

## Albert Camus's *The Renegade, or A Confused Mind*: What Confusion? What Terrorism?

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June 21, 2015

<i>ACNPS</i>	<i>Albert Camus – Noble Prize Banquet Speech</i>
<i>BHR</i>	<i>Between Hell and Reason</i>
<i>C</i>	<i>Caligula</i>
<i>EK1957</i>	<i>Exile and the Kingdom (1957)</i>
<i>EK2007</i>	<i>Exile and the Kingdom (2007)</i>
<i>ER</i>	<i>L'exil et le royaume</i>
<i>FM</i>	<i>The First Man</i>
<i>LCE</i>	<i>Literary and Critical Essays</i>
<i>MS</i>	<i>The Myth of Sisyphus</i>
<i>NB1935-1942</i>	<i>Notebooks 1935-1942</i>
<i>NB1942-1951</i>	<i>Notebooks 1942-1951</i>
<i>NB1951-1959</i>	<i>Notebooks 1951-1959</i>
<i>NRF</i>	<i>La Nouvelle Revue Française</i>
<i>P</i>	<i>The Plague</i>
<i>O</i>	<i>The Outsider</i>
<i>R</i>	<i>The Rebel</i>
<i>RRD</i>	<i>Resistance, Rebellion, and Death</i>

### Confusion

Albert Camus's short story *The Renegade, or A Confused Mind* is highly significant for what it reveals of Camus's ideas about a person's place in the world. However, it is notoriously confusing. The confusion begins with the title. In an early note to himself Camus refers to a potential short story entitled "A confused mind" (NB1951-1959, 44). The resulting story was published in *La Nouvelle Revue Française* in 1956 as "L'esprit confus" (The Confused Mind) (NRF). When it appeared in 1957 as the second of six short stories published collectively as *L'exil et royaume* the emphasis of the title shifted from confusion to a renegade; in the table of contents the title is "Le renégat" (The Renegade) although the story is headed with the title "Le renégat ou un esprit confus" (The renegade or a confused mind) (ER). The story was published in an English translation by Justin O'Brien under the shorten title "*The Renegade*" in *Exile and*

*the Kingdom* in 1957 by Vintage Press (EK1957). Finally, in 2007, Vintage Press brought out a fiftieth anniversary edition of *Exile and the Kingdom* translated by Carol Cosman (EK2007). Cosman translated the title as “*The Renegade, or A Confused Mind.*” Throughout the story’s conception and publication emphasis in the title shifted between the protagonist as a renegade or a confused mind.

There are other confusing aspects to the story. There is an otherworldliness and timelessness in the description of people, places, and events that allow a reader to make conjectures only. The protagonist—the renegade—is not named. The name of his village in the high plateau of the Central Massif of south-central France is not given. Most of the story’s action takes place in a remote desert city called Taghaza, a major center of salt mining and trade from the thirteenth century to the sixteenth century, then abandoned. But the presence of soldiers with rifles in the story places the action some time during French colonial rule which did not begin until the first half of the nineteenth century when Taghaza was no longer inhabited. In addition to the confusion of time and place the disjointed interior monologue of the protagonist is confusing beginning with the story’s opening words, “What a muddle, what a muddle” (EK2007, p. 27), to the incomprehensible “*gha, gha*” uttered towards the conclusion.

Such all-encompassing confusion is a challenge to ascertaining what Camus intends to convey with this story in addition to ascertaining which translation to read. As seen earlier, beginning with his earliest notes Camus always conceived the protagonist’s confused mind as a major theme of the story. Thus, while the protagonist is a renegade, my focus in this essay is on his confusion, to me a greater manifestation of his nature than being a renegade. It is due to the import I give to confusion that I base this essay on Cosman’s translation. Her inclusion of “or a confused mind’ in the title is a significant marker of a major theme of this essay: A person’s need

for a sense of unity and order-- a form to life-- when confronted by an unfathomable world and how that need can lead to a confused mind. Such confusion, when encased in nihilistic hatred, a passion that triumphs over reason when wedded to the abstract doctrine of totalizing belief systems, results in destructive consequences for the renegade and for others. We discover the renegade's search flounders over his inability to master his emotions. The clash of passion over reason and of adherence to abstract doctrine over life experience leads tragically to nihilistic terrorism over human solidarity.

