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Albert Camus's Mediterraneanism in *La Peste*

by

Jacquelyn Libby

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in French in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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Jacquelyn Emma Libby

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in French in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

September 7th, 2017

Peter Consenstein

Chair of Examining Committee

September 7th, 2017

Francesca Canadé Sautman

Executive Officer

Supervisory Committee

Peter Consenstein

Ali Nematollahy

Jason Herbeck

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

ABSTRACT

Albert Camus's Mediterraneanism in *La Peste*

by

Jacquelyn Libby

Advisor: Professor Peter Consenstein

The following dissertation uses the speech Camus gave at the inauguration of a new community arts center in Algiers in 1937, entitled "La Culture Indigène. La Nouvelle Culture Méditerranéenne," to show that this expression of Mediterraneanism, as well as its evolution, can be detected in his novel *La Peste*, which was published ten years later in 1947. The bearing of Camus's identification with the Mediterranean world on his speech is that it generated a sense of in-betweenness. This in-betweenness, I argue, is a key feature of Camus's Mediterranean thought that is also found in *La Peste's* subject matter, its universal themes of exile, belonging, love and separation, along with the chronicle's imitation of Thucydides' own narratorial style. In-betweenness thus provides us with a lens through which Camus's Mediterraneanism can be clearly linked to *La Peste*.

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Albert Camus's Mediterraneanism in *La Peste*

Introduction

Albert Camus's writing covers multiple genres. Throughout his lifetime he produced work as a literary author, playwright, essayist, philosophical thinker, and journalist. For this reason he has been studied within scholarly circles for his connection to a variety of fields including, to name a few, existentialism, the philosophy of the absurd, literary lyricism, political theory, as well as regarding issues of measure, justice and revolt. An examination of the relationship between the different genres of Camus's works can also shed light on the interconnection between the varied themes that are present in his writing. The following dissertation is focused on the speech Camus gave at the inauguration of a new community arts center in Algiers in 1937, entitled "La Culture Indigène. La Nouvelle Culture Méditerranéenne," and how this expression of Mediterraneanism, as well as its evolution, can be detected in his novel *La Peste*, which was published ten years later in 1947. The speech and all other quotations from Camus's work are taken from *Albert Camus Œuvres Complètes. Vols I-II, 2006 III-IV, 2008*

Camus delivered his speech on a new Mediterranean culture at the age of 23. His words express a mixture of both youthful outrage and naïve idealism. His call for the recognition of a new Mediterranean culture was born from a wish to rally against the rising tide of right wing politics and the growing power of nationalist and fascist governments across Europe. This spirited cry also exposed Camus's desire to articulate the cultural connection he felt to this maritime region that touches the shores of three continents - a connection he believed was shared by other southern European settlers living in colonial

French Algeria. Politicians of the 1930's in Spain, France and Germany had been legitimizing their national identity tracing their country's history back to the Mediterranean by proclaiming themselves as descendants of Rome. Camus's Mediterranean culture however, had its foundational origins emanating from further east – from Ancient Greece. These opposing viewpoints, of where to source the roots of Western civilization, via Rome or Ancient Greece, are a good example of how the Mediterranean cultures of Ancient Greece and Rome along with their expansionist colonizations can be appropriated by politicians and thinkers alike to justify a foundational unity to contemporary national culture.

Camus's Mediterraneanism was thus born out of twofold circumstances stemming from a reaction against the politics of his day combined with a need to articulate the kinship he felt with other inhabitants of the Mediterranean region, admittedly by and large from European environs, and in particular his affinity for the culture and history of Greece. This specific situation is a good example of discord between the private and the public sphere with regard to the articulation of cultural identity. Camus's personal and passionate desire to articulate his cultural community's place in society by virtue of his Mediterranean thought did not in fact always keep step with the national political discourse. This complex situation is at the heart of not just understanding Camus's Mediterraneanism, but also plays a role in the misconceptions of what he stood for; a complicated point of view.

Aside from being the subject of Camus's inauguration speech, his admiration and affection for Mediterranean culture, history, nature and peoples, surfaces throughout his lifetime's œuvre, and especially features in what is considered some of his most lyrical fictional work, such as *L'Envers et l'Endroit* (Camus 1: 29), *Noces* (1: 99) and *L'Été* (3: 565),

to mention a few examples published before WW II. The essay 'Amour de Vivre' (1: 64), from the collection *L'Envers et l'Endroit* recounts Camus's descriptions and observations of Spanish life as experienced in Palma, the capital of Mallorca. In 'Noces à Tipasa' (1: 105), from *Noces*, Camus extols the natural beauty of the Mediterranean and in *L'Été* it is not just the natural beauty of the Mediterranean sea and sun which feature since Camus appropriates Ancient Greek culture in referencing Prometheus, Helen, and the Minotaur in the title of three of his essays (3: 589, 597 & 567). Moreover, in the final section of his non-fictional essay, *L'Homme Révolté* (3: 61), which was published four years after *La Peste* and fourteen years after giving his inauguration speech, Camus again sets out his Mediterranean thought under the heading 'La Pensée de midi,' (3: 300). The political backdrop of the 1930's influenced Camus's 1937 speech. Likewise the historical and political context of WW II and its aftermath play an important role in the development of 'La Pensée de midi.' In the concluding pages of *L'Homme Révolté*, Camus extols his Mediterranean humanism as a stratagem of resistance to counter the socio-political excesses of those years. "La pensée autoritaire, à la faveur de trois guerres et grâce à la destruction physique d'une élite de révoltés, a submergé cette tradition libertaire. Mais cette pauvre victoire est provisoire, le combat dure toujours. L'Europe n'a jamais été que dans cette lutte entre midi et minuit" (Camus 3: 318). In his argument, Camus edifies Mediterranean history and thought, which for him is grounded in the philosophy and culture of Ancient Greece. He posits that the Mediterranean tradition of balance, categorized as 'la mesure,' provides the necessary opposition to 'la démesure' wrought by the upheaval of a war, occupation and extreme ideology. Camus uses Ancient Greek myth to elucidate his argument:

Cette limite était symbolisée par Némésis, déesse de la mesure, fatale aux démesures (3: 315). . . . Ce contrepois, cet esprit qui mesure la vie, est celui-là même qui anime la longue tradition de ce qu'on peut appeler la pensée solaire et où, depuis les Grecs, la nature a toujours été équilibrée au devenir. L'histoire de la 1^{re} Internationale où le socialisme allemand lutte sans arrêt contre la pensée libertaire des Français, des Espagnols et des Italiens, est l'histoire des luttes entre l'idéologie allemande et l'esprit méditerranéen. . . . la longue confrontation entre la mesure et la démesure qui anime l'histoire de l'Occident, depuis le monde antique. (3: 317)

Thus, essential components of Camus's 1937 inauguration speech (re)appear in *L'Homme Révolté*, albeit more sharply shaped by the political, social and economic impact of WW II and the post war years: "Le conflit profond de ce siècle ne s'établit . . . qu'entre les rêves allemands et la tradition méditerranéenne" (3: 317-318). This dissertation shows that the progression of Camus's Mediterraneanism, from his speech through to work he published after WW II, remains present in *La Peste*.

Camus's Mediterraneanism, although deeply rooted as a reaction to the rise of nationalism in the 1930's and later Germany's National Socialism, is thus embedded not only in his early fictional work, but also informs his later work since it forms a significant part of his philosophical essay *L'Homme Révolté*. This dissertation demonstrates that Camus's Mediterraneanism reaches further still. It exposes that not only can his Mediterraneanism be traced in one of his major novels that is rarely associated with his Mediterranean thought, but that this thinking is in fact foundational for *La Peste*.

In his speech Camus sees himself as being part of a newly defined Mediterranean culture. *La Peste* is a fictional novel that takes place in the French Algerian port city of Oran, yet at first glance it does not promulgate in any obvious fashion Camus's argument for a united Mediterranean culture nor his self-identification with said culture. Nonetheless, this dissertation uncovers and investigates aspects of Camus's Mediterraneanism that can be found in *La Peste* and thus reveals the evolution that occurred in his Mediterranean thought in the decade between giving the inauguration speech and publishing *La Peste*.

Camus began his research for *La Peste* circa 1940 and when it was finally published seven years later it had been rewritten substantially. The surviving manuscripts allow us to trace his creative process during the re-writing of the work. I demonstrate in chapters two and three that these manuscripts also allow us to trace the evolution of his Mediterraneanism. In the final published version of *La Peste*, Camus's Mediterraneanism lies in the shadows of the Nazi allegory: the most common basis of interpretation of the novel. However, through the study of the early versions of *La Peste*, I am able to show that there are other themes, besides the Nazi allegory, present in the text that are essential for understanding the novel and that these themes are related to Camus's Mediterranean thought. Namely, in chapter two I examine how the narratorial strategy of *La Peste* takes its cue from the Ancient Greek historian Thucydides' own technique of chronicling historical events, specifically his account of the Athenian plague in 430 BCE. The narrator of *La Peste* admits to acting as a historian placing great emphasis on offering a truthful account of events, which in turn encourages the reader to consider the possibility of different truths. In chapter three, I show that by the end of WW II, Camus's Mediterraneanism, which was expressed so clearly in his inauguration speech, has become less apparent in *La Peste*, but

that it remains fundamental for interpreting the novel. This underlying and re-written Mediterraneanism is what I term in-betweenness, a concept that elaborates on the Mediterranean aspects of Camus's work and which in turn speaks to the much analyzed complexity of Camus's relationship to both the colonial mother country of France and his native Algeria. It is through the understanding of this theme, which I develop further in my subsequent chapters, that I offer a new and complex reading of *La Peste*.

Relevant to Camus's Mediterraneanism is his biography, which I discuss in chapter one in connection with Camus's involvement in the literary circles of Algiers centered on Edmond Charlot's small bookstore and publishing house, which gave rise to the so-called École d'Alger. I again refer to Camus's biography in chapter three in connection with his re-writing of *La Peste* while exiled in southern France during WW II. The social, historical and political backdrop to Camus's life is thus significant in regard to my investigation of his Mediterranean thought.

Awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1957, Camus's international reputation and literary renown had already been steadily growing due to the success of his novels *l'Étranger* and *La Peste*. This prominence on the public stage was augmented by the fact that Camus had also worked within the French Resistance during WWII and thus came to be regarded as a spokesperson for a generation. However this role sat uncomfortably with him and Camus felt himself becoming more alienated from the left wing Parisian intelligentsia. This situation was only to be exacerbated by his infamous falling out with Jean-Paul Sartre alongside the post-colonial turbulence of the 1950's, with France's war with Algeria beginning in 1954. Camus's stubborn refusal to support Algerian independence was followed by a self-imposed public silence on the matter coming after his

failure to help negotiate a civil truce between the two sides in 1956. This contentious backdrop set the scene for the last decade of Camus's life and left its imprint in the writing that he produced, both regarding his fiction and non-fiction. Thus, wrapped up within the historical context of Camus's work, the scholarly reception of his oeuvre, and Camus's own experience of national identity, is the complex reality of France's colonial past and its occupation of Algeria.

It is this unique position of finding himself at odds with the extremes of both sides of an extremely violent conflict and thus more than ever occupying an untenable space in-between the two nations that makes the in-betweenness expressed in Camus's early work as an idealized Mediterraneanism all the more pertinent. David Carroll, in his book *Albert Camus: the Algerian: Colonialism, Terrorism, Justice*, expounds on the complexity of Camus's national identity:

... the question of national identity, what it meant to be French and how "Frenchness" was imagined and represented in political and literary texts, was more complex in the Algeria in which Camus was born and grew up than perhaps anywhere else in metropolitan France or in any other French colony or possession. It also meant that to be "Algerian" was an even more conflicted issue – not just for Berber and Arab Algerians, who had no officially recognized national identity, but for French Algerians as well. (Carroll 3)

Camus's hybridity therefore reaches not just across scholastic and professional borders, but also across national ones.

For, when talking about Camus's roots in the Pied Noir community it is oft overlooked that with the death of his father in WW I, Camus lost his most direct blood

connection to France. His mother and father were both Pied Noirs, but not all Pied Noirs were French and Camus's mother, Catherine Camus, née Sintes, had Menorcan ancestry. The hierarchy within French Algerian society shows us that among the white or non-Arab working class poor of Algiers, many families had roots in countries such as Italy, Spain, Malta and Portugal.

It is known that Camus was raised primarily by his maternal grandmother. After the death of his father, his mother, now a war widow, was forced to leave Mondoví (known as Dréan today) to seek lodging in the cramped apartment in Algiers with her half deaf brother and mother, a redoubtable matriarch who ruled the roost with an iron fist and a bull whip. Camus's grandmother had emigrated from Menorca to Algiers at a young age. In the autobiographical, posthumously published novel *Le Premier Homme*, Camus allows us, through his description of Jacques Cormery's family, heavily based on his own, to appreciate the extent to which Menorcan customs and a Spanish and Catalan heritage prevailed in his childhood environment. David Carroll classifies this by stating: "In Camus's terms, the Algerian in Camus is a Mediterranean: neither strictly French nor Algerian, neither European nor African, but both at the same time" (Carroll 9). It is this aspect of Camus's work that is the focus of my thesis, for the Mediterranean physically symbolizes an in-between space between France and Algeria, but one that also unites the two.

Camus's Menorcan family mores were in themselves diluted and interwoven with Spanish customs belying another colonization albeit one that had occurred many centuries before the French occupation of North Africa. The history of how the Mediterranean has been colonized goes back to the Phoenicians, the Greeks and the Romans, followed by the Vandals, the Byzantines and then the Arabs, and so the construction of identity within

Camus' family and ancestry, at least going back on his mother's side, already bears traces of Arab influence only to be layered by Aragonese, then British and finally Spanish hegemony. These people then flee poverty to go work in the Maghreb and as a direct impact of France's colonial expansion they become French. Furthermore, the geographical positioning of Menorca directly between France and Algeria poignantly serves as a physical symbol of the position that Camus found himself to inhabit. Straddled between two worlds that during his lifetime were drifting further and further apart, he tried tenaciously to hold onto their compatibility.

Camus's self-identification with his Mediterranean heritage is evident in his speech. Furthermore, his appropriation of this Mediterranean identity allowed him to carve out a personal space to mitigate the complexity of his position inhabiting the two worlds of France and French colonial Algeria. This thesis examines how Camus's complex relationship to his geographical and cultural identity informed not only his speech but also his second major novel, *La Peste*.

The bearing of Camus's identification with the Mediterranean world on his speech is that it generated a sense of in-betweenness. This in-betweenness, I argue, is a key feature of Camus's Mediterranean thought that is also found in *La Peste's* subject matter, its universal themes of exile, belonging, love and separation, along with the chronicle's imitation of Thucydides' own narratorial style. In-betweenness thus provides us with a lens through which Camus's speech can be clearly linked to *La Peste*.

Chapter 1

“Et jamais peut-être un pays, sinon la Méditerranée, ne m’a porté à la fois si loin et si près de moi-même” (Camus 1: 66).

Camus’s Mediterranean Thought in his speech: “La Culture Indigène. La Nouvelle Culture Méditerranéenne.”

Central to understanding Camus’s Mediterranean thought is the speech he gave in February 1937 at the inauguration of a new community arts center in Algiers when he was just 23 years old. In this chapter I begin by examining the previous critical interpretations of Camus’s lecture, from the post-colonial to the contemporary. From there I deduce how Camus’s Mediterranean thought, as first expressed in his lecture for the opening of the Maison de la Culture in Algiers, endeavors to provide a new way of conceiving of Mediterranean cultural identity. I examine how Camus’s speech can be read as a foundational base to reading much of his future work. Camus’s thinking and arguments for a new Mediterranean culture distinguish themselves from previous writings by possessing a liminal characteristic. By this I mean Camus carves out an alternate place from which to base his Mediterranean thought that lies in-between mainland France and colonial Algeria. This threshold position is like the Mediterranean sea itself, situated geographically between two continents, Europe and Africa, yet French colonial rule dictates the entire area to be understood as one French unity. I see, in Camus’s speech, an attempt to articulate how one specific social sector of French Algeria, the working class European settlers, felt a cultural distance from both the ruling powerful French colons and the indigenous Arabs. I

demonstrate how Camus's literary expression of that distance, and the in-between it creates, remains in his future work.

It is noticeable, due to the growing attention this speech has been given, that it plays an essential role in research on Camus and the Mediterranean. However, before it was considered as central to Camus's Mediterraneanism, certain scholars offered up varying readings of the speech. Conor Cruise O'Brien analyzes it from a post-colonial point of view and Edward Saïd, despite not quoting the speech itself, appeals to O'Brien's arguments in his chapter on Camus in his seminal book *Culture and Imperialism*. Neil Foxlee has more recently published an entire monograph devoted entirely to Camus's lecture, entitled *Albert Camus's 'the New Mediterranean Culture': A Text and Its Contexts*. Foxlee's lengthy interpretation goes further than the speech itself and discusses in detail the social and political context of the interwar years, which provide the historical background for Camus's early intellectual endeavors.

While scholars such as O'Brien have considered the speech reactionary and others such as Foxlee read it to be progressive for its time, this chapter ultimately argues that Camus's speech works as a source for his liminal positioning between France and Algeria, a position of in-betweenness that I show is relevant to reading his later writings and thought, in particular *La Peste*. Camus's intent to articulate a *new* Mediterranean culture is evidence of his search to find *new* expressions for discussing the culture in which he was living. In my later chapters I demonstrate that his Mediterraneanism and the in-betweenness it engenders is a springboard from which many well-researched and re-occurring camusien themes stem, such as belonging and exile, as well as tension and irresolution. I read this lecture with a view to connecting Camus's Mediterranean thought with *La Peste* in my later

chapters, showing how it infiltrated and influenced the writing of this text. Furthermore, I show how Camus's imagined Mediterraneanism helped shape a distinct cultural perspective that was for Camus like the Mediterranean sea itself, always half way between Algeria and France. He neither belonged to the powerful minority in French colonial society nor to the subjugated, disenfranchised Arab masses. For Camus this was a liminal or in-between position that was difficult to balance and uncomfortable to maintain.

In 1937, despite his young age, Camus was in fact general secretary to the center. The speech he gave at the new Maison de la Culture was entitled "La Culture Indigène. La Nouvelle Culture Méditerranéenne," the crux of which begged the question, is a new Mediterranean culture realizable? Camus begins his speech explaining the mission of the cultural center:

La Maison de la Culture, qui se présente aujourd'hui devant nous, prétend servir la culture méditerranéenne. Fidèle aux prescriptions générales concernant les Maisons du même type, elle veut contribuer à l'édification, dans le cadre régional, d'une culture dont l'existence et la grandeur ne sont plus à démontrer. (1: 565)

Camus explains that this centre will serve to encourage the development of Mediterranean culture, which he presumes, perhaps presumptuously, is already established and thriving since he states its existence and greatness need no proof. It is interesting to note that in his opening words Camus alludes to the Mediterranean as a culture that is already conceived as being great. This position connotes that his Mediterranean view is characterized by European culture and history since the established greatness of the Mediterranean would have been for any educated European a reference to both the Roman and Greek empires

which dominated and shaped Mediterranean history and the teachings thereof. This narrow perception leaves little room for any further associations to regional influences beyond Greece and Rome and thus consolidates Camus's Eurocentric image of an area that was in fact also shaped by conquests and colonizations from a variety of peoples, including Phoenicians, Arabs, Ottoman Turks and Iberians. That said, as Camus continues with his speech, his ensuing introductory words make clear he was determined to show how his vision of Mediterranean culture, although a European one, was not founded on the pitting of one set of people against another:

Servir la cause d'un régionalisme méditerranéen peut sembler, en effet, restaurer un traditionalisme vain et sans avenir, ou encore *exalter la supériorité d'une culture par rapport à une autre*, et, par exemple, reprenant le fascisme à rebours, *dresser les peuples latins contre les peuples nordiques*. Il y a là un malentendu perpétuel. Le but de cette conférence est d'essayer de l'éclaircir. (emphasis added) (1: 565)

Despite his use of the terms Latin people and Nordic people, which once again confirm his Eurocentric perception of the Mediterranean, it is clear that Camus wishes to use this occasion to clarify the benefits and value behind his new vision of a Mediterranean community. He is at pains to set out the errors of other conceptions of what it means to be Mediterranean and claims that comparisons of one culture over another are not only of little value, but also perpetuate further cultural misunderstandings. He intends to rectify these misconceptions by stating: "Il y a là un malentendu perpétuel. Le but de cette conférence est d'essayer de l'éclaircir" (1: 565).

Furthermore, in performing a public speech act commemorating the inauguration of

the new Maison de la Culture in Algiers, Camus is able to utilize the building itself as a space that tangibly both reflects and promotes the ideas he is orating. By being present at the cultural center while speaking of the Mediterranean, his argument for a positive collaboration to consolidate a Mediterranean community is given the much-needed fixed locus that the sea itself arguably cannot provide. In this way the *new* Maison de la Culture conceptually represents Camus's new vision that revitalizes the concept of a Mediterranean culture. The title of his speech incorporates the word "Nouvelle," proving that Camus's objective was to articulate a fresh approach to an already accepted idea, that of a Mediterranean culture.

The Maison de la Culture also provides Camus with a neutral space, one that is not in Rome or Athens, or on mainland France for that matter, from which he can defend his vision of an anti-nationalistic Mediterranean community. To further this point and distance himself from any possible comparisons that could be drawn between his Mediterranean thought and the spread of extreme nationalism in Europe, Camus identifies what he sees as the common mistake made when trying to define the "Mediterranean." He states: "Toute l'erreur vient de ce qu'on confond Méditerranée et Latinité et qu'on place à Rome ce qui commença dans Athènes. Pour nous la chose est évidente, il ne peut s'agir d'une sorte de nationalisme du soleil" (1: 566). Camus here defends the freshness of his vision, arguing that he is not simply asserting a different kind of nationalism, "une sorte de nationalisme du soleil." Instead he makes sure to distance himself from nationalism in general, that is to say from the fascist politics headed by Mussolini, Franco or Hitler. Camus discredits other perceptions of the Mediterranean, which view Latinhood and Roman Civilization as the central pillar and foundation to its identity, reminding us that Roman culture was not itself

homogenous, having gained many of its attributes from Ancient Greece. By bringing into the debate the interconnecting histories of Rome and Ancient Greece, especially regarding the influence of the latter on the former, Camus seeks to underscore the heterogeneity of the cultural history of the Mediterranean, which at different periods in time was comprised of empires incorporating regions in Europe, Asia Minor, the Levant and Africa.

Nonetheless, Foxlee identifies the inevitable counter point and flaw to Camus's view (which is at best idealistic and at worst ignorant), that Algiers, as a part of this Mediterranean community, may serve as an example of a harmonious co-habitation of peoples:

... despite criticizing both British and Italian imperialism in his lecture, Camus never explicitly acknowledges that he is speaking in part of the French Empire. [and] ... he fails to draw the obvious parallel with France's century-long domination of Algeria. ... he seems blind to the parallel with France's so-called 'civilizing mission' (mission civilisatrice) in Algeria, the centenary of whose conquest had been celebrated just seven years before. In both of these cases, Camus appears to bear out Stendhal's dictum that the eye that sees does not see itself. (Foxlee 81)

Foxlee demonstrates Camus's "blindness" towards the French colonial project in Algeria. However, as discussed above, this blindness can still be read as an effort by Camus to unify rather than divide, even if it is also interpreted as naiveté or idealism. In addition to the role of the Maison de la Culture as a perceptible space that eschews cultural domination, it is important to also emphasize the historical and political context in which this speech was given.

It should be remembered that Camus's speech had as its backdrop the ever-strengthening momentum of fascism that had been sweeping across Germany and Italy in the 1920's and 1930's. As a result, the creation of this new Maison de la Culture was a work in progress aiming to counterbalance such an extreme political environment, hence Camus's stance to distance his Mediterraneanism from any kind of nationalism. Its members, Camus included, were intent on articulating a new common Mediterranean identity based on the natural geography of the sea and the fixed location of the center, in Algiers. They also focused on a shared history, to support their argument of forming a community that on both a political and humanistic level, would be an alternative to and a stand against the rising wave of fascism in Hitler's Germany, Mussolini's Italy and which was propelling the Spanish civil war. "The essential role that cities such as Algiers and Barcelona can play is to serve, in their modest way, that aspect of Mediterranean culture that encourages man instead of crushing him" (Camus 1: 570). The extremism of the politics at the time is a fundamental influence as to why Camus was calling for a collective community amongst these port cities. For Camus, the new Mediterranean culture had to act as an antidote to the political events unfolding elsewhere in Europe. He, thus, wishes to see Algiers and Barcelona as loci, which united by their common Mediterranean aspects, act as bulwarks against the extremism and violence of fascism. He states:

Notre tâche ici même est de réhabiliter la Méditerranée, de la reprendre à ceux qui la revendiquent injustement, et de la rendre prête à recevoir les formes économiques qui l'attendent. C'est de découvrir ce qu'il y a de concret et de vivant en elle, et c'est, en toute occasion, de favoriser les aspects divers de cette culture. *Nous sommes d'autant plus préparés à cette tâche que nous*

sommes au contact immédiat de cet Orient qui peut tant nous apprendre à cet égard. Nous sommes ici avec la Méditerranée contre Rome. (emphasis added)
(1: 570)

In making reference to the Orient as a region that enriches and enlivens Mediterranean culture, Camus is now adding to his previously Eurocentric definition of Mediterranean culture. He emphasizes that to rehabilitate this culture, so that it may be strong enough to act as a bulwark against fascism, it is essential to broaden hitherto narrower inclusions as to what defines Mediterranean: “favoriser les aspects divers de cette culture” (1: 570). For Camus the connection with the Orient must thus be included in his new vision of a Mediterranean culture as the inclusion of this region diversifies and thereby solidifies the culture’s strength and worth. Once again the geographic situation of Algiers offers itself as the perfect locale from which this movement can emanate. “Nous sommes d’autant plus préparés à cette tâche que nous sommes au contact immédiat de cet Orient qui peut tant nous apprendre à cet égard” (1: 570).

To look at a map of the countries that border the Mediterranean, one would not necessarily claim Algeria as being situated in the Eastern part of the region and thus in immediate contact with the Orient, as one would for example, Egypt, Lebanon or Greece; therefore, Camus’s reference to Algeria’s proximity to the Orient suggests something else. Camus understands Algeria as a place where one has “contact” with the Orient. His Mediterranean thought bridges a gap or a divide that was otherwise palpable between the East and the West, that is to say between the occidental world of France and the rest of southern Mediterranean Europe, more specifically the Mediterranean countries which lie in Africa and the Middle East.

French interest in the Orient reached its peak in the nineteenth century, aroused at first by Napoleon's military campaigns in Egypt and kept alive due to France's colonial expansion into North Africa. France's fashionable fanaticism with the Orient resulted in a stereotyped exotic and erotic vision of Eastern regions and cultures being promoted through the Arts and literature. The popularity of Orientalism was so much en vogue that artists and writers produced work based on this theme without so much as even setting foot outside France. Other artists, such as Eugene Delacroix and Jean-Léon Gérôme, travelled to the Near East and Africa to capture their experience of the Orient. They depicted scenes from many genres including military campaigns to daily life and domesticity. Delacroix's 1834, *Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement* provided for its time the rare example of an artist gaining access to uncovered Muslim women in the harem and the tableau received much positive attention when it was displayed at the Salon. The novelist Pierre Loti, who served with the French Navy, mined his global travels to produce popular fictional works inspired by his experiences in and around Morocco, Algeria, Egypt and Turkey. The French were captivated by the Orient precisely because its culture and people seemed so different compared to French culture and its inhabitants. Depicting the Orient as 'Other', as more colorful, more erotic and more exotic than France, consequently set the two geographic regions and cultures apart. In his speech, by saying that French Algeria has immediate contact with the Orient, Camus does not Orientalize the Near East in the same manner. He sees a connection between the two cultures that had been, up until then, understood and depicted as being very different from each other. Camus also adds that to revive the Mediterranean culture, it is to the Near Eastern cultures that one must

look and that they have much to teach: “cet Orient qui peut tant nous apprendre à cet égard” (1: 570).

Thus while Camus does not connect France’s oppressive political domination over the Algerian people with that of Italy’s colonial project (see Foxlee, 81 above), he does connect Algeria to its geographical and cultural neighbors to the east. In his more inclusive image of the Mediterranean, the town of Algiers is an alternative against the rising tide of National Socialism. Camus calls the manifesto in support of the invasion of Ethiopia, which was signed by twenty-four Western intellectuals, “degrading” (“dégradant”) (1: 568). In stating that we are “contre Rome” (1: 570), Camus speaks out against Mussolini’s dictatorship. This point of view also demonstrates a stand against radical ideological doctrines in France, such as those espoused by the extreme right-wing Charles Maurras, who headed the nationalistic journal and movement *Action Française*. Maurras pushed for France to align herself with Mussolini’s Fascist Italy. France’s colonial “mission civilisatrice” was also linked to the growing nationalistic movement. Aligning French nationalism with the glory and greatness of the Roman Empire, as the classical era was perceived, gave, in the eyes of the colons, the French colonial mission only greater justification. Camus sees the Mediterranean as in fact all things opposite to Rome and Maurras, and he prefers to widen his geographical and historical perception of Mediterranean culture to the Orient. Camus replaces the Roman Empire with that of Ancient Greece and includes the Orient so as to further differentiate his stance from that of the right-wing nationalistic colonials.

However, the historical context of Camus’s speech has also been read differently by some post-colonial scholars as a quasi-manifesto for a group of French Algerian

intellectuals and artists who later came to be labeled the *École d'Alger*. This group has mostly been regarded as being part of a literary elite intent on promoting European writings and ideas in colonial north Africa without encompassing any aspects of Muslim or Arab culture. Post-colonial scholars in their writing and thinking about Algeria under French colonial rule, such as Conor Cruise O'Brien and Edward Saïd, have studied Camus's views in this speech and in his fiction to show how they see Camus's work as being evidence of supporting the colonial order. In his critique of Camus's fiction Saïd chooses,

... to question and deconstruct Camus's choice of geographical setting for *L'Étranger* (1942), *La Peste* (1947), and his extremely interesting group of short stories collected under the title *L'Exil et le Royaume* (1957). Why was Algeria a setting, for narratives whose main reference (in the case of the first two) has always been construed as France generally and, more particularly, France under Nazi Occupation? (Saïd 183)

Saïd here exposes the contradiction of Camus's use of Algeria as the setting for his two most famous novels and certain short stories in that these texts can be read as predominantly representing France. The most explicit example of this is the reading of *La Peste* as a metaphor for Nazi occupied France, which Camus himself acknowledged in 1955 when writing to Roland Barthes: "*La Peste*, dont j'ai voulu qu'elle se lise sur plusieurs portées, a cependant comme contenu évident la lutte de la résistance européenne contre le nazisme" (Camus 2: 286). Furthermore, the omission of any representation of the non-French population prompts Saïd to conclude that "Camus's narratives of resistance and existential confrontation, which had once seemed to be about withstanding or opposing both mortality and Nazism, can now be read as part of the debate about culture and

imperialism” (Saïd 182). The thread of his argument leads Saïd to question “the degree to which his [Camus’s] work inflects, refers to, consolidates, and renders more precise the nature of the French enterprise there” (184). As an example of Camus’s fiction ‘reflecting’ and ‘consolidating’ the colonial order, Saïd points to the nameless Arab in *L’Étranger* whom Meursault kills on the beach, as well as the lack of Arab characters in *La Peste*. Because of this literary collusion, he contends that even though Camus was born in Algeria, since he was a French citizen and not an indigenous Muslim, he denies Camus the right to consider Algeria his homeland and identify positively with the Algerian landscape. Saïd believes that Camus’s affinity to Algeria constitutes a justification for continued French occupation rather than the expression of a subjective, emotional attachment to the harsh beauty of the land: “. . . we must consider Camus’s words as a metropolitan transfiguration of the colonial dilemma: they represent the *colon* writing for a French audience whose personal history is tied irrevocably to this southern department of France” (184). Saïd admits that Camus’s words are “irrevocably tied” to Algeria, which under colonial rule was not just a colonial outpost, but an actual administrative department of France itself, as he points out. In Saïd’s opinion, all these words are only “tied” to Algeria by their representation of the “*colon*.” Therefore what Camus has to say represents only the colonizers’ point of view and his writing is only to be read by a French audience, an important insight which will be elaborated on below.

Conor Cruise O’Brien’s criticism follows a similar approach to Saïd’s, but he applies his line of thought to both Camus’s fiction as well as to the above speech. O’Brien bases his critique on Camus’s position as a French citizen and focuses on how that social standing thus biases Camus’s view of the Mediterranean as a purely European entity. For O’Brien,

this explains why Camus ignores cultural aspects of the Maghrebin population in his fiction. O'Brien further points out that Camus's examples of the unity of Mediterranean culture focus entirely on European commonalities, for example, the historical Latin heritage of origin and the linguistic commonalities of the Romance languages. "... his [Camus's] own Mediterranean truth reposes on a supposed linguistic unity derived from the similarity of the Romance languages: and this is in a country of which the majority of the inhabitants were Arabic-speaking" (O'Brien 12). "... for O'Brien it is not excessive to speak here of hallucination on Camus's part" (Foxlee 61). In staging a clear dichotomy of Romance languages versus Arabic, O'Brien overlooks however the more complex linguistic reality that existed in French Algeria. Camus, in referring to Romance languages, shows how he is looking for a commonality between different cultural communities that made up the non-French European part of French Algerian society. While French was the imposed dominant language within the colony, Italian, Spanish, Catalan, Maltese and Sicilian were all spoken by those southern Europeans who came to Algeria looking for work. In fact the common patois used by the working class was a mixture of French, Maltese, Italian, Catalan, Provençal and Spanish and not the French of the educational system (Dunwoodie *Writing French Algeria* 140). Camus was thus looking for a common link amongst a sector of the colonial society, which identified more strongly with its southern Mediterranean culture than with its Frenchness. He was drawing attention to a cultural and historical reality amongst a community that felt neither fully French nor, on the other hand, Arab.

Furthermore, although "the majority of the inhabitants were Arabic-speaking" (O'Brien 12), the indigenous Algerian population also had their own dialects and regional linguistic variations, just as the European part of the population spoke a variety of

languages and dialects. Additionally spoken Arabic differs from written Arabic. The Berbers, especially in the Kabyle region of Algeria, consider their language so distinct from Arabic that they still to this day fight for its recognition as an official language of Algeria alongside Arabic. It must not be forgotten that Camus was writing in 1937 and what he was saying was considered quite progressive for this period. At this time, the sector of society that held all power and authority within the colony was French speaking and thus enforced French to be used in commerce and trade, civil administration, politics and education. It is perhaps an ahistorical hallucination on O'Brien's part to assume Camus would ignore the political and cultural reality of colonization that constituted his entire world. It is doubtful Camus, or any other politically active French Algerian at that time, could have envisaged a Mediterranean community that embraced Arabic as its common language, all the more so when not even all indigenous Algerians employed one single language between them.

O'Brien's argument which claims Camus's Mediterranean culture is Eurocentric stands correct, but I see a contradiction in his reasoning to determine it as also only "French" in Algeria. O'Brien concludes by saying "It is quite clear, though never explicitly stated, that his [Camus's] Mediterranean culture is a European one and in Algeria a French one ..." (O'Brien 12). Such a summary actually contradicts what Camus has in fact established, which is that his expression of a Mediterranean culture is precisely more than just French. O'Brien's arguments expose the danger of concluding that Camus's Mediterranean thought was French simply because it was not Arabic. Camus's Mediterranean culture most certainly was a European one, especially in Algeria, but that is not to say it was French, nor did it take into full consideration the indigenous population. Nevertheless, its non-French attributes made it sit uncomfortably and unsustainably

between the extremes of the colonial regime, that is to say the absolute authority of France, and the ignored, subjugated indigenous Algerians.

