

## ALBERT CAMUS SOCIETY CONFERENCE 2020 ABSTRACTS

### **Eric Berg: Four Character Studies from *The Plague* and Their American Counterparts During COVID-19**

**Abstract:** In this paper I will take a close look at four characters in Camus' *The Plague* and situate them in the current (2020) American landscape while suffering under COVID-19. I will illuminate Father Panloux in relation to American Christian response to COVID, particularly the Baptist Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America; Dr. Rieux and the American medical community paying special attention to the CDC; Cottard as the American radical right; and Rambert and the American press with attention given to the idea of "fake news" and social media. As a bonus, I will identify Dr. Castel and, although difficult, locate the American President Donald Trump in the text.

### **Aoife Connolly: Becoming the First French Algerian Man: Developing Settler Identity in Albert Camus's *Le Premier Homme***

**Abstract:** In France, continued controversies surrounding Albert Camus point to the unresolved legacies of the country's colonial past in addition to some of the identity challenges of its former settlers in Algeria, a million of whom fled to France as independence approached. Against the backdrop of postcolonial critiques or analyses seeking to rehabilitate the author, this paper examines Camus's semi-autobiographical novel *Le Premier Homme* as means for the author to work through his own contested identity in a personal story that also seeks to represent the settlers more generally.

This paper argues that Camus develops a concept of idealized masculinity using fiction. Moreover, his depiction of men goes beyond stereotypical Mediterranean machismo in order to foreground a unique settler identity which is marked by a strong association with the mother and the motherland. The paper argues that through the fictionalized character of Jacques, Camus addresses personal concerns surrounding identity and begins to contemplate the end of a feminized colonial Algeria.

### **Bhagyalaxmi Das: The Humanism of Shakespeare and Albert Camus**

**Abstract:** Humanism is a philosophy that rejects supernaturalism and stresses on individual's dignity and worth and capacity for self-realization through reason and not religion or blind beliefs. It affirms our ability and responsibility to lead meaningful, ethical lives capable of adding to the greater good of humanity. The beginning of the Renaissance marked the birth of Humanism, with the development of an important split between reason and religion. With Renaissance developed an era of self-consciousness, self-discovery, awareness about one's own existence, seeking the meaning and purpose of life and to question the purpose of one's identity. This identity crisis gave birth to an 'existential crisis' in humans. Shakespeare, the quintessential Renaissance man expressed this existential crisis through his plays and characters that elaborately portray the general passions and principles of human nature. He laid a direct offensive on existential values such as one's own identity, dignity, freedom, revolt and moral responsibility. Later, humanism acquired a new definition following the two world wars in late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. French philosopher, Albert Camus's era became a landmark in modern humanism. His vision stressed that by working together we can create new values. 'A new

humanism,' was the gift that Camus gave to future generations. Camus's Absurdism is Humanism because it is a theory of 'Man for Man'. Whatever goodness is prevalent in life is in humans and this goodness is created out of human struggle to conserve and broaden the area of goodness which humans alone know and can ensure. In a world that is slowly losing all its humanity, Camus's call to revolt is the call to humanize the inhuman. Today, as we try hard to distinguish between what is 'human' and 'nonhuman', we come to see some very relevant forecasts or premonitions in Shakespeare's and Camus's works. In condemning the degradation of the moral conscience of our times, we can hear both the writers making an appeal for humanism that is committed to the cultivation of moral excellence among us.

This paper conceptualises and presents humanism as transcended from Shakespeare to Camus and how the two literary giants have been protective about saving the significance of the term before it faces extinction.

### **Meaghan Emery: *La Chute* (1956) and *Justice: A Portrait of the Outsider Intellectual***

**Abstract:** In Albert Camus's 1956 novel, *La Chute*, Jean-Baptiste Clamence's confession becomes an impossible search for understanding impeded by his need for absolute control. An attorney from Paris, retired after a brilliant career, Clamence has settled in Amsterdam, far from the scene of a past memory that continues to haunt him. Witness to a drowning in Paris, he did not act to save a young woman fallen into the Seine River -- a scene that recalls Camus's wife's suicide attempt. Throughout his first-person narrative, Clamence demonstrates a lack of scruples. He would rather compromise his principles rather than put his reputation at risk; however, he cannot escape his guilt. Critics interpret Clamence's portrait at least in part as Camus's take on Sartre's group. Yet, when compared with similar passages from his unfinished manuscript, published in 1994 as *Le Premier Homme*, one can also read an indictment of the author's ambition, an ambition that cost Camus relationships. In an entry from November 1, 1954, a few short years following his falling out with Sartre, his notebooks reflect on the artist's fall from "la gloire" as a novel subject matter. This paper will analyze the elements of Clamence's character with an eye to what Camus was at the time reproaching in himself. Indeed, *La Chute* might be seen as his most revealing novel. In that manner that is evocative of today's "cancel culture," Clamence expresses the inescapable "malheur," a state of impotence, that comes from lack of understanding. Clamence understands, however, just as Camus did, that human justice is "ce qu'il y a de pire."