Camus drew up in a notebook in 1952 a list of potential stories to be published under the title "Short Stories of Exile." His notes show that nihilistic hatred was from the beginning of Camus thoughts on the story a key element: "A confused mind—the progressive missionary goes to civilize the barbarians who cut off his tongue and ears and reduce him to slavery. He waits for the next missionary and, with hatred, kills him" (NB1951-1959, 44). This nihilistic hate that envelops the renegade's search for form is foreshadowed as early as the protagonist Meursault in Camus first novel *The Outsider* (O). In the preface to the American edition, published as *The Stranger*, Camus asserts: "For me...Meursault is not a piece of social wreckage, but a poor and naked man enamored of a sun that leaves no shadows. Far from being bereft of all feeling, he is animated by a passion that is deep because it is stubborn, a passion for the absolute and for truth" (LCE, 336). The nihilism the renegade shares with Meursault is revealed in the famous concluding thought of *The Outsider*: "So that it might be finished, so that I might feel less alone, I could only hope there would be many, many spectators on the day of my execution and that they would greet me with cries of hatred" (O, 129). From Camus's first novel, *The Outsider*, to his last, *The Fall*, the protagonist is a "good modern nihilist" (LCE, 364). The protagonist of *The Renegade, or a Confused Mind* is, as well, "a good modern nihilist."

### **A form to life: unity and order**

Camus conceived of his work as beginning at a “zero point” (NB1942-1951, 20). As he explained: “I was looking for a method and not a doctrine. I was practicing methodical doubt. I was trying to make a *tabula rasa*,’ on the basis of which it would then be possible to construct something” (LCE, 356). At zero point a “man stands face to face with the irrational,” a point Camus characterized as “the absurd” (MS 28). The absurd is neither the person nor the world but the confrontation of the two “straining against each other without being able to embrace each other” (MS 40). Confronted with a silent world displaying no meaning a person could succumb to despair. As Camus famously posed the issue: “There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide” (MS, 3). However, since the beginning of humanity people “cling to the world and by far the majority do not want to abandon it” (R, 260). This “fight against death amounts to claiming life has a meaning, to fighting for order and unity” (R, 101). As Camus asserts: “It is not sufficient to live, there must be a destiny that does not have to wait for death. It is therefore justifiable to say that man has an idea of a better world than this. But better does not mean different, it means unified” (R, 262). The renegade’s story is one of a search for unity.

It is, then, a human trait to seek the clarity of a cohesive form of unity and order to life: “That nostalgia for unity, that appetite for the absolute illustrates the essential impulse of the human drama” (MS, 17). The inability to ascertain a unified form fosters uncertainty about a person’s place in the world. Because of this ambiguity “There is not one human being who, above a certain elementary level of consciousness, does not exhaust himself in trying to find formulas or attitudes that will give his existence the unity it lacks” (R, 262). People “demand order in the midst of chaos, and unity in the very heart of the ephemeral” (MS, 10). In the search

for unity and order “Man...tries in vain to find the form that will impose certain limits between which he can be king. If only one single living thing had definite form, he would be reconciled” (R, 262). It can seem to a person they are alone in their need for a form of unity to their life. There is a “Nostalgia for the life of others. This is because, seen from the outside, another’s life forms a unity. Whereas ours, seen from the inside, seems broken up. We are still chasing after an illusion of unity” (NB, 1942-1951, 27).

The challenge is that for most people “Living, naturally, is never easy,” indeed, “You continue making the gestures commanded by existence for many reasons, the first of which is habit” (MS 5). Because habit of thought and behaviour give form to a person’s life “We get into the habit of living before acquiring the habit of thinking” (MS, 8) but “At any streetcorner the feeling of absurdity can strike any man in the face” (MS, 10-11). At this moment “Weariness comes at the end of the acts of mechanical life, but at the same time it inaugurates the impulse of consciousness” (MS, 13). A moment of lucid awareness is achieved: “The return to consciousness, the escape from everyday sleep represent the first steps of an absurd freedom” (MS, 59). It is at this point a person must consciously assume responsibility for creating their values from their personal experience in the world in the here and now. Faced with this challenge, many turn to spiritual and secular belief systems humans have created throughout history to address the fundamental confrontation between a person and a world that displays no explicit meaning of their place in it. Belief systems prescribe a person’s place in the world, values to direct their lives, and a promise of some indefinite future of universal unity in the world or beyond it. In doing so, belief systems can attract people susceptible to forms of nihilism.