Emily Apter's article "Out of Character: Camus's French Algerian Subjects", written after Saïd and O'Brien's work, maintains their views on the post-colonial reception of Camus's work by stating, "Albert Camus's vexed relation to his Algerian *terre natale*, remains unfinished business . . ." (500). Apter sees the collusion of Camus's writing with the colonial order as actually contradicting the morality on which he based much of his philosophical thought and ethics. She thus supports Conor Cruise O'Brien's

. . . scathing exposure of Camus's moral double standards vis-à-vis Europe and North Africa. It also points up the extent to which critical reception of Camus's work has, until relatively recently, tended to downplay how he compromised his moral stance by taking the French side (500)

In suggesting Camus compromised his moral stance by taking the French side, Apter, like Saïd and O'Brien, overlooks the multiple narrative strategies within Camus's writing that actually attempt to break down the binary division of France vs. Algeria. Camus did not betray his moral stance by taking the French side, because by depicting the in-betweenness of his cultural identity through his association with a Mediterranean self, as opposed to a French or Algerian self, we can see that these so called "sides" that Apter alludes to actually overlap and are more complex than previously believed. The post-colonial points of view highlight the shortcomings of Camus's hypocritical position of being at once critical of, but also a part of the colonial order. For example, a famous piece of his journalistic writing exposes the inept cruelty of the French colonial system in the Kabyle (Camus 1: 1375-78). But he does not write about such issues in his fiction.

O'Brien's linguistic separation of Romance languages versus Arabic and Apter's use of the term "the French *side*" (my emphasis) both indicate to what extent the history of France's colonization of Algeria, a colonization that culminated in a ferocious war and served to entrench ever more deeply and violently already visible divisions and harsh inequalities, has influenced scholars to talk of "sides." This has led to a concentration of critical analysis of Camus's works that hinges on binary readings, as shown above in the quoted comments.

My alternative reading does in no way deny that the French North African colonial order was an unjust order where the elite, omnipotent colonizers dominated a powerless subjugated majority. Yet, within these two sectors, true to all colonial orders, there can also be detected sub-divisions and hierarchies within hierarchies, on both sides, which render the social situation more complex and uneven. For Camus, the Mediterranean "n'est pas classique et ordonnée, elle est diffuse et turbulente, comme ces quartiers arabes ou ces ports de Gênes et de Tunisie. . . . c'est de l'Orient qu'elle se rapproche. Non de l'Occident latin" (1: 569). In speaking of a disordered Mediterranean, where East meets West, Camus demonstrates openness to observing multiple thresholds, borders and divisions, which cannot clearly be divided in to just two separate entities. As the section above demonstrates, in doing so, Camus illuminates the messy, overlapping reality of European colonial life in French Algeria which was progressive for his time period.

Moreover, the question of this study is not to investigate if Camus compromised his moral stance or not, it is rather to ask how straddling several cultural divides, between his French, French-Algerian, Southern European and Mediterranean identity, all affected and influenced the stances which he did take. This uncomfortable and paradoxical situation is

what led Camus to dwell upon the nature of a specific stratum within the social hierarchy of Algiers, a stratum that represented the southern European or Mediterranean working-class, colonial population. His self-conscious bid to articulate and advance a new Mediterranean cultural community, as seen in his speech, concurs with the fact that even though he was a French citizen, under colonial law, a coherent sense of belonging was lacking enough for Camus to feel the need to express feelings of exile, tension and irresolution, in his later writings. Instead of being morally hypocritical by taking the French side, as Apter reads it, we can see how Camus exposed a “third” side or “middle” space, depicting the in-between position of French Algerians both literally and figuratively within the Mediterranean. He desired a community that both touched upon and yet was distinct from the culture of the colonizer, placing it in a liminal position. By looking towards a culture that is of, on, in and around the Mediterranean, Camus envisioned another community that, at least in his imagination, was both separate and collective.

Moving on from the post-colonial interpretation of Camus’s speech, it is necessary to situate the historical context of his lecture. Here Camus’s words can be examined within the wider context of the history of French Algeria. His speech forms part of literary current that emerged in reaction to the more extreme pro-colonialist attitude that had been promoted by earlier French writers such as Louis Bertrand. Bertrand’s Algérianiste movement of the 1920’s promoted a moral justification for France’s colonial enterprise in North Africa, positing France as guardian to the Latin legacy of the Mediterranean and therefore protector and civilizer of the inhabitants of the Maghreb. In the 1930’s, however, a new generation of writers adopted a more universalist approach to French Algerian

identity focusing on the Mediterranean attributes common to the (Southern) European settlers in Algeria.

Camus articulated his Mediterranean identity in this manner since his speech was also formed against Bertrand's argument that to justify French imperialism it was necessary to uphold the notion that the indigenous population was racially inferior – hence the need to civilize them. Here, in Foxlee's translation of Bertrand's words, we can read exactly how the Algérianistes understood France's colonial project: "By conquest," said Bertrand in a 1931 lecture on the Mediterranean spirit and Algeria, "I mean above all a civilizing task" (Foxlee 96). Whereas Bertrand overtly alludes to the French colonial enterprise, known as "la mission civilisatrice," as previously noted, Camus, while failing to draw the obvious parallel with France's century-long domination of Algeria does, in his speech, criticize Italy's supposedly "civilizing" work in Ethiopia (1: 568). The notion of carrying on the civilizing work done by the Italians, traced as far back as the Roman Empire, was not in keeping with Camus's views. For him, the French Algerians did not have to identify themselves as descendants and continuers of this empire. Thus, a greater variety of shared Mediterranean cultural attributes and not just a shared Latin heritage was the keystone to the cultural center's philosophy as Camus announces in his speech when emphasizing the Mediterranean as a "Bassin international traversé par tous les courants" (1: 569), and North Africa as "un des seuls pays où l'Orient et l'Occident cohabitent" (1: 569).

These newly emerging writers honed their work by reacting against Louis Bertrand's and his fellow Algérianistes' approach. Dunwoodie explains:

In the drive to extend Europe's borders, colonialists erected new frontiers within conquered territories which defined the spaces allotted to settler and native and, in doing so, located containment (and transgression) at the centre of the colonial policy. The terms *peuple*, *race*, *communauté*, which dominated the discourses of the Algérianistes, were grounded in awareness of those frontiers, as was the ideologically charged metaphoric language of centre/periphery, insider/outsider. (Dunwoodie 175)

The determination of space was paramount when dealing with terminologies such as "*peuple*, *race*, *communauté*". As Dunwoodie states, such words dominated the discourse of the Algérianistes and so issues of belonging, division and difference, connected to geographic space, would come to be the focal points for anyone who examined the cultural community of French Algeria. For Camus, these cultural differences were connected directly to the geographic space of the Mediterranean basin, but for him this area stretched further east than had previously been espoused. As quoted above, for Camus "l'Occident" and "l'Orient" live side by side in Algeria. Camus's speech thus challenges the colonialists' frontiers and re-positions, or at least extends, certain centers and peripheries in the evocation of a new Mediterranean culture. This larger space was in part what gave Camus's Mediterranean culture a positive source of strength and it provided the Maison de la Culture with the tools with which they could promote a more inclusive Mediterranean community. As the quote below shows, by looking outwards towards the East, Camus's Mediterranean culture, his definition of a Mediterranean "*peuple*, *race*, or '*communauté*," directly challenged that of Maurras, as well as Bertrand's and the Algérianistes' more right-wing colonial stance:

C'est cette latinité que Maurras et les siens essayent d'annexer. C'est au nom de cet ordre latin que, dans l'affaire d'Éthiopie, vingt-quatre intellectuels d'Occident signèrent un manifeste dégradant qui exaltait l'œuvre civilisatrice de l'Italie dans l'Éthiopie barbare. Mais non. Ce n'est pas cette Méditerranée que notre Maison de la culture revendique . . . Notre tâche ici même est de réhabiliter la Méditerranée, de la reprendre à ceux qui la revendiquent injustement . . . C'est de découvrir ce qu'il y a de concret et de vivant en elle, et c'est, en toute occasion, de favoriser les aspects divers de cette culture. Nous sommes d'autant plus préparés à cette tâche que nous sommes au contact immédiat de cet Orient qui peut tant nous apprendre à cet égard.

(Camus 1: 568, 570)

Camus's assertion to reclaim and rehabilitate the Mediterranean and the "aspects divers de cette culture" indicates the extent of his disagreement with certain aspects of colonization and shows how his definitions of "race" and "communauté" distilled into a Mediterranean context differed from those of the generation before. Camus does criticize the violence of Italy's colonizing mission in Ethiopia, however, he does not go as far as to draw the same conclusions with regard to France's colonial project. Nonetheless, the arguments in his speech show that he believed differently enough in order for an alternative vision of the Mediterranean and French Algeria to manifest itself.

Most Europeans who migrated to and colonized Algeria became French citizens, which created the first layer of the social hierarchy that distinguished settlers from the indigenous population. Outsiders, that is to say Europeans from outside Algeria, but inside the Mediterranean, took over the center space and took power from Arab Algerians who

were thus moved to the periphery of colonial society from their once internal position where they were centrally dominant on their own land. The historical result of this immigration is that the outsiders became insiders, by moving the insiders outside. What is more interesting, however, is to venture further than this binary position, a position exploited by the colonialists so as to monopolize and legitimize their hold on power, and question what actually constituted these binary definitions of space and identity invoked by those early founders of the French colonizing mission in North Africa. Undoubtedly, the implementation of the “mission civilisatrice” set up the framework for France’s colonial order to be based on a distinct “us” and “them”, with the colonizing French imposing *their* law, administration, government, culture and power onto the indigenous inhabitants viewed collectively as another community. This one and clear division was of course a most effective tool in cementing French authority ensuring that all European settlers in the colonial space would adhere to and even promote it, in order to safeguard their place on the dominant side. While Apter, Saïd and O’Brien have justifiably exposed the harsh deprivations and unnecessary sufferings caused by such a colonial ideology, their exposure of this injustice has remained trapped within the dynamic created by the colonial system. While binary terminology, such as “centre/periphery, insider/outsider” (Dunwoodie 175), is certainly an undercurrent in Camus’s fiction, to remain only within this discourse created by colonialism is to leave out the in-between space and investigation of other more complex areas where thresholds meet, and diverge and more importantly sub-diverge.

Current Mediterranean scholars, such as Matvejevic, Malkin, and Purcell, all speak of the Mediterranean in terms of its fluidity, by referring to its liquidity and having fluctuating boundaries. To quote Giaccaria and Minca: “In its real and metaphorical ‘liquidity,’ the

Mediterranean represents a fertile ground for the exploration of ‘other spaces’” (Giaccaria & Minca 345). Back in 1937 however, Camus’s speech was already expressing such a concept since his references to the Orient indicate a willingness to explore “other spaces” for inclusion in his vision of a new Mediterranean community. Camus most certainly considered the Mediterranean a “fertile ground for the exploration of other spaces” (345), as he understood it to be separate from mainland France. Camus’s imagined Mediterranean community represents an-“other” space which allowed him to belong, to be rooted and feel at home in an alternative way to the rich and powerful colons or the indigenous Arabs in French Algeria. In carving out this in-between space, Camus hereby also avoided identifying exclusively with a French national identity. These unique spatial attributes referred to by Giaccaria & Minca as being specific to the Mediterranean and co-opted by Camus are essential to today’s research in Mediterranean studies and we will also see in the later chapters how exactly they resonate in *La Peste*. In brief, it can be surmised that on the one hand, the accusations of post-colonial critics suggest that Camus and his literary circle were constrained by their historical circumstances and were unable to imagine a non-European Algeria. On the other hand, however, they can be seen as predecessors of contemporary Mediterranean theory.

To better understand the arguments that support Camus’s Mediterraneanism as part of a revitalization of Mediterranean cultural identity that emerged in reaction to Bertrand and the Algérianistes, it is necessary to examine in more detail the literary zeitgeist out of which these young French Algerian intellectuals were writing. Among the new writers of the 1930’s was a man named Gabriel Audisio. His works also attempt to redefine the colonized Mediterranean space and the polarized cultural identities of those

Europeans who lived and worked in it. Camus appreciated Audisio's work and he makes this appreciation public by acknowledging the fact in his speech. "(À cet égard on ne peut que renvoyer à Audisio)" (1: 569). In fact, Audisio's work was so popular among the members of la Maison de la Culture they chose to name their cultural center's bulletin *Jeune Méditerranée*. This name paid homage to the collection of essays Audisio had published in 1935, entitled *Jeunesse de la Méditerranée* (Foxlee 111). Camus was not just an avid reader of Audisio's work since they also became personally acquainted and in 1943 whilst living in Paris at the Hôtel Mercure, Camus received visits from Audisio (Todd 458). Widely known for his award winning early writings on the Mediterranean, one of which was entitled *Trois Hommes et un minaret*, Audisio represented the multinational identity of many of the European settlers in Algeria. Born in Marseilles, he was the son of an Italian father from Piedmont and a French mother from the region of la Savoie. He spent some of his childhood in Algeria and returned in his early twenties to be part of the Gouvernement-Général d'Algers, playing "a central role in the cultural and artistic life of the colony and, more specifically, in the break with the European-centred Algerianism in favour of the 'Mediterraneanism' promoted during the 1930's/1940's by the generation of artists and intellectuals he called the *École d'Alger*" (Dunwoodie 176). It was within this environment that young European writers and artists, including Camus, living in Algiers and influenced by Audisio were able to challenge the boundaries and divisions that had been promoted up until this time to solidify France's colonizing mission. The French had structured colonial society so as to erase any presence of Islam or indigenous culture and replace it specifically with a French one. These new writers were experimenting with a third cultural reference point, namely the Mediterranean:

This major shift in focus, from the narrowly Algerian to the all-embracing Mediterranean was clearly articulated in *Héliotrope*, which constitutes the first major text in which Audisio formulates the essential characteristics of the ‘Mediterranean humanism’ he was to share a few years later with Camus, Roblès, and the other members of the École d’Alger group. The cultural sources for the depiction and the valorization of the ‘physical and spiritual inebriation’ which he posits as being the unique centre of this humanism are evidence of the primary characteristic he uncovers in it, namely a heady diversity: Greek, Phoenician, Iberian, and Punic, in other words all the great pre-Islamic and non-Roman civilizations of the Mediterranean basin. . . .

(Dunwoodie 179)

Dunwoodie’s summarizing of Audisio’s “Mediterranean humanism” points back to the main crux of Camus’s speech. Camus freely admitted the important influence Audisio’s writing had on the formulation of his own Mediterranean thought and Audisio’s admiration and promotion for “all the great pre-Islamic and non-Roman civilizations of the Mediterranean basin” (179) supplied Camus with a broader alternative vision of the Mediterranean than any that had previously been portrayed in literature coming out of French Algeria.

Audisio, in his second novel, *Héliotrope*, “brings together various aspects of the Mediterranean and its people, as typified by a cast of characters drawn from the port and proletariat of Algiers” (Graebner 194). The tone and context of this text, based on working class lives in Algiers, will be repeated in Camus’s writings, especially in *Noces*, since for both Camus and Audisio the Mediterranean sun and sea take on sensuous meanings where “the Mediterranean male consummates his marriage to his native landscape” (194).

Audisio writes, “Car je suis provençal, sarde, catalan; je suis, peu m’importe, de tous les rivages de cette mer où j’ai vécu . . .” (194, Audisio 11-12). Such rhetoric, emphasized by “peu m’importe,” explains the desire for the new generation of European immigrants living in French Algeria in the 1920’s/30’s to express their affinity to the various regionalities of the Mediterranean. In this way they demonstrate a new alternative cultural identity that was not the same as that of the French from the mainland nor that of the indigenous Muslim population, it was a cultural identity somewhere in-between, based on the commonalities of the southern Europeans from the Mediterranean. As Dunwoodie explains, these immigrants as European colonialists emigrated to Algeria often due to hardships such as lack of employment and food in their native regions. They experienced feelings of exile, marginalization, and insecurity (179), especially those who remained in the lower levels of the colonial echelon. This mattered little to the French authorities, however, who were more concerned with organizing an efficient and economically productive workforce to advance France’s wealth, power and status as a nation and, in doing all this, *make* Algeria French¹.

Describing the French colonial mission Dunwoodie states how the French sought to . . . eradicate the presence of Islam, unearth and consolidate the traces of the European colonizer in North Africa’s past, and bolt Algeria onto the mainland as a province or region . . . by reducing the Mediterranean to little more than an internal sea of *la grande France* . . . (Dunwoodie 179)

¹ For more specific detail on France’s colonial project, see David Prochaska’s enterprising and detailed historical study of the French Algerian colonial port of Bône in *Making Algeria French* 2004.

² I employ the term “heterodiegetic” because, although Rieux as narrator does take part in the story, since the narrational strategy conceals his identity and because the narratorial voice speaks of Rieux in the third

Dunwoodie's words explain just how strictly the colonial project would define the status of Algeria. This colony was to be "bolt[ed] onto the mainland," meaning metaphorically that there should be no space left between the two geographic entities. The choice of Dunwoodie's words, "bolt . . . onto," indicates the forceful manner by which France colonized the coast of Algeria. The consequence of France extending her territorial reach across the Mediterranean was that, a once natural, aqueous border was no longer considered so much as dividing in nature, but rather as an "internal" space. However, many European immigrants living in Algeria had not all come from France and for them the Mediterranean was not "an internal sea of *la grande France*" (179), but something else entirely, more separate and culturally closer to their Mediterranean home.

In his speech, Camus refers to these cultural commonalities found around the Mediterranean: "Les hommes qui hurlent dans les cafés chantants d'Espagne, ceux qui errent sur le port de Gênes, sur les quais de Marseille, la race curieuse et forte qui vit sur nos côtes, sont sortis de la même famille" (1: 566). At first glance it may seem that Camus is telling us how Mediterranean culture unifies the Spanish and the Italians with the French. But I read it in a different manner. In explaining whom he considers as part of the Mediterranean community, Camus refers to the people who frequent the "singing cafés" in Spain. He then chooses to use two regional cultural identities defined by their local toponym rather than their nationality to demonstrate who else he feels belongs to this Mediterranean community. Written here he talks about the Genoese and the Marseillais. A separation is therefore made between the Genoese – those men from "le port de Gênes" and all other Italians, as well as between the men from Marseille and all other Frenchmen. Expressed this way, Camus's description of these local people, from Genoa and Marseille,

together with the Spanish could be read as forming one Mediterranean community. Most importantly, however, Camus does not describe any of them as French.

Camus continues to advance the uniqueness of a Mediterranean identity in his speech by adopting the French word “la Patrie.” Instead of using it to refer to the French mainland, harking back to Audisio, he uses this word to unite Mediterranean regions through their common natural and sensual attributes. Here he speaks of sense and smell:

La Patrie ce n'est pas l'abstraction qui précipite les hommes au massacre, mais c'est un certain goût de la vie qui est commun à certains êtres, par quoi on peut se sentir plus près d'un Génois ou d'un Majorquin que d'un Normand ou d'un Alsacien. La Méditerranée, c'est cela, cette odeur ou ce parfum qu'il est inutile d'exprimer : nous le sentons tous avec notre peau. (Camus 1: 567)

This quote helps us understand what Camus understood by the word “la Patrie.” As a child living in French Algeria, Camus was granted a scholarship enabling him to get a free education due to his status as “orphelin de guerre.” His father had lost his life for “la Patrie” in the early days of World War I. The fact that Camus received a French education meant that he would have been taught the same curriculum as all other French children. For Camus, living in French Algeria, “la Patrie” meant France and he would have been expected to feel affinity for the mother country despite, up until this age, never having visited mainland France. Interestingly enough, Camus understands that the words “la Patrie” can refer to an abstraction, but he will not interpret the word in that manner. Camus equates those words not directly with France, but instead with the inordinate loss of lives that occurred during the Great War, “La Patrie ce n'est pas l'abstraction qui précipite les hommes au massacre” (1: 567). “La Patrie” must have seemed an abstraction to him as a

school boy learning about rivers, mountains, provinces, kings and queens of a land on which he had never set foot. Rather than demonstrating a French nationalistic sentiment or a feeling of belonging to France, for Camus “la Patrie” is instead, “un certain goût de la vie qui est commun à certains êtres” (1: 567). These “certains êtres” are those who inhabit the Mediterranean.

Olivier Todd, in his biography of Camus, clarifies this point, emphasizing Camus’s unusual position of finding himself in-between two national identities in stating: “Camus cherche à dépasser son statut d’Algérois sans se rattacher à la seule France métropolitaine, encore moins à Paris. Guide culturel, il ne se sent ni entièrement français ni uniquement algérien” (Todd 188). Once again we can see here that by imagining a Mediterranean community formed by the European settlers in North Africa, Camus carves out a new space which bypasses the dilemma of choosing between being “uniquely French” or “uniquely Algerian” by having a third choice which, for Camus at least, could encompass both. However, Camus does admit to complexities and paradoxes in his reasoning of a Mediterranean identity. He expresses this in the essay ‘Amour de vivre’ (Camus 1: 64), which features in the collection *L’Envers et l’Endroit* (1: 29), which is one of his most early published and more autobiographical texts: “Et jamais peut-être un pays sinon la Méditerranée ne m’a porté à la fois si loin et si près de moi-même” (1: 66). This quote tellingly exposes how Camus’s vision of a Mediterranean community provided him with a sense of belonging to such an extent that he could claim the Mediterranean as his country, for, according to the above quote, the Mediterranean is a country, “un pays.” Yet, despite the fact that he claims the sea provides him with a fixed locus to call home, Camus also understands the shortcomings of using the Mediterranean as a national identity. This

watery vacuity, with an intangible and liminal role as a country, also leaves Camus feeling far from himself, “loin . . . de moi-même.”

The founding members of the Center came from what would later be labeled the “pied noir” community of Algeria and, although all French on paper, their commonality, too, was constructed around an imagined Mediterranean identity rather than their French nationality. Just as Audisio had described himself as Sardinian and Provençal, some of these founding members also had multiple regional identities. For Camus, it was his mother’s side of the family, which came from Menorca and would have identified themselves as regionally Catalan and only in national terms would have named themselves Spanish. Camus even emphasizes Majorca in his speech when listing Mediterranean port cities. Majorca is the largest of the four Balearic Islands that, along with mainland Cataluña, form the Catalan province. By specifically mentioning this island, Camus makes an overt reference to his and his mother’s Balearic cultural heritage. Majorca also features as the setting in his essay ‘Amour de Vivre.’ A contemporary of Camus, Emmanuel Roblès had family who came from mainland Spain, as did so many who were like him born in the city of Oran. In moving away from the racial undertones of the Algérianiste movement, this group of young writers, artists and intellectuals promoted a shared Mediterranean identity through a Mediterranean homeland.

It has already been noted that there lies a paradox between Camus’s fiction and non-fiction regarding his interest in Algerian Arabs. As the post-colonialists point out, no Arabs are portrayed in any central manner in his novels or plays, however, Camus did take an interest in Arab affairs in both his journalism and political activism. Despite there being no specific mention of the inequalities that Muslim Arabs faced in Camus’s speech, the Maison

de la Culture did not ignore Arab culture. The members wished to integrate the indigenous culture into their programs and they included readings of Arab poets on their agenda. Yet hardly any Muslim Algerians actually came to the Cultural Center, as Todd explains: “Peu de musulmans fréquentent la Maison même lorsqu’elle se consacre aux arts indigènes” (190). Despite the fact that the evenings of Arab culture were not popular, the fact that the center offered them tells of a willingness to be inclusive. One can only speculate as to the reason why Muslim attendance was low. Most likely this was because the poor Arab sector of the population didn’t have the luxury of bountiful leisure time with which they could pursue such activities. Todd notes, “La Maison de la Culture . . . publie deux bulletins mensuels, inaccessibles aux ouvriers, européens ou arabes, qu’il s’agisse . . . des poèmes arabes traduits par José Aboulker . . .” (187). The intellectual agenda that was on offer to the Arab and European working class shows that the Cultural Center offered a program suited to the educated Europeans and those members of the Muslim elite who had received a French education. Whenever Camus and his contemporaries did come into close contact with Muslim Algerians, they were more often than not those who came from elite, French educated backgrounds and whose views on the colonial polemics of the day remained moderate and cautious.

The inauguration of the Maison de la Culture occurred during an important period for the growing Algerian Nationalist movements and the members themselves were not oblivious to this growing unrest. Furthermore, as mentioned above, they included Muslim cultural aspects into their program and so the members of the Center, Camus included, did come in to contact with anti-colonial Islamic activists. Further proof of their interest in the struggle of non-French citizens to gain greater civil and social equality lies with their

support of the initiative by the Popular Front to grant French citizenship to the Muslim elite. Camus's biographer Todd details the objectives of the Blum-Viollette bill and its ultimate failure.

Les membres de la maison de la culture défendent le projet Blum-Viollette. Gouverneur de l'Algérie, Maurice Viollette voulait accorder la citoyenneté française à l'élite musulmane. En 1931, il publia *L'Algérie vivra-t-elle?* Si les élites musulmanes ne sont pas promues et intégrées à la nation française, prédit-il, la France perdra l'Algérie vers 1945 ou 1950. Pendant le Front Populaire, son idée est reprise. Le projet Blum-Viollette accorderait des droits politiques à deux cent mille électeurs musulmans. Sous la pression des hommes politiques, y compris les radicaux-socialistes, membres du Front Populaire, le projet s'évapore, mais Camus le défend. (190)

The Maison de la Culture, in supporting this bill, demonstrated a pro-Muslim stance that extended to supporting equal rights for the educated upper class section of the indigenous population. They advocated for a position that was not even fully backed by all members of the Popular Front.

Camus's lecture makes no direct reference to the sovereign and political rights of the non-French citizens, but the members of the cultural center went as far as to draw up a manifesto, edited by Camus, in favor of the reformist Blum-Viollette Bill to make public their support for these reforms. The manifesto was published in the second issue of its monthly newsletter (Foxlee 5):

Considérant que la culture ne saurait vivre là où meurt la dignité et qu'une civilisation ne saurait prospérer sous des lois qui l'écrasent; qu'on ne

saurait par exemple parler de culture dans un pays où 900 000 habitants sont privés d'écoles, et de civilisation, quand il s'agit d'un peuple diminué par une misère sans précédent et brimé par des lois d'exception et des codes inhumains.

Considérant, d'autre part, que le seul moyen de restituer aux masses musulmanes leur dignité est de leur permettre de s'exprimer ; qu'à cet égard le projet Viollette marque une étape dans l'obtention pour ces masses d'un droit à la vie qui est de tous les droits le plus élémentaire. (Camus 1: 573)

The manifesto in favor of the bill expresses awareness of the inequality between the lives of the majority of the population and those of the native inhabitants. It calls for the masses and not just the elite section of the Muslim population to be afforded basic human rights, such as the right to an education and to self-expression. However, the bill itself, of course, would only have granted political access to roughly two hundred thousand Muslims, a small percentage of the total indigenous population, but it was a radical step for its time. From a contemporary perspective, we can see its limitations. The bill was only to grant a political voice to the Muslim elite and structured that voice within the discourse of European ideas of political enfranchisement. It certainly did not allow for the Arab population to evolve according to its own social and political agenda. But perhaps, since even the limited scope of this bill never gained the support it needed to be passed in the Assemblée Nationale, it should be understood within its historical circumstances as an alternative to the right-wing politics, which kept all indigenous Algerians disenfranchised.

With the benefit of hindsight, one can see how Maurice Viollette's prediction regarding the fate of colonial Algeria, from his book *L'Algérie vivra-t-elle?*, rang only too

true. The primary reason for the failure of this project was the inveterate attitude on the part of the colonists to allow native Algerians to legally qualify as both French and Muslim. The issue of citizenship and religious identity lay at the heart of the Muslim Algerians' struggle for greater recognition. If at times France appeared willing to afford native Algerians greater civil, social and political rights, including most importantly access to French citizenship, as proposed by the Blum-Viollette bill, these propositions were always either compromised or blocked by the settler community. The colons knew they could limit the power given to the upper echelons of Muslim society by forcing them to choose between being French or Muslim. For their part, the elite Muslims generally felt reluctant to give up the right to legally commit to Sharia law. Earlier legislation passed in 1865 had already made it possible for certain native Algerians to obtain French citizenship, but it had required that they give up all legal rights to their Muslim identity, effectively this meant abandoning Sharia law. Many Muslim Algerians had not been prepared to make this sacrifice and so they remained excluded from positions of political clout.

To understand the importance of the larger connection between Camus's work at the Maison de la Culture and Arab resistance to colonial rule, it is necessary here to examine the historical background to the rise of Islamic activism and its various movements. In this manner we can then better understand the progression of Camus's involvement with the political events of the 1930's and thus assess the extent to which he was aware and sympathetic to the growing anti-colonial sentiment on the part of the Arab population and how this affected his own Mediterranean thought. A link can be made between Camus's acquaintance with certain moderate Muslim activists who were searching for more cautious and less violent ways to gain greater political and social

enfranchisement, and the development of his own avocation for a new Mediterranean culture that equally sought to avoid violent political extremes, especially fascist and communist ideologies.

Mark Orme, in his book *The Development of Albert Camus's Concern for Social and Political Justice*, investigates if and when one can pinpoint the beginnings of Camus's interest in the plight of the Arabs, Kabyles and Berbers. Referring to Herbert Lottman's biography *Albert Camus: A Biography*, Orme notes, "... the teenage Camus was already very acutely sensitive to the flagrant inequalities between, on the one hand, the Arabs, Kabyles, and Berbers constituting the local Moslem population of Algeria and, on the other hand, their European counterparts" (46). Despite the source being purely anecdotal Orme uses Lottman's research, which uncovers important evidence of a teenage Camus's early collaboration with pro-Muslim activists:

... Camus joined a team of collaborators working on a local *Ikdam*, a publication founded in 1919 by Emir Khaled with a view to raising Moslem consciousness. As Lottman elucidates, that journal championed what in its day was a revolutionary vision: "The paper's line was quite radical for that time, demanding equality of Moslem and French-European settlers, an end to special and discriminatory legislation for the indigenous majority, freedom of speech, of travel, the right to organize." While very little is known about the nature of his interest in the initiative – none of the writer's other biographers even raise the matter for discussion – this youthful encounter, which Lottman goes on to spotlight as "Camus' first experience of Algerian Moslems and their aspirations," is interesting in so far as it testifies to an early

awareness on Camus's part of the discriminatory practices in evidence in Algeria's Moslem communities. (46)

As Orme states, this kind of opportunity would have certainly alerted a young Camus to Muslim Algerian grievances against the colonial order, grievances that Camus would later acknowledge while working for the Communist Party and highlight in his journalism. Little is known regarding the nature of Camus's interest in *Ikdam*, but the work produced at this magazine along with information about its origins and founder, Khaled Abd Al Qadir, at least give us some indication of the type of anti-colonial environment to which the young Camus was exposed.

To learn more about the purpose of *Ikdam*, it is necessary to look back at the history of the nascent Algerian independence movement, for the journal has direct links to one of the more famous and earliest pioneers of Algerian Nationalism. It was founded by Khaled ibn Hashimi ibn Hajj Abd Al Qadir, whose full name according to Lizabeth Zack "literally means 'Khaled, son of Hashimi (his father), grandson of Abd Al Qadir'" (Zack Footnote 1 216). Khaled the younger's grandfather, Abd Al Qadir, was a famous political and religious figure who proved to be a thorn in the side of French forces in their initial bid to conquer different regions of Algeria. By the end of the 1830's Abd Al Qadir had succeeded in outmaneuvering the French military forces gaining full control of the Province of Oran as well as large swaths of the western part of the country. However, despite his victories over the invading forces and his ability to unite the different tribes in this area of North Africa, Abd Al Qadir ultimately had to capitulate to the French in 1842. This surrender was due to the effectiveness of the scorched-earth tactics employed by the French, which devastated the local population who then had no option but to turn against Abd Al Qadir and accept

French rule. Today historians still consider him as one of the founding insurgents against French colonial rule.

Furthermore, scholars today, in their desire to identify the precise origins of Algerian nationalism, go as far as to claim that his grandson, Khaled Abd Al Qadir, born in 1875 and the founder of *Ikdam*, should also be considered “a potential source of Algerian Nationalism” (Zack 206). Despite his grandfather’s renown as a resistance fighter, Khaled Abd Al Qadir the younger, benefited from the colonial system thanks to his family’s elite status. He received a French education and subsequently gained employment in the French Army, eventually advancing to the rank of officer. After ill health forced him to retire from military service during WW I he returned to Algiers in 1919, where he delved into local politics and sought to continue his grandfather’s legacy by joining the resistant group the Young Algerians who were pushing for social reforms for all Algerian Muslims (206). It was during the inter-war period that members of the Muslim elite began to advocate for political change in a new manner. Rather than trying to resist French rule through violent attacks or skirmishes, the Young Algerians changed tactics and sought to gain greater civil and political freedom by working with the idea of assimilation, gaining power through the military and the French education system.

The inter-war years were important times regarding the local impetus for change in the political structure of colonial French Algeria, especially regarding the statutory rights of the indigenous Muslim population. The experience of having fought for France during WW I allowed for a change in the mind set of those native Algerians who could now compare their subjugated life in colonial Algeria with the more prosperous and equal living conditions of the French living in France. Thus, these post-war years marked a certain

watershed regarding local politics and the fight for greater political franchise for indigenous Arabs. On the one hand, the Young Algerians were successful in their demands, since reforms were granted by the then Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau. However, despite having initially envisaged an enlightened package of changes to be brought into effect expanding Muslim access to political life in Algeria, Clemenceau was forced to compromise on his intentions and ultimately passed far less reaching reforms due to intense opposition and pressure from the right wing and the “colons” in Algeria. The result of the more conservative 1919 reform bill was that it only effected change for a very small percentage of the native population. What is important, however, is that these changes, minor as they were, were to prove pivotal in paving the way for the more drastic resistance efforts that were to come.

These developments to the political system served to further ignite the debate on both sides. For the Muslim Algerians they were seen either as a beacon of hope or dismissed as essentially ineffective due to their limited scope. For the colonial settlers they roused suspicion and fear. For them, any reforms that granted more power, however limited, to the indigenous population meant a weakening of the stronghold that they - the colons - had over the subjugated masses; a stronghold the powerful minority was reluctant to relinquish. Consequently, there exist still today differences of opinion with regard to the impact made by the 1919 reforms and the extent to which they influenced those resistance fighters who would take the next step and demand not just greater political franchise, but also independence. The long term implications of the reforms may still be subject for debate, but it is accepted that both sides were by now pitted against one another,

demonstrating on the one side a growing desire for change and on the other a dogged determination to maintain the status quo.

Additionally, there existed divisions and tensions between the various Muslim resistant groups and leaders during this time. Ira Lapidus in his book *A History of Islamic Societies* (2002) summarizes the situation and divides these anti-colonial groups into three categories:

In the flush of victory and gratitude for Algerian support in the war, France offered Muslims French citizenship if they would give up Islamic civil law. Other legislation enlarged the representation of native peoples in local assemblies and gave suffrage to property owners, officials, and veterans. French settler pressure forced the French government to renege on many of the concessions, but not before French concepts of justice, equality and citizenship had taken hold among Muslim intellectuals. The intellectual elites had three main components: the French-educated Algerians who favored cultural and political assimilation into France; populist leaders who organized Algerian workers, both at home and in France, into a radical political movement; and reformers who appealed to the petite bourgeoisie of the towns and to certain rural populations, and attempted to define an Algerian national identity in Arab and Muslim terms. (630)

From Lapidus's description we can see that certain Muslim intellectuals advocated for equality with the French by pushing for changes that would allow them to participate more freely and equally in French colonial society. But, more importantly, they did not go so far as to call for Algerian independence. One of the groups that petitioned for this type of

change was the Young Algerians.