### **Peter Francev: Albert Camus, Edith Stein, and the Problem of Empathy in *The Plague***

**Abstract:** Whilst there is no mention of the phenomenology or ethics of Edith Stein (1891-1942) in the fiction and non-fiction of Albert Camus (1913-1960), one can easily surmise that Camus, being a part of the Parisian café scene during the years leading up to, including and beyond the second world war, would have encountered some discussions of Stein's thought through Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) or Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961), prior to his falling out with both men. It is then the purpose of this paper to set out and accomplish several things: firstly, I would like to provide a very brief historical introduction to Stein; secondly, I should like to offer readers a concise summary of Stein's principle text on empathy (*On the Problem of Empathy*)<sup>1</sup>; finally, I would like to offer an exposition

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<sup>1</sup> Edith Stein, *On the Problem of Empathy*. Translated by Waltraut Stein (Springer: The Hague, 1964).

and analysis of Stein's concept of empathy, from a phenomenological perspective, in Camus's novel *The Plague*<sup>2</sup>. To say that 2020 has been an 'uneventful' year is a gross understatement. Clearly, the Covid-19 pandemic affected us in ways which we could have never imagined. One benefit of the pandemic, as you are probably aware, is, once again, the intense interest in *The Plague*<sup>3</sup>. As I plan to illustrate, the novel contains six major and minor characters (Dr. Rieux, Paneloux, Tarrou, Rambert, Grand, and Cottard) from which Camus utilizes in order to demonstrate an individual's interaction with empathy in the midst of an epidemic; however, I would like to first look at Stein in order to provide the framework for the novel's analysis.

## **George Gaiko: Albert Camus and Speculative Realism: Solving the Problem of Correlationism**

**Abstract:** According to representatives of speculative realism, the most pressing problem of philosophy today is the problem of the correlationism. The problem stems from the fact that all philosophical thought, starting with Immanuel Kant's philosophy, is focused on comprehending itself, not the world. We are not studying the world as such, but the correlations of the mind with it. Speculative realists strive to find methods and means of direct knowledge of the world, or at least the direction of search.

Albert Camus solved this problem. In his work "The Myth of Sisyphus" he notes the gap between knowledge and being: in his opinion, neither different versions of philosophical systems, nor science can provide reliable information of the world for a person. As a result, an absurdity arises - a discord between the world and man. The absurd is the most important category, as it solves the problem of correlationism. Using the aporia of Aristotle, Camus shows that no knowledge can be absolute. On the one hand, this method shows that reality as such is not available. On the other hand, it raises doubts about this. Camus's absurdity does not deny correlationism, but makes it at least not absolute. This means that reality should be available to us despite correlationism that cannot be destroyed. But how is it possible that reality would be available-inaccessible?

To demonstrate this, we turn to Graham Harman Object-Oriented Ontology. In his philosophy everything is an object, which means that we can apply Camus's argumentation (and any other) to his ontological model. The objects in the OOO are accessible-inaccessible to each other, just like the world in Camus's philosophy. But how it happens, the OOO does not explain. It is obvious that the application of Camus's method to Harman's system allows not only to solve the problems of OOO, but, first of all, to give an ontological substantiation of solving the problem of correlationism in Camus's philosophy. In our work, we propose a solution to the problem of correlationism using the methodology of Camus.

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<sup>2</sup> Albert Camus, *The Plague*. Translated by Stuart Gilbert (Vintage: New York, 1948).

<sup>3</sup> According to the *NY Times*, *The Plague* has seen a resurgence on the best seller list. In addition to Vintage having an extremely difficult time keeping the novel in stock, Camus scholars Dr. Robert Zaretsky and Dr. Peter Francev were interviewed by National Public Radio's Salt Lake City affiliate regarding Camus's life and the significance of *The Plague*, respectively.