### **Nihilism and belief systems**

Nihilism assumed a virulent dynamic in the nineteenth century as vividly analyzed by the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1990). Experiencing the ideological confrontations and horror of World War II, witnessing the emerging Cold War, drawing on Nietzsche's analysis, and being against any movement embracing absolutist values, Camus was among the earliest to analyze nihilism's roots, characteristics, and consequences in the twentieth century. Although Camus valued Nietzsche's analysis of nineteenth century nihilism he asserted Nietzsche, Hegel and Marx, were "evil geniuses" for their negative impact on twentieth century Europe (LCE, 354). Throughout his life, through essays, fiction, and drama, Camus "sought only reasons to transcend our darkest nihilism" (LCE, 160). In the preface to the 1955 American edition of *The Myth of Sisyphus*, published in French in 1942, Camus wrote: "This book declares that even within the limits of nihilism it is possible to find the means to proceed beyond nihilism. In all the books I have written since, I have attempted to pursue this direction" (MS, v). Camus analysis of twentieth century nihilism identifies tendencies belief systems can display when infused by nihilism. Understanding these tendencies assists in constructing a coherent narrative of the renegade's experience and, therefore, a better understanding of his confusion.

Belief systems can have tendencies attractive to nihilism such as "an intemperate recourse to absolutes" (R, 102) which, when developed to their fullest, aim to completely infuse a person's consciousness with an all-encompassing world view that directs the totality of their thinking and behaviour. Indeed, while there is no one philosophy or movement of nihilism Camus argues its variations "have all tried to construct a purely terrestrial kingdom where their chosen principles will hold sway" (R, 100). A person seeking a unifying form to their life in a belief system believes they are in accord with the unfolding of history rather than being its

victim. This state of mind gives them a sense of power over their lives while the system actually fosters passivity by reinforcing the acceptance of the system's prescribed habits of belief and behaviour. Systems claim a person has the freedom to make choices but in practice only as long as the choices conform to the dictates of the system, that is, "a 'total' collective freedom and not a personal one" (NB1942-1951, p. 180). Such a totalizing belief system can evolve to a form of totalitarianism: "The kingdom of heaven will... appear on earth, but it will be ruled over by men—a mere handful to begin with, who will be Caesars, because they were the first to understand—and later, with time, by all men. The unity of all creation will be achieved by every possible means, since everything is permitted" (R, 60).

### **A search for a form to life**

As confusing as the renegade's story appears it is possible to construct a cohesive narrative of his journey into confusion and its brutal consequences with the profile of nihilistic and belief system tendencies identified above. The opening sentences to the story serve as a prelude in revealing the renegade's confusion, the consequences of his encounter with a totalizing belief system, and the lack of unified form to his life:

"What a muddle, what a muddle! I must put my head in order. Since they cut out my tongue, another tongue, I don't know, goes on wagging inside my skull, something is talking, or someone, who suddenly shuts up and then begins all over again—oh I hear too many things I'm not saying, what a muddle, and if I open my mouth it's like the noise of rattling pebbles. Some order, any order, says the tongue, and it talks of other thing at the same time, yes I always yearned for order (EK2007, 27).

How did he reach such a confused state? The journey begins growing up in the harsh conditions of a village in the rugged Central Massif plateau of France: a coarse "pig of a father," a crude mother, daily lard soup, long winters, and bad tasting water, a life where, "because of the

alcohol, they drank sour wine and their children have rotten teeth” (EK2007, 28). It was as claustrophobic and suffocating as Camus experienced it when living there for a period in 1943 under the oppressive atmosphere of the German occupation.

The renegade is an intelligent child but stubborn; a “blockhead” according to his father (EK2007, 28). His harsh early life breeds an intense hatred of his father and of other authority figures (EK28-29). Although his father does die from the acid wine that “finally ate holes in his stomach” (EK2007, 28), the renegade still believes “I have a score to settle with him and his masters, with my masters who deceived me, with filthy Europe, they all deceived me” (EK2077, 29). His life breeds in the renegade a nihilism that “is not only despair and negation, but above all the desire to despair and to negate” (R, 57-58). He embarks on a trajectory of despair and negation to the end. His life lacking a sense of form, he wants “to go away, to leave them all behind and finally begin to live in the sun, with clear water” (EK2007, 28).