Zack states that the journal *Ikdam* was created by the Young Algerians soon after the 1919 reforms had been passed to provide a platform from which they could continue to criticize the French occupation of Algeria and promote the fight for greater political and civil rights for the native population. As a political movement, the Young Algerians and *Ikdam*, along with its founder Khaled Abd Al Qadir, are thus considered forerunners in the struggle for an independent Algeria. The 1919 reforms had fallen short of the Young Algerians' aspirations, but that did not dampen their motivation or determination. Extracts from a publication of *Ikdam* dated June 1919 give an idea of the changes that Khaled Abd Al Qadir and his supporters were demanding:

... 'the native will not accept French citizenship with a status other than his own' (Kaddache, 1970, p. 67). He insisted that natives want 'to conserve their language, values and religion' and that natives be able to retain their 'Muslim' status along with basic citizenship rights (Ageron, 1991, p. 79; Kaddache, 1970, p. 67). This issue became the effective rallying point for Khaled's party. (Zack 212)

In reaction to the demands put forth by Khaled Abd Al Qadir, the colons maintained all the more ardently that in order to gain French citizenship the Muslim Algerians would have to give up Islamic law. Such action still divided Muslims who were pushing for changes to French rule. Some thought it better to side with the French and were willing to adopt their assimilation policies in order to gain greater involvement in politics; others felt that to accept such limited advances was not in the interests of the greater struggle towards independence.

If it is true that the teenage Camus collaborated with workers from *Ikdam* as Lottman suggests, then it can also be concluded that he would have had direct contact with this more moderate rhetoric espoused by certain members of the Muslim elite, which did not go so far as to push for independence from France, but did demand a more equal society for the Muslim population. Notwithstanding, whether Camus can be associated with *Ikdam* or not, its stance reflected Camus's own. The moderate left-wing position of *Ikdam* and the Young Algerians was a contemporary political point of view that, by the 1930's, was being championed by not just Camus, but, also his peers at the Maison de la Culture.

This moderate position, which is derived from the Muslim elite's anti-colonialism, is also the context through which Camus's Mediterraneanism should be understood; a Mediterraneanism that, as we have seen, stands against fascism but also embraces the "Orient" or the eastern regions of the Mediterranean basin. Camus's inclusion of the Orient in his speech at the Maison de la Culture reflects a sensitivity to the non-European part of the Mediterranean. This did not translate into a championing of Algerian Independence, but does show that Camus was aware and in agreement with certain, all be they more moderate, aspects of the Muslim anti-colonial agenda. The more moderate approach favored by the Muslim elite was situated between the radically conservative and intransigent settler mindset and the equally radical, revolutionary politics of the pro-independence nationalists. The in-between position in which these Muslim moderates found themselves mirrors Camus's own preference for choosing an in-between cultural space - the Mediterranean - for the European colonial population as espoused in his speech. Thus, we can read Camus's Mediterraneanism as partly being the product of a specific social and political moment in history which preceded de-colonization. This is the context,

albeit a complex one, through which we should understand Camus's own political coming of age.

Much scholarly attention has been focused on Camus's isolated position in the Algerian War of Independence and much ink has been spilled in assessing why he rejected independence as a viable solution to the war. Nonetheless, it is through close examination of the origins to his early political and social awareness, which figure in his Mediterranean thought, that we gain greater insight into some of the reasons for his intransigence when it came to his future opinions on the issue of Algerian independence. From a young age, through his work at the Maison de la Culture and through the ideas expressed in his inauguration speech, Camus chooses to follow an in-between path that navigates a fine middle line between extreme rhetoric on either side. This was to be a path that he would continue to adhere to throughout his professional career. Camus's inclination, as shown in his speech, to follow a middle path and create a third way goes hand in hand therefore with his attraction to moderate Muslim calls for greater political franchise and social equality, since these aspirations were not extreme. It also sheds light on why he refused to speak out in favor of the more radical Algerian nationalists, such as the terrorist organization the Front de libération nationale (hereafter written as FLN), even when there was great peer pressure placed upon him to do so. Camus did not justify terrorist tactics of such a violent nature, no matter the perpetrator, given that they are by definition always extreme. Therefore, Camus's early work at the Cultural Centre can be seen to have laid the groundwork for the political views he held right up until the War of Independence. As Orme points out, "Camus was broadly supportive of the Arab cause (yet, crucially, he would not go so far as to support political independence for Algeria) . . ." (Orme 54-55).

Not only, therefore, was Camus influenced or at least attracted to the Muslim elite's more moderate appeals for social and political equality, but Camus's work with the journal *Ikdam* may also have had bearing on his later work for the Communist Party. Camus was involved with *Ikdam* sometime between 1929 and 1933 on the basis of him being a teenager. This period would not have coincided exactly with the founder Khaled's time at the journal, but it is known that while working in Algeria "Khaled used the journal *Ikdam* to publish *exposés* on the general situation of the native population and to denounce administrative abuses" (Zack 214). Therefore, Khaled's views would have been known and promoted amongst the members who worked at *Ikdam* and these views included anti-imperial Communist ideology. Camus, thus, would have been made aware of the Young Algerians involvement with the Communists who were working closely with Khaled in Paris.

Before being exiled to Syria in 1926, Khaled left Algeria for Paris to work with the Communists to campaign for better workers' rights especially for the immigrant Algerian part of the labor force. Furthermore, the connection can be drawn between *Ikdam's* communist interests and Camus's own since Camus himself joined the Communist Party in the summer of 1935 at the age of twenty-one not long after his work at *Ikdam*. While it was fashionable to join the Communist Party at this time simply because it was antifascist, Camus had already been introduced to communist ideas through his theatre work and discussions with his peers, especially those from the university milieu. It is known that he certainly discussed his anxieties over his decision to join the Party with his former university Professor Jean Grenier. In having come into contact with members of the Young Algerians while working at the journal a few years earlier and from his duties at the Maison

de la Culture and with the theatre, one can easily surmise that Camus's political views were thus nurtured by Algerian activists whose views mirrored his own. With the help of the Parti communiste français (hereafter written as PCF), these Algerian activists with whom Camus had the most contact, were fighting for their right to French citizenship without sacrificing their Muslim identity, but not necessarily pushing for complete independence.

Furthermore, the Maison de la Culture was actually financed with money from the Communist Party (Graebner 208) and so Camus's position as General Secretary to the Center was inherently tied to his interest in politics and commitment to Communism. Jan F. Rigaud explains the connection between the cultural center and the politics of the time: "La Maison de la Culture in Algiers was supposed to promote cultural activities, but it was also a propaganda tool for the Popular Front and the Communists. It was affiliated with the Association de la Culture, whose headquarters were in Paris" (Rigaud 207). The link between the Communist Party and the Cultural Center is important mainly because, as mentioned earlier, on joining the Algerian sector of the PCF, the Parti communiste algérien (hereafter written as PCA), Camus comes into wider contact with the founders of early nationalist movements. Orme gives more detail about Camus's role in the PCF and the PCA, which was created in 1936:

Camus's adherence to the PCF coincided with what, in Algeria, amounted to a nationalistic drive to draw more young Arab militants into the party rank and file. . . . Hostile to the entrenched exploitation of (French) imperialism, the contemporary PCF was sympathetic to the cause of Arab nationalism and, in this respect, the party campaigned not only on an antifascist ticket, but also for anti-colonialism. (Orme 52)

Membership to the Party thus served two purposes for Camus. It allowed him to rally against fascism, his commitment to which only became more ardent with the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936. He desperately wanted to go fight for the Republicans, but his ill health held him back from active service. Joining the PCF also allowed him to become more active in his work against social inequality. Orme elucidates on this point:

Indeed, by the mid-1930's, Camus displays a rudimentary concern for the victims of, in broad terms, both social and political oppression: the former in relation to the ethnological divide in his own beloved Algeria (a discriminatory practice deriving from colonial injustice but which Camus does not yet appear to see as such); the latter regarding the wholesale denial of democratic ideals threatened by fascist coercion. (49)

As Orme declares, Camus's own views regarding social inequality in French Algerian society were not expressed in terms of an Algerian nationalist narrative and this matched the PCF's own standpoint.

The PCF initially took an anti-imperial stance in its aim to unite the working classes from different nations, the majority of whom was Arab in French Algeria. Nevertheless, changes on the European political scene caused the Communists to renege on their position. In doing so they failed to remain faithful to supporting the hopes of the indigenous Algerians in obtaining greater political and civil rights. The PCF's realignment with French nationalist sentiment arose from a reaction to the prominent growth of National Socialism in Germany. Furthermore, the coalition government of the Popular Front weakened the Communists anti-imperialist stance because of pressure exerted from the less radical members of the government. Hence, some French Algerian Communists adopted a more

pro-colonial view, dismissing the indigenous Algerian Arabs' struggles against injustice. Camus did not concur with the change in party line in this instance and this effectively marked the beginning of the end of his time as a member of the Communist Party.

It has been established here that Camus's work at the Cultural Center was not focused on radical anti-colonial measures for he certainly did not endorse efforts to eliminate France's presence in Algeria. Nevertheless, we have also established that he was aware of the unequal divisions in colonial society, since his energy and attention were directed to speaking out against those divisions. In joining the Communist Party, Camus combined his social activism with his antifascist advocacy. Orme details how these two areas of Camus's political and social activism come together through his membership to the PCA and moreover how both these areas further connect him to Muslim activists:

As a young man whose main duties in the PCF consisted, by his own admission, of "recruitment in Arab quarters," Camus's awareness was undoubtedly raised of the plight of the local Algerians "whose conduct and honesty [he] admired," as he would later confide to Grenier (Corr, 180). We should also mention as worthy of notice the fact that Camus's formative experience of theater in Algeria . . . brought him in to contact with many Moslems, some of whom actually went on to become future leaders following Algeria's independence from France in 1962. (54-55)

We can see through Orme's quote just how intertwined Camus's mission at the Cultural Center and his theatre work was with his growing political and social awareness. The more involved he became with these issues, the more contact he had with the moderate Muslim discourse like that published in *Ikdam*.

Yet, the about-turn made by the PCF regarding their decision to not support Arab nationalism caused schisms to form between members of the PCA itself, the most significant being between two important militants Messali Hadj and Amar Ouzegane, leader of the PCA. "Dans les années 20, le PCF, anticolonialiste, a aidé les partisans de Messali Hadj et de son Étoile nord-africaine. Les priorités changent avec la montée du nazisme et du fascisme . . ." (Todd 193). Consequently, Camus, who took Messali's side in the polemic, came to see his political and social thought, along with his ideas on a Mediterranean identity, caught between mercurial issues of social activism, anti-colonial rhetoric, Communist ideology and growing Algerian nationalist sentiment.

Camus's involvement in these volatile political circumstances is interesting for us since the dissension that occurs within the PCA causes Camus's own position regarding the social and ethical problems of the day to suddenly become incompatible with the very political ideology he believed it was in accordance with. By the late 1930's Camus's social and political views place him in a metaphorical no man's land. Because Camus was isolated by his dissension with the PCA, one can better understand the rhetoric he uses in his inauguration speech. The disillusionment Camus feels with his fellow Communists confirms his growing distaste for extreme ideology and can be discerned in his desire to imagine his own version of a cultural community, a new community based not on French or Algerian cultural reference points, but instead on the Mediterranean. This middle, or in-between, space allows Camus to remain true to his social and political principles. He decides not to remain loyal to the Party if that means compromising his values. Camus's reaction to this turn of events thus led him to a place of in-betweenness. Hence, Camus's inclination to refer to both the metaphorical and literal in-between position of the Mediterranean in his

Mediterranean thought.

In order to better understand this middle position that has been discerned from Camus's speech, it is necessary to detail the change in position taken by the Communists, as well as the reasons behind it and the divisions it caused among the Muslim Algerians. In the mid 1930's, Camus became acquainted with Messali Hadj. Messali had worked closely with Khaled in Paris as part of another resistant group called l'Étoile nord-africaine (hereafter written as ENA), but the Popular Front government banned the movement due to its pro-Algerian independence stance. Messali left France for Algeria and went on to form the Parti du peuple algérien (hereafter written as PPA), in 1937, which again advocated for greater political autonomy for native Algerians without initially going so far as to demand full independence from France. For Messali, national independence was the ultimate goal, but to begin with he advocated simply for reforms to the colonial system, most importantly demanding the right to French citizenship for all Arabs. He was not a supporter of the FLN and its violent military style tactics. Messali came to be distrusted by the PCF and more importantly by the members of the PCA. Amar Ouzegane, one of the leading members of the PCA, spoke out vehemently against both Messali and the PPA and campaigned against their reformist ideas. Camus, however, disagreed with Ouzegane and the Communist Party line. He paid the price for this loyalty to Messali. In stubbornly adhering to his own principles and by questioning and then rebuffing the PCF's change in colonial ideology, Camus effectively allowed himself to be forced out of the Communist Party. Despite retaining respect for Camus, Ouzegane demanded Camus's expulsion. Todd elucidates here Ouzegane's position in the whole affair:

À ses yeux, celui-ci [Camus] n'est pas un Européen d'Algérie classique : il ne

souffre pas, lui, « d'ethnocentrisme occidental ». Ouzegane a fait une collecte pour lui, lorsque malade, il manquait d'argent. . . . Il comprend l'intérêt que Camus porte aux travailleurs musulmans. . . . Il ne met pas en doute l'honnêteté de Camus, mais pour lui, c'est un jeune militant à la formation politique rudimentaire. . . . (Todd 201-02)

According to Todd, Camus thus manages to disagree with Ouzegane on a political level without losing his respect, since Ouzegane admits to appreciating Camus's concern for the social issues that many Muslims were facing. Nonetheless, Camus's position, although it seemed enlightened, did not sit comfortably enough with the Communist majority who still opposed Arab nationalism.

The resistance on Camus's part to toe the line and instead forge his own path reflects his desire to carve out his own space and discourse, which did not always fit neatly into the dominant politics of the time. This would have been no easy task since disagreeing with Communist party policy was not looked upon kindly. Camus would have been well aware that his questioning of the Communist position would likely result in his being expelled from the Party, yet he was willing to risk expulsion in order to stay true to his political principles. In supporting Messali's style of reform over the larger Communist ideology, Camus showed his attraction to a different narrative. Camus's ideas concerning political reform to the colonial order coupled with the determination to place his own moral and social ideals first and foremost, resulted in a situation that left him isolated, stranded between more mainstream positions:

Le Parti s'éloigne du PPA : ce que Camus prend, selon Ouzegane, pour une inacceptable erreur stratégique et morale n'est qu'un changement tactique.

L'un y voit une métamorphose politique radicale, l'autre une modification provisoire. Camus défend d'abord les « indigènes ». Les communistes les font passer au second plan. (202)

It is Camus's skepticism of radical ideology, along with his wish to uphold the interests of those workers who inhabited his own childhood neighborhood of Belcourt, European and Arab alike, which prompts Camus to differentiate himself from the larger political picture. For him, the important issue at stake was always to be seen at a local Mediterranean level, a position that left him, however, blind to the wider issue of the growing Algerian nationalistic feeling.

These minutiae concerning Camus's entanglement in the political machinations of the 1930's may seem superfluous here. The important point, however, for us, is that they allow us to understand the context of Camus's speech at la Maison de la Culture. The speech's ideas emanate from the political discourse of 1930's Algiers. Within this context, *Ikdam*, Algerian nationalist movements, like the ENA, the PPA and the PCA, along with La Maison Culturelle and the PCF, were all linked by political, civil, social and economic issues that overlapped with the ethical and moral problems Camus was beginning to grapple with. I suggest that these early turbulent experiences of politics within the PCA and at La Maison Culturelle would have made an impact on the young Camus and his subsequent dismissal from the political scene only helped to further shape his desire to seek middle ground or an in-between space that avoided extremes. Therefore, we can now better understand why Camus continues to champion greater social and political rights for Muslims while never going so far as to call for France to give up its colonial territory. Camus remains aware of the colonial abuses yet fails to support an independent Algeria as a solution due to his

attraction to the moderate middle ground.

Mark Orme suggests that Camus's own childhood reminiscences which feature in correspondence with his former school master, Jean Grenier, and also in *Le Premier Homme*, retrospectively show "a later awareness on Camus's part of distinctions between individuals in Algeria drawn in line with racial differences: a clear discriminatory practice engendering socioeconomic persecution and political (i.e. colonial) exploitation" (Orme 47). According to Orme's evidence, it is clear that later on in life Camus was to continue to express awareness of the racial implications underpinning the stark socio-economic differences between indigenous Arabs and poor European settlers, but the origins of this awareness, the awareness of difference, only serves to entrench Camus in isolated positions, caught in-between other more extreme political options. It can be understood then, that even if Camus was not actively advocating for anti-colonial measures to be instigated, he was aware of the unequal divisions in colonial society. As seen from his speech however, both his energy and attention were directed more towards fighting fascism rather than critiquing the French colonial order.

In his speech, Camus expresses support for a Mediterranean collectivism that will be different from a Russian collectivism. Camus's caution with regard to Russian communism is another example of his intent to rally against ideologies in general, be they Communism, Christianity or Fascism, and spurs him to formulate his own middle ground theory. This line of thought also sat nicely with Audisio's debunking Bertrand's *latinité*. Seth Graebner expands on this idea, stating: "In his [Camus's] view the Mediterranean rises above ideologies, overpowering and transforming them into local products" (Graebner 209). This idea that the Mediterranean rises above ideology makes sense when taken in the context of

Camus's political antifascist stance. He used his idea of a Mediterranean community to reformulate nationalistic dogma to fit a more local perspective, which in turn shaped his political activism in the Algiers of the mid 1930's. Instead of adhering to a political standpoint for the sake of remaining true to an ideology, Camus, in his disappointment with political rhetoric, is drawn instead to his natural environment, specifically the nature of the Mediterranean, which for him is a source of commonality and, to re-quote Graebner, a "local product." Reading Graebner's words, we see how Camus's Mediterraneanism is also a reaction to his disillusionment with ideologies and it provides him with a new cultural foundation, which in being "local" remains relevant to his origins and political values.

Given the turn of political events in the mid 1930's regarding the PPA founded by Messali Hadj, Camus's involvement and subsequent expulsion from the Communist Party in Algeria, his short-lived time at the Maison de la Culture and the about turn made by the Communists to no longer support anti-colonial interests in Algeria, it is understandable that Camus looks towards a new expression of identity in the form of Mediterraneanism. This new cultural community, or culture as he calls it, allows him to imagine a middle space free from ideology, be it Nazism or Communism. Camus is naïve to think his position is somehow un-ideological just because he skirts two political extremes. Furthermore, his cultural community is based on the European Mediterranean and so it conveniently evades the wider polemics of the inequality within French Algerian colonial society and for this reason such issues are not highlighted in this speech. Nonetheless, as previously stated, this is not to say that Camus is wholly impervious to non-European elements to the Mediterranean.

By defining the Mediterranean as a meeting place of East and West, Camus looks beyond the borders of the French colonial territory and focuses on belonging to numerous Mediterranean civilizations. Graebner underscores this plurality: "For Camus, the Mediterranean constitutes an avenue toward his particular kind of collectivism that would differ significantly from the Soviet version. Everything rests on this regional difference. Under Camus's secretariat, the Maison de la Culture aimed to work regionally . . ." (209). By recognizing the importance of regionality and the idea of the local, Camus shows himself to be sensitive to the subtle differences between the make-up of the social groups within the European community who had previously been taken as one homogenous group because all were white Europeans. Despite Camus's resistance to acknowledging the illegitimacy of the European presence and domination of Algerian society, he does profess a sensitivity to the inequalities within the society in which he grew up. Todd discusses the tensions and differences between the Arabs and the poor working class white Europeans in his descriptions of Camus's childhood environment.

À Belcourt, ils côtoient les Arabes et croient les connaître. On parle d'Ahmed, de Fatma, prénoms qui noient la singularité dans une généralité condescendante. On partage le méchoui sur les plages. On ne se rend pas les uns chez les autres. Petits Blancs et Arabes mettent en commun leur haine de la police même pendant une *baroufa*, une bagarre. Ces pauvres craignent le chômage. On accuse Arabes, juifs, Napolitains, Valenciens, Corses, Marseillais de voler le travail. La xénophobie affleure comme la solidarité. Rue de Lyon, voix françaises, arabes, espagnoles, italiennes se mêlent. (Todd 36)

This was the one area in colonial society where Arab lives came into contact with those of the poorer white settlers and it is out of this same environment with its array of allegiances and enmities that Camus wrote.

Having established that Camus's Mediterranean thought, as expressed in his inauguration speech, underscores a unique partiality for finding a middle ground between the politics and colonial cultural of French Algeria, we can also read it as separate from the post-colonial critique that places it within the context of the *École d'Alger*. As stated previously, Camus's speech has been taken as a manifesto for the *École d'Alger*. His words have been interpreted as promoting European writings and ideas in colonial North Africa without encompassing any aspects of Muslim or Arab culture or demonstrating awareness or concern for the inequalities inherent in French colonial society. As we have seen, this argument no longer holds true when Camus's Mediterranean thought is studied within the social and political context of its time. When Camus's speech is read as a critique of the limitations of political ideology as well as an alternative expression for a new cultural community that existed in-between mainland France and Muslim Algeria, it also contradicts the reasoning of those who see him as only writing to endorse the colonial order.

More interestingly, Foxlee goes on to debate the accuracy even of collectively naming the young members who worked with *La Maison de la Culture* as being in the *École d'Alger*. He puts into doubt the very existence of the *École d'Alger* as a school in itself, arguing it was named anachronistically post WW II and he discredits the veracity of reading Camus's speech as a manifesto for this literary movement. According to Foxlee, the

manifesto should be read only as an outline for the objectives of La Maison de la Culture rather than for the literary movement of the *École d'Alger*.

Indeed, the idea of an *École d'Alger* had not even been thought of in 1937, as Dunwoodie himself makes clear when he goes on to describe Camus as the “spokesman for [a] group of young intellectuals . . . who *were to become known* as the *École Nord-Africaine des Lettres* and, more lastingly, as the *École d'Alger*.” (Foxlee 69)

This group of young intellectuals included Edmond Charlot, another French Algerian with family ties to the island of Malta. Charlot had attended the same lycée as Camus and, like Camus, had been equally encouraged by their professor, Jean Grenier, to pursue his energies and interests into the literary world.

It was thus in Charlots’s small bookstore, “Les Vraies Richesses,” opened in 1936, which also served as a small publishing house, and through Charlot’s literary review *Rivages* and his collection “Méditerranéennes,” that these burgeoning young intellectuals found an outlet for promoting their literary pursuits concerning their lives in French Algeria, the Mediterranean and their cultural identity. Yet despite this small publishing house-cum-bookstore being a center where like-minded young artists and writers could and certainly did commune, the idea of their naming themselves as being part of a movement or literary school remains uncertain. Hélène Rufat in her interview with Edmond Charlot, conducted two years before he died and which appeared in the July 2004 edition of the bulletin put out by la Société des Études Camusiennes, records Charlot as dismissing the notion of such a “school” ever existing, noting he called the idea “une foutaise” (bullshit) (Rufat 66). This anachronistic naming of the *École d'Alger* once again

highlights the complex and contradictory nature of Camus and his contemporaries' cultural identity. They were physically rooted in the geographical space of Algeria, but the distance from mainland France meant their historical and cultural position looked towards the Mediterranean to connect their affinity to both France and French Algeria.

Camus's speech can thus be better understood when read as a new expression of Mediterranean cultural identity, which provides him with the foundation for his Mediterranean thought that is carried through in to his later work. It has been established that Camus's thinking is a continuation of earlier expressions on Mediterranean identity, but that it also differs from the reactionary attitudes of Bertrand and Maurras. Through the influence of writers like Audisio, Camus comes to create his own particular vision of a European Mediterranean cultural identity that situates itself in-between France and Algeria, straddling a geographic threshold. Read this way, Camus's middle position with its liminal characteristics destabilizes the binary order created by the colonial ruling powers by adding a third option to the "us" and "them" duality. Camus also builds on his new approach of an anti-nationalistic Mediterranean cultural identity in French Algeria by including the Orient. This acts to further differentiate his pro-Mediterranean arguments from those made earlier by thinkers such as Louis Bertrand. Finally, it has been concluded that, most importantly, Camus's Mediterranean thought must be understood within the historical and political context of which it was a part. This speech, besides articulating his expression for a new Mediterranean culture, allows us to better understand Camus's involvement with the Communist party and his connection to certain anti-colonial movements from 1930's French Algeria. In this manner, we see how Camus's Mediterranean thought is tied to his growing awareness of social inequalities despite his

activism never being anti-colonial or pro-Arab nationalism. Through his short-lived time working at the Maison de la Culture, Camus not only communicates a new way of conceiving of a Mediterranean cultural identity, but, by iterating his middle ground between France and Algeria, we can use this liminal position as a lens that will allow us to read anew his future work.

Chapter 2

“Tout ce que l’homme pouvait gagner au jeu de la peste et de la vie, c’était la connaissance et la mémoire” (Camus 2: 236).

“Je ne sais pas ce que je cherche, je le nomme avec prudence, je me dédis, je me répète, j’avance et je recule” (3: 602).

In-betweenness in the narration of *La Peste*.

In my first chapter, I examined Camus’s inauguration speech for the new Maison de la Culture in Algiers. I addressed Camus’s emphasis on the Mediterranean in his articulation of a ‘new’ Mediterranean culture and especially the sense of in-betweenness it evokes due to its placement both culturally and geographically between Algeria and France. Camus’s attachment to this idealized Mediterranean culture, with which he identified as an alternative to the rise of fascism in Europe, is best understood when situated in-between the hegemonic French rule in colonial Algeria and the mother country of mainland France.

This chapter attends to *La Peste*, Camus’s second major novel, the success of which consolidated him as a popular and respected writer, and my analysis thereof explores how Camus’s Mediterraneanism is indirectly expressed through what I continue to term “in-betweenness.” While *La Peste* is not overtly about the Mediterranean, I argue that because the concept of in-betweenness is present in its major themes, this text can benefit from a reading that uses the in-betweenness of Camus’s Mediterraneanism to explore its narratological strategy.

As already discussed in Chapter one, Camus’s Mediterranean vision based its origins in Ancient Greece, rather than aligning itself with Roman history and thus the

fascism of his day, and hence provides a foundation to his conception of a Mediterranean culture. In this chapter, one structural and stylistic aspect of the chronicle that also connects to Camus's interest in Ancient Greece, and thus indirectly to his Mediterraneanism, is the use of Thucydides' historical documenting of the Plague of Athens. The fact that *La Peste* is partly inspired by Thucydides is dealt with below. For our purposes in this chapter, it is important to remember that Thucydides is the first historian in the Western tradition to connect objectivity with the recording of history, as well as the first writer to describe the effects of plague in what we would call scientific detail. This chapter explores how the Greek historian's chronicling technique has an influence on the narratorial voice used by the protagonist Dr. Bernard Rieux in his recounting of the plague epidemic in Oran. As we shall see, echoes of a Thucydidean approach to recording history can be detected in Rieux's documenting of his plague chronicle since he places great emphasis on providing an objective and balanced account of events. The text's appropriation of the Greek historian's recording method is thus pertinent, as Thucydides' narratorial technique has a bearing on the narrator Dr. Rieux's act of telling his story which obliges him to place himself in an in-between narratorial space.

I further develop the motif of in-betweenness by analyzing beyond the stylistic to also incorporate social and philosophical manifestations thereof. I begin my analysis of *La Peste* by discussing the literary tradition of plague narratives and comparing different narratorial methods. I then focus on the narrator and the significance of his opening remarks to the chronicle. I continue to analyze the narrative method, revisiting its connections to Thucydides' own style of narration. Lastly, I move away from the act of narration to look at how in-betweenness is evoked through more philosophical aspects of

the novel that touch on the human condition through the destabilization brought about by the plague. This disruption calls into question the boundaries between what is significant and what is insignificant, especially regarding the significance of the meaning that lies behind all the words we use, portrayed in our case here, by the character Joseph Grand's obsession with words, which in its own way also links back to Thucydides' and Rieux's preoccupation with narration and the imparting of truthful information.

Before examining how our protagonist, Dr. Rieux's narration connects to Thucydides' own plague chronicle, it is first necessary to lay out how Camus, as the author of the text, came to this Ancient Greek primary source. I will also here comment on how *La Peste*, in its appropriation of a Thucydidean style of chronicling the plague, fits into the larger context and history of plague writing.

The research Camus undertook for the writing of *La Peste*, as explained by Marie-Thérèse Blondeau, one of the editors of Camus's *Œuvres Complètes*, had him consulting a wide variety of both medical and historical documentation covering the history of plague epidemics (2: 1133-1136). Significantly, his investigations led him to the earliest written account of the disease found in book two of Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War* (henceforth referred to as *History*). Camus's interest in Thucydides' chronicle was no accident since it forms part of his wider inclination towards Ancient Greek literature, history and culture. This interest was foundational to his Mediterranean thought and we know it continued to influence Camus as he began work on *La Peste* through the numerous notes he made in his *Carnets* concerning classical studies, which attest to his reading of both primary and secondary sources on the subject. His *Carnets* notes include evidence that he read the works of Plutarch, Homer, Marcus Aurelius, as well as Thucydides (934-937).

Furthermore, an essential feature of Camus's first version of *La Peste* includes a main character, Stephan, a Greek and Latin teacher, who, having survived the disease, instead of joining forces with the sanitary workers in their fight against the plague, chooses to write a pamphlet on Thucydides' and Lucretius' accounts of plague epidemics. Herein lies an important intertextual theme, which I analyze in more detail in the next chapter, since Camus moves beyond using Thucydides' text on the plague simply for his own research and chooses to actually incorporate it into his chronicle through the character of Stephan. Camus ultimately discards Stephan and his pamphlet, from his final version, but traces of Thucydides' influence linger, as I show here, through my analysis of the narratorial method employed by our protagonist Dr. Rieux.

Additionally, Camus's appropriation of Thucydides' account of the plague draws on sickness and devastation to discuss the human condition and, as such, forms part of a larger tradition of essayists and poets who throughout history use Thucydides' text as inspiration for their own plague epidemic compositions. This may be because, like war, the devastation of pestilence provides the ripe circumstances for creative reflection on the existential and metaphysical nature of our existence. These same consequences of the plague, I argue, provide us with examples of in-betweenness that in turn reflect the positioning of Camus's Mediterranean thought. Examples of plague narratives that follow in Thucydides' footsteps include works by Lucretius, Virgil and Ovid. The Greek historian's account of plague has also been both translated and adapted by many scholars over the course of time. "The first vernacular translation of Thucydides was into French, was [sic] made not from the Greek text but from Lorenzo Valla's Latin translation, by Claude de Seyssel, and was completed in 1527. An English translation by Thomas Nichols, based on de Seyssel's French translation,

was published in 1550” (Rhodes *Thucydides* 85). Thomas Hobbes penned the first translation of Thucydides’ prose from Greek into English. Another translation was written in 1659 by Thomas Sprat, an English churchman and scholar who adapted “The Plague of Athens” into a poetic account. This text was republished in 1665 when “London was reeling from a disastrous epidemic of bubonic plague that claimed over 50,000 lives, a fifth of the city’s inhabitants” (Anselment 3). Anselment also references the influence of Thucydides’ text on subsequent plague narratives, stating:

The decision to imitate Thucydides, whatever its immediate occasion, is in fact part of a long literary tradition. Through Lucretius’s subsequent influence on Virgil, Thucydides’s narrative indirectly affected the account of the plague that ends Book 3 of the *Georgics*: more directly, Thucydides’s history of the Athenian epidemic shaped the description of pestilence in Procopius’s history of Justinian’s reign. The inclusion of plague episodes in such works as Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* and Lucan’s *Bellum civile* [sic] suggests that even for those not indebted to the Greek Historian, plague narratives became set pieces. (4)

Such a summary of canonic texts that employ the plague as their foundational theme allows us to better grasp the historical literary context within which Camus created his plague chronicle. Thucydides’ passage “The Plague of Athens” is the urtext linking all these works as the original seed whence they sprang and thus has a bearing on most, if not all, Western plague narratives. While Camus does not make reference to all of these plague narratives, he, like them, is using Thucydides (and Lucretius) as the beginning of a tradition.

In the centuries that follow Virgil, Ovid and Lucan's era, the plague does not disappear from literature or art, but continues to be a source of inspiration for writers, poets, dramatists and artists alike; including but not limited to, Boccaccio, Chaucer, Tintoretto, Pushkin, Herman Hesse and Antonin Artaud. René Girard refers to some of these examples in his article entitled "The Plague in Literature and Myth," where he highlights the common denominator of all plague narratives as its ability to not simply destroy, but that in doing so it unduly levels the playing the field, so to speak:

The plague is universally presented as a process of undifferentiation, a destruction of specificities. . . . The plague makes all accumulated knowledge and all categories of judgment invalid. . . . The distinctiveness of the plague is that it ultimately destroys all forms of distinctiveness. . . . All life, is finally, turned into death, which is the supreme undifferentiation. (Girard 834)

What is interesting about Girard's argument is that one could imagine the plague's extreme reductionist nature as simplifying all knowledge and making it easier to ascertain facts since with plague everything becomes one and the same, "it ultimately destroys all forms of distinctiveness." And yet, Girard does not ascertain this notion, but instead takes it further and states the opposite: "The plague makes all accumulated knowledge and all categories of judgment invalid." It is precisely this particularity of the nature of a plague epidemic, its power to make us question the knowledge that we had previously relied upon as true that is brought out in *La Peste*. It also provokes the creation of in-betweenness given that the characters find themselves in the new and unsettling position of uncertainty where it is hard to ascertain what is the 'right' or 'real' meaning of the events occurring around them. The text exemplifies this occurrence through Grand's obsession with choosing the 'right'

words for the opening line to his novel and the narrator's aim to emulate Thucydides' narratorial style with its emphasis on truth telling and objectivity.

I read plague-infected Oran through its connection to Thucydides' own historical narrative of the plague that hit Athens in 430 BCE. Since Greece's ancient history often plays a large role in Mediterranean history, the plague thus connects Oran, albeit tragically, to wider Mediterranean history and culture reaching back to Thucydides. The importance of this link to Thucydides aligns Camus's fictionalized chronicle to not simply one of the most important historians of the Ancient Greek world, but in fact to the founder of modern history itself. Thucydides is often regarded as such due to his pioneering techniques of historical research consisting of his methodical wide-ranging objective analysis of events.

Certainly it must not be forgotten that Thucydides' description of the plague epidemic in Athens forms only part of the Greek historian's larger work, his historical account of the Peloponnesian War, which is regarded as foundational for historiographers today. Thucydides' work has also influenced not just the fields of Historical Studies, but also International Relations, Political Science and Philosophy. This is because his innovative work as a historian, centered on a pragmatic method of collecting objective facts, led him to analyze human nature through behavior. Such an iconoclastic approach to recording events meant that Thucydides' *History* broke with the literary tradition of his time because he dismissed attributing the intervention of the Gods as a method by which one could understand or analyze the physical reality of the events he set out to record. His interest in fact lay in analyzing the human relation to the bellicose circumstances of war or a fatal epidemic, thus diverging from religious interpretation and "the unreliable streams of mythology" (Book 1. 21). Thucydides' skepticism regarding the use of myth or religion to

analyze the causality of events resonates with the existentialist thought advanced by Camus and his intellectual peers according to which human action determines our fate as opposed to the notion that we exist in a determinist universe. In *La Peste* the emphasis lies on the actions (be they thwarted, frustrated or successfully executed) of the characters, highlighting the human reaction to the metaphysical aspect of this calamity. Our protagonist, Dr. Rieux, deliberates carefully over how to impart this information in his chronicle, his decision affecting the way in which he delivers the tale he wants to tell. In the same manner, Thucydides' focus on *how* to report the events he describes in his *History* shaped both the content and narratorial style of his writing and this legacy is continued in *La Peste* by the narratorial style employed to chronicle Oran's plague.

