero of Our Time*, *The Last Judgment* and *The Good Apostle*. Camus considered several other possible titles before deciding to go with his friend Roger Martin du Gare's suggestion of *The Fall*. The novel was published by Gallimard in May with many considering it a powerful return to form for Camus. Sartre believed it to be his best work but refused publicly to say anything positive about the work.²⁴ By this time Francine seemed to be over the worst of her illness.

Throughout this period Camus was in turmoil over what would become the Algerian War. In 1954 there was an outbreak of terrorist attacks and in 1955 seventy Europeans and 50 Arabs were massacred at North Constantine. In retaliation almost 1300 were killed. Europeans were arming themselves before leaving their houses and Camus was desperately concerned for the safety of his family. In January of 1956, while still writing for L'Express, Camus called for a 'Civilian Truce' and visited Algeria in an attempt to gather support for his proposal. He arrive to death threats and a crowd of thousands shouting 'Death to Camus!' Feeling that he could do nothing useful and worried that attempts to interfere would endanger his family Camus decided to remain silent on Algeria. However, this was a public silence, he still wrote letters on behalf of those he considered to be victims of injustice in Algeria. When his friend Jean De Maisonseul was arrested Camus broke his vow and wrote an angry letter to *Le Monde* demanding the man's release.

In 1957 Camus sent Jean Grenier the manuscript for the collection of short stories *Exile and The Kingdom*. The book, when published, was given faint praise by the critics. *The Fall* had been unexpected and revived Camus' image somewhat but people were waiting for a great novel not a collection of short stories. The previous year he had adapted Faulkner's *Requiem for a Nun* for the French stage. It was very successful and ran for two years. In 1957, Camus threw himself into theatre work, planning a repertory theatre that would put on eight performances a week, five modern French plays, two foreign classics and a matinée performance of a French classic. That year he also published *Reflections on the Guillotine* an essay against capital punishment. Things were getting worse in Algeria and some criticized Camus for published on the death penalty whilst remaining silent on North Africa. The problem was that he was powerless to do anything. Frightened for the safety of his mother, who refused to leave Algiers, and impotent in his attempt to intervene politically in the troubles he felt forced into silence, humiliated and weak. Feeling extremely low, he shared his troubles with his new

²⁴ According to Olivier Todd in his introduction to the Penguin edition of *The Fall* (2000)

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mistress, the young actress Catherine Sellers, 'I've never known such a state as I find myself in.'²⁵ Things were about to get worse.

Camus discovered that he'd won the Nobel Prize whilst dining with girlfriend Patricia Blake. A messenger interrupted their meal with the 'good news'. Camus reacted by almost suffocating as he choked on his food. Camus believed André Malraux ought to have been awarded the prize. Friends later commented that Camus, rather than being pleased with the award, looked on the brink of tears and like a man being buried alive.²⁶ The problem for Camus was that, at forty-three, he should still have decades left to produce further works but the Nobel was traditionally understood as a prize given at the end of a person's career. Not only did Camus believe he was yet to write his masterpiece but he was convinced that he didn't have decades left to write it. In addition, having spent years getting over the onslaught after *The Rebel* he was well-aware that his critics and enemies were going to have a field day. There would be good press as well as the bad but there would also be interviews, journalists would expect him to speak on the situation in Algeria and on his plans for future books. The pressure to write the next 'Albert Camus novel' had now become the greater pressure of writing a novel worthy of a Nobel Prize winning author. The ceremony took place in Stockholm on December 10th and two days later Camus spoke to the students at Stockholm University. Tensions were running high over Algeria and a Muslim student asked why Camus was willing to discuss Eastern Europe but maintained silence on Algeria. What started off as a question turned into a tirade peppered with political slogans and insults directed at Camus. In his reply he made a comment that was classic Camus:

I have always denounced terrorism. I must also denounce a terrorism which is exercised blindly, in the streets of Algiers for example, and which one day could strike my mother or my family. I believe in justice, but I shall defend my mother above justice.²⁷

This was not a prepared statement but an off the cuff remark. Much was made at the time and still is today over what exactly Camus meant by holding his mother above justice. Back in Paris, Camus spent the last few days of 1957 suffering intense anxiety and panic attacks. Some extracts from his notebooks written over this period reveal the state he found himself in:

October 17th

²⁵ Todd, p.366

²⁶ Todd, p.372

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Nobel. Strange feeling of overwhelming pressure and melancholy. At 20 years old, poor and naked, I knew true glory. My mother.