## **George Heffernan: Why Did Meursault Shoot *and* Kill the Arab on the Beach? Several Plausible Answers**

**Abstract:** In Camus's novel *The Stranger*, Meursault shoots and kills "the Arab" on the beach for what can only be described as unclear reasons. At his interrogation, Meursault tells the examining magistrate that he thinks his case is pretty simple. But the magistrate informs Meursault that he cannot understand one thing about his case, namely, why he first fired one shot at the Arab, then waited for a short time, and finally fired the second, third, fourth, and fifth shots at the motionless body on the beach. The magistrate asks Meursault: "Why did you pause between the first and second shot?" He repeats the question: "Why, why did you shoot at a body that was on the ground?" He reiterates it again and again: "Why? You must tell me. Why?" The five *pourquoi's* that the magistrate directs at Meursault echo the five shots that Meursault fired at the Arab. But Meursault has no answer to the magistrate's question. To the contrary, Meursault thinks that the magistrate is wrong to dwell on it because it really does not matter. Yet, as Meursault will learn in the course of his trial, it really does matter, because it makes all the difference between a simple case of self-defense and a complex case of premeditated murder. In this paper, I will examine several plausible answers to the question concerning why Meursault not only shot but also killed the Arab on the beach.

## **Maciej Kaluzka: Camus on Violence- Curiously Unequivocal**

**Abstract:** Ever since the publication of "Letters to a German friend", Camus's preoccupation with violence - especially social and political violence - is noticeable. Contrary, however, to his studies on absurdity, the philosopher does not dedicate any serious part of his work to the concept of violence. In effect, although his position on political violence is self-evident, it is much more difficult to formulate the theory of violence, that would correspond to his ethical position. Which does not mean, that such formulation, or at least a hypothesis of such conception, cannot be derived from his essays. In my presentation, I would like to confront Camus's observations on violence with theoretical, ethical formulations of the phenomenon:

- 1) violence as excessive use of force (MCV)
- 2) violence as violation of rights (GCV)
- 3) violence as violation of integrity (VVI)

In summary, I will try to show that Camus's stance towards violence is unequivocal on practical and ethical levels: it is unavoidable in practice but impermissible in morality. It is much more difficult, however, to compare and decide, which ethical theory would be closest to Camus's intentions. And my suggestion is that the best result may be derived, if we try to understand Camus's violence as prolegomena to VVI.

## **Simon Lea: Honesty and The Will to Truth in *The Myth of Sisyphus***

**Abstract:** In *The Myth of Sisyphus* Camus makes several positive references Nietzsche thus leaving the reader with the distinct impression that Camus approves not only of Nietzsche's philosophical output but the way in which he goes about doing philosophy. Referencing *Beyond Good and Evil*, Camus claims

that Nietzsche shows ‘the way of the absurd man’. The reader is also left feeling that Camus believes Nietzsche would approve of his own philosophical project in *The Myth*. However, there are several passages in Nietzsche’s work that appear to show that not only would the German philosopher disapprove of what Camus is attempting to achieve but that he would think him foolish for even trying. In *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche claims that the value of life cannot be assessed and questions the wisdom of philosophers attempting to find such a value. Camus opens *The Myth* with the problem of suicide, claiming it to be the only truly serious problem. Is Camus’ essay not a philosophical investigation into the value of life? Could Nietzsche approve of this endeavour?

The ‘way of the absurd man’ as described by Camus in *The Myth* has at its heart a dogged pursuit of, and commitment to, the truth. However, at various places in Nietzsche’s writings, most notably in his *Genealogy of Morals*, he is extremely critical of what he calls ‘the Will to Truth’. How could Nietzsche approve of Camus’ commitment to the truth in *The Myth* when in *Beyond Good and Evil* he claims that a ‘renunciation of false opinions would be a renunciation of life’ and in *Gay Science* he questions the problem with deceiving *oneself* and others? In this paper I examine Camus’ ideas on the virtue of honesty set against Nietzsche’s criticism of the Will to Truth to show that his commitment to honesty is not only something Nietzsche can approve of but that *The Myth* itself is part of a philosophical project of which Nietzsche can approve.