Because we can link *La Peste* to Thucydides via narrative design, a direct link can be drawn to the history of plague as well as to the wider issue of how one writes history, especially concerning great tragedies such as deadly epidemics and war. As we shall see in analyzing the history of plague narratives, fact and fiction are often intertwined, creating room for philosophical debate questioning what we know and how we should act in the face of such knowledge. Although *La Peste* is an entirely fictional work, encoded in this fictional account of plague is the problematic ambiguity of 'the truth.' This is made apparent through the way in which our protagonist, the pragmatic doctor Bernard Rieux, chooses to recount his direct involvement in the combat against the plague. This he does by placing great emphasis on his duty to only relate that which happened: "Sa tâche est seulement de dire: 'Ce qui est arrivé'" (2: 37). Furthermore, as will be discussed in more detail further on in the chapter, this presentation of Rieux's 'truthful' chronicle is juxtaposed with Grand's equally conscientious but unavailing attempts to describe, not the

'real' events of the plague, but a highly stylized, fictional scene, reminiscent of a 19th century novel that is to be the opening to his very own work of fiction.

Let us here look at how Thucydides presents his aim to gather impartial information, so as to provide an objective account of the war. His innovative pursuit of objective facts is indeed based on his own recollection of his personal experience of the plague along with other eyewitness accounts. He delivers his chronicle using an impersonal narrative style, rarely employing the first person singular, and includes others' testimonies, which he corroborates. He states his famous methodology in the introduction to his work:

And with regard to my factual reporting of the events of the war I have made it a principle not to write down the first story that came my way, and not even be guided by my own general impressions; either I was present myself at the events which I have described or else I heard of them from eyewitnesses whose reports I have checked with as much thoroughness as possible. (Book 1: 22)

Thucydides' intentions are echoed at the start of *La Peste* for we read: "... le narrateur ... n'aurait guère de titre à faire valoir dans une entreprise de ce genre si le hasard ne l'avait mis à même de recueillir un certain nombre de dépositions et si la force des choses ne l'avait mêlé à tout ce qu'il prétend relater" (Camus 2: 37). At the close of Camus's novel it is stated "... son métier l'a mis à même de voir la plupart de ses concitoyens, et de recueillir leur sentiment. Il [Rieux] était donc bien placé pour rapporter ce qu'il avait vu et entendu" (2: 243). Because the narration uses the personal experience of a doctor living in Oran, and thus one who is directly involved in treating victims of the plague, as the basis for the narration of *La Peste*, Rieux is well placed to record both his and other people's personal

experience of the plague and this fact is underscored by bookending the entire novel with direct references to the opportune position the narrator holds, which help justify his reasons for recording these events and convey the objectivity of his account. In addition to asserting the truthful value of the narrator's chronicle, because he was present at all of the events described, the narrator of *La Peste* defends his use of others' testimonies and attests to the veracity of other eyewitness accounts:

Le narrateur de cette histoire a . . . son témoignage d'abord, celui des autres, puisque par son rôle, il fut amené à recueillir les confidences de tous les personnages de cette chronique, et, en dernier lieu, les textes qui finirent par tomber entre ses mains. Il se propose d'y puiser quand il jugera bon et de les utiliser comme il lui plaira. (2: 38)

As with Thucydides' text, the main narratorial voice of *La Peste* is given a sense of greater objectivity through the incorporation of other eye-witness accounts. One way this is achieved is through the inclusion of the character Tarrou's thoughts and musings, as he works alongside Rieux to combat the plague at first hand. Tarrou documents his time spent in Oran in a journal, which after his death ends up in Rieux's possession, allowing the latter to impart Tarrou's viewpoint. This journal thus neatly provides the reader with supplementary information to occasions to which Rieux was not party. The significance of its style and content will be discussed in more detail later on in this chapter.

In order to further elucidate the importance of Thucydides' plague narrative on *La Peste*, it is expedient to discuss here another example of how Thucydides' narratorial strategy has influenced or been appropriated by other plague chronicles and how this can be related to *La Peste*. Among them, is Daniel Defoe's description of the great plague of

London (1664-5). Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year in London* is a renowned example within the tradition of plague narratives and it has a direct link to *La Peste* since it opens with an epigraph of Defoe's (discussed in Section II of this chapter). As has already been established, Thucydides wrote a history and was at pains to establish the veracity of his facts. Defoe composed a historical fictional novel, but like Thucydides, he too, includes passages in his chronicle devoted to analyzing the credibility of his narrator's sources. He also incorporates statistical tables documenting mortality and burial figures as well as public orders and notices that the English government had printed and distributed. Due to Defoe's rigorous and detailed research, along with information drawn from his Uncle, Henry Foe's journals, debate has raged over the years as to whether his work should be classified as fiction or non-fiction. To this extent, comparisons have been drawn between Defoe's fictional account of the plague in London and Samuel Pepys's eyewitness accounts published in *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, one of the most important primary sources of English history during the restoration period. Rubincam elaborates on this point, stating:

The ancient historian [Thucydides] chose to use his own experience as part of the evidential basis for his account of the plague in his history. It is typical of his narrative method that he gives no more details concerning how he gathered information for this purpose. The modern novelist, [Defoe] by contrast, created a fictional persona to be the first-person narrator of his account of the plague. His narrative is undoubtedly the product of rigorous researches involving both oral testimonies from survivors and official written documents (such as mortality bulletins issued each week by the various London parishes), as well as his own childhood memories. He inserts

portions of the raw information he obtained from the written documents he studied into his narrative for literary purposes. (Rubincam 210)

From this summary of the fictional and nonfictional aspects of both Thucydides' and Defoe's accounts of plague, we can see how *La Peste* blends features from both Thucydides' and Defoe's work regarding its narrator and narratorial style. That is to say, like Defoe, Dr. Rieux provides us with his own and others' personal eyewitness accounts and experience of the plague. He, however, also mirrors Thucydides by stint of presenting himself as an outside observer, who is documenting facts all the while emphasizing the objective veracity of his historical account.

Before moving on, let us here define in more detail the narratorial strategies of Thucydides' *History*, Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year in London* and *La Peste*. To do so I will employ the narrative definitions that Gérard Genette lays out in his seminal *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*. Unlike Defoe's first-person narrator, who is an autodiegetic narrator and Thucydides' own voice, which is homodiegetic, [even though in narrating his *History* he more often than not refers to himself as an "agent in the third person" (Rood 18)], Dr. Rieux does not narrate his chronicle in the first person singular and so we cannot read *La Peste* as a first person narrative. Instead, we have a more complex arrangement because our narrator decides to hide his identity and therefore it is not immediately discernable who is speaking. Dr. Rieux is thus an extra-homodiegetic narrator.² However, the narrator seems heterodiegetic due to his incognito identity. For, it is not apparent from the beginning of the tale that the narrator is homodiegetic; that is to say the narrator is a

² I employ the term "heterodiegetic" because, although Rieux as narrator does take part in the story, since the narrational strategy conceals his identity and because the narratorial voice speaks of Rieux in the third person, it can be supposed that the latter is also outside of the story. See pages 78-81 for further explanation.

character in the story, and yet happens to refer to himself in the third person singular. It is only at the end of *La Peste* that we find out that the narrator has actually been Rieux all along (he having kept his identity hidden) and only then does the reader become aware that the chronicle is told by one of the main characters; not so unlike Thucydides after all.

Because of our narrator's hidden identity and our initial ignorance of the fact that Dr. Rieux refers to himself in the third person, there are passages in *La Peste* where it appears that another narratorial voice joins the chronicle to describe our narrator's intentions or actions, that is to say a voice that is both extradiegetic and heterodiegetic. This voice speaks of our narrator in the third person, for example: "Du reste, le narrateur, qu'on connaîtra toujours à temps . . ." and "Le narrateur de cette histoire . . ." (Camus 2: 37-38). This extradiegetic and heterodiegetic voice also harks back to Thucydides. This is not because the narrator of *La Peste* adopts the Greek historian's homodiegetic narratorial voice, because he does not. Thucydides employs only one narratorial voice, his own; (he rarely speaks of himself in the first person and more often uses the third person.) Rather, our narrator appropriates Thucydides' approach to narration. This technique of speaking of himself in the third person is employed when Rieux describes his retelling of the events as the work of a historian: "C'est ce qui l'autorise à faire œuvre d'historien" (2: 37). In claiming the narrator (i.e. himself) to be a historian "même s'il est un amateur" (2:37) and one who uses documentation and other people's testimonies, combined with textual evidence to back up his own imparting of facts, "... un historien . . . a toujours des documents. Le narrateur de cette histoire a donc les siens : son témoignage d'abord, celui des autres ensuite . . . et en dernier lieu, les textes qui finirent par tomber entre ses mains" (2: 37-38), a clear parallel is drawn between *La Peste's* narratorial style and Thucydides'

narrative methodology, (as quoted on pages 74-75), even though the strategies and voices of the narration may differ on the surface, because both narrators perform the role of historian.

Rieux embodies the unidentified narrator, who is presented nameless to the reader, and so benefits from a neutral vantage point and is therefore able to deliver an objective account of events. Yet, as the narrator, Dr. Rieux has the dual role of objective chronicler and protagonist who is deeply and personally connected to the impact of the plague, as well as to those who fight it alongside him. This first hand experience of the disease allows Rieux to offer up an eyewitness account of the plague complimented by that of his peers. By concealing his identity until the end of the chronicle, however, Rieux can artfully exploit the advantages of providing both a subjective and an objective account of the plague because as an extra-homodiegetic narrator he resides both inside and outside of the plot. Due to his hidden identity he is also both homo and heterodiegetic, to refer once again to Genette's terminology. This hybrid narratorial position encompasses the advantages of two different styles of narration, one with its source external to the plot, the other internal, by situating itself between each option and allowing features of both to overlap where necessary.

Because Rieux does in fact take part in the story, his voice echoes not just that of Thucydides, but also Defoe's first person narrator's experience of the London epidemic. Additionally like Rieux, Defoe's storyteller of *A Journal of the Plague Year in London* does not reveal his identity, penning not his name, but just his initials, H. F., at the very end of the novel. Moreover, both Defoe's narrator and Dr. Rieux survive the epidemics they describe without ever contracting the disease. Thucydides on the other hand does in fact fall victim

to the plague, but survives. It must not be forgotten however, that the original protagonist, Stephan, also succumbs to the plague and survives.

In noting that *La Peste*'s narrator benefits from features apparent in both Thucydides' and Defoe's chronicles, it becomes clear that the act of masking Rieux's identity as chronicler allows him to slip into a narratorial space that floats somewhere in-between the first-person (homodiegetic) and third-person (extra-heterodiegetic) level of narration. This is because the narrative remains at all times extradiegetic, but can also be read as both hetero and homodiegetic once we realize that Rieux is in fact the narrator. Rieux is therefore able to "prendre le ton du témoin objectif," keeping "une certaine réserve" (2: 243).

Nonetheless, at the same time Rieux also confesses to deliberately taking a viewpoint, albeit indirectly since he persists in avoiding the use of "I": "Mais en même temps, selon la loi d'un cœur honnête, il a pris *délibérément* le parti de la victime et a voulu rejoindre les hommes, ses concitoyens, dans les seules certitudes qu'ils aient en commun, et qui sont l'amour, la souffrance et l'exil" (emphasis added) (2: 243). Because Rieux never says "I" the extra-heterodiegetic voice must intervene to relate this information to the reader, hence this confession is narrated in the third person singular. We can see thus how this hybrid narratorial method creates contrariety. Admitting to having *deliberately* taken the side of the victims, because he was following the dictates of his honest heart, directly contradicts Rieux's claim to presenting the objective tone of a witness. Rieux is therefore a character-cum-narrator who wears two hats. On the one hand he can be the narrator who remains emotionally detached from the plague, "Mais ce que, personnellement, il avait à dire, son attente, ses épreuves, il devait les taire" (2: 243), and yet on the other hand he is

the doctor who compassionately and humanely fights and suffers alongside his contemporaries: “C’est ainsi qu’il n’est pas une des angoisses de ses concitoyens qu’il n’ait partagé, aucune situation qui n’ait été aussi la sienne” (2: 243). It is the creation of these two overlapping narratorial roles, combining detachment and empathy, that fashions an in-between space where both fact and fiction are complicated and thus questioned.

La Peste is thus a text that is hyper aware of its own role in how it tells its story. The clandestine manner of Rieux’s narration exposes the challenges present in describing events fictional or otherwise. The plague itself is a phenomenon that is accepted as a historical reality, just as equally as it may be imaginatively represented in myth, historical or futuristic fiction. In *La Peste*, both via the multiple narrative voices and the intradiegesis of Grand’s struggle in composing the first sentence to his novel (discussed later in this chapter), the complexity in the acts of writing and communicating are exposed, including documenting history which in turn involves determining fact from fiction, the real from the unreal.

In sum, Thucydides, along with Defoe and Camus’s chroniclers, all tell accounts of plague epidemics that they wish their readers to read as true through both historical *and* testimonial narrative strategies. Reading *La Peste* within the literary context of other European plague narratives, we can observe how the plague, both real and imagined, functions as a historical fact to be documented by historians and as a source for fictional literary aspirations and philosophical deductions. In whichever case the common theme of reduction and destruction is apparent, consequently fragmenting the physical as well as theoretical aspects of existence. In summing up her analysis of Defoe’s and Thucydides’ works, Rubincam states: “The comparison of Thucydides’ and Defoe’s plague narratives

thus proves to demonstrate very well the fine line that separates history from fiction” (212). The text of *La Peste* expands the notion of this separation by drawing attention to the in-betweenness of its narrator’s position and by broadening the scope of the narrative to question not just the realms of history and fiction, but also those of all knowledge and language, in which the former two reside.

Section II

In-between truth and fiction: What is the meaning of all this?

It is not solely the narratorial style of *La Peste* that links the text to previous plague writers. The chronicle opens with a short epigraph that contains a quote by Defoe, which speaks to the idea of determining one thing from another and functions as a hint to the wider philosophical reach that our chronicle embodies beyond its eponymous subject matter. The lines are not taken from Defoe's plague narrative *A Journal of the Plague Year in London* which one might expect, but instead from the preface to volume three of his novel *Robinson Crusoe*. The quote reads: "Il est aussi raisonnable de représenter une espèce d'emprisonnement par une autre que de représenter n'importe quelle chose qui existe réellement par quelque chose qui n'existe pas" (Camus 2: 33). These lines immediately alert the reader to the idea that the imprisonment caused by the plague can, and in fact may, represent another type of imprisonment that resembles in no way whatsoever the events being described in the chronicle. Furthermore, if one is to read deeper into the last part of Defoe's quote, there lies within more than a hint at the enigmatic issue of discerning what is real, what is fiction, from that which is not. Defoe's words are asking us to query if the knowledge we perceive as providing us with the truth actually achieves this end. This deeper level of questioning reality and how one distinguishes the real from the unreal was initiated by Thucydides' own quest to write a history that offers an objective account of events that purports to relay *the* truth. In my analysis of *La Peste*, the narratorial style, along with Grand's obsession with finding the 'right' words to begin his own fictional novel, highlight the complexity in achieving an accurate and objective picture of the truth.

Camus's plague epidemic provides us with the very circumstances that upend people's lives and completely shatter so-called stable and presumed fixed realities. The result is a kind of splintering between what one knows and what one thinks one knows, highlighting the subjective and sometimes deceptive nature of the truth.

As mentioned previously, Camus initially foresaw the character of Stephan as his narrator-cum-protagonist, with the story of *La Peste* unfolding through the discovery of the teacher's diary. But with the elimination of Stephan, the narratorial element must fall to Dr. Rieux. By having Rieux straddle two positions both inside and outside the action, Thucydides' aim of objectivity is incorporated, which is to say information is best imparted by a neutral outside observer, yet without losing the eye-witness primary account of a narrator embedded in the action.

It is through this unusual narratorial in-between position, one which places Rieux as internal and external to the plot, that the text expands upon the greater philosophical bearings of a plague epidemic in light of the absurd. For, Rieux's narratorial style hereby specifically addresses the complex issue of how to narrate the plague as a force that renders the incomprehensible real. That is to say, those in its path must live conscious of their finitude, their mortal nature, and thus confront existential questions such as: what is the meaning of (our) existence? As narrator, Rieux admits, "le fléau n'est pas à la mesure de l'homme, on se dit donc le fléau est irréal, c'est un mauvais rêve qui va passer" (2: 59). Here Rieux attempts to express the denial, or inability, to comprehend the reality of tragedies of this sort. Plague is bigger than us, it eludes comprehension and so we relegate it to the same category as a bad dream, "un mauvais rêve . . ." The text is expressing the need to place the plague somewhere in-between reality and unreality, between existence and non-

existence, so we choose the state of dreaming, which is akin to a space between living and not living.

While contemplating the notion that the plague has arrived in his town, Rieux tries to imagine the reality of the disease: “Des chiffres flottaient dans sa mémoire et il se disait que la trentaine de grandes pestes que l’histoire a connues avait fait près de cent millions de morts. Mais qu’est-ce que cent millions de morts? Quand on a fait la guerre, c’est à peine si on sait déjà ce qu’est un mort” (2: 59-60). The words and numbers that float around in his head describe a reality, but in trying to grasp and know that reality the doctor stumbles and finally concludes that in fact these words and statistics do not really allow him to know what the reality of plague really is.

Dix mille morts font cinq fois le public d’un grand cinéma. Voilà, ce qu’il faudrait faire. On rassemble les gens à la sortie de cinq cinémas, on les conduit sur une place de la ville et on les fait mourir en tas pour y voir un peu clair. Au moins, on pourrait mettre alors des visages connus sur cet entassement anonyme. Mais naturellement, c’est impossible à réaliser, et puis qui connaît mille visages? (2: 60)

Rieux therefore resorts instead to conjuring up images to help him interpret the figures. He imagines masses of people, likening 10,000 bodies to the full capacity of five large cinemas, or he makes complicated calculations multiplying the length of the average rat by the number of dead rats so as to visualize forty thousand dead rats lined up nose to tail. But even these mental gymnastics are not enough. The reality of the plague appears beyond imagination, especially if it has not yet been experienced. It can be described, but not necessarily understood. Like war, the plague exists and yet people do not want to believe it

will ever exist in their reality, which causes surprise and shock when it does befall them:

“Et pourtant pestes et guerres trouvent les gens toujours aussi dépourvus” (2: 58-59). *La Peste* addresses the problem of how one accurately narrates or chronicles an event that no one can ever imagine happening to oneself, in order for future generations to know that reality when indeed the said reality appears impossible to convey.

The narration of the *La Peste* thus encounters the difficulty in narrating. The one word, ‘plague,’ cannot conjure up everything that encompasses the reality of plague. The reality remains separated from any description of that reality, but Rieux’s dual position as narrator-cum-protagonist attempts to bridge that gap. The epidemic is thus a tool which highlights states of separateness and in-betweenness.

This in-betweenness is expressed in the addressing of how one is to narrate the plague as well as in how the characters confront the plague that is being narrated. We can draw parallels between the format and content of Thucydides’ historical narrative and that of *La Peste* because both texts display an engagement with human nature and behavior. With *La Peste*, we have a novel that aims to offer an objective account of the passage of a plague epidemic. Yet the text also evokes aspects of the absurd and revolt inherent in the human reaction to the disaster within an allegory of war.

Having discussed Thucydides narratorial style, it is here worthwhile to look at some of the contemporary literary criticism of *La Peste* to better understand its style of narration. Over the years, critical readers have either commended *La Peste*, in view of its moral message, or have reproved the novel for portraying an overly universalist and naïve approach to complex ethical issues. Aurélie Palud weighs in on the divided literary reception by attesting to the difficulty critics have had in categorizing *La Peste*:

The Plague is far from being a classical novel. As a matter of fact, because of the specificity of the narration and the hybridity of genres, the novel seems polyphonic, ambivalent and unclassifiable.

First, *The Plague's* genre is hard to define. Many critics have proposed a classification: *The Plague* would be apologue, allegory, historical romantic fiction, morality story, mixture of essay and novel, or parable. Some insist on the five parts of the text as the five acts of a tragedy . . . Camus himself refused the naming of "novel" and preferred the term "narrative." This resistance to classification can be perceived as a sign of modernity . . . (20)

La Peste, because it features different traits from of a variety of writing styles, ranging from the allegorical to the tragic, defies being neatly classified according to constructed categories of genre. Moreover, at various moments during the writing of *La Peste* Camus uses different designations to describe his text, proving that he too saw his work as resisting the limits of any singular categorization. Some examples are: "aventure" (2: 923), "roman" (2: 923, 958, 961, 985) "biographie" (2: 922), "témoignage" (2: 37) "anthologie" (2: 987 & 989) and "journal" (2: 992). These terms he applied either to the text as a whole, or to specific sections. Although our narrative is a retelling of a fictionalized plague epidemic, *La Peste* recounts the unfolding events via an unidentified eyewitness to give the illusion that the story is based on a truth and that the narrator's words are reliable. In this manner the narrative reflects Thucydides' attempt to render his personal account of experiencing the plague epidemic of Athens into an objective historical text. For this reason I suggest another term, that of 'chronicle,' to add to Palud's list of genres as an alternative

yet fitting category for our narrative; a term, besides which, Camus himself employs at various points throughout his tale, (2: 35, 37, 50 & 243).

The adjective “polyphonic” (20) that Palud employs to describe Camus’s text addresses the heart of our analysis of *La Peste* because Camus uses the theme of plague to evoke heterogeneity not only regarding the genre of his text, but also within the acts of communication that make up the narrative. The arrival of the plague in Oran, because it forces the inhabitants to face their inevitable mortality, allows Camus to expand on his existential thinking and highlight the variety of ways human beings separate themselves from the knowledge that death is their pre-destined fate. In this manner we can better understand Camus’s reluctance to confine his text to the label of ‘novel’ because, as shown above, while *La Peste* can be read as a fictional chronicle about plague, it also offers a philosophical introspection on human nature and existence, which, as already mentioned, is alluded to in Defoe’s epigraph.

For Palud, the unclassifiable nature of *La Peste* is a sign of the text’s modernity, and while this may be so, I focus however on the counter argument that *La Peste*’s connection to antiquity through the influence of Thucydides’ historiography allows the chronicle to move beyond the boundaries of any one genre. As we have established, *La Peste* is indirectly linked to Camus’s vision of a Mediterranean culture, as expressed in the speech discussed in chapter one, through the continuation of “in-betweenness.” It can also be linked to the Mediterranean past through its appropriation of the narratorial style of Thucydides’ *History*. Tellingly, the notes Camus makes on the philosophy, literature, history and theatre of Ancient Greece increase in number in his *Carnets* while he was living in Oran, from January 1941 until the summer of 1942, and at the same time was beginning to work in

earnest on *La Peste* (Camus 2: 916 – 954 and endnotes 2: 35 & 2: 47, 2: 1391). Thus, *La Peste* can be understood as a plague narrative that offers a latent continuation of Camus's Mediterranean thought via the in-betweenness it evokes. This in-betweenness, I argue becomes the bedrock of the text and allows Camus to explore the philosophical implications of the absurd via the plague's destabilization of what it is to exist in the world.

Furthermore, the lexical indecision over the classification of the genre of *La Peste* mirrors an important feature of the chronicle made manifest via the character of Joseph Grand. This municipal clerk, who befriends Rieux, demonstrates a fastidious approach, some might say, finical anxiety, to choosing his words based on the hope of finding "le mot juste" (2: 65), even though it forever eludes him: "Enfin, et surtout, Joseph Grand ne trouvait pas ses mots" (2: 64). This habit of Grand's, which I discuss in more detail in the Section V of this chapter, actually represents more than a mere quirk in his personality since it defines the man and his life: "Mais pour évoquer des émotions si simples, cependant, le moindre mot lui coûtait mille peines. Finalement, cette difficulté avait fait son plus grand souci. 'Ah ! docteur, disait-il, je voudrais bien apprendre à m'exprimer'" (2: 65). Grand's struggle to express himself ties in with the destabilizing consequences of the plague along with the philosophical concept of the absurd because his exaggerated pondering over the sense evoked by every word he employs draws a spotlight onto the significance of the meaning that lies behind all the words we use. Such an examination of language foreshadows the growing interest in the philosophy of language that became prevalent in the decades after Camus's death.

The theme of 'meaning' is also at the heart of the philosophical conflict of the absurd, which stipulates that although human kind perpetually strives to live as if there

exists an undeniable meaning to existence, we are constantly thwarted in this endeavor because death is our only certainty. Because the plague brings the inevitability of death to the forefront of the lives of the inhabitants of Oran, they must confront the absurd and face their own inescapable mortality. Consequently, they become conscious of their betwixt position in-between life and death. The characters experience their own existential crises and the self-deception, or 'mauvaise foi,' of their previous lives is exposed. This is because the plague separates them from their former way of living by fragmenting their once seemingly stable values, customs and comforting routines. In brief, the plague destabilizes entire lives and therefore people's understanding of what it is to exist in the world. This destabilization means that the boundaries between what is significant and what is insignificant are brought into question.

One way in which the text addresses this reevaluation of where significance lies is through Grand's insatiable quest to find the right words. Additionally, this issue of significance or insignificance is also presented through the complexity of the role of an objective narrator. As already established, in *La Peste* our narrator at first sight appears to emulate Thucydides' unbiased and trustworthy voice, with great significance thus placed on the goal of impartiality. The narrator twice reminds the reader of this stating, "... pour ne rien trahir et surtout pour ne pas se trahir lui-même, le narrateur a tendu à l'objectivité" (2: 158); and "... [Rieux] voudrait au moins justifier son intervention et faire comprendre qu'il ait tenu à prendre le ton du témoin objectif" (2: 243). However, the plausibility of this objective narration is tested by contradictory descriptions of the town of Oran, the dissimulation of the identity of the narrator, as well as characters whose behavior encourages the reader to reevaluate distinctions between what is deemed significant or

insignificant. A further heterodiegetic narratorial voice is also inserted at various times to verify and endorse Rieux's objectivity (although we, of course, learn at the end of the chronicle that this voice was Rieux's all along and thus homodiegetic). Hence, any reading of Camus's chronicle can be said to hinge on unanswered or unanswerable questions, including, for example, the wide reaching question, 'what do we know?' The result of this type of interrogation exposes the unlimited nature of enquiry and leads to a separation from what hitherto was knowledge that keeps us secure in ourselves and in our surroundings. The chronicle of *La Peste* portrays a destabilization of that security. *La Peste* thus not only defies classification, but also the straightforward interpretation of our existence and as a result encourages readers to be suspicious and inquisitive.

Saïd states: "Both [Camus and Orwell], in short, are posthumously interesting because of narratives they wrote that now seem to be about a situation that on closer inspection appears quite different." (172). Saïd's argument, although expressed in the context of a postcolonial critique of Camus's work, is still helpful when applied to our analysis of *La Peste* because it encourages us to reinterpret Camus's text yet again and not rely on simply one understanding or previous reading. Saïd's words tell us to widen our expectation of what Camus's text can achieve, which is of value when reading it through or alongside another author such as Thucydides. The plague epidemic is what evidently drives the plot and takes center stage in the chronicle. However, this does not necessarily signify that other readings cannot be discovered, especially beyond that of the Nazi allegory, in order to discern what lies in-between the most obvious metaphors of the text. As will be shown in the next chapter, this argument holds all the more sway considering Camus wrote a first draft of his chronicle before his experience of being trapped in the German occupied

'zone sud' in France. Camus's chronicle is about the plague and how it mirrors war, in particular World War II, yet as we see from Camus's own words, the theme of separation is in fact an important facet of this work, for, as Camus himself writes in his personal *Carnets*, "Faire ainsi du thème de la séparation le grand thème du roman" (2: 985) and "Peste. C'est la séparation qui est la règle. Le reste est hasard" (2: 1007). This theme allows Camus to use the epidemic of plague to destabilize existence because this destabilization consequently separates the townsfolk of Oran from their previous understanding of what is significant and insignificant in their lives and subsequently encourages them to question knowledge and meaning.

The introductory lines to the chronicle set the scene for eliciting this type of questioning through their presentation of ordinary facts that are, on closer scrutiny, however, not as trustworthy as they first appear.

Les *curieux* événements qui font le sujet de cette chronique se sont produits en 194., [sic] à Oran. De l'avis général, ils n'y étaient pas à leur place, sortant un peu de l'*ordinaire*. À première vue, Oran est, en effet, une ville *ordinaire* . . .
(emphasis added) (Camus 2: 35)

We learn from the outset that Oran is an *ordinary* town and this story is being recounted because it tells of some *extraordinary* events that occurred there. The words "*curieux*", and "*ordinaire*" seem innocuous and practical enough to relate the situation at hand, since the opposition of "*curieux*" versus "*ordinaire*" evinces this logical supposition. But, on closer inspection these adjectives do not actually relay any trustworthy information, since their use is of a subjective nature. It is after all the narrator who is determining the caliber of these adjectives and deciding what is ordinary and what is not. On what grounds are we, as

readers, to base this definition of “*ordinaire*” and its counter part of “*curieux*”? Because of these adjectives that are open to broad interpretation, we can see that what is really at stake here is the choice of words, which in setting the scene for the chronicle actually tell us very little. Our attention is thus brought to the limitation regarding the use of such words and at the same time they remind us that we are bound to the subjective opinion of the narrator. In a veiled attempt to appear objective, the narrator does, however, avoid using the first person singular, conceding that these observations are of the general opinion, “De l’avis général,” when surmising that the events were out of place, “ils n’y étaient pas à leur place.” He then concludes his introduction by reaffirming that, at first glance, “À première vue,” Oran is in fact ordinary, “Oran est, en effet, une ville ordinaire . . .” (2: 35). It is worthwhile here to offer up the perspicacious suggestion that the lead in, “À première vue,” can be read as hinting that one ought to take a *second* glance to indeed verify these declarations. The introduction thereby encourages the reader at the start of the narrative, to think about the act of narrating, as well as wonder how objective one can be in such cases. The fallout of this narrated chronicle will make one ask if it is possible to be completely objective at all.

Further evidence to support the above argument is found in the lines of text that follow on from the opening paragraph. The three-sentence introduction subtly leads readers into thinking that they are being presented with an ordinary town, yet a mere two lines later we are informed that this is in fact not the case: “D’aspect tranquille il faut quelque temps pour apercevoir ce qui la rend *différente* de tant d’autres villes commerçantes, sous toutes les latitudes” (emphasis added) (2: 35). If after a time one figures that Oran is in fact very different from so many other commercial cities of its ilk,

why then describe it as very ordinary? The citation can be read as a warning with its implication that one's first impression of the town, that it is like so many others, will certainly change over time and one will eventually realize it is in fact different, proving that first appearances or judgments are not always to be trusted.

In summarizing his description of Oran, the narrator emphasizes its banality and ordinariness, "Ce qu'il faut souligner, c'est l'aspect banal de la ville et de la vie" (2: 37). Yet in a somewhat contradictory manner this statement follows on from his example of what is most original about this city, "Ce qui est plus original dans notre ville . . ." (2: 36). While detailing the mundane life one leads in Oran the narrator speaks of what it is to die in the city. This description contains paradoxical and ironic undertones since the narrator is describing dying in Oran even before the plague hits. Without referring to the epidemic that is to come, he states that in general, it is difficult to die in Oran.

Ce qui est plus original dans notre ville est la difficulté qu'on peut y trouver à mourir. *Difficulté*, d'ailleurs, n'est pas le bon mot et il serait plus juste de parler *d'inconfort*. Ce n'est jamais agréable d'être malade, mais il y a des villes et des pays qui vous soutiennent dans la maladie, où l'on peut, en quelque sorte, se laisser aller. Un malade a besoin de douceur, il aime à s'appuyer sur quelque chose, c'est bien naturel. Mais à Oran, les excès du climat, l'importance des affaires qu'on y traite, l'insignifiance du décor, la rapidité du crépuscule et la qualité des plaisirs, tout demande la bonne santé. Un malade s'y trouve seul. Qu'on pense alors à celui qui va mourir, pris au piège derrière des centaines de murs crépitants de chaleur, pendant qu'à la même minute, toute une population, au téléphone ou dans des cafés, parle de traites, de

connaissements et d'escompte. On comprendra ce qu'il peut y avoir d'inconfortable dans la mort, même moderne, lorsqu'elle survient ainsi dans un lieu sec. (emphasis added) (2: 36-7)

This extract highlights how the narration is focused on language. In his description the narrator is not entirely happy with his first choice of adjective: "*Difficulté*, d'ailleurs, n'est pas le bon mot et il serait plus juste de parler d'*inconfort*." To better express himself he opts to use "*inconfort*" instead of "*Difficulté*" when assessing how it is to die in Oran. Needless to say, the coming months will ironically prove the opposite of difficult because once the plague arrives death will easily ensue. The narrator states that one needs good health to live in Oran, "tout demande la bonne santé" because if you are ill you won't be soothed or looked after, "Un malade s'y trouve seul." This conclusion also carries within it an ironic foreboding, since the town will soon be full of sick people, and in order to defeat the scourge that befalls them the main characters of our plot, Tarrou, Grand and Dr. Rieux, will create a strong sense of solidarity to combat the solitude talked of here by the narrator. Perhaps this is what the narrator is alluding to when he talks of towns that stand by you when you are ill and allow you to let yourself go, "mais il y a des villes et des pays qui vous soutiennent dans la maladie, où l'on peut, en quelque sorte, se laisser aller." This expression does not really tell us what it is like to die in Oran, it simply proves that, for the narrator at least, it is easier (more comfortable) to be sick in some places rather than others. Oran is not a place where you can neglect yourself, "se laisser aller," and so even before the plague arrives, we are alerted to 'vigilance' being an important trait and prophetically it will also be one that will prove to be necessary and beneficial to us as readers.

A similar vigilance is also needed to detect the dissembled objectivity of the narrator with his avoidance of the first person singular. Rieux begins his chronicle using an observant yet detached tone. He describes the urban landscape of the town of Oran, using the changing of the seasons as his reference point, and all this he imparts using the third person singular, “... où l’on ne rencontre ni battements d’ailes ni froissements de feuilles,” or “Le printemps s’annonce seulement par la qualité de l’air,” or “on ne peut plus vivre alors que dans l’ombre des volets clos” (2: 15). However, by the third paragraph he changes tack and declares that a better way to really understand any town, Oran included, is to ascertain how such townsfolk work, love and die. In delving deeper into the life style of the habitants of Oran, the narrator’s discourse takes on a more judgmental tone and at the same time he falls into using the first person plural:

Une manière commode de faire la connaissance d’une ville est de chercher comment on y travaille, comment on y aime et comment on y meurt. Dans *notre* petite ville, est-ce l’effet du climat, tout cela se fait ensemble, du même air frénétique et absent. . . . *Nos* concitoyens travaillent beaucoup . . .

(emphasis added) (2: 35)

By calling Oran *our* town, “*notre* ville,” and the citizens, “*Nos* citoyens,” the narrator is not only luring the reader closer into the story, but actually implicating himself in it, giving a hint to his identity and homodiegetic narratorial status. At the same time Rieux is therefore jeopardizing his objectivity, since he no longer resembles the neutral outside observer who narrated the opening paragraph, but rather someone who is actually involved in the narrative. Perhaps this is why only a few pages later he decides to defend his objectivity and in this section he speaks of himself in the third person singular (2: 37, 38).

Furthermore, in his description of how the people of Oran work, love and die, the narrator employs two contradictory terms, “frénétique” and “absent,” to detail how exactly the inhabitants carry out all three of these activities. These two adjectives convey an opposition that insinuates a schizophrenic ambience to the city. In this way they also portray the townsfolk as fickle or unsettled and show the narrator as being contradictory in his descriptions. This in turn further encourages an aporetic reading. In brief, if one reads the opening section to the chronicle with a skeptical eye, the indecisions expressed in the introduction via the words “ordinaire,” “curieux,” “différente,” “difficulté” and “inconfort” send out one clear message: narrating can be deceptive.