October 19th

Frightened by what happens to me, what I have not asked for. And to make matters worse, attacks so low they pain my heart.

December 29th

3pm. Another panic attack. It was exactly four years ago, to the day, that X. became unbalanced (no, we are on the 29th, a day away then).²⁸ For a few minutes, a feeling of total madness. Then exhaustion and trembling. Sedative. I write this an hour later.

Night of the 29th to the 30th: interminable anguish.

December 30th

Continued improvement.

January 1st

Anxiety redoubled.

January-March

The major attacks have passed. Only a dull and constant anxiety now.

In 1953 Camus started work on an ambitious adaptation of Dostoevsky's *The Possessed*. By 1958 he had a completed version of the play that was three and half hours long with three acts, twenty-two scenes. Financing the project was difficult but the money was found and rehearsals began in November. Maria Casares was, for Francine's benefit, benefit not cast although Catherine Sellers was given a role. Francine knew that her husband and Catherine were lovers but pretended Albert and Catherine were no more than friends. Maria and Camus were still together and took a trip together, along with Janine and Michel Gallimard to Greece. A new girlfriend was also on the scene, a young Danish art student called Mi. In January of 1959 *The Possessed* opened to mixed reviews. In order to try and make money the decision was made to go on tour with the play and this plan was successful

²⁷ Lottman, p.648

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with over 600 performances.

Camus now had less than a year to live. The previous year had been hard on Camus, starting off with intense panic attacks. The Algerian situation had broken him. The publication of *Actuelles III*, a collection of writings on Algeria, was a disaster and a meeting with Algerian students left him in tears after one of them called him a coward. He sought refuge away from Paris and found one in the small village of Lourmarin, in the region of Provence. With some of his Nobel Prize money he bought a home in which he could escape from people to work alone in monastic style. Camus felt he needed solitude to write but he also found it difficult to be alone. Francine and the children would visit, as would Mi, who stayed in a nearby farmhouse. He would receive other visitors, including theatre director friend Robert Cérésol who noticed during his visit a bundled of papers labeled 'for Nemesis', the long essay Camus would never get to write. Camus told him that this essay would be for his return to Pre-Socratism.²⁹ We can only speculate what the final piece would have been like. The same is true of his novel *The First Man* on which Camus was working in the last few months of his life. There were other projects, theatre work, including his continued attempt to be given his own repertory theatre and an television appearance for a programme called 'Gros Plan' in which he discussed his work in the theatre.

Francine and the children arrived for Christmas. The Gallimards had spent their Christmas in Cannes, and suggested dropping by to visit Camus who had planned a brief return to Paris in the new year. Francine would take the children and Camus, who had already bought a ticket, was going to travel by train. However, Michel Gallimard persuaded his friend to drive back up in his car. Sunday January 3rd, Camus, Michel and Janine Gallimard, their teenage daughter and their dog got into the Michel's Facel Vega and drove north. The plan was to reach Paris in two days. The following day, after an overnight stop in the village of Thoissey, they drove until it was time for lunch. Back on the road and shortly before 2pm Michel lost control of the vehicle. Camus and Michel Gallimard were killed. The two women who were together in the back seat were thrown free of the car and not seriously injured. Among the wreckage Camus' briefcase was discovered, containing among other items, his notebook and a manuscript containing early pages of *The First Man*.

²⁸ Camus is referring to Francine's depression.

²⁹ Lottman, p.690