Yearning to create a new life he encounters in his predominant Protestant village a Catholic priest who, like a furtive spy from away, “hugged the walls as he passed through the village” (EK2007, 28). The priest advances a belief system that promises to provide a cohesive, orderly form to the world and a secure place in it. The priest talks to him about a future in a seminary, tutors him in reading and Latin every day, and describes a Catholicism that is the sun; indeed, for the renegade “Catholicism is the sun” (EK2007, 28). A new member from the village “was a victory” in the Church’s continuing effort to combat the competing Protestant belief system (EK2007 28). The renegade leaves the village for a seminary in Grenoble, but he takes with him the anger it bred.

### **Embracing a belief system**

The renegade fervently embraces the belief system of the seminary. He praises the Lord who never kills, turns the other cheek, and issues gentle commands. The renegade craves to prove himself to this “greatest of lords” to such an extent he pleads: “offend me and you’ll have the proof” (EK2007, 28). But his fervor does not derive from love but bitterness; he ruminates angrily on when he and other seminary students “walked in tight black rows in the summer under the Grenoble sun and passed girls in light dresses, I did not look away, not me, I despised them, I waited for them to offend me and sometimes they would laugh” (EK2007, 29). He thinks: “Let them strike me and spit in my face” (EK2007 29). For him “the offence and suffering were sweet!” (EK2007, 29). He sets a goal for himself: “I sought out penances, I minimized the ordinary, in short I wanted to be an example ...so they would pay homage to what had made me bitter, praise my Lord through me” (EK2007, 29).

At the seminary a retired priest tells him about the savage cruelty of the inhabitants of Taghaza, a remote desert city built of slabs of salt, closed to outsiders. According to the priest only one man succeeded in entering the city and lived to tell it. The people whipped him, put salt in his wounds and stuffed it in his mouth, and drove him into the desert. He was saved by nomads. The renegade becomes obsessed by this story. He angrily rejects the usual path of priests; “Converting decent people who are simply a bit lost, that was our priests’ ideal, I despised them for daring so little with so much power” (EK2007, 31). He is convinced it is his mission to go to Taghaza “and reveal to them my Lord” (EK2007, 30). At the seminary they try to discourage this mission but, being stubborn, he pledges “to join the most barbarous people and live their life, to show them on their own ground, and even in the house of the fetish, through my example, that the truth of my Lord was strongest” (EK2007, 31).

He knows the people of Taghaza will offend him but their offenses will be a demonstration of his endurance: He will “subjugate those savages, like a powerful sun. *Powerful*, yes, that was the word I kept rolling around on my tongue, I dreamed of absolute power” (EK2007, 31, emphasis in the original). Achieving power to construct a form to his life means for him achieving power over others. He will force them to kneel on the ground, to capitulate; the stronger their original, cruel convictions, the greater would be their surrender and conversion. He will exercise the full power of the system to achieve the unity he craves, “to reign at last with a single world over an army of the wicked” (EK2007, 31). Rejecting the warnings of the seminary he steals money from the bursar’s office and flees, moving from the world of the whites to an alternative world of the blacks. He traverses mountains with “all black peaks and ridges sharp as a blade” (EK2007, 32). He hires a guide to take him “out on the endless sea of brown stones, shrieking with heat, burning with a thousand mirror bristling with fire, to that place on the border between the land of the blacks and the country of the whites, where the city of salt stands” (EK2007, 32). The daytime white heat on the salt clashes with the cold blackness of the night, creating “black Eskimos suddenly shivering in their cubical igloos” (EK2007, 33).

### **Taghaza**

Arriving in Taghaza guards lead the renegade to the city’s square. There the belief system of the gentle Lord is immediately confronted by the brutal onslaught of the powerful Taghaza system which displays its own characteristics of absoluteness of belief, of unity and order enunciated through its rituals, the demand for obedience, the elitism, the hatred for outsiders, and the assurance to its adherents they are the drivers of history. In their salt houses the people of Taghaza “sleep in weightless sleep, and upon waking they order, they strike, they

say that they are a single people, that their god is the true god, and must be obeyed” (EK2007, 34). Kneeling in the square “under the blows of the iron sun,” surrounded by a silent crowd, the renegade, “pale with exhaustion,” breaks down and weeps (EK2007, 35). The crowd turns its back on him and walks away. At this juncture the renegade’s nihilism prevails as he turns away from the seminary system; “The unity of the world, which was not achieved with God, will henceforth be attempted in defiance of God” (R, 61). In defiance he feels he must “settle accounts with love” (EK2007, 32).