Nonetheless, the reading of the introduction to *La Peste* proposed above, as being ambiguous and deceptively straightforward, is not in keeping with how Camus’s style of writing has generally been described. Adjectives such as neutral and blank are more likely to be considered as most fitting for his writing technique. Roland Barthes, in his book *Le Degré zéro de l’écriture*, famously labeled it “une écriture blanche” (10) featuring “un style de l’absence” and “un état neutre et inerte de la forme” (56). Following this reasoning Camus’s writing style has also been compared to that of Hemmingway. Ben Stoltzfus in his article “Hemmingway’s influence on Camus: The Iceberg as Topography,” draws comparisons between Hemmingway’s work and Camus’s, specifically *L’Étranger*, through their lack of overt statement:

In *L’Étranger*, Meursault’s unseen metaphysical trauma (his quarrel with *finitude* in the Foucauldian sense) is also implied as opposed to directly stated. Accordingly, in *Le Degré zéro de l’écriture*, Barthes calls Camus’s writing *une*

écriture blanche because, like Hemmingway's, it is both innocent and neutral.
(Stoltzfus 171)

It must be noted that here Stoltzfus is analyzing *L'Étranger* and not *La Peste* and it is true that Barthes's theory of a neutral writing style has been most frequently applied to Camus's first novel. The famed opening sentence of *L'Étranger* was perceived as radically innovative when it was first published precisely because, "these first lines of the novel set the tone for a straightforward reporting of the naked facts . . . 'devoid of psychological reflection'" (Stoltzfus 171). While this neutral writing style is fittingly applied to *l'Étranger* since it captures the quintessence of Meursault's laconic nature and effectively promotes his disturbing absence of guilt so paramount to the narrative, I do not find Barthes's observations about a neutral or absent style of writing so easily applicable to Camus's second novel. As we have just shown in our analysis of the introduction to *La Peste*, the text teases out the limitations of a neutral narrator by showing how even the most straightforward and unemotional act of narration can in fact under the surface contain more esoteric readings. By doing so the narrative appears to imitate that of Thucydides and yet at the same time challenges the latter's aim of objective factual reporting, because having an eyewitness narrator exposes the conflict between providing a truthful account of events and the risk of it also being a highly narrow and subjective one.

Viewed in this manner, Barthes's neutral "*écriture blanche*" does not accurately capture the complex layering inherent in the narration of *La Peste*, which has been discussed in detail at the beginning of this chapter. The apparent absence of literary style in the narrator's matter of fact description of Oran is not in fact an absence at all, but an emulation of Thucydides' own voice that *tried* to erase itself from its own text in pursuance

of imparting an objective and more importantly “truthful” account of the Peloponnesian war, including the plague that hit Athens. However, as our examination of the narrative voices in *La Peste* has proven, it is impossible to completely hide the narrator’s voice. As Greenwood points out:

Thucydides’ text promotes the view that for the thoughts of the historian to be of value, they should resist, look beyond or transcend the historical and social circumstances of the historian. After all, this is a writer who practices self-alienation in his own text. Nicole Loraux has studied the way in which Thucydides refers to himself in his own work and has concluded that Thucydides deliberately played down the fact that Thucydides the Athenian general in Book 4, who is an active participant in events, is the same man as Thucydides the detached writer of the war. (Greenwood, 3)

Just as Thucydides is both an active participant in his chronicle as well as the detached writer of those events, so too is Rieux. By concealing his role as narrator until the very end of the text, he benefits from an in-between role with a voice both inside and outside the plot. Nevertheless, despite both narrators wanting to “practice self alienation” in their own texts, the readers end up knowing that they are both “active participants” in their own chronicles.

Rhodes elaborates on this dilemma facing historians, explaining that no matter how objective they wish to be, they have to make subjective choices with their work:

Every historian, however strongly committed to factual accuracy, has to decide which facts to include, which facts to treat prominently and which to treat in passing, how one fact should be in relation to others. There can be no

history without interpretation. Thucydides not only had to interpret, but his family background and involvement in the war make it impossible that his interpretation should be unprejudiced. The tendency of recent scholarship has not been to set him on a pedestal as a totally accurate and objective historian (as earlier generations did) but to present him as an “artful reporter”, who though his manner is often matter-of-fact has used great artistry in selecting and presenting his material so as to have the desired effect on his readers. (Rhodes *History II* 9)

From this analysis of Thucydides’ historical reporting, we can understand how Rieux too has to interpret the documentation available to him. With the best of intentions of being objective and truthful, Rieux’s decision regarding his selection and presentation of facts and material does not really differ in any substantial way from that of Grand’s dilemma in choosing the correct wording for the first line of his novel. Both Rieux and Grand are aiming for a “desired effect,” one based on the ‘true’ rhythm of the words, the other on their objectivity. Both Grand’s novel and Rieux’s chronicle thus speak to the difficulty in determining fact from fiction, occupying a space somewhere between the two.

Evidence that further supports my argument is found in Jennifer Cooke’s *Legacies of Plague in Literature Theory and Film*, where she analyses the detached narratorial style of *La Peste*, stating:

Gomel believes Defoe and Camus inherit the narrative detachment from an established legacy of plague description:

There is a special narrative voice proper to pestilence. This is the voice of Thucydides describing the great plague of Athens in the

second book of his *History of the Peloponnesian War*: a clinical, carefully detailed description, strangely detached, despite the fact the historian was one of the victims of the disease.

Camus only embodies this voice “proper to pestilence” at the final moment when Rieux says of himself: “Incontestably, he had to speak for all.” “I” cannot speak for all, the inference is, if I say “I,” although Rieux intermittently uses “our” or “we,” a mark of community solidarity and a denial of his own narrative uniqueness or priority. (Cooke 27-28)

According to Gomel, the “narrative detachment” forms part of the tradition of plague narratives, starting with Thucydides. From both Cooke and Gomel’s assessment, it is clear that because of the multiple levels of narration, where Rieux would say “I,” another voice, that of the extra-heterodiegetic narrator, says “he,” “Décidément, *il* devait parler pour tous” (2: 244). Yet, even if Rieux is speaking for all – as a “mark of community solidarity” – with a voice that lies somewhere in-between that of a first person homodiegetic and heterodiegetic narrator, this does not render that voice *de facto* innocent or neutral.

Furthermore, there are other more autobiographical arguments that can be put forward to help discern Camus’s “style de l’absence” (Barthes 56). It must not be overlooked that Camus, due to his diagnosis of TB, missed out on the opportunity of sitting for ‘le concours d’agrégation,’ which would have taken him along the career path towards a posting as a university professor. Instead, in need of an income, he took up employment as a journalist starting in 1938, working in Algiers for *Alger Républicain* and then as editor in chief for its offshoot *Le Soir Républicain*, until January 1940 (Todd 236 & 297). Camus returned to journalism in March 1940, moving to Paris to work for *Paris-Soir* until

December of that same year (319 & 358). During the years Camus worked as a journalist, he was also writing *L'Étranger* in his spare time. His time as a journalist thus may have had a bearing on his fiction since the neutral and objective tone with which he infused his literary texts reflects the objective and direct journalistic style of reporting associated with newspaper articles in their aim to deliver clear and concise facts without any bias or “psychological reflection.”

From another autobiographical stance, one could also link Camus’s innovative breviloquent style to the taciturn atmosphere in which he grew up. According to his biographers (Todd and Lottman), as well as evidence present in his last novel *Le Premier Homme*, all the adults in Camus’s household were illiterate. His mother was deaf and almost mute and his uncle had a speech impediment. Camus’s writing style may also have drawn on the silent relationship that he had with his mother, underscored by the fact that he never knew his father.

Palud also misses this background to Camus’s neutral writing style and argues that his “naked” writing technique is once again evidence of his text’s modernity:

... if *The Plague* acquires certain aspects of modernity, it is also because of its style. Indeed, numerous critics have talked about a monotonous, linear, dull style. As Paul-F. Smets reminds us in his article, Francis Jeanson defined Camus’s style as “a very sophisticated absence of style.” ... Camus tries, in *The Plague* to deliver the facts in their nakedness, offering no sign of subjectivity. (21 & Blondeau 2: 1169)

Leaving the question of his modernity aside once more, I take issue with Palud’s assessment that Camus delivers “facts in their nakedness” in the context of *La Peste*,

because, as argued above, Camus's narrator is not able to always remain objective. Instead the chronicle, as straightforward as it first appears, undermines this objective approach.

Nonetheless, the link that is most pertinent here however, regarding Barthes's "écriture blanche" and Camus's *La Peste*, is that the neutral writing style, which the narrator appears to employ in the introduction, is exactly the style a historian would use to impart information in an objective manner. After having described Oran in a rather ornery fashion, telling both of its commonplace and yet unique features, (as noted on pages 93-96 of this chapter), Rieux, speaking of his role in abstract terms since he employs the third person singular instead of referring to himself, proceeds to validate his own narration by claiming that a chronicler (such as he) merely states the facts that he knows to be fact and is thus a truthful and reliable storyteller:

Arrivé là, on admettra sans peine que rien ne pouvait faire espérer à nos concitoyens les incidents qui se produisirent au printemps de cette année-là et qui furent, nous le comprimes ensuite, comme les premiers signes de la série des graves événements dont on s'est proposé de faire ici la chronique. Ces faits paraîtront bien naturels à certains et, à d'autres, invraisemblables au contraires. Mais, après tout, un chroniqueur ne peut tenir compte de ces contradictions. *Sa tâche est seulement de dire : « Ceci est arrivé », lorsqu'il sait que ceci est, en effet arrivé, que ceci a intéressé la vie de tout un peuple, et qu'il y a donc des milliers de témoins qui estimeront dans leur cœur la vérité de ce qu'il dit.* (emphasis added) (Camus 2: 37)

The extra-heterodiegetic narrative voice (which, as we know, is in fact Rieux's own voice incognito) insists that the narrator's words are truthful and reliable. However, on closer

inspection, we can note that while claiming that this narrator speaks “*la vérité*”, the narrative voice also points out the obstacle that hinders such a feat, “. . . après tout, un chroniqueur ne peut tenir compte de ces contradictions” (2: 37). By stating that a chronicler cannot take into account the differences of opinion on any given situation, we know that the viewpoint he imparts will most certainly be his own supplemented with *his* selection of differing viewpoints. Thucydides concedes as much saying, “Not that even so the truth was easy to discover: different eye-witnesses give different accounts of the same events, speaking out of partiality for one side or the other or else from imperfect memories” (Thucydides Book 1. 48). So once again we realize that our chronicle and chronicler may pose as objective when in fact the point of view that is being imparted is unavoidably rather more subjective and so the definitive text will always reside somewhere in-between the two.

Chronicling the plague in a historical sense places this epidemic alongside many other outbreaks that have occurred throughout time across Europe, the wider Mediterranean region and into Asia, but it does little to resolve a major feature of the plague and that is the need for humans to understand why the outbreak has occurred, in the same way that we yearn to discover a deeper teleological meaning to our existence. Rieux recalls reading about the destruction wrought by reoccurrences of the plague (2: 61) including Lucretius’ use of Thucydides’ text, but the historical documentation, - despite its gory, macabre and even frightening content, - fails to actually allow Rieux to understand what it means to have the plague in Oran.

Le mot de “peste” venait d’être prononcé pour la première fois. . . . Les fléaux, en effet, sont une chose commune, mais on croit difficilement aux fléaux

lorsqu'ils vous tombent sur la tête. Il y a eu dans le monde autant de pestes que de guerres. Et pourtant pestes et guerres trouvent les gens toujours aussi dépourvus. Le docteur Rieux était dépourvu, comme l'étaient nos concitoyens, et c'est ainsi qu'il faut comprendre ses hésitations. C'est ainsi qu'il faut comprendre aussi qu'il fut partagé entre l'inquiétude et la confiance. (2: 58 & 59)

Rieux is caught in-between feeling worried that the worst is to come or confident that this disease can be beaten. He knows that he can recall statistics and research on the plague, he can imagine the plague, he can fear the plague, "On pouvait imaginer . . . on pouvait craindre . . ." (2: 61), but the difficulty lies in understanding it, in grasping the reality of such a catastrophe and trying to make sense of it. He states:

Mais ce vertige ne tenait pas devant la raison. Il est vrai que le mot de "peste" avait été prononcé, il est vrai qu'à la minute même le fléau secouait et jetait à terre une ou deux victimes. Mais quoi, cela pouvait s'arrêter. Ce qu'il fallait faire, c'était reconnaître clairement ce qui devrait être reconnu, chasser enfin les ombres inutiles et prendre les mesures qui convenaient. Ensuite, la peste, s'arrêterait parce que la peste ne s'imaginait pas ou s'imaginait fausement. Si elle s'arrêtait, et c'était le plus probable, tout irait bien. Dans le cas contraire, on saurait ce qu'elle était et s'il n'y avait pas moyen de s'en arranger d'abord pour la vaincre ensuite. (2: 61)

The word plague has been uttered and at that very moment one or two people are succumbing to the disease and Rieux realizes that instead of images and statistics, he must use reason to help him comprehend what the plague means and yet the plague is beyond

reason (see the discussion on pages 85-86). This leads him to conclude that it will only be in fighting the plague, in trying one's best to conquer it, regardless of success or failure in the endeavor, that one would actually be able to know it for what it is. The experienced plague will always be separated from the narrated plague.

Be that as it may, our analysis of *La Peste* has shown that "knowing something for what it is," i.e. determining the truth, is a problematic task, as Thucydides' freely admits in his *History*. This issue of establishing how to narrate the truth once again links *La Peste* with Thucydides' own plague chronicle. As we have already established, the Greek historian wished to record the events of the Peloponnesian war in the most objective way possible. The reasoning behind his intention of imparting the true events to his readers is because he believes they will not always have sought out the truth for themselves. He states: "Most people, in fact, will not take trouble in finding out the truth, but are more inclined to accept the first story they hear" (Thucydides Book 1. 20). Thucydides breaks with his predecessors' tradition of recording facts interwoven with myth and so distinguishes his work from that of, "the poets, who exaggerate the importance of their themes, or the prose chroniclers, who are less interested in telling the truth than in catching the attention of their public . . ." (Book 1. 21). Critical of others' attempts to write down history, where the "subject- matter, owing to the passage of time, is mostly lost in the unreliable streams of mythology" (Book 1. 21), he famously claims to "have used only the plainest evidence and to have reached conclusions which are reasonably accurate . . ." (Book 1. 21). He places objective reporting over any entertainment value because for him, "my work is not a piece of writing designed to meet the taste of an immediate public, but was done to last forever" (Book 1. 22). As already noted in our introduction, the narrator of

La Peste, wishes his readers to benefit from a truthful and objective recounting of events as confirmed by our earlier citation where Rieux claims that the narrator "... ait tenu à prendre le ton du témoin objectif" (Camus 2: 243). This point is further reiterated in Camus's *Carnets* when he toys with the idea of including "[u]ne préface du narrateur avec des considérations sur l'objectivité et sur le témoignage" (2: 978). In an early manuscript of *La Peste*, Camus again considers the importance of objectivity, when he sketches out a beginning to his narrative and proposes "une ébauche du début du récit où l'on apprend que ce rôle est dévolu à un médecin" and importantly has his narrator state, "Il y a donc des chances pour que mon récit soit *objectif*" (emphasis added) (2: 1162). In this way, we can see how Camus's intention is to provide an objective account of the plague epidemic in Oran, reflecting Thucydides' own aim of impartial reporting, but that he nevertheless exposes the limits to this objective by probing the fine line between fact and fiction.

Thucydides' influence on Camus's narratological technique in *La Peste* is therefore a means through which to better contextualize Barthes's notion of writing a neutral and innocent text at degree zero. Instead of following Barthes's argument that Camus's writing can be summed up as an example par excellence of neutrality and objectivity, one needs to take into account the context and influence that generated this style, for, it does not exist in a vacuum. As I have shown, Camus's writing is a composite of autobiographical history (his silent relationship with his mother), his journalistic experience and most importantly for our analysis of *La Peste*, Thucydides' influence. By having Dr. Rieux as both protagonist and narrator, he inhabits a space that lies somewhere in-between the myth or image of the disease, as evident in the documented historical lineage of plague epidemics enhanced by medical facts and figures, and the reality of the plague as only one who has actually

experienced it could know and understand. Rieux as both narrator and protagonist benefits from being placed in-between the reality and the unreality of the plague which manifests itself through his poignant compassion and devotion to his job as a doctor and his dogged tenacity to continue his work and believe in it even when reason and logic, his habitual recourses, can no longer provide any answers. His role as a homodiegetic narrator, masquerading as a heterodiegetic one, straddles the gap that separates, what it is to narrate the plague and what it is to live the plague, what it is to have knowledge of the plague and what it is to know what the plague means.

Section III

The in-betweenness in separation and exile

Thus far I have contended that *La Peste* is a pared down and yet complex text that in its definitive form offers multiple and layered examples of humans caught living in-between facts, separated from each other, from the outside world and from the security that things are what they seem. In trying to reconcile that which 'seems to be' with 'how things really are' the characters are left stranded in an unreliable middle ground, only to find solace in the reliability of their solidarity with one another. This instability is echoed in the role of the narrator since he is constantly thwarted in trying to render his account of the plague wholly objective and universal due to the deceptive nature of objectivity. As the plague spreads around the town and daily reality changes for the citizens, our narrator is faced with the challenge of bridging the gulf between what he perceives as happening and how this can be most faithfully and objectively described. Moreover, the destabilizing effects of the plague are reinforced in the narrative technique and undermine the reliability of any one reading or finite interpretation and so throw into question the concept of neutral and objective writing.

Separation and in-betweenness are not just evoked through *La Peste's* style of narration, but also through its content. As the chronicle moves forward, the narrator's descriptions offer examples of separation through the portrayal of shifts in meaning attached to the townsfolk's existence. Separation, both temporal and spatial, is bound up with the arrival of plague in Oran because the disease creates multiple divisions and thresholds. As a result of this separation, in-betweenness is one consequence of the plague

because it transforms the city. An example of temporal separation is when the people of Oran are cut off from the outside world and subsequently find themselves in a betwixt and between position. They must wait, stranded in limbo, separated from each other, as well as from those far away, knowing change will come in the future for better or for worse. Despite knowing that this new situation is temporary, no one knows however when precisely the next phase will arrive or when everyone can resume their 'normal' way of existing. In this manner the citizens of Oran feel not only as if they are trapped, but as is the consequence for all prisoners, they are robbed of time itself: "Impatients de leur présent, ennemis de leur passé et privés d'avenir, nous ressemblions bien ainsi à ceux que la justice ou la haine humaines font vivre derrière des barreaux" (2: 83). As a consequence, the town is held at ransom by fate, where the past, present and future all work against them. Caught living outside of their normal experience of linear time, uncertainty and pessimism abound. The townsfolk are now doomed to live in an indefinite limbo, separated from their erstwhile comfortable hallmarks of time. Consequently, their new uncomfortable present is situated in-between the past they took for granted and the brighter future they one day hope they can cherish.

Spatial boundaries, created by the arrival of the plague and the subsequent imposed quarantine, also change the everyday routines of the townsfolk and alter how they view their place in the world. With the city gates closed, life in Oran is no longer the same due to this sudden and new isolation. The inhabitants are stuck between the desire to flee, which is prohibited, and their reluctance to remain due to the likelihood of death. They are thus not only held in a temporal in-betweenness, but also are spatially trapped between being forbidden from leaving the town and the inescapable fear of staying and struggling to

remain alive. *La Peste* describes how these new boundaries generate new spaces and attitudes due to the different ways in which the citizens must now understand their spatial existence – they have to accept that life will be very different from now on: “Ainsi chacun dut accepter de vivre au jour le jour, et seul en face du ciel” (2: 84). Their new situation is not only forced onto them, but they are each alone in their experience of it. Furthermore, it is not just the psychological fear of falling sick and dying that changes how the townsfolk now live – the rhythm of their daily life undergoes a large upheaval as well. The reduction in the frequency and amount of all movement, both social and economic, means that their city is transformed physically and to such a degree that it is no longer recognizable as the Oran they once knew. The result of the repositioning of these temporal and spatial conditions results yet again in what I term in-betweenness.

As the novel continues, we come to learn of the ‘new’ way of life of the inhabitants of Oran as this disease transforms what was once a lively and familiar space into a more hostile and estranged one:

Pendant que nos citoyens essayaient de s’arranger avec ce soudain exil, la peste mettait des gardes aux portes et *détournait* les navires qui faisaient route vers Oran. Depuis la fermeture, pas un véhicule n’était entré dans la ville. À partir de ce jour-là, on eut l’impression que les automobiles se mettaient à tourner en rond. Le port présentait aussi un aspect singulier, pour ceux qui le regardaient du haut des boulevards. L’animation habituelle qui en faisait l’un des premiers ports de la côte s’était brusquement *éteinte*. . . . Seuls, les produits indispensables parvinrent par la route et par l’air, à Oran. C’est ainsi qu’on vit la circulation *diminuer* progressivement jusqu’à

devenir à peu près *nulle*, des magasins de luxe *fermer* du jour au lendemain, d'autres garnir leurs vitrines de pancartes *négatives*, pendant que des files d'acheteurs stationnaient devant leurs portes. (emphasis added) (2: 85-86 & 87)

These descriptions of life under the plague detail a frustrating new reality with emphasis on reduction and restriction as seen in the choice of the verbs, "*détournait*," "*diminuer*," "*fermer*" and the adjectives "*éteinte*," "*nulle*" and "*négatives*." These inhabitants experience not only an extinguished way of life, but their new harsher reality comes with a sense of abandonment. For this reason the use of the word "exil," ("ce soudain exil"), to describe the many separations they encounter and the painful turmoil in which they find themselves, is especially apt:

Ainsi, la première chose que la peste apporta à nos citoyens fut l'exil. . . . Oui, c'était bien le sentiment de l'exil que ce creux que nous portions constamment en nous, cette émotion précise . . . Ils éprouvaient ainsi la souffrance profonde de tous les prisonniers et de tous les exiles, qui est de vivre avec une mémoire qui ne sert à rien. (2: 81-82)

At first glance the word "exil" seems inaccurate to describe this situation, since it is most often applied to people who have been forced to leave their homes and are not permitted to return. As a matter of fact it is appropriate here, but in a reverse manner, for the inhabitants of Oran are forced to remain in their homes only to have the reality of their space change around them. Our narrator names this reverse kind of exile by stating: "Mais si c'était l'exil, dans la majorité des cas c'était l'exil chez soi" (2: 83). A consequence of this "exil chez soi" is that by being imprisoned in one's homeland, memories no longer serve a

welcome purpose because they act as reminders of all that has been lost. In being forced to view the space of home anew, the inhabitants must therefore adapt to new feelings of both exclusion and imprisonment. Memories that were once a tool for escape from hardship have now themselves been transformed into hardship. The space of home, once the territory par excellence of comfort now harbors only discomfort. The Oranais are separated from the surrounding territory, but remain connected to the plague and its history, which means confronting existential questions and defying the absurd through solidarity. Reading Thucydides' account of plague as the foundation for this narration, coupled with the emphasis on recording the physical effects of the epidemic, as well as the reactions of the people of Athens to this breakdown of society, *La Peste* depicts destabilization and deconstruction in both a literal sense, through the devastation wrought by the plague epidemic, as well as in a literary sense reflected in the Oranais' new experience of exile and separation and later in Grand's personal struggle with the written word.

The citizens of Oran also bear witness to another internal exile, where there occurs a kind of doubling of spatial separation. Already separated by the laws of quarantine from the outside world, as the plague advances, newly defined limits are conceived, within the city walls, to separate the people who are infected and from those who are not. Furthermore, exile does not only affect the inhabitants of Oran because in contrast to the citizens who experience "l'exil chez soi" (2: 83), there are also those who endure separation from their loved ones because they travelled to Oran for a temporary visit and now find themselves trapped there and, in their opinion, unjustly so. Paradoxically, this form of exile that retains foreigners inside Oran's city walls creates cohesion and new possibilities of belonging. For example, Rambert, an outsider who tries to escape, finally accepts his

position in the contaminated space of plague-infested Oran and joins forces with Dr. Rieux to fight the plague. Ironically, Rambert's impulse to save himself, by escape, leads in fact to his remaining in Oran. His decision to stay, which does not come quickly or easily, is an act of solidarity. But it also reinforces the basic notion of the absurd that there never can be any 'escape' from death. It is the fate of all eventually. Thus any attempt to flee the plague, in order to escape death, only reinforces the vulnerability of existence as we live it everyday and not just under plague conditions.

The novel's main characters come together to navigate thus a new space formed as a product of their exile and one that is characterized by cohesion and solidarity. This space I argue represents in-betweenness due to its ephemeral nature. The special case of Oran being under quarantine creates a unique kind of exile. The townsfolk are forced to live in a familiar yet unfamiliar place. Oran is still their city, but they no longer recognize it and live in it differently than before. The streets are the same, their jobs may even still be the same, after all Rieux continues to go on his rounds and treat the sick, but at the same time life there is radically different. The Oranais can thus be described as existing in limbo, under new circumstances that can be placed somewhere in-between the future, when they hope the plague will have disappeared, and their pre-plague past. Those who stay and fight the plague are suspended in a time and space completely dominated and determined by the epidemic, yet they know that this state of affairs is transitory and thus can be understood as representing a sort of watershed in-between their past and future realities. What is harder for them to understand is that while life will certainly never be the same again, they are also now aware that they can no longer feel any certainty about the future.

These motifs of both temporal and spatial in-betweenness, allow Camus to weave into his narrative elements of the absurd, especially issues of significance or insignificance. With the chance of surviving the epidemic being very slim, the inhabitants confront the logic that their existence, their place in the world, no longer has any purpose. Their lives are suddenly exposed as pointless since nothing but death lies ahead and consequently find themselves in a state of limbo having to reconsider their grasp on reality: "ils se trouvaient en somme dans l'erreur et leurs idées étaient à réviser. . . . C'est à partir de ce moment que la peur, et la réflexion avec elle commencèrent" (2: 49). Yet as this quote shows, once the inhabitants arrive at the point of reassessing their situation, reflection on their predicament offers up the opportunity to free themselves of their mauvaise foi. The plague, despite the fear it brings with it, allows the Oranais the freedom to experience a renaissance in understanding what it is to exist in the world.

The confusion and panic set off by the plague turning people's world upside down is quickly contrasted by the metatextual trope whereby our narrator comments on his own narration. "Cependant, avant d'entrer dans le détail de ces nouveaux événements, le narrateur croit utile de donner sur la période qui vient d'être décrite l'opinion d'un autre témoin. Jean Tarrou . . ." (Camus 2: 49). The reader is here told that they are going to be offered the opinion of another eyewitness. This is proposed through Tarrou who is introduced as an intradiegetic narrator. This inclusion of a second narrator and the metadiscursive addition to the narrative can be understood as providing the readers with an alternative viewpoint, one that supplements the main narrator's perspective of the events and renders the account of the plague more balanced. Our main narrator is thus aware of the limits of his viewpoint and wishes to open up the narrative to other

observations. The tangential or even opposing nature of Tarrou's recordings highlight once more the limitations of Dr. Rieux's narration regarding absolute objectivity. This is shown by the fact that in contrast to our Rieux's distaste for Oran (2: 35-37), Tarrou "paraissait avoir été définitivement séduit par le caractère commercial de la ville ..." (2: 51). Tarrou's partiality for Oran hereby neatly counter-balances Rieux's disinclination for the same town, which is made evident in his description of Oran in the opening to the novel. Another difference between Rieux and Tarrou is that, "Les premiers notes prises par Jean Tarrou ... montrent, dès le début, une curieuse satisfaction de se trouver dans une ville aussi laide par elle-même" (2: 50). Tarrou agrees with Rieux's negative observation that the town is indeed ugly, yet for our visitor its ugliness is perceived in a more positive light.

Tarrou's presence in Oran is somewhat shrouded in mystery since the purpose for his stay is not clearly given (2: 49). As the plot unfolds, he comes to work alongside Rieux to combat the plague first hand. Tarrou documents his thoughts and observations in a journal, which after his death ends up in Rieux's possession, allowing the latter to therefore impart Tarrou's viewpoint throughout the chronicle. This journal thus neatly provides us with supplementary information to occasions to which Rieux was not party. Tarrou's added viewpoint gives extra perspective, allowing the reader to be more widely informed and thus able to make a more objective judgment of the events. It must not be forgotten, nevertheless, that the reader learns at the end of the chronicle that Dr. Rieux is in fact responsible for including Tarrou's viewpoint, which weakens somewhat the argument for objectivity.

Prior to the epidemic's arrival, Tarrou's journal is simply a source for his observations of ordinary daily life in Oran. His project however takes a more somber turn

as the effects of the plague start to dominate the life around him and thus also the content of his note taking. Nonetheless, his early intradiegetic anecdotes concern random events that he witnesses and

on y trouve la description détaillée des deux lions de bronze qui ornent la mairie, des considérations bienveillantes sur l'absence de l'arbres, les maisons disgracieuses et le plan absurde de la ville. Tarrou y mêle encore des dialogues entendus dans les tramways et dans les rues, sans y ajouter de commentaires, sauf un peu plus tard . . . (2: 50)

From this quote it is evident that Tarrou's early observations are made up of a variety of random and often banal eccentricities including overheard conversations and arbitrary detailed descriptions of specific parts of the town. He also adds comments, such as, "Enfin!" or "c'est remarquable" that fail to shed any light onto his thinking. Nevertheless, despite appearing superfluous due to their peculiar content, it is thanks to these early diary entries that the narrator discerns Tarrou's fascination for all that appears insignificant which, as we shall see, is connected to the theme of in-betweenness.

Section IV

In-betweenness and insignificance

The issue of insignificance plays a larger role in the entire chronicle of *La Peste*, for the upheaval caused by the plague forces all the inhabitants of Oran to reevaluate their lives and rearrange what they deem significant or insignificant now that death is indubitably palpable. Grand's first sentence of his novel is also relevant in this discussion about insignificance since it acts as a contrast to Rieux's own narration. When compared to the enormity of the events of plague, Grand's worry about the word order of an entirely fabricated sentence pales in significance, yet we will come to understand that although it appears less significant than Rieux's tale, Grand's first sentence does indeed carry great significance and should not be dismissed as inconsequential. Tarrou's anecdotes, while peculiar, are also still cogent, since even in their apparent insignificance they tell us something about Oran and the people who live there. Tarrou's intradiegetic stories thus find themselves situated somewhere in-between the serious magnitude of the epidemic relayed by Rieux and Grand's pedantic sentence.

Ses carnets, en tout cas, constituent eux aussi une sorte de chronique très particulière qui semble obéir à un parti pris d'insignifiance. A première vue, on pourrait croire que Tarrou s'est ingénié à considérer les choses et les êtres par le gros bout de la lorgnette. Dans le désarroi général, il s'appliquait, en somme, à se faire l'historien de ce qui n'a pas d'histoire. (2: 50)

By calling Tarrou a historian of that which has no history (or story) we are brought back to the thinking of the absurd, which postulates that because we remain ignorant of the

purpose of our existence it is thereby meaningless. Yet, as Tarrou proves via his journal entries, even the most banal and insignificant of events can be narrated into history (and perhaps should be). So Tarrou takes it on himself to recount small occurrences, which would otherwise be ignored and remain outside of our narrative. All it takes is an observer who is prepared to write down, in the objective manner of a historian, a record of what occurred and by doing just that Tarrou gives the insignificant its own story.

Our analysis has so far shown that *La Peste* elucidates the complexity in narrating the reality of plague and that Camus's text questions the fine lines between fact and fiction, as well as the real and the unreal. One of Tarrou's intradiegetic stories also touches upon this issue. It takes place when he and Dr. Rieux take a long earned break and go and sit up on the roof terrace of the building of the old asthma patient. While chatting in the warm evening breeze, Tarrou opens up to Dr. Rieux about his past, his relationship with his father and his activities as a social anarchist. The anecdote he tells the doctor concerns his experience witnessing a firing squad in Hungary:

Vous n'avez jamais vu fusiller un homme? Non, bien sûr, cela se fait généralement sur invitation et le public est choisi en avance. Le résultat est que vous en êtes resté aux estampes et aux livres. Un bandeau, un poteau, et au loin quelques soldats. Eh bien, non! Savez-vous que le peloton des fusilleurs se place au contraire à un mètre cinquante du condamné? Savez-vous que si le condamné faisait deux pas en avant il heurterait les fusils avec sa poitrine? Savez-vous qu'à cette courte distance, les fusilleurs concentrent leur tir sur la région du cœur et qu'à eux tous, avec leurs grosses balles, ils y

font un trou où l'on pourrait mettre le poing ? Non, vous ne le savez pas parce que ce sont là des détails dont on ne parle pas. (2: 208)

Tarrou, in explaining his experience of seeing men shot to death in Hungary, exposes Rieux's ignorance of what the real horror of a firing squad is like. He acknowledges that Rieux may think he knows what happens when a man is executed by a firing squad because he has read about such happenings in books, "vous en êtes resté aux estampes et aux livres," but as Tarrou makes clear, Rieux does not in fact know what it is really like. The narrated version, the book version, is not the same as seeing an execution with one's own eyes. The horror is not easily communicated. This of course brings us back to a central theme of *La Peste* whereby the text confronts the complexity regarding how to distinguish between fact and fiction. If it is hard for Grand to decide upon the 'right' words with which to open his fictional novel, how does one find the 'right' words to convey the truth and horror of a despicable event, such as plague or war, that needs to be acknowledged and documented in the annals of time?

Paradoxically, instead of Tarrou being responsible for documenting only the horrors of the plague epidemic in Oran, his diary entries offer so-called insignificant observations that function like a magnifying glass, enlarging the greater absurdity of our meaningless lives, suggesting that it is through what is often deemed insignificant that one can actually glean the greatest significance. Given the circumstances of the plague, all observations could be labeled insignificant since death looms so near. Plague transforms all that used to seem so significant and makes it, in the face of probable death, quite insignificant. The plague exposes the 'mauvaise foi' of the inhabitants of Oran who believed that their lives had meaning. Yet, as the characters of *La Peste* prove by voluntarily forming the sanitary

squads to fight the disease and help others, the plague also induces the desire to come together and engender solidarity within a community. The plague thus underscores the insignificance of our lives, but it also provokes one to take action, to resist its evil senselessness and so paradoxically the disease is also responsible for giving meaning to the characters' lives. Suddenly the insignificant has been rendered significant. This conclusion is reflected in the narrator's cautioning that if at first Tarrou's entries seem so left-field that they justify instant disapproval, this dismissal is in fact too hasty and wrong:

On peut se déplorer sans doute ce parti pris et soupçonner la sécheresse du cœur. Mais il n'en reste pas moins que ces carnets peuvent fournir, pour une chronique de cette période, une foule de détails secondaires qui ont cependant leur importance et dont la bizarrerie même empêchera qu'on juge trop vite cet intéressant personnage. (2: 50)

According to the narrator if we are to think that Tarrou's insignificant anecdotes are not worth paying attention to, precisely because they are by definition insignificant and thus lacking in meaning, then we are mistaken. Once again the text shows how one should be cautious when judging the documenting of facts because one must take into account reality's shifting nature and acknowledge the complexity that resides in any attempt to impart the truth.