### **Luke Richardson: Camus in Ruins**

**Abstract:** Camus's lyrical essays traditionally have been somewhat less discussed than his novels or philosophical works, and yet they offer a fascinating insight into his literary imagination. *Noces* published in 1938 before Camus experienced major success, and *L'Été* published in 1954 three years after *L'Homme révolté* act as bookends to a period of intense creation and the journey from a young journalist in French Algeria to one of France's most influential literary figures. This paper will explore a particular aspect common to both collections, visits to Roman ruins. In *Noces*, Camus describes a visit to the Roman ruins of Tipasa on Algeria's coast where he and his European friends enjoy the sensual pleasures of sunbathing on the ancient stones. Two decades later in the essay 'Retour à Tipasa' from *L'Été*, Camus narrates another visit to Tipasa, and reflects on the passage of time and the lost idealism of his youth. In *L'Été*, Camus also describes a visit to the Roman ruins of Djémila, where he sees none of the idealistic reflection on Algeria nature he found at Tipasa, but only, in the ruined state of the structures, a repudiation of the arrogance of the Roman colonial project. In writing about Roman ruins, specifically the narration of a visit to ruins prompting emotional reflections, Camus was entering a dialogue with a long tradition of such writing in European literature, specifically of the Romanic period. He was also, whether knowingly or not, entering into a significant discourse of writing about the Roman ruins in French Algeria, where they had been utilised by pro-colonial figures as physical objects which justified a prior European claim on the country. This paper will explore the topic of ruins in Camus's writing and how it is an illustrative area which demonstrates him again and the juncture of European and colonial literary traditions.

### **Denise Schaeffer: Tragedy, Rebellion, and Poetic Expression in Camus’s *Requiem Pour Une Nonne***

**Abstract:** Albert Camus premiered his stage adaptation of William Faulkner’s *Requiem for a Nun* in 1956 in Paris to critical acclaim. Camus admired Faulkner a great deal, referring to him in an interview as the greatest American writer. But his adaptation of Faulkner’s work is more an homage to an author

he personally admired; it is also a site of exploration of some of Camus's larger philosophical preoccupations, especially his ideas about tragedy and rebellion, which illuminate the rationale for some of the major alterations he makes to Faulkner's original. Beyond the practical challenge of streamlining a complex plot originally rendered in fictional time to the constraints of a live stage play, Camus's adaptation also engages with more substantive, philosophical concerns that guided his artistic choices. Camus outlines his approach in his Forward to the published text of his adaptation, focusing especially on his revisions to major speeches by the characters of Temple and Nancy. He explains: Nancy decides to love her suffering and her own death...she thus becomes a saint, the strange nun who suddenly invests the bordellos and prisons in which she has lived with the dignity of a cloister. This basic paradox had to be preserved...I therefore cut and tightened those speeches and made use of Temple instead in order to challenge the paradox that Nancy illustrates and throw it into stronger relief. In Camus's hands, Nancy and Temple's speeches and exchanges do not only become shorter but also take on a somewhat different tone. A closer look at Camus's alterations will illuminate the particular character of the "paradox" at the heart of Faulkner's story, which Camus hoped to both challenge and to sharpen, and how that paradox in turn reflects his own understanding of both rebellion and tragedy. To develop this argument, I shall first discuss Camus's understanding of the distinctiveness of modern tragedy as he presents it in his 1955 lecture, "On the Future of Tragedy." I then turn to his concept of revolt, or rebellion, as developed in *The Rebel (L'Homme Revolté)*. Finally, I will discuss how these two concepts are reflected in Camus' adaptation of Faulkner's novel.

### **Stephen J. Sullivan: Camusian Absurdism and Cosmic Injustice**

**Abstract:** I propose to offer a critical examination and revision of Albert Camus's absurdist philosophy, especially as it is presented in *The Myth of Sisyphus*. I begin by outlining his general account of the absurdity of human life and raise a serious problem for it. I give a more specific account of absurdity that connects it with unfulfilled longing for transcendent or supernatural meaning, and raise a serious problem for this account too. Then I suggest a major revision of Camusian absurdism according to which the absurdity of human life consists in the conflict between the human longing for justice and the apparent failure of the world to satisfy that longing. The result is an ethical variation on that philosophy with an emphasis on the role of cosmic injustice. I provide some textual grounds for this variation, drawing on *The Rebel* as well as *The Myth of Sisyphus*, without pretending that it captures all or even most of what Camus says about the absurd. I also argue that it solves some of the problems that his absurdism faces and offers other advantages as well. One of those advantages is that the variation enables us to see greater continuity between *The Myth of Sisyphus* and *The Rebel* than is often acknowledged. Another is that it sheds light on Camus' sometimes puzzling attitudes toward human death. The upshot is a rational reconstruction of his absurdism that is meant to retain much of its spirit while making it more defensible.