Thus begins the ritual submission to the all-encompassing Taghaza belief system. The renegade is dragged into the house of the fetish where he is left for days, given each day only a bowlful of brackish water and grain thrown like chicken feed on the sandy floor. His will weakened, he is forced into submission when brought to his knees by the tearing of his lower lip. The submission becomes more intense when he encounters the sorcerer, an intimidating representative of the belief system. He “suddenly appears with his raffia hair, his torso covered with a breastplate of pearls, his legs bare under a straw skirt, wearing a mask of reeds and wire in which two square openings had been worked for the eyes” (EK2007, 36). The sorcerer opens a small door revealing the fetish, an object with a “double hatchet-face, his iron nose twisted like a snake” (EK2007, 37). The renegade is dragged to the foot of the fetish, made to drink bitter, black water that made his head burn; “I was laughing, that was the offense, I was offended” (EK2007, 37). At last he achieves the offense he sought since his time at the seminary, the offence and penances he finds so sweet. He accepts “These are my lords, they know no pity and like lords they want to be alone, since they alone had the audacity to build a cold torrid city out of salt and sand” (EK2007, 34).

They proceed with the rituals, shaving his head and body, bathing him in oil, and beating his face with ropes soaked in water and salt. The renegade “knows I was now sworn to serve him [the fetish], to worship him” (EK2007, 37). His ankles are tied as he is forced to watch a continuation of the ritual which consists of music, dancing, beatings, and brutal copulation between the sorcerer and a young woman in front of the fetish. The young woman cries out and the renegade “cried out to the fetish too, yes, screamed horror-stricken” until a kick throws him against the wall. He remains a prisoner in the fetish’s house with housekeeping and ceremonial duties. His submission is complete: “Never had a god so possessed me or enslaved me, my whole life day and night was devoted to him, and pain and the absence of pain—wasn’t that joy?—were owing to him” (EK2007, 39). He has found a form to his life. Daily he is forced to face the wall and hear the screams of the beatings and ritual copulation in front of the fetish. Then one day he is given a test when the sorcerer, without his mask, brings a young woman to the house and leaves her alone with the renegade. She offers herself to him but when he approaches the sorcerer with other men rush in, pull him from the woman and cut out his tongue. He passes out on the floor. When he regains consciousness that night he is alone, covered in blood, his mouth stuffed with strange grasses, and “lived only a tormenting pain” (EK2007, 41).

His brutal experience completes the rejection of his previous beliefs. His hatred, beyond reason, is in accord with the brutality of the Taghaza system. He asserts: “The Lord of gentleness, whose name revolts me, I deny him” (EK2007, 42). Renegading on his commitment to the seminary belief system he confirms his allegiance to the Taghaza system: “I hated my people, the fetish was there, and in the depths of the hole in which I found myself, I did more than pray. I believed in him and denied all that I had believed until then” (EK2007, 41). He rejects the lord of love, embraces the lord of hate, a true nihilists god. He pledges: “I freely

became its hating and tortured citizen” (EK2007, 42). The renegade pledges himself completely to the fetish that represents the unity and order he seeks: “Hail, he was the master, the only lord, whose indisputable attribute was malice, there are no good masters. For the first time, rife with offenses, my whole body crying out with a single pain, I surrendered to him and condoned his malignant order, I worshipped in him the principle of wickedness in the world” (EK2007, 41-41-42). He adopts his brutal mutilation as a means of transforming his destructive hatred of his earlier life into a creative act: “I kissed their hands when I met them, I was theirs, admiring them tirelessly, I trusted them, I hoped they would mutilate my people as they had mutilated me” (EK2007, 43).

The renegade becomes an obedient adherent of Taghaza, the city of unity and order; its controlling discipline and rituals, its demanding servitude, its suspicion of and isolation from outsiders, its denial of free of expression through the cutting out of the tongue, its all-encompassing world view, and its absolutism that “does not admit nuance” (EK2007, 42). He rejects the unfulfilled, endless searching of the gentle Lord’s system, “its limit never reached, it reign impossible” (EK2007, 42). He is convinced only a nihilistic “evil can go to the limit and reign absolutely” (EK2009, 42). He believes that with this “true faith, I will no longer be alone” (EK2007, 46). Just as totalizing belief systems offer a person an escape from history, the renegade renounces the “long history they had taught him” in the seminary (EK2007, 42). It is “down with Europe, reason and honor and the cross” (EK2007, 42). For him, Taghaza becomes “the city of order, finally, right angles, square rooms, stiff men” (EK2007, 42).