Another example which highlights insignificance is in the research Camus undertook for his novel. In order to insert accurate descriptions of plague-like symptoms, used when describing the death of characters such as Rieux's concierge, M. Michel, the magistrate M. Othon's son and Tarrou, Camus consulted a variety of medical documents that furnished him with detailed descriptions of the physical signs of the disease. Marie-

Thérèse Blondeau, documents Camus's research, stating in her notes to *La Peste* that he relied on the facts presented in two specific works: "Il puise l'essentiel des renseignements médicaux dans le petit livre du docteur Bourges, chef du laboratoire d'hygiène à la faculté de médecine à Paris, *La Peste : épidémiologie, bactériologie, prophylaxie*. . . Il complète son information par la lecture du *Précis de pathologie médicale* de Besançon et Philibert . . ." (Blondeau 2: 1135). These medical texts allowed Camus to accurately describe in detail the pattern of symptoms that would present themselves in cases of plague. The issue of insignificance arises in the description of the final stages of the victim's suffering as a note in the main text confirms. Note 19, (2: 1178), tells us how Camus's use of the concept of insignificance comes via a specific medical fact that he gleaned from his research when consulting Besançon et Philibert. Note 19 corresponds to the watershed scene in the narrative where Dr. Rieux, having just heard his colleague, Castel, mention the word plague for the first time, looks out of his office window to contemplate the city of Oran spread out in the distance and tries to digest the fact that the current crisis is in fact a plague epidemic (Camus 2: 60). As Rieux allows his mind to wander, he tries to recall all that he has ever learnt on the subject of plague: "Au bout de tout cela, une phrase revenait au docteur Rieux, une phrase qui terminait justement dans son manuel l'énumération des symptômes: 'Le pouls devient filiforme et la mort survient à l'occasion d'un mouvement *insignifiant*'" (emphasis added)(2: 60). Rieux's recalling of this extract from the medical texts he studied as a student allows Camus to insert his own research regarding how death comes to those suffering from the plague. As Rieux recalls, after a chain of many grueling symptoms the victim succumbs to death with only the slightest of movements, "la mort survient à l'occasion d'un mouvement *insignifiant*." The connection between an insignificant

movement and death is intriguing since it brings us back to Tarrou's own documentation of the so-called insignificant parts of daily life in Oran. Now we are aware that where the plague is concerned, the least significant action can anticipate the most significant outcome, that is to say the slightest of twitches may signal the loss of life. Viewed from this standpoint the least significant action once again no longer appears insignificant, but quite the contrary, an absurdly trivial movement can actually carry enormous weight.

John Randolph LeBlanc and Carolyn Jones, in their article entitled, "Space, Place and Home: Prefiguring Contemporary Political and Religious Discourse in Albert Camus's *The Plague*," also consider the subject of significance and quote Camus's own thoughts on this precise issue. They state, quoting and translating Camus: "If we assume nothing has any meaning, then we must conclude that the world is absurd. But does nothing have any meaning? I have never believed that we could remain at this point" (209). *La Peste* is certainly a testament to probing the significance of meaning and the meaning of significance, yet this is not simply accomplished through the leitmotif of the plague, but through highlighting the importance of the seemingly insignificant in more subtle side plots, involving Tarrou and Grand.

Section V

In-between words

Finally let us now turn to the character of Grand and examine in detail his demeanor along with his struggle in choosing his words and the part these both play within the theme of insignificance. We discover Grand is a simple man, a municipal clerk, who is also trying to write a novel in his spare time. Dr. Rieux ruminates on how to categorize this former patient and new acquaintance cum colleague of his:

... le docteur s'aperçut qu'il pensait à Grand. ... le docteur trouvait à l'employé un air de petit *mystère*.

À première vue, en effet, Joseph Grand n'était rien de plus que le petit employé de mairie dont il avait l'allure. Long et maigre, il *flottait* au milieu de vêtements qu'il choisissait toujours trop grands dans l'illusion qu'ils lui feraient plus d'usage. ... Si l'on ajoute à ce portrait une démarche de séminariste, l'art de *raser les murs* et de *se glisser dans les portes*, un parfum de cave et de fumée, toutes les mines de *l'insignifiance*, on reconnaîtra que l'on ne pouvait pas l'imaginer ailleurs que devant un bureau ... (emphasis added) (Camus 2: 63-64)

In the same way that Grand finds it challenging to find the exact words he needs to communicate his thoughts, the text shows that Dr. Rieux finds it equally hard to grasp exactly what kind of a man is Joseph Grand. Rieux finds him mysterious and further describes Grand using expressions that only add to this sense of ambiguity, such as "*flottait, raser les murs, se glisser dans les portes.*" Rieux concludes that his colleague has all the

attributes which point to insignificance, (“toutes les mines de l’*insignifiance*.”) This summary of Rieux’s portrayal of Grand is in fact an ironic depiction, since it is the latter’s life long desire to master the use of all signifiers and we know Grand spends much time thus pondering the significance of words and how to communicate. Words and their meaning matter to Grand because the way he expresses himself is the dominating factor of his nature. Camus crafts a character who from the exterior we are told appears devoid of significance itself, but despite Rieux’s reading of Grand’s characteristics as insignificant (toutes les mines de l’*insignifiance*, 2: 64), we learn as the chronicle unfolds that on the contrary, Grand’s personal history, discourse and actions represent anything but insignificance.

We come to understand that it is Grand’s *attempt* to write his novel and not the end result, which provides us with a meaningful message about the significance of our existence. Grand’s never-ending struggle with writing his opening sentence mirrors the actions of Rambert, Tarrou and Dr. Rieux, who, alongside Grand, take action to resist the plague, but with the understanding that they do not have to be victorious for their resistance to be meaningful and significant. Fighting the plague together is enough to produce a sentiment of solidarity and give meaning to their lives. Rieux says as much to Tarrou when asked why he has dedicated his life to work as a doctor, despite the fact that this vocation obliges him to witness great suffering and pain. Tarrou states:

‘Mais vos victoires seront toujours provisoires, voilà tout.’ Rieux parut s’assombrir. ‘Toujours, je le sais. Ce n’est pas une raison pour cesser de lutter. - Non, ce n’est pas une raison. Mais j’imagine alors ce que doit être cette peste pour vous. – Oui, dit Rieux. Une interminable défaite.’ (2: 122)

Dr. Rieux here thus admits that he will never be victorious in his battle against death, but he does not see this as a reason to give up his work or hope.

Up until now, my reading of *La Peste* has highlighted the destabilizing consequences of the plague in the way that they expose the pre-plague 'mauvaise foi' of the Oranais or the pitfalls of objective and truthful narration. However, Rieux's acknowledgement in the above quote, shows a guaranteed truth has been voiced, the truth of human mortality. The significance of the plague's inevitable victory over its victims allows for those like Rieux to become conscious of the need to resist despite being faced with such an indomitable task; because once they have come to the realization that resistance is necessary, despite appearing insignificant or fruitless, solidarity follows. (Gaining this awareness is also the first and a very significant step in and of itself). Grand's actions also embody such resistance despite his insignificant appearance and lack of lexical dexterity.

While Grand's relentless and humble devotion to helping Dr. Rieux and the others in their fight against the plague expresses the significance of actions, to examine in more detail the issue of significance, it is essential to delve deeper into Grand's concern with words and more specifically analyze his inability to master the opening line to the novel he is writing in his spare time. LeBlanc and Jones also discuss the significance of Grand's famous opening sentence in a section of their article aptly entitled: "Joseph Grand: The Significant 'Insignificance' of the Human Presence" (216) where they underline the significance of Grand's so-called insignificance, by examining his role with language in connection to human compassion.

Grand's tenacious drive to find the right words resonates with Rieux's reluctance to give up his work or hope. It marks a progression away from the point of insignificance,

because Grand's neurosis highlights the importance of accepting never-ending possibilities to communication. After all, it is ironic that the most syntactically challenged character of the entire chronicle has a role that 'says' so much because he is "more than either historian or chronicler" and so ultimately "teaches us that we too must learn how to live with open-endedness" (219). Therefore, it is not Dr. Rieux or the plague epidemic but Grand who teaches us that we cannot remain at the point of insignificance and that despite not having answers we must always respect and honor what may be classified as insignificant, for it can easily be rendered significant. Through the text of *La Peste*, Camus broadens, redefines even, the measure of what is significant by uncovering the heroism that can be found in the simple actions of ordinary people. As the text has already established regarding the issue of truth and fiction in narration, so too does *La Peste* render imprecise the clear separation between the significant and insignificant, allowing for the space to develop in-between the two definitions where they can in fact overlap.

At first glance, Grand's opening sentence to the novel he is trying to write seems a perfect example of insignificance because of its incongruity within the context of the greater narrative of the plague. His first line reads "'Par une belle matinée du mois de mai, une élégante amazone parcourait, sur une superbe jument alezane, les allées fleuries du Bois de Boulogne'" (Camus 2: 105). This is the first of many renderings we come to read throughout the chronicle as Grand is incapable of settling on a perfect version of his sentence and so his act of writing becomes an act of endless repetition, more so since the changes he makes are subtle enough to appear insignificant. Grand, without fundamentally changing the meaning of his sentence, swaps one adjective for another, plays with the word order or adds and removes words to change the rhythm, with the result that he fills up

nearly fifty pages of written work containing only varying renditions of the same sentence (2: 217). Grand laments that despite each altered phrase he still is not saying exactly what he wants to say, he is unable to master the perfect sentence, to find the 'right' words. His struggle demonstrates a fundamental conflict between expression and communication, between desire and the fulfillment of that desire, between what one wants to say and how to say it. LeBlanc and Jones see Grand's repeated sentence as offering "not only his own vulnerability (the connection of the sentence to his unresolved feelings for his ex-wife) but also the vulnerability of the very language in which he writes (a fire destroys the words, but the possibility of new meaning survives)" (LeBlanc & Jones 212). Their analysis of Grand's phrase shows that even manipulated and ultimately destroyed words can have great power. However, it must not be forgotten that in *La Peste* we come to understand the power of language not just via the character of Grand. I take LeBlanc and Jones points further, and argue, as addressed earlier in this chapter, that the narrative style of the narrator is also powerful in its ambiguity as demonstrated by the description of Oran in the introduction. Just as the inhabitants of Oran have to reassess their understanding of life once the plague brings about significant changes to their existence, so too does the style of narration of *La Peste* encourage the reader to also pay attention to the power of words and thus remain open to reinterpretations of the text.

Consequently, both the greater narrative of *La Peste* and Grand's single sentence demonstrate how language is powerful and yet also vulnerable. This dual status is also reflected in the strength and vulnerability of those living in Oran. The inhabitants can never be completely saved since even when the plague has been eradicated there will always remain the risk of its return. Grand's language is also ambiguous, absent and vulnerable,

threatened and burdened by his continual doubt. Each time he rewrites his first sentence he is, in a certain manner, destroying his previous attempt. We can see Grand's sentence mirroring the effects of the plague itself: "Plague, initially, decreates and de-stories place. It establishes a sameness symbolized by a nearly existential isolation. . . . 'Plague', once started, silences memory and hope, isolates individuals and empties discourse" (LeBlanc & Jones 214). LeBlanc and Jones highlight the sameness that is a result of the plague epidemic and this point also reiterates Girard's quote from the beginning of our chapter (page 72) that the plague ". . . ultimately destroys all forms of distinctiveness" (Girard 834). If we remember here the argument used by Rambert at the very beginning of the epidemic crisis to convince Dr. Rieux to help him escape Oran and go back to his beloved, we can see how this sameness caused by the plague comes full circle. Rambert insisted that because he was not from Oran, "Je ne suis pas d'ici" (Camus 2: 92), he should not have to be subjected to the strict quarantine rules that bared him from leaving the town. Rieux counters his argument saying that, "À partir de maintenant, hélas, vous serez d'ici comme tout le monde" (2: 92). However, once the plague has become entrenched in daily life, the significance of words and actions shifts. Rambert becomes one of 'them,' but not through being from Oran. He too suffers the "decreation" and the "de-storying," of which LeBlanc & Jones speak, so that Rambert, like the rest of the Oranais, feels exiled and homeless. Camus underscores his intention to impart this sense of exile in the following note taken from his *Carnets*: "À la fin de la peste, tous les habitants ont l'air d'émigrants" (2: 978). The sense of exile separates the characters from their previous history, but through resisting the plague they create a new version. The plague causes them to become, "ce qui n'a pas d'histoire" (2: 50) and yet at the same time, also chroniclers of their own (new) history.

But not all the inhabitants of Oran suffer, as the character of Cottard shows. Nevertheless, it still holds true that the epidemic causes isolation, exile and suffering to most of the townsfolk. However, even though the effects of the plague cause patterns of harm that on the surface appear the same for all, in fact there are subtle differences between each individual case and each person's sorrow. In this manner the consequences of the plague are similar to the subtle changes that Grand makes to his sentence. Each version he writes resembles the first, but on closer inspection each attempt to pen this opening sentence conveys a slightly altered scene. The plague comes and destroys Oran in much the same way that any contagious epidemic would destroy any other town; the numerous deaths will be recorded and merge into ever growing statistics. On the surface the deaths will all come to resemble one another, but each death will also be felt on an individual and personal level. Grand's repeated sentence mirrors this because each version is different, yet never radically so. The subtle changes he makes are a reminder that the minutiae of our existence must not be overlooked (hence Tarrou's recording of banal quotidian events) and ultimately they signal the importance of the insignificant.

Let us look here at how Grand's opening phrase fits into the greater context of the plague narrative itself. The scene that Grand depicts, along with the language he uses for the first sentence to his novel, blatantly echo the canonic literature of a by gone era, mirroring in particular the prose of a nineteenth century realist novel. This intradiegesis, or story within a story (even if it is only a sentence long), at first appears to form a stark contrast with Rieux's own chronicle. On the one hand, we have the doctor's narration of a plague epidemic that purports to be truthful and objective and on the other we have Grand's hyper fictionalized and stylized sentence. Grand's novel in progress, as an example

of fiction par excellence, thus contrasts dramatically with the rest of the narrative, which is based on a professed truthful account of a plague epidemic. Of course the novel *La Peste*, understood as a work of literature created by Camus, is no more nor less real or truthful than Grand's own novel, with its opening sentence describing his young, svelte amazon; for they are both entirely fictional. However, Grand's sentence better represents fiction incarnate because of the style in which it is narrated, as opposed to Rieux's Thucydidean approach because Rieux does, of course, want us to believe that his version is true. For, even if it has been established that Rieux's narration is not completely objective, his aim is clearly to offer us as truthful a rendition as possible of a mimesis of experience. He claims his chronicle is based on true events, he includes others' viewpoints, along with statistics and relevant data.

Grand's style is thus cleverly juxtaposed with the narratorial style employed by Rieux. Instead of reading Grand's sentence in the way we read the doctor's narrative, that is to say as a truthful and objective account, the short description of an aristocratic lady taking a leisurely spring time ride through a park, because she is not related to the plague, appears even more incongruously out of place and artificial than the events described by Rieux, stated in the introduction as "... pas à leur place, sortant un peu de l'ordinaire" (2: 35). Grand's equestrian has no name, we have no knowing of why she is out riding that fine morning and her location too is ambiguous because the Bois de Boulogne where she is riding could be in either Paris or Algiers, Grand does not specify which. Note #21, in *Albert Camus Œuvres Complètes*, indicates that the Bois de Boulogne was in fact a "promenade aux environs d'Alger" (2: 105 & 1185). Whether Camus was referring to this space in Algiers or the park on the western side of Paris is not stated.

Since Grand is composing a fictional text, it begs to ask the question, is it not rather ironic that he is continually looking for the 'right' words, the true words, for his opening sentence? After all, can there exist a true version of a fiction? Unlike Rieux, who has a narratorial methodology grounded in objectivity to guide him in his recounting of this extraordinary event (as stated at both the beginning and end of *La Peste*), and the support of "des milliers de témoins qui estimeront dans leur cœur la vérité de ce qu'il dit" (2: 37), Grand is actually doing the opposite since he is trying to narrate his imagination. He states: "Quand je serai arrivé à rendre parfaitement le tableau que j'ai dans *l'imagination*, quand ma phrase aura l'allure même de cette promenade au trot, une-deux-trois, une-deux-trois, alors le reste sera plus facile et surtout *l'illusion* sera telle, dès le début, qu'il sera possible de dire: 'Chapeau bas!'" (emphasis added) (2:105). Through his use of the words, *imagination* and *illusion* it is clear that contrary to Rieux, Grand makes no attempt to convince the reader that his words are depicting a truth. And yet he still endeavors to conceive of the right or perfect adjective that will convey the exact image, tone and rhythm that he wishes to convey. Rieux's narrative may at first appear more significant and truthful than Grand's, given that it forms the foundation of the chronicle and at the same time provides us with a connection to ancient history through Thucydides. Nevertheless, Grand's sentence, although its content can appear insignificant on the surface, especially when contrasted with the gravity of a deadly plague epidemic, actually still plays an important role in *La Peste* since it too serves as an example of the complexity of what it is to narrate. Grand's search for a fictional truth (or the truth of his fiction) ironically then can be said to share similar qualities with Rieux's endeavor to provide a truthful account of the plague.

In the end, for Grand, his struggle in depicting his young lady riding her horse is even more complicated and distracting than fighting the plague: “De 18 heures à 20 heures, il pouvait donner son temps. Et comme Rieux le remerciait avec chaleur, il s’en étonnait: “Ce n’est pas le plus difficile. Il y a la peste, il faut se défendre, c’est clair. Ah! si tout était aussi simple!” Et il revenait à sa phrase.” (2: 126) For Grand the fight against the plague is straightforward and composing the first line to his novel is anything but. Grand further emphasizes this point in response to Cottard’s questions about his time-consuming hobby: “Bon, avait dit Cottard, vous faites un livre” Grand replies “- Si vous voulez, mais c’est plus compliqué que cela!” (2: 72). Grand’s reply brings us back to the argument that although his sentence appears extraneous and so his work combating the plague appears more integral to our narrative, the sentence in fact plays a highly essential role in the narrative, as a whole, due to its complexity.

Grand’s sentence in fact is portrayed as taking its toll on the municipal clerk more than the plague itself. He is admonished at work for not being able to concentrate on his usual tasks. His boss believes that the reason behind Grand’s distraction is due to his spending too much of his free time volunteering to fight the plague, when in fact the text tells us that his weariness is because of his work on his sentence:

Certains soirs, il est bien vrai qu’il avait l’air encore plus fatigué que Rieux . . .
Oui, il était fatigué par cette recherche *qui l’absorbait tout entier*, mais il n’en continuait pas moins à faire les additions et les statistiques dont avaient besoin les formations sanitaires. Patiemment, tous les soirs, il mettait des fiches au clair, il les accompagnait de courbes, et *il s’évertuait lentement à présenter des états aussi précis que possible*. Assez souvent il allait rejoindre

Rieux dans l'un des hôpitaux et lui demandait une table dans quelque bureau ou infirmerie. Il s'y installait avec ses papiers, exactement comme il s'installait à sa table de la mairie, et dans l'air épaissi par les désinfectants et par la maladie elle-même, il s'agitait ses feuilles pour en faire sécher l'encre. Il essayait honnêtement alors de ne plus penser à son amazone et de faire seulement ce qu'il fallait" (emphasis added) (2: 128)

Here we see how Grand approaches his volunteer work. His attitude is to conscientiously deliver correct and accurate details in just as meticulous a way as he does with his sentence. Furthermore, his wish to present the state of things as accurately as possible (*présenter des états aussi précis que possible*) mirrors Rieux's aim to tell the story of this plague in the most truthful light as possible, once again highlighting the similarities between both their narratives. But most telling is the fact that it is neither Grand's daytime work at the town hall nor the evenings spent compiling data for the anti-plague task force that absorb him so completely; it is his sentence. Moreover, the sentence consumes him to the extent that he must make a conscious effort to not always be thinking about his galloping Amazon.

Section VI

The post-colonial argument

Grand's sentence, as well as the novel as a whole, have also been analyzed in a post-colonial context. Some post-colonial readings of *La Peste* have argued that Camus's colonial mindset is reflected in the novel. For example, certain post-colonial scholars have pointed out Camus's failure to confront the unjust discrepancies within the colonial community upon which he based his novel. Camus is said to have neglected to depict how the breakdown of Oranian society through plague would affect *all* the inhabitants within his fictional community since his chronicle features no indigenous Arab characters (O'Brien 46-49). Consequently, it has also been argued that Oran is portrayed as a European city because the narrative concerns itself solely with the French part of this colonial society (Saïd 174, O'Brien 46). Since the publication of *Le Premier Homme*, other post-colonial critics have offered counter perspectives to the above points of view, for example, David Carroll in *Albert Camus, the Algerian: Colonialism, Terrorism, Justice* and Charles Poncet in *Camus et l'impossible Trêve Civile: Suivi d'une Correspondance avec Amar Ouzegane*. Poncet documents in detail the deep political complexity of Camus's strong desire to help bring about a peaceful resolution to the Algerian French conflict, even though he never advocated for Algerian independence. These recent perspectives on Camus's involvement in the colonial politics of French Algeria allow us to better appreciate the complexity and contradictions that beleaguered him for not taking a position fully on either side.

Taking the examination of Grand's sentence further, LeBlanc and Jones also analyze Grand's deliberations and doubts over his choice of words as a means through which

Camus is able to comment on the European presence in Algeria and recognize the limits of the colonial ideal (223). They argue that Grand's sentence describing a beautiful and commanding lady trotting through the Bois de Boulogne on a fine sorrel mare one glorious morning in May "suggests an attempt . . . to articulate a yearned for and lost *ideal* of European elegance, a Renoiresque landscape of European gentry" (emphasis added) (LeBlanc & Jones 222). The image that is created by Grand's phrase is an idyllic and idealistic one, but more importantly, it is an image that Grand ultimately finds impossible to articulate. LeBlanc & Jones argue that Grand's incapacity to depict an idealized European setting demonstrates awareness on Camus's part of the unsustainability of colonialism. Interestingly enough the issue of the Grand's problems with narration in a post-colonial context overlaps with the arguments put forth in this chapter, regarding truthful and objective reporting and narration, in more general terms. At one point in our story, doubting the accuracy of his description of the Bois de Boulogne, Grand asks Rieux and Tarrou for their opinion as to the extent by which the paths of the "Bois" are lined with blooming flower beds:

Comme il [Grand] n'avait jamais connu qu'Oran et Montélimar, il demandait quelquefois à ses amis des indications sur la façon dont les allées du Bois étaient fleuries. À proprement parler, elles n'avaient jamais donné l'impression de l'être à Rieux ou à Tarrou, mais la conviction de l'employé les ébranlait. Il s'étonnait de leur incertitude. "Il n'y a que les artistes qui sachent regarder." (2: 127)

In this quote we can see that Rieux and Tarrou both doubt their own memories of just how the paths appear in the Bois du Boulogne. They *think* they know what they look like, but

when asked to be sure they waver. Grand's surprise at their uncertainty is summed up by his belief that both Rieux and Tarrou obviously do not know how to look and take in the details of their surroundings – this being the talent of artists, which they obviously do not possess. There are two factors to point out here. Of course, Tarrou and Rieux are not artists, Rieux is a doctor by profession and Tarrou a volunteer in the anti-plague effort, and as such they are both committed to practical work far removed from the creative (some may say chimerical) work of artists. Nonetheless, in addition to their anti-plague work they are both documenters providing us with fact-based evidence, including their own observations, to bring us this chronicle on the plague. So in an ironic twist, while their work may not fit the mold of an artist and while they may give Grand reason to believe they do not demonstrate having the eyes of an artist, we know that both Rieux and Tarrou are skilled at watching and observing and recording and remembering, for this is necessary in order to provide an objective and truthful account of Oran's plague epidemic, which Rieux at least claims to do. Once again the text offers us an example of where both Grand and Rieux's narratives overlap despite appearing to be very different with one portraying fiction and the other realistic historical documenting. Grand wishes to base the first line of his novel on a real place and for him it is important that he accurately describes the "allées" of the "Bois du Boulogne" exactly as they are, just as Rieux insists that his chronicle retells the events of the plague accurately and faithfully.

While I can understand the arguments put forth by Le Blanc and Jones within the context of a post-colonial reading of *La Peste*, I am not of the opinion that Camus wrote his novel so as to express his viewpoint on the French colonial occupation of Algeria. If Grand's sentence does in fact have political allusions, I would not go as far as to suggest that it is

simply an outright critique of colonialism. I rather read Grand's syntactical problem as evidence for in-betweenness and separation, which I argue underpin much of Camus's work and thinking. While Grand's sentence reflects authoritative conservatism in language, it also shows that different truths lie in-between harsh realities (the plague) and fanciful imaginings (le Bois du Boulogne) which are reflected in Grand's ironic disdain at Rieux and Tarrou's lack of ability to accurately recall just how efflorescent are the paths of the Bois du Boulogne.

If there is a political reading to be made of Grand's sentence, the incongruity and incompleteness of Grand's words point rather to what I discuss in my first chapter regarding Camus's disapproval of right wing French politics, where I show how Camus takes a more internationalist position with regard to the shortcomings of the French colonial presence in Algeria expressed through his idealization of a new Mediterranean culture in his speech. However, in my analysis of *La Peste* I make a distinction between Camus the author and the objectives of the narrator and characters in the text. Camus's attempt to articulate a new Mediterranean culture evolves more from his distaste of the right wing politics of the colonial French rather than from a specific stance against colonialism per se. Since the colonial hegemony was almost entirely partisan to right wing nationalist politics, the canonic voice of France is one that Camus does not and perhaps cannot adapt. That said, if there is a reflection of Camus, the writer, in his characters, one could see Grand's own impotence in completing his novel as mirroring Camus's search for an alternative discourse, expressed in his idealization of a new Mediterranean Culture, which however is not explicitly manifest in *La Peste*. Nonetheless, vestiges of Camus's Mediterranean thought do remain in the in-betweenness of Rieux's narratological position

and in the similarities and differences between the doctor and Grand's narration. Beyond focusing on a political interpretation of Grand's failure to write, I read his difficulty with expressing his imagined setting for his novel as complimenting the other impossibilities that the text conveys. These impossibilities include the futility in believing we can prevent death and in believing we can create a wholly objective account of events. They also all allude in a wider sense the struggle inherent in accepting the human condition as absurd.

To combat the worsening epidemic, Grand becomes an essential part of the sanitary teams that are set up by Tarrou, (Camus 2: 119). In an ironic twist for one so obsessed with words, Grand's volunteer work has him dealing with numbers and being responsible for recording the number of deaths by plague. Although Grand's quest to perfect his first sentence can be understood as a solitary struggle, there are times when his fastidious musings over his choice of words bring him closer to his colleagues, as shown, in the previous quote, by his asking for their opinion on the accuracy of his descriptions. Grand carves out what precious little free time is left to him, after his day job and evening anti-plague volunteer work, and dedicates it to improving his opening sentence, often working late into the night. As this quote below also shows, Grand continues to use words to bond with Tarrou and Rieux, as they suggest moderations to his famous phrase:

Quelquefois, le soir, quand le travail des fiches était terminé, Rieux parlait avec Grand. Ils avaient fini par mêler Tarrou à leur conversation et Grand se confiait avec un plaisir de plus en plus évident à ces deux compagnons. Ces derniers suivaient avec intérêt le travail patient que Grand continuait au milieu de la peste. Eux aussi, finalement trouver une sorte de détente. . . .

« Comment va l'amazone ? » demandait souvent Tarrou . . . Une autre fois, il

[Grand] lut à ses deux auditeurs la première phrase ainsi modifiée . . . (2: 126)

In this manner, Grand's sentence, as well as representing a solitary quest, can also be understood as symbolizing part of the communal struggle against the epidemic since Rieux, Tarrou and Grand are brought together because of it. Interestingly enough, in contrast to Grand's habitual trouble with finding the right words, when asked to help out with the sanitary teams he jumps at the chance replying with a confidently expressed affirmative: "Il avait dit oui sans hésitation, avec la bonne volonté qui était la sienne" (2: 126). In replying to Rieux's request to aid them, Grand shows not a hint of hesitation and utters an enthusiastic 'yes.' This shows that the solidarity that comes from the community formed in fighting the plague is enough to help him overcome his habitual fastidious lexicology. Grand's sentence, despite its representation of a French ideal of nineteenth (or perhaps eighteenth) century literature and its dissembling simplicity, underpins the bringing together of characters in their struggle against the plague and symbolizes how meaningful compassion is formed out of their resistance. For Grand, resisting the plague is easier than choosing between verbs and conjunctions, easier than writing a letter to his long lost wife and he says as much: "Ce n'est pas le plus difficile. Il y a la peste, il faut se défendre, c'est clair. A ! si tout était aussi simple !' Et il revenait à sa phrase" (2: 126).

This analysis of Grand's sentence is not complete without returning to the words, found in the subtitle to LeBlanc and Jones's article, "The Significant 'Insignificance'" (216). It is not simply Grand's phrase in and of itself that is so important, but the significance lies in the minor or seemingly 'insignificant' edits that he continually makes. These changes, as inconsequential as they may first appear, do in fact merit great significance. To understand

this argument it is necessary to further examine Grand's own frustrations with the syntax of the sentence in more detail.

We come to learn more about Grand's work approximately one month after the plague epidemic has been officially announced, when, exhausted after a long day of work, Grand invites Dr. Rieux up into his apartment. Once there, Rieux takes a look at Grand's writing and asks him about it:

“Des soirées, des semaines entières sur un mot . . . et quelque fois une simple conjonction.” Ici, Grand s'arrêta et prit le docteur par un bouton de son manteau. Les mots sortaient en trébuchant de sa bouche mal garnie.

“Comprenez bien, docteur. À la rigueur, c'est assez facile de choisir entre *mais* et *et*. C'est déjà plus difficile d'opter entre *et* et *puis*. La difficulté grandit avec *puis* et ensuite. Mais assurément, ce qu'il y a de plus difficile c'est de savoir s'il faut mettre *et* ou s'il ne faut pas.” (emphasis added) (Camus 2: 104)

From this description we learn in more detail the exact difficulties Grand is having. He is struggling with the small, often over-looked words, which taken on their own, devoid of context, do not appear to carry much weight or meaning and as such could be considered 'insignificant.' Certainly in comparison with the words “plague” or “death”, which resonate so ominously in this text, the conjunctions “mais,” “et” or “puis” do not immediately appear so important. This conclusion is however incorrect since the small words over which Grand deliberates are significant. Acting as conjunctions in a sentence, they are necessary so as to join ideas. These words then do have a very important role in connecting. Moreover, it will be these same 'insignificant' words that will be left out of the telegrams which the Oranais will come to know as their only means of communication and connection

with the outside world, (2: 79-80), which shows just how significant they are. Their omission from telegrams is the basis for an entire style of writing.

In Grand's opinion, the hardest choice is whether to employ "et" or not. Interestingly, he never in fact comes to actually employ a single conjunction, "et" or otherwise, in any of the numerous versions of his first sentence. Yet his apprehension over the inclusion or omission of the word "et" shows that Grand is aware of the difficulty surrounding words that by their very definition 'connect'. He is aware that if one adds a conjunction like "ensuite" or "et", then the discourse must continue. But, despite avoiding the use of any conjunction, the final version of Grand's sentence that is made known to the reader remains open-ended, intimating that the discourse will continue anyway. This is made clear because his last attempt is unfinished, "Par une belle matinée de mai, une svelte amazone, montée sur une somptueuse jument alezane, parcourait, au milieu des fleurs, les allées du Bois . . ." (2: 217). This scene takes place whilst Rieux is tending to Grand due to the latter having contracted the plague and from his bed Grand asks the doctor to read his words aloud. Grand expresses his dissatisfaction with the sentence and orders Rieux to burn all the pages. Later, Grand miraculously recovers from the plague and realizes it was wrong to destroy all his work, but believing that he remembers everything he vows to *continue* with his writing (2: 217). The inconclusive ending to the last version of Grand's sentence and his insistence with carrying on with his work despite its having been destroyed, indicates how we must learn to accept the continuous nature of many unresolved issues with our existence, that there are many open ends which may never have answers or finite conclusions; for, we will never discover the perfect version and true version of Grand's sentence.

Blondeau follows up on the never-ending nature of the plague in her remarks on *La Peste*. She notices how Camus made notes on his manuscripts which allow us to grasp how he viewed the phenomena of a plague epidemic: “Camus retient surtout de ses lectures le caractère récurrent et incroyable du fléau, phénomène qu’il traduit ainsi: “Impression qu’elle ne s’arrête jamais,” et que confirme une adjonction marginale sur le premier manuscrit: ‘La peste ne finit pas’” (Blondeau 2: 1135-36). Camus thus learnt from his own research how the plague bacillus can never be eradicated and so the plague will always be an ongoing disease. This helps us understand why Camus chose to promote accepting the open-endedness to the reason for our existence through a chronicle about a plague epidemic. The plague represents the complexity of meaning in and of itself because of its non-finite, reoccurring characteristic.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that Camus's plague epidemic, narrated by Dr. Rieux, presents multiple commentaries on narration and to what extent narration can be trusted to be objective. The aim of objectivity is complicated in the text via the intentions of our narrator, his hidden identity alongside the hybrid and overlapping narratorial styles that allow Rieux to move in-between accepted definitions of his role, to be both inside and outside of the events he describes.

In addition, Grand's relentless search for a true version of his fictional sentence contrasts and compliments Rieux's own dogged attempt to fight the plague and record this struggle with truthful accuracy. The unfinished nature of Grand's writing shows us that there are no limits to the range of possibilities in communication, for it can constantly be renewed and reworked. Equally, the never-ending feature of the plague points to the eternal quest of humankind to decipher a greater understanding of our existence, with death being the only constant in each case.

La Peste confronts issues of truth and reality, tackling what it is to record facts objectively and create imaginatively. The text asks us to think about the line that divides these opposites and whether one can comfortably reside in the space in-between the two? Such a feature also contributes to placing the novel within the larger tradition of plague narratives because, "... what Defoe's narrative suggests is as true in 1722 as it is for Camus in 1947 and for readers in the late twentieth century: the imagination is unrestrained in its potential for creativity at the same time it is confined by experience" (Stephenson 227).

Rieux experiences the plague, but the text demonstrates the difficulty in narrating that

experience so others can really know that reality. Grand's imagination is unrestrained in his attempt to describe a canonical fictional scene reminiscent of a nineteenth century novel, yet he too exposes the difficulty in knowing what the right, the truthful version of his fiction should be. Thus, *La Peste* can be said to use the crisis of a plague epidemic to present multiple and layered examples of humans caught living in-between facts and fiction, separated from each other, from the outside world and from the security that things are what they seem. The plague, as both chronicle and narrative theme, is a device through which social, lexical and epistemological reevaluation are articulated, ultimately showing how the truth remains contestable and elusive.

Chapter 3

“Eschyle est souvent désespérant; pourtant, il rayonne et réchauffe. Au centre de son univers, ce n’est pas le maigre non-sens que nous trouvons, mais l’énigme, c’est-à-dire un sens qu’on déchiffre mal parce qu’il éblouit” (Camus 3: 606).

Si le propre de l’art est d’attacher le général au particulier, l’éternité périssable d’une goutte d’eau aux jeux de ses lumières, il est plus vrai encore d’estimer la grandeur de l’écrivain absurde à l’écart qu’il sait introduire entre ces deux mondes. Son secret est de savoir trouver le point exact où ils se rejoignent, dans leur plus grande disproportion. (1: 315)

“Parler sépare, aussi” (4: 700).

In-betweenness and separation as foundational to the allegorical in Camus’s *La Peste*.

This third chapter continues my analysis of *La Peste* by focusing on Camus’s own process of writing this novel and the connection external events had on the evocation of his Mediterraneanism. In chapter two I showed the connection between the narrative technique used by the Greek historian, Thucydides, and Rieux’s delivery of his chronicle on pestilence. I established how Rieux, as a narrator who straddles two positions both inside and outside of the action, imparts the viewpoint of a participating eyewitness and outside observer in a manner that echoes Thucydides’ own narratorial objective. This third chapter moves beyond my examination of the objectivity of the narrator and investigates the

historical and personal circumstances, as well as literary influences, surrounding Camus's own act of writing and re-writing *La Peste*.

Given that Oran, geographically speaking, is a Mediterranean port, it is interesting that Camus does little to emphasize this fact in his chronicle. Instead, Camus portrays Oran as a town in limbo, suspended and isolated from the outside world, placed in-between its pre-plague past and post-plague future. This position, I argue, is typical of Camus's Mediterraneanism in theme, which as demonstrated in chapter one, is conceived of as a space in-between mainland France and Algeria. In the opening lines to the chronicle Oran is described as "... une ville ordinaire et rien de plus qu'une préfecture française de la côte algérienne" (2: 35) which denotes the town as belonging to both France and Algeria through both an administrative and geographic sense respectively. Yet Oran and *La Peste's* Mediterraneanism is separated from both France and Algeria due to the isolation caused by the plague. In a sense Camus's Mediterraneanism becomes hidden, just as the sea in the story is hidden from view (discussed below). But, this feature of existing in an in-between position (Oran as a town in limbo and the Mediterranean as geographically between Africa and Europe) connects both city and sea, in their essence, to Camus's earlier expression of a Mediterranean culture, albeit in a new form.