But this system, like that of the seminary, will fail him, driving him to a new level of nihilism: terrorism. Terrorism is the use of violence to intimidate a group of people to achieve

specific ends. The renegade turns to terrorism to foment conflict between Taghaza and the European culture he abhors.

### **The terrorist**

From inside the fetish house the renegade overhears talk outside about an agreement reached between a contingent of twenty French soldiers and Taghaza. The soldiers will be allowed to camp outside the city as long as they respect its customs. A missionary, expected to arrive within two days, will be allowed to care for the children of the city. The renegade sees the agreement between the city and colonial officialdom as a betrayal of Taghaza: “I was sick, a wheel of knives and needles was churning inside me” (EK2007, 44). For him the people of Taghaza “were crazy, they were allowing someone to lay hands on the city, their invincible power, the true god” (EK2007, 44). In his mind this agreement, “instead of hastening the coming of the only possible kingdom” (EK2007, 44), will delay the conquest of the world by the Taghaza system. His hate takes him to the ultimate logical act of the nihilist, murderous terrorism. He must kill the missionary before he gets to Taghaza.

That night he escapes from the hut, retrieves an old rifle, and sneaks into the desert where he hides among rocks on the trail to Taghaza, anxious to shoot the missionary before the Taghaza guards arrive. As the missionary and his guide draw closer the renegade “fires twice, and there they go toppling over” (EK2007, 45). The missionary “raises his head a little, sees me, his hobbled all-powerful master, why is he smiling at me, I am crushing that smile!” (EK, 2007, 45). The renegade strikes the missionary in the face with his rifle butt, an action he believes will lead to the apocalyptic end promised by totalizing belief systems: “today, today, at last, all is consummated and everywhere in the desert, even hours away, the jackals sniff the absent wind,

then start on their way at a patient little trot toward the carrion feast that awaits them. Victory!” (EK2007, 46).

The Taghaza guards arrive and strike him. Overjoyed by their anger, the attack induces a vision of total, devastating war between Taghaza and the world. Taghaza will establish a universal form of unity and order: “Oh my masters, they will conquer the soldiers then, they will conquer the word and love, they will rise up from the deserts, cross the seas, fill the light of Europe with their black veils, strike the belly, yes, strike the eyes, sow their salt on the continent, all vegetation, all youth will be extinguished, and mute hordes with hobbled feet will make their way beside me in the desert of the world under the cruel sound of the true faith” (EK2007, 46). But he becomes confused; why, he asks, “must I weep at the moment of triumph?” (EK2007, 46). A tongue within his mind speaks to him: “If you consent to die for hatred and power, who will forgive?” (EK2007, 47).

Who will impose the penance he finds so sweet? He is having doubts about the course he has taken; “Ah! What if I were mistaken again!” (EK2007, 47). He exclaims to himself: “Leave behind that face of hatred. Be good now, we were mistaken, we shall begin again, we will rebuild the city of God’s mercy, I want to go home” (EK2007, 47). His body burning from the intense sun, he pleads for help from a hand he sees reaching out to him; “Yes, help me, that’s it, hold out your hand, give...” but “A fistful of salt fills the mouth of the babbling slave” (EK2007, 47). An abrupt ending, compounding the confusion of an already confusing story.

### **Passion and reason, abstract doctrine and life experience.**

In his search for unity in his life the renegade embraces belief systems that fail to fulfill that need; he ends up a terrorist and slave. Two phenomenon account for his failure and

confusion: passion's dominance over reason and abstract doctrine's dominance over life experience.