In comparison to the speech Camus gave at the inauguration of the Cultural Center in 1937, we gain a wider notion of his Mediterraneanism in *La Peste*, especially as the chronicle is rewritten. Nonetheless, the in-betweenness that is evoked remains in contact with his Mediterraneanism allowing for a more complex reading of the text.

For example, the answer to the question, 'what is the text about?' is better answered with an understanding of this ambiguous, in-between perspective. It can be said that Camus's

novel is about plague, but it is also about ordinary life. Thus the narrative occupies a space 'in-between' the quotidian and the radical upheaval of a contagious epidemic.

This in-between position of Oran also paves the way for Camus to explore in his novel more universal aspects that pertain to the human condition, such as home and belonging. In *La Peste*, Camus's Mediterraneanism thus comes to be represented by an in-betweenness inherent in the themes of separation and exile and subsequently his Mediterraneanism becomes more universal and abstract. A contribution to the transformation of Camus's Mediterraneanism in *La Peste* comes from the Czech writer Kafka. Camus dedicates a chapter to him in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, which he completed at the same time as he began work on *La Peste*. Camus's *Carnets* also attest to the influence of Kafka's philosophical thinking on the character and plot development of the chronicle, all of which I examine in more detail later on in this chapter.

If we take a close look at Camus's creative process from when he began compiling material for *La Peste* up to its publication in 1947, we can appreciate how the motifs of separation and exile were paramount from its conception and how they were then later incorporated into the Nazi allegory. As a result, they are more often than not analyzed within this latter context. We can follow the evolution of *La Peste* through the two surviving handwritten manuscripts, most often referred to as the first version and a typed second version of *La Peste* archived in Paris. These texts, as well as sections of Camus's early drafts, are published in volume two of *Albert Camus Œuvres Complètes*, 2006 edition, (henceforth written as *OC*). In addition to the two manuscripts, the *OC* also includes Camus's *Carnets* entries for 1935-1948 containing the rough notes and ideas he jotted down while researching and writing *La Peste*. Although some sections of these texts defy chronological

categorization, for the most part they are instrumental in allowing us to follow the evolution of Camus's chronicle. While many scholars study the definitive publication of *La Peste* from 1947, the following examination of Camus's two manuscripts, alongside the comments, notes and amendments made throughout the course of his writing *La Peste*, aims to explain why Camus insisted that his chronicle be read on several levels and not just along the lines of the Nazi allegory.

Camus's decision to compose a second version of his chronicle, which provides the foundation for this third chapter, is based on the dissatisfaction and frustration he felt at the first, which is clearly voiced in his *Carnets* in the autumn of 1942: "Résumer clairement mes intentions avec *La Peste*" (2: 961). This resolution to refine and rewrite his text echoes the rewriting of Grand's much-repeated sentence and its philosophical implications, which have already been discussed in chapter two. It is important to examine the character of Grand within the context of Camus's re-writing since Grand only appears in the second version of *La Peste* and can be viewed as replacing one of the original protagonists, the Latin and Greek teacher Stephan, (although Rieux can also be read as replacing Stephan as the main narrator.) Stephan is also a link back to Camus's own interest in Thucydides since, in the early version of *La Peste*, this character eschews anti-plague action to instead write a pamphlet on Thucydides and Lucretius. The elimination of Stephan and the inclusion of Grand play an important role in the creative progress of Camus's chronicle. Proceeding from a suicidal Stephan to the heroic character of Grand may seem a radical change at first, with little linking the two characters, but our analysis will show how this development aligns itself with the progression of Camus's philosophical thinking and allows the theme of separation to be maintained.

Towards the end of 1942, it is clear that Camus's frustration with his work leads him to the decision to significantly edit his text and show that, "... de plus, *La Peste* démontre que l'absurde n'apprend rien. C'est le progrès définitif" (2: 955). This statement tells us that, whilst writing his novel, Camus was simultaneously thinking about how to integrate his philosophical thinking into *La Peste*. The theme of the absurd is made manifest in the text through Dr. Rieux's valiant actions to continue to treat plague victims even when he knows that he has no cure for the disease. It is also apparent in Grand's stunted advancement with his writing. As we know, Grand is determined to continue his narrative despite the absurdity of not being able to definitively compose the opening sentence to his novel and so move beyond it. Camus's own frustrations with the progress of writing his novel can be seen reflected in Grand's writer's block.

To fully appreciate how Camus understands and achieves progression beyond the absurd and to explore the themes of separation and in-betweenness, it is necessary to investigate the development from Camus's early version of *La Peste* to the definitive publication, focusing on what he decided to change and why. So far our analysis of *La Peste's* probing of objective imparting of information through a narratorial strategy influenced by Thucydides, demonstrated in chapter two, has revealed that Camus reached a point where he believed it necessary to progress from the argument that "nothing has any meaning" (LeBlanc & Jones 209 & Chapter 2 p124). Philosophically, Camus had moved on from this position in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*. But, since his completion of *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* coincided with his early research on *La Peste*, Camus's notes on the absurd can be connected to both texts. Camus's rewriting of his chronicle, with its intensified focus on the separation caused by the plague, and the incomprehension that follows this suffering, act as

catalyst and tool to create meaning where it is presumed there is none. He explicitly alludes to this idea within the framework of the theme of separation in his notes on his second version, stating in his *Carnets* in early 1943, "Peste, 2^e version. Les Séparés. . . . la peste délivre peut-être de tout" (2: 981). This notion of deliverance, as a consequence of the plague, indicates Camus's probing to move beyond the absurd meaningless point to life and it also fits in with his decision to eliminate the suicidal Stephan and instead insert the unassuming yet heroic character of Grand into the plot.

In order to argue that the themes of separation and exile should be read as equally important, or more important, than the allegorical reading, it is necessary here to comment further on the allegorical interpretation of the novel since it has been a dominant factor in the critical reception of this work. The core theme and eponymous title of pestilence have commonly been read as a metaphor for the Nazi occupation of France along with the mass exportation and attempted extermination of the Jews during WW II. The anti-plague task-force's courageous struggle to combat the pestilent epidemic are read as resembling the efforts made by the French Resistance fighters who risked their own lives in trying to defeat the Germans. The rats who initially bring and disseminate the disease, are a suggestive symbol for the Nazi soldiers themselves. Camus himself discusses the allegorical side to his novel in correspondence with Roland Barthes:

La Peste, dont j'ai voulu qu'elle se lise sur plusieurs portées, a cependant comme contenu évident la lutte de la résistance européenne contre le nazisme. La preuve en est que cet ennemi qui n'est pas nommé, tout le monde l'a reconnu, et dans tous les pays d'Europe. Ajoutons qu'un long passage de *La Peste* a été publié sous l'occupation dans un recueil de combat

et que cette circonstance à elle seule justifierait la transposition que j'ai opérée. *La Peste*, dans un sens, est plus qu'une chronique de la résistance. Mais assurément, elle n'est pas moins. (Camus 2: 286)

In his reply to Barthes's analysis of his work, Camus states that while being fully conscious of the obvious allegorical aspects to his novel, he does not, however, wish it to be read on that level alone: "*La Peste*, dont j'ai voulu qu'elle se lise sur plusieurs portées . . . elle est plus qu'une chronique de la résistance." Camus wishes for his novel to be read on multiple levels without negating the importance of its anti-Nazi allegory. Using these remarks as a point of departure fosters a deeper reading of the text. In this manner, we can move beyond the allegorical and expose the rich variety of meaning that the aforementioned themes of separation, in-betweenness and exile impart.

It took roughly seven years for Camus to complete *La Peste*, which was published in 1947. This creative journey was not always a smooth one for Camus. As already mentioned, more than one draft of the novel exists and, as such, allows scholars, via contrasting and comparing early drafts with later amendments, to note what aspects of the plot Camus changed and when. His *Carnets* in particular provide useful insight into some of those alterations, and at times highlight Camus's own frustration with the project. In her notice on *La Peste* in the *OC*, Marie-Thérèse Blondeau reminds us of the difficulties Camus felt with regard to his novel:

Camus n'a cessé, au cours de la longue gestation du roman, de ressentir un terrible sentiment d'échec comme si, frappé lui-même par la peste, il se trouvait dans l'obligation de "toujours recommencer." À l'automne 1942, il note : "Peste. Impossible d'en sortir. Trop de "hasards" cette fois dans la

rédaction. Il faut coller étroitement à l'idée", et : "Résumer clairement mes intentions avec *La Peste*." (Blondeau 2: 1133-34)

The statement "Peste. Impossible d'en sortir" can effectively be read in two ways. On the one hand it is a truism of the plague itself because the characters cannot physically escape from the plague by fleeing Oran since they are trapped inside the city due to the strict quarantine measures. Moreover, history provides us with ample evidence that epidemic diseases of this nature subside neither quickly nor easily and one also cannot escape the fact that any epidemic generates fear and pandemonium. The recent devastation caused by the Ebola crisis in West Africa and the current outbreak of Zika, a virus transmitted by daytime mosquitos which causes microcephaly in babies, are just two pertinent examples. It was, perhaps, these features of an epidemic that Camus felt the need to stress in his note in his *Carnets*. Yet, because Camus was also by this time at the point of deciding to rework his novel significantly, he may also have been referring to his own creative obstacles. Camus's *Carnets* entry could thus be interpreted as describing consequences of the plague or be a reference to a less physical and more psychological sense of escape, an allusion to his own frustrated feelings with regard to his difficult progress on the novel. Or perhaps both analyses are true and as Blondeau so astutely points out, it is as if the plot line and its themes themselves have stepped out of the fiction and contaminated Camus's own work in progress (Blondeau 2: 1133), a point to which we have already alluded regarding Grand's creative impotence mimicking Camus's.

On examining the content and context of Camus's notes in his *Carnets*, we know that some of his musings on the absurd are dated chronologically alongside his completion of *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* and simultaneously his early research notes on *La Peste*, that is to say

around the end of 1940 into early 1941 (2: 915-922). Consequently, the theme of the absurd, explored in his first major published work of non-fiction, reoccurs with reference to his second novel. One example is in one of Camus's earliest notes linked to the setting of *La Peste*, "À propos d'Oran. Écrire une biographie insignifiante et absurde" (2: 922). For this reason I here examine features that link *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* with Camus's chronicle *La Peste* within the framework of his thinking of the absurd.

The climate of war and occupation has long been regarded as inextricable from the interpretation of *La Peste*, but the German occupation also provides us with a connection between *La Peste* and *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* since the restrictions and censorship brought into effect by the Nazis impacted the realization of the latter. When trying to get *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* published, Camus came up against Nazi censorship. Due to the Germans' anti-Semitic laws it was on their authority that he thus was forced to remove his chapter on Kafka if he wished to go ahead with publication in France:

Kafka, as a Jew, was on the "List Otto" of prohibited authors, whose works French publishers had agreed not to publish and not even to allow to be discussed by other authors . . . Although he [Camus] briefly considered the possibility of publishing the full manuscript in Switzerland or Algeria to avoid censorship, he accepted the alteration and the book was passed by the censor in Paris. (Aronson 27)

Alfred Thomas provides more detail on Camus's choice to remove his chapter on Kafka, stating, "Camus clearly regretted this decision, for a short time later he joined the resistance and published the chapter clandestinely" (134). Whether he regretted it or not, Camus did concede to the Nazi censorship regarding *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, but kept his

interest in Kafka alive through the underground publication of the chapter and by continuing to read and be inspired by the Czech writer's work to the extent that it had a bearing on the narrative of *La Peste*.

In Camus's opinion, Kafka's writing showed him that he must reread, accept that there are many interpretations to texts and that meaning is unstable and can shift and mutate. Camus writes as much in his *Carnets*:

Tout l'art de Kafka consiste à obliger le lecteur à *relire*. Ses dénouements – ou ses absences de dénouements – suggèrent des explications mais qui n'apparaissent pas en clair et qui exigent que l'histoire soit relue sous un nouvel angle pour apparaître fondées. Quelquefois il y a une double ou une triple possibilité d'interprétation d'où apparaît la nécessité de deux ou trois lectures. (Camus 2: 968 & 1: 305)

The above citation from Camus's *Carnets* dates to the end of 1942, when Camus was about to significantly reformulate the text that he had so far produced of *La Peste*. Furthermore, the ensuing pages of his *Carnets*, which contain notes that cover the next three months (2: 968-993), abound with musings on the development of the absurd, as well as ideas for the second version of *La Peste*. The themes of exile and separation are also very much apparent. The words in the citation above also echo the open-endedness which Camus sought to emphasize in the second version of his novel.

Le Mythe de Sisyphe appeared in bookstores on the 16th October 1942, without the chapter on Kafka, which Camus had at the behest of the German authorities replaced with a section on Dostoevsky and suicide (1: 305). Concurring with Thomas, the editors of the *OC*

also disclose that Camus did not renounce his intention to publish his study on Kafka, despite its disfavor with the Nazis.

C'est dans le numéro 7 de la revue *L'Arbalète*, revue de "contrebande" publiée à Lyon par Marc Barbezat, que finalement Camus le [le texte sur Kafka] fait publier à l'été 1943; le texte s'intitule alors 'L'Espoir et l'Absurde dans l'œuvre de Franz Kafka' et se trouve précédé d'un luminaire: "Les pages qui suivent ont fait d'abord partie d'un ouvrage déjà paru, où était étudiée la notion d'absurde. . . . On se demandait ensuite s'il était possible d'imaginer de même, sur le plan de la création, une œuvre véritablement absurde. Le chapitre sur Kafka répondait à cette préoccupation. Les circonstances ont cependant empêché sa publication." Il faudra attendre la réédition de *Sisyphes* en 1945 (il y eu entre-temps, en 1943, une réimpression) pour que 'L'Espoir et l'Absurde dans l'œuvre de Franz Kafka' soit réintégré à l'essai, dans un 'Appendice.' (1: 1273-74)

The unauthorized publication of Camus's chapter on Kafka appeared in the summer of 1943, that is to say, around eight months after the official publication of *Le Mythe de Sisyphes*, and it featured a clear explanation that claims that Camus's text, although now separated from its original context, still responds to his exegesis of the absurd as explored in his original essay. Meanwhile, between the publication of *Le Mythe de Sisyphes* and the appearance of Camus's text on Kafka in *L'Arbalète*, Camus was busy working on his second version of *La Peste*. If we follow the chronology carefully we can see that Camus records his finishing the manuscript for *Le Mythe de Sisyphes* in his *Carnets* in Feb 1941, "Terminé Sisyphes" (2: 920). The essay then finally appears in bookstores in October 1942, twenty

months later, minus the study on Kafka, which is printed clandestinely by the summer of 1943. During the months between October 1942 and the following summer Camus was dealing with difficult personal issues. He was having treatment for his TB, as well as struggling creatively with his second version of *La Peste*, as attested by his *Carnets*, the notes for which reflect his personal turmoil (2: 955, 958, 975-981). Camus had in September 1942 left Algeria for France and moved with his wife Francine to the rural hamlet of le Panelier in the Massif Central to better manage his health. In the autumn of 1942, the Nazis invaded “la zone libre” (later renamed ‘zone sud’ once the Germans advanced south to occupy all of mainland France; ‘la zone occupée’ was then also renamed ‘zone nord’) and so as of November 11th 1942 Camus found himself trapped in France, effectively exiled from Algeria where Francine had returned a month earlier to resume her teaching position. This difficult personal situation was to have a bearing on the work Camus produced during this time, as is discussed in greater detail later on in this chapter. For us, however, it is interesting right now to examine the changes that Camus made to his study on Kafka during this time when he was also making significant edits to *La Peste*.

The editors of the *OC* document that there exist two manuscripts of *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, *ms. 1* and *ms. 2*, and both contain the chapter on Kafka (1: 1281). There also exists a typed copy of *ms.1*, labeled *dactyl. 1 Kafka*, which Camus edited by hand: “C’est sur cette dactylographie que Camus, de manière manuscrite, retravaille son texte: indication précise de la place des trois derniers additifs et recherches stylistiques (en particulier sur le premier paragraphe du chapitre)” (1: 1281). This opening paragraph to his chapter on Kafka is of interest to us since it mirrors almost word for word the entry Camus made in his *Carnets* on Kafka dated at the very end of 1942 and cited above on page 156 (Camus 2: 968

& 1: 305). The *OC* editors claim that a second manuscript, categorized as *dactyl. 2 Kafka* is the version used for the clandestine publication in *L'Arbalète*:

... publié *ne varietur* dans la revue lyonnaise *L'Arbalète* (n°7, été 1943; sigle: *préorig. Kafka*) ... c'est ce texte qu'intégrera Camus en appendice au *Mythe de Sisyphe* en 1945. Pour la seconde fois Camus en remanie le premier paragraphe: sur la première page de *dactyl. 2 Kafka*, il ajoute, à la main, de manière très lisible, le passage qui ouvre aujourd'hui le chapitre ("Tout l'art de Kafka [...] mot à mot," p. 303). (1: 1281)

Knowing that this new introductory paragraph for his clandestinely published study of Kafka is almost identical to the *Carnets* entry penned at the end of 1942, it is clear that Camus takes his reading of Kafka into his work on *La Peste*. It especially has bearing on the transition he eventually makes from the character of Stephan to Grand. His comments on Kafka, expressed in his *Carnets*, tell of an interpretation that focuses on the absence of endings and surmises that "Tout l'art de Kafka consiste à obliger le lecteur à *relire*" (emphasis added) (Camus 2: 968 & 1: 305). Camus applies this understanding of Kafka, that is to say the importance of re-reading, to his second version of *La Peste* not just in exposing the limitations to an objective narrator, that is to say, we should perhaps re-read the chronicle once we know Dr. Rieux is the narrator to gain a different perspective on the objectivity of events recounted, but also through the character of Grand and his sentence; my own re-reading and analysis of *La Peste* focuses especially on these two aspects so as to highlight the way in which the text makes us question what we think we know. For, it is not only Grand who rereads his opening line over and over. The reader is also constantly confronted with this remodeled phrase while following Rambert and

Rieux's participation in helping Grand with his editing. Through each reading of the sentence we come to understand that via every small change that Grand makes, he is trying to impart a larger change in the sentence's meaning. Fundamentally though, and in fitting Kafkaesque fashion, Grand never achieves closure on it, even when his writing is destroyed by fire. Just as with the eternal reoccurrence of life-threatening epidemics, we are forever destined to be separated from the intellectual closure of an ultimate understanding of our existence.

In his text on Kafka, Camus discusses how the Czech writer narrates the absurd through the story of K in *The Castle*.

Peu d'œuvres sont plus rigoureuses, dans leur démarche, que *Le Château*. K . . . est nommé arpenteur du château et il arrive dans le village. Mais du village au château, *il est impossible de communiquer*. Pendant des centaines de pages, K . . . s'entêtera à trouver son chemin, fera toutes les démarches, rusera, biaisera, *ne se fâchera jamais*, et avec *une foi déconcertante*, voudra rentrer dans la fonction qu'on lui a confiée. *Chaque chapitre est un échec. Et aussi un recommencement*. Ce n'est pas de la logique, mais de l'esprit de suite.

L'ampleur de cet entêtement fait le tragique de l'œuvre. (emphasis added)

(Camus 1: 310)

Camus's analysis of Kafka's protagonist in *The Castle* has much in common with Grand and his struggles in *La Peste*. The impossibility of communication that K . . . confronts everyday is also a major theme in Camus's chronicle and one that is not just related to Grand and his sentence, but permeates the entire narrative. Imparting knowledge, be it the narrator's description of the town of Oran, factual information about the epidemic or more emotional

and sentimental feelings between lovers, friends or colleagues, all provide the basis through which the text interrogates metaphysical meaning and the act of narration. Some clear examples of the latter being the breakdown in communication between Grand and his ex-wife and also between Dr. Rieux and his spouse, shown when they struggle to speak to one another when Rieux puts her on the train to the sanatorium (2: 34 & discussed in detail on pages 184-185). K . . . like Grand and Rieux has a persistent but calm demeanor; neither becomes angry and both possess a bewildering faith in their work. In their unflinching endeavor to triumph over the implausible, consistent failure allows for continual renewal. This Sisyphean struggle is expressed in *La Peste* by Grand's constant editing and manipulation of his sentence as well as in Dr. Rieux's work against death. In this manner, we see how Camus adapts his reading of the absurd in Kafka's novel to express the open-endedness of meaning in *La Peste*.

Furthermore, the four *Carnets* entries that follow directly on from Camus's thoughts on Kafka, and which were all written around December 1942, tell us much about Camus's creative thoughts and personal feelings while working on *La Peste* and his study of Kafka. The entries deal in precise succession with Camus's melancholy, the low spirits he experiences due to his own feeling of "exile" in the harsh Auvergne winter in le Panelier, the monastic features of suffering from a difficult illness, his nostalgia and pining for Algeria, which now resides only in his memory (2: 969) and lastly, the "Développement de l'absurde: . . . C'est à l'homme de se fabriquer une unité" (2: 969). These last words are evidence of Camus's preoccupation with the need to move away from the individual nothingness of the absurd to a more collective unified feeling, which he believes can be achieved through communal resistance and this will be played out with great effect in his

second version of *La Peste*. As Blondeau notes in the *OC*, as of November 1942 the theme of separation invades Camus's second version of *La Peste*, but more importantly this is also tied in to Camus's decision to eliminate Stephan and replace him with the character of Grand: "Stephan est le seul 'séparé' de la première version, et encore sa femme l'a-t-elle quitté quinze ans auparavant. Or, exil et séparation vint envahir la deuxième version pour des raisons historiques et personnelles" (Blondeau 2: 1149-50). The first version of *La Peste* contains only one character who is separated, Stephan, and this is because his wife has left him. Grand's wife also leaves him and this is before the plague hits Oran. Grand wishes to write a letter to her explaining himself, but this letter never gets penned. His impotence, before the plague arrives, to write the words he wishes his ex-wife to read, is similar to his impotence to write beyond the first sentence of his novel, which he is trying to write during the plague. Camus's second version abounds with more complex and layered examples of separation which strike a contrast to the unified collective resistance carried out by the anti-plague task force. Blondeau sums this up in saying: "On a vu que le passage de la première à la deuxième version se fera sur le partage entre individuel et collectif: pour donner à son récit le vrai visage d'une chronique, Camus va gommer tout ce qui est trop individuel, et le premier à en partir sera Stephan" (2: 1145). With the elimination of Stephan, Camus is now freer to pursue a portrayal of the collective gaining meaning together rather than searching for it alone.

From Camus's *Carnets* entries we can draw clear connections between a shift from the individual to the collective expressed alongside themes that Camus reads in Kafka and then develops in *La Peste*. Illness, solitude, nostalgia, exile, solidarity and revolt, are all apparent in his *Carnets* and these notes act as a window into his personal situation. As we

shall see they also become embedded in his chronicle of plague reflecting how Camus's personal situation had some bearing on his creative work. In a similar manner his various studies for both *La Peste* and other artistic projects influenced each other. Hence, Camus connects the notion of open-endedness derived from his reading of Kafka to his theme of separation in *La Peste*. The ontological questions concerning the absurdity of our existence featured in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* have a continued influence on Camus while he was working on his second novel. In this manner, themes that were important to him from as early as 1940 when he was first penning *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* find their way into his development of the narrative of *La Peste*. We can now better understand, due to the circumstances of war and being forced to publish outside of the law, how Camus integrated his reading of Kafka's work into his second novel. In doing so he also achieved a crafty circumnavigation of the Nazi censorship. Thus, although the personal and historical circumstances post 11th November 1942 do have great impact on the emphasis of separation and exile in the second version of *La Peste*, we can see that these themes had had their place in Camus's work for a long time already. In fact the historical and personal situation of Camus's own exile in le Panelier served more to solidify the important threads of his narrative rather than give rise to them per se.

In April 1941 Camus sketches out a plan in his *Carnets* for what will be his first draft of *La Peste*. Camus entitles the summary of his first draft "*La peste libératrice*" (2: 923). The word 'liberating' is troublesome given that this outline contains descriptions that center on loss and death: "*La peste libératrice*. Ville heureuse. On vit suivant des systèmes différents. La peste : réduits tous les systèmes. Mais ils meurent quand même. Deux fois inutile. Un philosophe y écrit 'une anthologie des actions insignifiantes'" (2: 923-24). From this early

reference, dated April 1941, we can, at least, deduce that Camus's idea of freedom resulting from the plague stems from elimination since it comes from the premise that the plague reduces, and even destroys, all systems, (as already discussed in chapter 2, page 72). It cancels out previously held beliefs and in doing so destabilizes how one thinks about the veracity of all knowledge. The consequence of this effect is that the victims of the plague are left in a liminal place, existing in-between their previous 'normal' life and their post-plague future; which will most certainly henceforth radically change. This in-between state acts as a precipice where the chaos of destabilization will eventually lead to the opportunity for renovation and repair.

The plague's omnipotence makes the inhabitants of Oran reevaluate their lives. This opens the readers' eyes to new possibilities of thinking and understanding and brings us back to the message drawn from Kafka that rereading is essential if new perspectives are to be gained. Camus uses the adjective "heureuse" in connection with Oran - "Ville heureuse" (2: 923-24) which I understand as taking us back once more to Camus's text *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* and the image of Sisyphus happy despite his burden. Sisyphus's task of pushing a boulder uphill for it only to roll back down to the bottom and thus constantly having to repeat his labor over and over again is not so dissimilar to Dr. Rieux's relentless uphill struggle trying in vain to cure dying people and Grand's search for the elusive perfect sentence. Nonetheless, with the words "Ville heureuse" precede "La peste" so this happiness, which describes the town, may not necessarily be a conscious one. Yet through the narrative of *La Peste* we still learn via Rieux and Grand's magnanimous actions that a conscious happiness can be connected to their labors. It comes from their journeys and not simply their goals and it is this realization that is liberating.

Camus, by inverting the way we would normally judge Sisyphus', Rieux's and Grand's burdens, encourages us to rethink our judgment in other areas. The text of *La Peste* therefore interrogates our understanding of fixed knowledge and exposes new meaning. This conclusion brings us back to Camus's formulation of a *new* Mediterranean culture expressed in his speech of 1937, at the inauguration of the Centre de la Culture in Algiers, where he speaks of looking East rather than West, or to Ancient Greece rather than Rome, as the basis for a new perspective of a Mediterranean identity. It is also reminiscent of how the text of *La Peste* illustrates a rethinking of our perception of what is deemed significant and insignificant. This, as already discussed in chapter two, is played out through Tarrou's banal anecdotes and Grand's seemingly inconsequential first sentence. Both examples portray that which is considered insignificant, especially when compared to the backdrop of a serious and deadly epidemic, to in fact be seen as significant.

The theme of insignificance will be played out through Stephan as well as through Grand and Tarrou. In fact, Camus's expression of the significance of the plague's liberating aspect evolves from his first to the second version through his development and elimination of Stephan. It is therefore necessary to document Camus's research, reading and notes concerning his first draft of *La Peste* in order to better understand the context which led to his creation of the character Stephan and why he is later disregarded. Camus writes out his plan for this first draft, *La peste libératrice*, (2: 923-4), while he is living in Oran, Algeria, with his newly wedded wife Francine, having been relieved of his previous job at *Paris-Soir* in France where he had been residing from March 1940 until January 1941. "*La peste libératrice*" is a heading for "une sorte de premier canevas du roman" (Blondeau 2: 958). In this early outline Camus mentions the Latin & Greek professor,

Stephan, his commentary on Thucydides and Lucretius and lists, in note form, the major implications of the arrival of plague: “Un jeune curé perd sa foi. . . . On emporte les corps dans les tramways. . . . On ferme la ville. On meurt en vase clos et dans l’entassement. . . . À la fin, le personnage le plus insignifiant se décide à parler : ‘Dans *un sens*, dit-il, c’est un fléau” (emphasis added) (2: 924). We know that not all these aspects make it into the final version since the character of Stephan is cast to one side. Father Paneloux, the priest, retains his faith and the insignificant character (whoever that may be?) makes no such statement at the end of the narrative. Nonetheless, although the ending of the published narrative is considerably different from the proposed one here, the words “dans *un sens*” still carry importance for us. This *one* meaning implies that identifying the plague as “un fléau” is one choice of many, which further confirms our argument that Camus ultimately uses *La Peste* to show the availability of many truths or interpretations of a truth. As a result, Camus exposes the complexity between what it is to impart or narrate an event and glean one finite significance or meaning from that narration. In addition, we are then better able to resist the meaningless of the absurd and can focus on finding our own communal, compassionate, polysemic and ‘solidaire’ meaning to the enigmatic reason or reasons behind our existence. Thereby we can read the plague as simply a scourge and yet also as so much more.

We see that Camus uses the text of *La Peste* to underscore what he had already pointed out in his chapter on Kafka, that is to say the importance of rereading and realizing there can be more than one interpretation. Camus’s recounting of the plague epidemic delivers multiple readings in one narrative sequence. He achieves this by highlighting the ambiguity in meaning, which allows the value of the significant and insignificant to shift. In

this, Camus shows how all eventualities can be both significant and insignificant; meaning is in constant motion and we must expect that we will forever remain separated from any finite and definitive signification. Camus's entry on Kafka in his *Carnets* is important because it links us back to the arguments made throughout this chapter and the last, posturing the value of the significant and insignificant. Camus's reading of Kafka recalls Edward Saïd's words that express how we interpret Camus's text as being "... about a situation that on closer inspection seems really to express another quite different one" (172 & page 92 in chapter 2) and confirms the importance of rereading and reinterpretation.

David Carroll's analysis of Camus's *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* also supports our discussion regarding the influence of Camus's reading of Kafka on the narrative of *La Peste*.

What interests Camus especially in such feelings is that, 'comme les grandes œuvres, les sentiments profonds *signifient toujours plus qu'ils n'ont conscience de le dire*' (Ess, 105) ('like great works, deep feelings always signify more than they are conscious of saying' (MS, 10, translation modified)). What these feelings *say* and are conscious of saying may very well be an appropriate subject for philosophical investigation, but what they *signify* (or suggest) demands an extra-philosophical approach and type of analysis, one that recognizes *the limitations of what can be directly phrased and is open to what is conveyed indirectly by allusion or suggestion*. (emphasis added) (Carroll 56-57)

Carroll's analysis of Camus's interest in feelings expressed in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* could be equally understood as a commentary on the actions of Rambert, Tarrou, Dr. Rieux and

Grand in *La Peste*. Their straightforward actions in fighting the plague “*signifiant toujours plus qu’ils n’ont conscience de le dire*” and this unequivocal resistance is driven home by being contrasted with the difficulty some of these characters have in communicating their thoughts and words. The clearest example is decidedly best portrayed through Grand and his incapacity to tell his wife of his feelings, but Rieux too makes a floundering attempt to communicate with his wife when he bids her farewell at the train station, which I assess later on in this chapter (see page 183-84). The significance of Camus’s plague narrative is that in following on from his thinking expounded in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, it illustrates “*the limitations of what can be directly phrased and is open to what is conveyed indirectly by allusion or suggestion.*” Camus conveys this aspect through his ostensibly objective narrator, who nonetheless offers a subjective viewpoint. The complexity surrounding the act of communication and narration is also portrayed through Grand’s complex relationship with words because he is separated from the ‘right’ words since they elude him. This is in regard to the opening sentence of his novel as well as concerning his wife. It is also apparent via the difficulties the authorities encounter in deciding how best to announce the arrival of the epidemic. Our analysis of communication difficulties exposes the unstable nature of interpretation and the importance of indirect or seemingly insignificant “*allusion or suggestion.*” Carroll’s analysis of Camus’s thinking in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* demonstrates Camus’s evolution from the first to the second version of *La Peste* where he initially incorporates the idea of objectivity as championed by Thucydides only to interrogate this illusive aim of a narrative. Camus’s interrogation exposes open ended-ness in his exploration of communication and expression.

Carroll also accentuates the importance of separation in his examination of Camus's analysis of the absurd:

What Camus calls 'the constant point of reference' of the essay is thus the indisputable fact of difference, separation or divorce: 'le gouffre qui sépare le désir de la conquête' 'le décalage constant entre ce que nous imaginons savoir et ce que nous savons réellement' . . . 'le fossé (qui) ne sera jamais comblé . . . entre la certitude que j'ai de mon existence et le contenu que j'essaie de donner à cette assurance' (Ess, 110-11). And it is the 'gouffre' between the individual and the world that also paradoxically constitutes a fundamental link between them. (58)

The separation articulated here by Carroll harks back to our analysis of how the text of *La Peste* questions how we can navigate the space between "ce que nous imaginons savoir et ce que nous savons réellement." The characters of *La Peste* may not necessarily triumph in bridging the gap between their desire to vanquish the pestilence and gaining absolute victory in doing so, since the text provides us with profound examples of loss and failure including the death of Tarrou (2: 234) and the death of M. Othon's son (2: 183.) The narrative also ends with a reminder that the plague can reoccur and thus death will always be victorious, even though the revolt against it remains ongoing. Despite this inevitability or rather more because of it, the text of *La Peste* tells of how it is necessary to resist and fight the disease, because through resistance we glean a positive message of solidarity from an otherwise tragic and senseless event. This position is made clear in Camus's second manuscript with his change from the melancholic, suicidal character of Stephan to the unassuming hero in Grand and the shift in emphasis from the individual to the collective;

the bleakness of the absurd can be resisted by rebelling together against it. In exposing hitherto this latent consequence of the plague, that resistance creates a certain salvation, Camus creates meaning where there was presumed to be none. This reasoning is not so far removed from us imagining Sisyphus happy.

Section II

Manuscript changes and mainstays: Stephan, Grand, Cottard and suicide

Camus's *Carnets* furnish us with invaluable information concerning his musings and feelings towards his work. They help us to better understand how the foundational themes of *La Peste* were being developed as a continuation of, and more importantly, as a progression beyond, Camus's earlier texts and hence before the Nazi allegory of *La Peste* took shape. Let us now here focus specifically on the theme of separation and examine how the characters of Stephan and Grand show it to be a keystone of the novel.

Camus mentions the plague in his play *Caligula*, which he wrote between 1938 -39, but the first time the words "la peste" appear in his *Carnets* is October 1940 (Camus 2: 916). This entry is only indirectly connected to his second novel, since it concerns historical research about the devastating effects of the plague on the province of Padua besieged by the Venetians in the fifteenth century, yet it marks nevertheless the beginnings of Camus's research into the disease. However, an earlier notation that has been connected to the novel, but which does not contain the actual words "la peste", appears in his *Carnets* dated sometime in December 1938 (Longstaffe 113). This entry concerns what eventually becomes a discarded section of the first draft. "C'est à Jeanne qui sont liées quelques-unes de mes joies les plus pures. . . . Je crois que j'ai bien souffert quand je l'ai perdue" (Camus 2: 867). This note, written in the first person, is a description of lost love regarding Jeanne, who, we know from Camus's first draft of *La Peste*, is the wife of Stephan, the character Camus later erases. Camus writes out this imaginary diary entry under the guise of Jeanne's forlorn and abandoned husband. Neither the word plague nor any mention of other

characters appears in the passage. Nevertheless, the entry is still pertinent to the published text since in the definitive publication Jeanne reappears as the absent wife of Joseph Grand, and it is Grand, in place of Stephan, who pensively recalls their failed marriage. It is important to note here that at this genesis stage of the novel, dated to a time before WW II had even begun, the themes of separation and loss feature as core elements. These themes endure in spite of later editing, for example the elimination of Jeanne's original husband Stephan, and merge into the Nazi allegory as they become more connected to the plague itself.