Camus recognized the importance of passion in life. He wrote: "We insist that the part of man which cannot be reduced to mere ideas should be taken into consideration—the passionate side of his nature that serves no other purpose than to be part of the act of living" (R, 19). A character in *The Plague* asserts: "I know now that man is capable of great deeds. But if he isn't capable of a great emotion, well, he leaves me cold" (P, 162). For Camus it may be "An extreme virtue that consists in killing one's passions," but it is "A deeper virtue that consists in balancing them" (NB1942-1951, 187). Balancing passion and reason is essential to achieving a functioning level of lucidity, of seeing things clearly. Passion is the intensity awareness accords to experience, out of which arise a person's aspirations in the world. But passion must be balanced by reason. It is only through experience in the here and now, subject to lucid reflection, that a person creates a cohesive narrative of life: "It takes time to live. Like any work of art, life needs to be thought about" (HD, 74). While passion strives for the greatest experience of life, it is understood "living also implies thinking about life—that living is, in fact, precisely this subtle relationship between a man's experience and his awareness of it" (NB1935-1942, 104). As Camus warns, while there "are facts the heart can feel, yet they call for careful study before they become clear to the intellect" (MS, 3). In moderating passion in the service of reason, Camus himself serves as a model in contrast to the renegade. Both grew up in harsh poverty but, unlike the renegade, Camus broke free from the angry emotion he felt towards his impoverished conditions and family. Indeed, Camus rejected having to choose between love and hate. Immediately after the end of World War II he wrote in an editorial in the resistance newspaper *Combat*: "We are asked to love or hate such and such a country and such and such a people. But

we are among those who feel too strongly our common bonds with all men to make such a choice” (BHR, 138).

Camus was committed all his life to the importance of love as a form of solidarity with others. A person’s confrontation with a silent world is not only a personal but a collective experience, “Therefore, the first progressive step for a mind overwhelmed by the strangeness of things is to realize that this feeling of strangeness is shared with all men and that the human reality, in its entirety, suffers from the distance which separates it from the rest of the universe” (R, 22). In his mid-twenties he entered into his notebook: “The misery and greatness of this world: it offers no truths, but only objects for love. Absurdity is king, but loves saves us from it” (NB1935-1942, 93). He declared at the time: “I recognize only one duty, and that is to love” (NB1935-1942, 54). Twenty years later, at the time he was thinking about a story of a confused mind, he wrote “there is merely bad luck in not being loved; there is misfortune in not loving. All of us, today, are dying of this misfortune. For violence and hatred dry up the heart itself” (MS, 201). Believing in the necessity of the solidarity of love over nihilistic hate Camus asserted: “All of us, among the ruins, are preparing a renaissance beyond the limits of nihilism. But few of us know it” (R, 305). Through the story of the renegade Camus reveals the limit of nihilism thereby helping us to know it.

The description of poverty the renegade experiences reflects Camus’s own youth in a poor Algerian working class family. Camus escaped his world of poverty through the intervention in his life of a teacher who recognized and encouraged his abilities. Camus went on to a successful creative life. Despite the poverty, anger, and shame, he was able to appreciate what he also gained from his experience through the lucid analyses of his experience and transforming it into art. Writing about himself as an artist he concluded: “As for myself, I know

that my source is...in the world of poverty and sunlight I lived in for so long, whose memory still saves me from two opposing dangers that threaten every artist, resentment and self-satisfaction” (LCE, 6). He recognized that “I have had my share of difficult experiences. However, I did not begin my life with a feeling of anguish” (LCE, 350). Consequently he rejected nihilism ; there is “no total nihilism. The moment you say everything is nonsense you express something meaningful. Refusing the world all meaning amounts to abolishing all value judgements. You choose to remain alive the moment you do not allow yourself to die of hunger, and consequently you recognize that life has at least a relative value” (LCE, 159-160). Camus declared: “I continue to believe that this world has no ultimate meaning. But I know that something in it has a meaning and that is man, and our task is to provide its justification against fate itself. And it has no justification but man; hence he must be saved if we want to save the idea we have of life” (RRD, 28).

Camus pursued a mode of rational analysis of his life experience and the moral choices it generated, a methodology that recognizes “Properly speaking, nothing has been experienced but what has been lived and made conscious” (MS, 15). When he reached maturity he rejected the absolutist, abstract belief systems of Christianity and of Communism after a brief membership in the party. He never again aligned himself with any further belief system. For him abstract philosophizing must yield “to a more modest attitude of mind deriving at one and the same time from common sense and understanding” (MS, 4). A person, through the application of lucid reasoning, sees the world as it is when constructing a form to their life. Rejecting the abstract absolutes characteristic of belief systems Camus declared: “I do not want to found anything on the incomprehensible. I want to know whether I can live with what I know and with that alone” (MS, 40). For him “It is in this process of bending and adjusting thought, in this conscious

elimination of error, that truth—that is to say, what life can teach us—is to be found” (NB1935-1942, 139). In doing so it is critical “that, faced with the humblest or the most heart-rending experience” a person “should always be ‘present’...and endure this experience without flinching, with complete lucidity” (NB1935-1942, 143). Reliance on “what life can teach us” through the application of a lucid consciousness is the key element of Camus’s experiential approach to life. Changes in ideas due to a person’s response to life experiences frustrate the dogmatic minded attracted to abstract belief systems, one being the renegade.

### **The renegade’s confusion**

In contrast to Camus achieving a balance of passion and reason, the renegade continually experiences passionate eruptions of hate encompassing life in the village, his parents, European culture, the young girls of Grenoble, the seminary and its teachings, the Taghaza pact with the soldiers, the missionary. He abandons the Lord of love of one belief system for the lord of hate of another. He is overcome with “a rage, *gha gha*, drunk with heat and anger” (EK2007, 40). Writing about nihilism, Camus observed “To those who despair of everything, not reason but only passion can provide a faith, and in this particular case it must be the same passion that lay at the root of the despair—namely, humiliation and hatred” (R, 178-179). Despairing of everything, the renegade is driven by a passion of humiliation and hatred warping any clear minded approach to life’s experiences. He is incapable of gaining through lucid analysis any insight into himself and the circumstances he attempts to escape. He does not comprehend the reasons for his predicament; any thought he gives to it only fuels his hatred thereby prohibiting any balance of passion and reason. Consequently, transferring his allegiance from the god of love to the god of hate takes his nihilism to a new level: terrorism. In Camus’s play *The Just Assassins* the nihilistic terrorist Stepan exclaims “I’m different, I, and I hate, yes I *hate* my

fellow men” (C, 274, emphasis in the original). Looking back on his years of revolutionary struggle he laments: “How could I have the energy to love? But, anyhow, I still have the energy to hate, and that’s better than feeling nothing at all” (C, 274). Like Stepan, the renegade’s hate impels him ultimately to murder.

Totalizing, abstract belief systems prophesize a unified vision of the future outside history at some ever-receding point in time but they fail on one account: “Prophecy functions on a very long-term basis and has as one of its properties a characteristic that is the very source of strength of all religions: the impossibility of proof” (R, 189). Those who adhere to such systems, such as the renegade, “have turned their backs upon the fixed and radiant point of the present” (R, 305). For those who can balance passion and reason a moment of lucidity opens the way for a person to see that “The mind’s first step is to distinguish what is true from what is false” (MS, 16). A person’s actions shift from being driven by abstract dogma and the passions of history to being driven by their personal aspirations and experience in the world. The renegade found in his search for a form to life outside history that “The end of history is not an exemplary or a perfectionist value; it is an arbitrary and terroristic principle” (R, 224). A person cannot escape entirely the constraints of the unfolding history in which they live but by achieving a lucid consciousness a person can rebel from letting a system totally define who they are and their actions; they acquire the freedom of mind and creativity with which to confront the challenges of life experiences. This is a point of liberation; an embracing of freedom to embark on a life of action. Driven by hatred, the renegade was never able to assess his experience with complete lucidity. The renegade rebels but it is a rebellion driven by hatred, not a lucid consciousness.

## **Conclusion**

Having failed to create a unifying form to his life the renegade's last wish was to go home but he cannot; "His exile is without remedy since he is deprived of the memory of a lost home or the hope of the promised land" (MS, 6). There is no home, no promised land for him; he remains a slave in exile. He never learned that "One cannot destroy everything without destroying oneself" (C, vi). His adherence to belief systems did not diminish his hatred and confusion but fueled them, conjuring up visions of vindictive revenge. His life is never a forward progression of a lucid consciousness encountering the world; he immerses himself in totalizing belief systems that deny him the power and lucidity to achieve such an end. His life is a cycle of confusion propelled by hatred. Unlike Camus, who learned to look back with love to his harsh youth and transform it into a life of creativity, the renegade ends up a "babbling slave" of his confused nihilistic passion.

Meanwhile, the twentieth century nihilistic confusion so vividly represented in *The Renegade, or a Confused Mind* continues to be manifested in the twenty-first century in the clash of belief systems around the world. The struggles between passion and reason, between abstract doctrine and life experience and the resulting confusion continue, making Camus's insights as relevant today as they were over half-century ago.

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