Because the 1938 entry from the *Carnets* was written before Camus penned his first draft of the novel, ("C'est à Jeanne qui sont liées quelques-unes de mes joies les plus pures. . . Je crois que j'ai bien souffert quand je l'ai perdue" (2: 867)) and later on still, he modified other facts substantially for his second version, the original entry from the *Carnets* could be seen to have a rather tenuous connection to the finished product. However, the themes of lost love and nostalgia are retained by Camus as recognizable descriptive features, so it is apparent that he wished to preserve these aspects of his early musings for his final version. Note 28 to the above-mentioned *Carnets* entry in the *OC* details the relevance of Jeanne: "Première apparition du personnage de Jeanne, l'épouse volage de Grand. Ce fragment se retrouvait presque intégralement dans le premier état de *La Peste*, sous la plume de Stephan, le professeur sentimental (R. Q.)" (Blondeau 2: 1388). The passage from the *Carnets* is used in Camus's first draft, but the entry does not appear in its entirety in the definitive publication. However, loss and separation remain since the absent wife's name, Jeanne, remains unchanged and other details about her, mostly regarding her family and background, are also recycled. This evidence supports the reasoning that the Nazi allegory

was added on to the larger motif of separation. The proof is found in the chronology of Camus's earliest references to *La Peste* in his *Carnets*, since these entries begin in late 1938, years before the Nazi invasion of France takes place and thus also before any such allegory could be conceived of. Despite the editing that takes place changing the rejected husband from Stephan to Grand, the theme of separation remains tied to words and relationships.

Blondeau expands on the difficulties the character of Stephan presented for Camus, pointing out that eliminating him did not prove to be an easy solution either. "On peut voir dans l'éclatement de Stephan en différents personnages l'impossibilité pour Camus de reconstituer son propre univers fragmenté. . . . 'Journal de la Séparation? Stephan ?' montre le professeur en train d'évoluer vers Rambert (à qui Camus hésite à attribuer Jeanne, femme de Stephan, comme épouse)" (2: 1149). As Blondeau suggests, the fragmentation that occurs in the evolution of the chronicle with Camus's elimination of Stephan mirrors the consequences of the plague itself and then comes full circle by molding the development of his characters. Some of the features of Stephan's character penetrate other characters and circumstances in the chronicle; for example, Tarrou's character takes on the role Stephan had of documenting the events of the plague in a diary. But Grand remains the character who inherits Stephan's main features, including his interest in literature. Furthermore, Grand's issue with words develops only more deeply the theme of separation begun with Stephan: "Ainsi du grand projet littéraire de Stephan qui occupe une partie non négligeable de la première version, ne restent que les angoisses stylistiques du modeste employé condamné à polir éternellement la même phrase . . ." (2: 1149) Stephan's great literary project on Thucydides and Lucretius can be seen as morphing into Grand's novel.

In both drafts, the characters Stephan and Grand suffer the loss of Jeanne and in neither instance is this due to the plague. Thus Jeanne does not play a part in the allegorical reading of the plague as the Nazi invasion of France. From her first appearance in the *Carnets* to her role in the final version, Jeanne remains a symbol of separation and her absconding with another man, the cause of her split from Grand, plays a fundamental role in the composition of Grand's character. Although the *Carnets* entry, which first mentions Jeanne, is no longer recognizable in the published novel and despite her role as a spouse being recycled to suit a different character, we can see that the motif of separation is present at the conception of *La Peste*. Beyond representing separation the character of Jeanne remains a symbol for love, or rather lost love, and the heart-break and loneliness that accompanies it. Despite the changes that Camus implements regarding Jeanne, alongside symbolizing separation, more specifically she continues to exemplify the sadder side of human nature, that is to say the sorrow of unrequited love and the emptiness that exists in its aftermath, which can dominate and reshape a life.

Grand's struggle to find the right words with which to open his novel is also manifest in his relationship with his wife. In the definitive publication of 1947, when Grand first opens up to Dr. Rieux about his failed marriage, he confesses that he still misses his wife and wishes he could write to her and explain himself:

Probablement, Jeanne avait souffert. Elle était restée cependant: il arrive qu'on souffre longtemps sans le savoir. Les années avaient passé. Plus tard, elle était partie. Bien entendu, elle n'était pas partie seule. "Je t'ai bien aimé, mais maintenant je suis fatiguée . . . Je ne suis pas heureuse de partir, mais on

n'a pas besoin d'être heureux pour recommencer." C'est, en gros, ce qu'elle lui avait écrit.

Joseph Grand à son tour avait souffert. Il aurait pu recommencer, comme le lui fit remarquer Rieux. Mais voilà, il n'avait pas la foi.

Simplement, il pensait toujours à elle. Ce qu'il aurait voulu, c'est lui écrire une lettre pour se justifier. "Mais c'est difficile, disait-il. Il y a longtemps que j'y pense. Tant que nous nous sommes aimés, nous nous sommes compris *sans paroles*. Mais on ne s'aime pas toujours. À un moment donné, j'aurais dû trouver les mots qui l'auraient retenue, mais je n'ai pas pu." (emphasis added) (Camus 2: 89-90)

The text shows how the plague separates the citizens of Oran on a variety of levels. The emotional, physical and lexical examples of separation in this description of Grand's failed marriage, mirror the separation caused by the plague and also show how difficult it becomes to express that separation. In the final version of the novel, we learn that Jeanne leaves Grand only after many years together, but the sense of estrangement and pain had been growing between them as is made evident by the sentence "Jeanne avait souffert. Elle était restée cependant . . ." Their silent and erosive love eventually leads to Grand losing his wife and condemns him to live in a sort of limbo, where he is caught existing between his memories of what once was and his whimsical desire to reconnect with her. He accepts that people may not love each other forever, "Mais on ne s'aime pas toujours" and yet it is clear that Grand is still grieving his failed marriage and has been unable to move on: "Il aurait pu recommencer, comme le lui fit remarquer Rieux. Mais voilà, il n'avait pas la foi." Grand continues saying he and his wife understood each other without the need for words,

“Tant que nous nous sommes aimés, nous nous sommes compris *sans paroles*,” yet he desperately needs to find words to convince his wife to stay and suffers because they evade him. Furthermore, when his wife finally does leave instead of telling him in person she writes a letter, “C’est, en gros, ce qu’elle lui avait écrit.” Jeanne’s choice of using a letter to communicate her decision suggests that, at least on an oral level, they not only lived together without voicing their love, but that her leaving was also carried out in silence. Grand wishes that he, too, had written to Jeanne, to explain his side of things, but the written words also remain elusive. “Simplement, il pensait toujours à elle. Ce qu’il aurait voulu, c’est lui écrire une lettre pour se justifier. ‘Mais c’est difficile, disait-il . . .’” (2: 89-90). The so-called ‘right’ words elude Grand and consequently this leads to his physical separation from the one he loves and in his mind perpetuates it.

In a similar manner to the narrator’s contradictory descriptions of Oran in the introduction, Grand’s unrequited love story bears witness to the deeper issues lying beneath the surface of the text that ask: “how *are* things really?” Grand believed he and his wife understood each other, but this proves to be a false assumption on his part because, evidently unhappy with their life together, she eventually decides to leave him. Moreover, his struggle to find the right words, which has been examined in detail in the previous chapter, especially with regard to the first sentence of his novel, defines his character and yet, while we are told that Grand “parlât le langage le plus simple” (2: 46), we are also informed of his “manie . . . d’invoquer les locutions de son pays” (2: 63). Grand’s compulsion with words comes to form the linchpin of Camus’s chronicle because Grand’s continual search for the “right” words underscores open-endedness by dint of eliciting a

greater questioning in regards to the meaning of all words and thus complicates the idea of objectivity.

Grand's broken love for Jeanne also acts as an ironic foil to the more ardent and impatient love expressed through the character, Rambert, who comes to be separated from his beloved due to the lockdown of the city as a measure to contain the plague. Once Rambert is trapped inside Oran, he worries that being forced to live apart from his partner will bring their relationship to breaking point. Among the newly formed category of internally exiled townsfolk representing one mass of people separated from the outside world, Rambert is an example of the sub-category that emerges, representing those who are doubly exiled, so to speak, since they are trapped in Oran and are living far from their loved ones as well as far from home. The narrator refers to Rambert's personal situation when talking about the different kinds of separation that occur because of the plague:

Et quoique le narrateur n'ait connu que l'exil de tout le monde, il ne doit pas oublier ceux, comme le journaliste Rambert ou d'autres, pour qui, au contraire, les peines de la séparation s'amplifièrent du fait que, voyageurs surpris par la peste et retenus dans la ville, ils se trouvaient éloignés à la fois de l'être qu'ils ne pouvaient rejoindre et du pays qui était le leur. (2: 83)

Note 3 to this sentence in the *OC*, reminds the reader that along with Rambert's separation from his lover, Dr. Rieux's own separation from his wife mirrors the situation in which Camus found himself when he was effectively forced to remain living in France during the last three years of World War II: "Ce fut le cas de Camus qui ne put rejoindre ni son pays ni son épouse" (Blondeau 2: 1183).

Rambert's circumstance acts as examples of human vulnerability. Often, when suddenly faced with having no access to a cherished someone or something, which one presumes will always be available, this situation acts as the catalyst that compels us to re-evaluate what is of real value in our lives, leading to reflection on what or how much that precise object or person signifies. For his part, it quickly dawns on Rambert that by being forced to remain in Oran and live indefinitely apart from his girlfriend, she, unable to endure this separation, may well find another love. It is for precisely this reason that the journalist resorts to desperate measures to find a means of escape from the quarantined town. Firstly, he implores Dr. Rieux to provide him with documentation that would effectively allow him to leave, but, when the doctor refuses, Rambert resorts to employing the services of illegal smugglers. He justifies his need to flee by stating to Rieux that he does not belong in Oran, "Je ne suis pas d'ici" (2: 92). Under different circumstances this remark would provide logical enough reason to argue why a foreigner should be able to leave town in order to return home. But, circumstances under plague conditions are of course different and, accordingly, Dr. Rieux responds, "À partir de maintenant, hélas, vous serez d'ici comme tout le monde" (2: 92). Instead of reaffirming that Rambert is prohibited from leaving, Dr. Rieux instead counters Rambert's argument by telling him that from now on he is from Oran and like everybody else. Stating that Rambert is now "comme tout le monde" reiterates the universal power of the plague to reduce all systems impartially, affecting everyone and everything. This is similar to the way that no person can escape the Absurd and as such the plague's universality is also a reflection on Camus's own thought. For, Camus wants all to feel the equality of existence to help us struggle together against political and social evils (represented here by the plague) as well as resist the negativity of

the philosophical Absurd. Taken out of context, this last sentence, where Rieux tells Rambert he is now from Oran, appears illogical, because one can only be from one place, and one's origins cannot be chosen randomly or forced upon an individual. Yet, as the doctor explains, despite the circumstances being rather silly, "Cette histoire est stupide" (2: 92), the plague concerns all and there are laws that have to be obeyed for the welfare of everyone. Therefore, Rambert has to accept that he, too, is now one of them.

Paradoxically, Rieux's line of argument only causes Rambert to feel his separation all the more acutely. He admits to following the doctor's line of reasoning, but he still refuses to agree with him: "Je ne peux pas vous approuver" (2: 93). Rambert pleads his case by appealing to the humanitarian aspect of it, insisting "C'est une question d'humanité" (2: 92), and accuses the doctor of speaking the language of reason when life is far more abstract. For Rambert the meaning is focused on the individual, "... le bien public est fait du bonheur de chacun" (2: 93), but for Dr. Rieux, although he sympathizes with Rambert's predicament and only wishes him the best, it is the larger picture, the collective, that is at stake. The goal for Rieux is to limit the epidemic and act with regard to the welfare of the town as a whole, "Il y a des choses que ma fonction m'interdit" (2: 93). Rieux derives meaning from his role as a doctor, which in turn determines his personal moral code and so for him there is no dilemma and the argument is clear, one must accept things as they are and follow those rules, even if that means exile. Rieux concludes his argument in a matter of fact manner, saying: "Il faut la [cette histoire] prendre comme elle est" (2: 92). However, his attitude is undermined by the multiple examples in the text that encourage us to question how we know our reality. Here we need to ask the question, 'comment est cette histoire exactement?' Having just been told of Grand's failed marriage, but also that he and

his wife loved each other, knowing his difficulties with words, but appreciating he is determined to write a novel, alongside the fact that at any moment the plague can come and take one's life away, the recent events in the plot serve to cast doubt on the possibility of us ever knowing 'how things really are.' Life in *La Peste* is cast as unstable and inconsistent.

Later in the chronicle, Rambert finally decides that he no longer wishes to escape Oran and instead prefers to stay and work with the anti-plague task force. He tells Rieux, "Docteur, dit Rambert, je ne pars pas et je veux rester avec vous" (2: 177), and then explains his change of mind to Rieux and Tarrou:

"Ce n'est pas cela, dit Rambert. J'ai toujours pensé que j'étais étranger à cette ville et que je n'avais rien à faire avec vous. Mais maintenant que j'ai vu ce que j'ai vu, je sais que je suis d'ici, que je le veuille ou non. Cette histoire nous concerne tous."

Personne ne répondit et Rambert parut s'impatienter.

"Vous le savez bien d'ailleurs ! Ou sinon que feriez-vous dans cet hôpital ? Avez-vous donc choisi, vous, et renoncé au bonheur ?" (2: 178)

For Rambert, deciding to help fight the plague is a question of deciding to give up happiness or not. He decides he is willing to give it up and he assumes Rieux and Tarrou have stayed for the same reason. However, when he demands that they agree with his reasoning, Rieux does not comply. He instead states: "Pardonnez-moi, Rambert, dit-il, [Rieux] mais je ne le sais pas. . . . Rien au monde ne vaut qu'on se détourne de ce qu'on aime. Et pourtant je m'en détourne, moi aussi, sans que je puisse savoir pourquoi" (2: 178). Rambert's predicament, whether he should stay in Oran and help fight the plague or secretly escape so he can

return to his loved one, is another example of the text presenting us with a search for a truth, since Rambert believes that there is a right choice to be made. He justifies his change of heart by claiming he would feel too much shame if he ran away and that whether he likes it or not he is now an inhabitant of Oran. The plague concerns him as much as anyone else. However, it appears that Rambert harbors doubts about his own arguments since he needs both Tarrou and Rieux to confirm that they agree with him and when he is met with their silence he becomes agitated and vigorously repeats his question: “Ni Tarrou ni Rieux répondirent encore. Le silence dura longtemps, jusqu’à ce qu’on approchât de la maison du docteur. Et Rambert, de nouveau, posa sa dernière question, avec plus de force encore” (2: 178). In fact, Rieux does not agree with Rambert. He tells the journalist that he does not know why he has chosen to turn away from the one he loves. In saying that he does not know, Rieux shows how the three men are separated from knowledge they wish to have. Their conversation exposes the fact that there may not exist a true or right answer to their predicament, whether that be to stay and fight the plague or follow one’s heart and save oneself. The situation of these three men reflects the philosophy of the Absurd, given that when one questions the meaning to one’s existence, one true and fixed answer is not available.

Most relevant to the unique situation of these three men is that it can be connected to Camus’s Mediterraneanism and how it has been reconceived in *La Peste* due to its link with the issue of belonging and home. Camus’s Mediterraneanism as set out in his speech evoked an attempt to articulate a new cultural identity that was neither French nor Algerian. Through a reformulation of Camus’s Mediterraneanism, we can see that Tarrou and Rambert are from France and hence they are connected to a French heritage, unlike

Rieux, who we can presume is from (French colonial) Oran. However, their conversation demonstrates that due to the plague the three men articulate differently why they belong or do not belong in Oran. By the end of the chronicle, all three stay for the same reason, to fight the plague together, even though they do not all have the same sense of belonging to Oran. In a way, this reflects Camus's Mediterraneanism where (as discussed in chapter one) different Southern Mediterranean national and regional identities are united under the greater identity as being Mediterranean. Rambert, Tarrou and Rieux are all united by the plague. As Rieux says, because of the plague, Rambert is now (as if) from Oran. As with Camus's Mediterraneanism, it is not a French identity which is emphasized, but a connection against a common enemy. In *La Peste*, it is the plague (and later, allegorically speaking, the Germans.) Similarly, for Camus in 1937, he conceived of a community against a common enemy. At that time, pre WW II, it was against right wing nationalists and the rise of fascism. But, most relevant to the unique situation of these three men is that they here can be connected to Camus's Mediterraneanism and how it has been reconceived in *La Peste*.

We can certainly empathize with both Rieux and Rambert's position. Neither is necessarily right or wrong. For Rambert and Rieux the same situation has provoked two very different reactions. The contrasting reactions that Rieux and Rambert manifest to the same situation encourages us readers to be more cautious in our judgment of determining, 'how things really are,' what we believe we already know and what we understand.

Moreover, if we examine the sequence of the narrative, that, too, can be regarded as more complex than it first appears. If we look carefully at the organization of the chronicle, we see that it permits the reader to be presented in quick succession with three types of

love that all involve separation, yet in different ways, and so highlight how the same circumstances can have multiple and varying effects on all involved. Firstly we hear about Grand and Jeanne's failed marriage, then we are reminded about Dr. Rieux's own separation from his wife, which is made apparent by his sending her a telegraph the same evening of the day Grand tells the doctor about Jeanne. According to the narrative, the above conversation between Rambert, Tarrou and Rieux, occurs three weeks later.

However, in the text all three episodes follow on, one after the other. By placing all three conversations in a sequence, their similarities and contrasts are all the better exposed. As the plague does in general for the entire populace of Oran, Rambert's predicament obliges him to inhabit an uncomfortable space. He is forced to belong, but does not feel as if he does. He resides in an in-between space, somewhere between home and a foreign place, because the longer he remains in Oran the less foreign it becomes. His is also in a temporary situation, but nonetheless one which has no known end and in this way it is similar to Grand's suffering, which because of his incapacity to find the right words for a letter to his ex-wife, is also ongoing. Rambert's predicament also has similarities with the doctor's alienation from his wife, as there is no knowing whether Madame Rieux will recover from her illness or not or if the doctor himself will survive the plague. Yet despite these similarities, differences still abound in the way each man reacts to his predicament.

In *La Peste*, it is Dr. Rieux's wife who is the first character to be, in a manner of speaking, exiled for health reasons. She leaves the city before a state of plague is even declared to receive treatment in a sanatorium far away from her husband. Their separation foretells in a reverse manner that which is to befall the rest of the townsfolk since the result of the plague attacking Oran will be a reverse of the doctor and his wife's situation;

the healthy will be kept out and the sick within. The doctor's placement here represents an ironic twist to the general context of separation; he, a healthy man separated from a sick wife, is enclosed among the plague stricken and she, sick, is outside amongst the healthy. Since the reader is already aware that Rieux's wife is spending time at a sanatorium in order to receive treatment for a long standing illness (2: 40), the following passage brings our attention to the fact that since the town is now shut off from the outside world, Dr. Rieux and his wife are separated by two factors, one because of the plague and secondly due to her ill health: "Le soir, Rieux télégraphiait à sa femme que la ville était fermée, qu'il allait bien, qu'elle devait continuer de veiller sur elle-même et qu'il pensait à elle" (2: 90). Knowing that Dr. Rieux is also separated from his wife allows the reader to better grasp the contrasts and differences between Rambert's reaction to the quarantine and the doctor's own. Their two cases demonstrate how the plague brings about separation but to differing degrees, since both men were already living apart from their spouses; due to a journalistic assignment for Rambert and Madame Rieux's ill health for the doctor.

In addition to the differences between these issues of love and separation, there are also similarities between Grand's situation and that of Dr. Rieux, inasmuch as they both have laconic relationships with their spouses and struggle to openly talk about the emotional issues that lie between them. The focus here is placed on the discourse presented to the reader of the chronicle and the act of communication. When Dr. Rieux says goodbye to his wife and puts her on the train to the sanatorium, she has great difficulty in holding back her tears:

Un moment après, à la gare, il l'installait dans le wagon-lit. Elle regardait le compartiment. . . .

Puis il lui dit très vite qu'il lui demandait pardon, il aurait dû veiller sur elle et il l'avait beaucoup négligée. Elle secouait la tête, comme pour lui signifier de *se taire*. Mais il ajouta :

“Tout ira mieux quand tu reviendras. Nous recommencerons.”

“Oui, dit-elle, les yeux brillants, nous recommencerons.”

Un moment après, elle lui tournait le dos et regardait à travers la vitre. Sur le quai, les gens se pressaient et se heurtaient. Le chuintement de la locomotive arrivait jusqu'à eux. Il appela sa femme par son prénom et, quand elle se retourna, il vit que son visage était couvert de larmes.

“Non,” dit-il doucement.

Sous les larmes, le sourire revint, un peu crispé. Elle respira profondément :

“Va-t'en, tout ira bien.” (emphasis added) (2: 40)

The doctor does indeed try to talk with his wife about intimate issues, but it is clear that his timing is wanting since the train is seconds away from departing and there is really no time to talk about such matters. The shake of his wife's head is enough of a signal for him to know to say no more. As with Grand and his wife, words are not wanted or possible here either, their meaning being both insufficient and overwhelming for this tense moment. Throughout the entire tense exchange there is a palpable atmosphere of suppressed feeling. Even before the epidemic has had a chance to spread, Grand and Rieux's marriages are evidence of the uncomfortable spaces we inhabit when words are in vain.

Nonetheless, amongst these examples of strained silence between Dr. Rieux and his wife and Grand and his estranged spouse, there exists the exception where silence does not necessarily engender disaffection or distance, but on the contrary symbolizes deep love.

This is the case where filial and not romantic love is concerned because it is demonstrated first and foremost by the relationship Dr. Rieux has with his mother. Their kinship is one of few words and yet the verbal taciturnity they share indicates a loving, compassionate and intimate mother and son connection. This is clearly evident when they both tend to Tarrou after he contracts the plague and then dies. Doctor Rieux, on finding out that Tarrou has the plague, takes the unprecedented (and illegal) step of keeping him in his house so that he and his mother can care for him exclusively. In this instance, it is in fact Mme Rieux who asks her son to go against the rules to keep Tarrou with them, insisting that she will care for him alongside the doctor. And this they do in silence, broken only by the sound of the rain and Mme Rieux's knitting needles:

Crispé par l'insomnie, le docteur imaginait entendre, aux limites du silence, le sifflement doux et régulier qui l'avait accompagné pendant toute l'épidémie. Il fit un signe à sa mère pour l'engager à se coucher. Elle refusa de la tête, et ses yeux s'éclairèrent, puis elle examina soigneusement, au bout de ses aiguilles, une maille dont elle n'était pas sûre. (2: 232)

Mme Rieux nurses Tarrou in equal capacity as her son. She remains as steadfast in her care and affection for both Rieux and Tarrou as she is in her self-effacing demeanor. The love she shows for both men is carried out in silence, as is much of her existence. After Tarrou's death, while holding vigil over his body, Rieux contemplates this silent love: "Il savait ce que sa mère pensait et qu'elle l'aimait en ce moment. Mais il savait aussi que ce n'est pas grand' chose que d'aimer un être ou du moins qu'un amour n'est jamais assez fort pour trouver sa propre expression. Ainsi, sa mère et lui s'aimeraient toujours dans le silence" (2: 235). Although the silence here indicates deep affection and concern, it is also important to

highlight from Rieux's contemplation how some things are beyond expression, even love.

Words do not come easily for Rieux and his mother to convey in all its range, their own love and what is more, the pain and heartache of such a devastating situation, where the chances of Tarrou's survival are very slim.

Nonetheless, it is not just the case of Tarrou's death that shows this silent motherly love. Tarrou describes his own mother to Dr. Rieux stating: "Ma mère était simple et effacée, je n'ai jamais cessé de l'aimer, mais je préfère ne pas en parler" (2: 204). Once again words are not wanted here, as Tarrou says he prefers not to speak about his mother. This mirrors how she, like Madame Rieux, lived out her emotions silently too. The narrator mentions how Tarrou describes Mme Rieux when commenting on Tarrou's diary entries, stating:

Tarrou insistait surtout sur l'effacement de Mme Rieux ; sur la façon qu'elle avait de tout exprimer en phrases simples ; sur le goût particulier qu'elle montrait pour une certaine fenêtre, donnant sur la rue calme, et derrière laquelle elle s'asseyait le soir, un peu droite, les mains tranquilles et le regard attentif (2: 225)

Tarrou admits to loving the same quality in both women. Madame Rieux's self-effacement reminds him of his mother's own humility. He tells the doctor: "Ma mère était ainsi, j'aimais en elle le même effacement et c'est elle que j'ai toujours voulu rejoindre" (2: 225). In saying that he wants to rejoin his mother, who is dead, Tarrou also connects to her again through silence, this time through the most ultimate silence, that of death.

These two mother figures are described as saint-like beings who do not say much, but are revered for their gentle demeanor and self-effacing presence. Their own silence, as

well as the silence between them and their sons, is thus another example of how words are, sometimes not necessary and sometimes not enough, that they are not capable of conveying the immensity of emotion. Consequently, even though it is clear that love is present, the bearers and receivers of that love remain separated from verbalizing it.

The separations suffered by Grand, Rieux and Rambert highlight the fact that alongside the unexpected and uncontrollable features of plague, there are other more quotidian forms of separation. Grand's predicament demonstrates that separation can grow where one least expects it. In addition to regretting the separation from his wife, Grand lives in a manner separated from words because throughout the novel he continues constantly to search for the appropriate ones with which to express himself. The meaning and use of words in fact becomes an obsession for him. This is made manifest through his quest to write the perfect opening sentence to his novel, but it is not just in writing where he has trouble expressing himself. After Jeanne leaves him, Grand laments his inability to find the right words and believes that if he had done so his wife would have stayed: "À un moment donné, j'aurais dû trouver les mots qui l'auraient retenue, mais je n'ai pas pu" (2: 90). Over the years, a chasm of silence widened between them, yet, according to Grand, they understood one another without words: "Tant que nous nous sommes aimés, nous nous sommes compris *sans paroles*" (emphasis added) (2: 90). Grand however appears to have misjudged their mutual silence since his wife does, of course, leave him. The silent ease Grand claims to have experienced with his wife reads as a man in denial of a communication problem with his spouse since we know that words are problematic for him, even during the most ordinary of conversations. Grand's inability to convey his feelings through words becomes a keystone to the narrative: "Now with love lost, words –

that is, speaking and writing – become Grand’s problem” (LeBlanc & Jones 218). Grand’s problem is also not simply an oral issue, since he wishes to find the right words so he can explain himself in a letter to his wife, but that letter will never be written because the right words always remain elusive. Through Jeanne’s act of leaving Grand, we are therefore presented with a physical separation as well as a lexical separation through both written and oral discourse. The lack of understanding between Grand and his wife is highlighted by their lack of communication. The counterpoint to their situation is shown nonetheless through Rieux and his mother’s laconic relationship. They say relatively few words to each other, but appear to understand each other deeply. Their love is one that needs few words. Silence between the characters in *La Peste* often represents a problem in communication, but not always.

As we have seen, throughout the narrative there are various examples of situations when one is not able to say what one wants to say. Regarding Rieux and Grand this is due to an emotional incapacity with their spouses. Or, sometimes one is not able to say what one wants to say due to a physical debarment, evident with those who die from the plague or are separated from their loved ones due to the quarantine. Rambert is prevented from communicating with his lover due to the restrictive quarantine measures which limit communication with the outside world (Camus 2: 90-94). Whereas Rambert’s lack of communication with his girlfriend is due to the plague, Dr. Rieux and Grand, however, have been incapable of speaking freely with their wives from a time before the plague. Grand’s obsession with words also points to the complexity that lies behind the use and choice of words. An impotence to say what one means, which is a characteristic trait of Grand’s, and

the ensuing silence it brings forth, show the limitations human beings must deal with when trying to articulate themselves and communicate.

Examples of separation and the in-betweenness created because of them, are thus made manifest in the text on many different levels, intertwining issues of communication and lexicality, home and belonging, objectivity and truth as well as our teleological view of existence. Another example of separation and one that also supports my argument that the theme of separation precedes the Nazi allegory, is the episode of Cottard's attempted suicide, which also brings up issues of syntax and communication. This event also brings our arguments together because it links back to our examination of Camus's own re-writing of the text and the differences between the two manuscripts. The suicide is the subject of the second reference to *La Peste* in Camus's *Carnets*, dated 1938, and is a link between Camus's early notes and the definitive text. Cottard's suicide attempt also provides another link to *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, the opening sentence of which proclaims that suicide is the only truly serious philosophical question. In *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* Camus uses the notion of suicide as the starting point for his arguments on the Absurd. The inclusion of a suicide in the plot of *La Peste* that undergoes transformation overtime, offers us the opportunity to examine the evolution of Camus's configuration of *La Peste* all the while continuing our examination of the theme of separation.

Cottard is a character portrayed as being separated socially from his peers since he is depicted as a loner. Contrary to the solidarity formed between the other main characters, he remains on the fringes of this tight knit group and he both welcomes and even profits from the state of plague. While the rats carrying the plague represent, in a metaphoric sense, the invasion of Nazi soldiers marching into France and the threat of death that

comes with war and invasion, Cottard's suicide represents another kind of death, one of a more existential nature and one that is not caused by the plague. In the allegorical sense, Cottard can be read as a collaborator, since he is a character who benefits from the arrival of the plague, that is to say the arrival of the Nazis in France. However, with this reading in mind, his suicide occurring at the beginning of the novel is perplexing. His suicide comes into clearer focus when understood as connected to the eliminated character Stephan who also commits suicide in Camus's first draft of the novel, which is discussed further below. Cottard's attempt at taking his own life plays a key role within the plot because this scene brings up problems of interpreting and understanding a text through his alarming and yet beguiling suicide note. It is pertinent to note here how Cottard's suicide attempt shows that the philosophical question of what it means to take one's own life, with which Camus opens *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, remains an important theme in his later work.

In his *Carnets*, Camus notes four words that are to appear written on a door and these four words are stated in the published version of *La Peste*, on the front door of Monsieur Cottard's apartment, espied by Grand, a neighbor of Cottard's. "Sur une porte: 'Entrez. Je suis pendu.'" (2: 870). In the *Carnets*, Camus then adds an extra sentence: "On entre et c'est vrai. (Il dit 'je' mais il n'est plus 'je')" (2: 870). In the final version of *La Peste*, it is Cottard who tries to kill himself, and although the words on the door remain the same, the above-cited reference from the *Carnets* in fact refers to the earlier character, Stephan, who only appears in the first draft of *La Peste*. Raymond Gay-Crosier, editor in the *OC* of Camus's *Carnets* 1935-1948, notes that, "... Dans le premier état, c'est Stephan qui s'est pendu. Plus tard, ce sera Cottard (R. Q.)" (2: 1388). As was the case with the first *Carnets* notation of *La Peste*, which mentions Stephan and his ex-wife Jeanne (and is analyzed

earlier in this chapter on pages 171-174), this second *Carnets* entry features once again the eliminated character Stephan, as well as an alteration of an initial idea. Just as the theme of separation is maintained through the character of Jeanne despite Camus's decision to change her husband from Stephan to Grand, the inclusion of a suicide in the plot is also retained, despite Camus's decision to change the character who decides to kill himself from Stephan to Cottard. The juxtaposition of suicide against solidarity is also maintained because Stephan's reluctance to help fight the plague is transferred to Cottard, who is equally uninclined to help combat the epidemic. This juxtaposition also neatly situates *La Peste* between *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* and *L'Homme Révolté* as Camus progresses with his philosophical thought, moving on from the question of suicide to that of community through unified resistance.

If we look in more detail at the full reference in the *OC* to the above citation, "On entre et c'est vrai. (Il dit 'je' mais il n'est plus 'je')" (2: 870), we note that it contains a complex reflection on language and meaning. Furthermore, having already established this entry was written in 1938 before the outbreak of WW II, we also know that it cannot be related to the Nazi allegory and so the linguistic gymnastics portrayed in this citation, unlike the Nazi allegory, can thus be considered a feature of the novel from its conception. Blondeau in the *OC* notes that:

Quel que soit le sort réservé au professeur, Camus a trouvé très tôt la phrase qui passera d'une version à l'autre et de Stephan à Cottard : "Entrez. Je suis pendu." Elle apparaît en décembre 1938 dans les *Carnets*, accompagnée d'un commentaire de l'auteur sur la valeur du "je." Est-ce un souvenir ? "Sur une porte: 'Entrez. Je suis pendu.' On entre et c'est vrai. (Il dit 'je' mais il n'est plus

'je').” Dans la première version l'époux de Jeanne mourait effectivement pendu. (2: 1146)

From the full citation it is clear that in Camus's early draft it is Stephan who hangs himself. This then changes to Cottard in the published manuscript. Cottard is saved by Grand, who on reading the message on the front door, enters the apartment and stops his neighbor before he is overcome by asphyxiation. With the change in character from Stephan to Cottard, Camus's literal interpretation of the suicide note is shown to be false: Cottard succeeds in hanging himself, but not in dying; the “je” remains “je”, because in remaining alive he retains agency. If he had died there would no longer be a “je” to express such a fact. The linguistic ambiguity of the suicide note, saying “I” when there is no longer an “I” underscores once again the problematic theme of expressing ‘the truth’ in narration and that multiple interpretations of sentences, such as this one in the text, exist.

Cottard's succinct message initially appears straightforward and comprehensible, despite the macabre context. Yet a closer reading shows the scene to be more esoteric. Let us here examine the following quote from Camus's *Carnets*, written in reference to Cottard's suicide: “Il dit ‘je’ mais il n'est plus ‘je.’” This phrase opens up the opportunity to ask what it is to say ‘I’; who can say ‘I’ and can ‘I’ survive beyond the grave? The answer to this latter question is complex. One could presume that substantially, the response must be no, because only a living human being with agency can use the first person pronoun in speech or writing to communicate a present tense situation. One must be alive to be able to physically utter or write the word, ‘I.’ The writings of a deceased person can still be read, valued or dismissed, praised or criticized, however this is always with knowledge that the act of writing occurred before the death of the writer. To write about one's own death after

it has occurred is thus problematic. One can only write about one's death as conjecture, or as it is happening, but not once one is dead. The "je" Cottard pens on his door, "Entrez, je suis pendu" (2: 46), reads as if it's from the pen of a dead man. One can say or write "I am dead," but the reader knows that at the time of saying it or writing it, the writer was not dead, but in fact alive. Cottard is very much alive when he writes, "Je suis pendu," - he has to be - , but he means for the "I" to be read as dead. This "I" can also be understood as a subversion of the omitted personal pronouns from the stunted telegrams written by the trapped inhabitants of Oran, who, contrary to Cottard, are desperately trying to remain alive. Cottard is still alive when he chucks the words up on his front door, but his act of writing at that moment is an act of potential deception. He pens a lie because the words remain untrue until he follows through with his intention of killing himself and because Grand saves him he is not able to fulfill this intention. Furthermore, were he to be successful, the lie would not stand corrected since now the "je" becomes problematic because, as already mentioned above, a dead person cannot express the word "je." The "je" no longer 'is.' Camus's early remark regarding the sentence on the door, "On entre et c'est vrai" (emphasis added) (2: 1146), relates a truth because in the first draft of the novel Stephan does succeed in killing himself. In the final version, Grand's saving Cottard renders the situation more complex. He enters and saves Cottard just in time: "Cela va mieux, dit-il en arrivant vers Rieux, mais j'ai cru qu'il y passait" (2: 46). By saving Cottard, Grand is implicated in rendering the words on the door untrue. The message also thus informs us to keep reading, read carefully and reread.

This fracturing in the possibilities of interpreting the personal pronoun "je" also mirrors how the consequences of the plague will fracture every "je" found in Oranian

society along with their values and customs. The antidote to this fracturing occurs through Camus's advocacy for solidarity, encouraging the "je" to become "nous." It must not be forgotten that, from the very beginning of our tale, the narrator employs the first person plural when describing Oran, "notre petite ville, . . . Nos citoyens . . ." (2: 35), so as to connect with and include the reader in the chronicle. Of course, Rieux uses the pronoun "nous" to also help hide the identity of the "je," or rather his "je." Such solidarity Camus understands as beneficial for society because it works against social imbalance allowing the disempowered, like Grand, to feel value and worth through their teamwork. Camus's distrust of omnipotent power structures is expressed through the disaccord between the official discourse and rebellious action, portrayed for example through the black market for food and smuggling out people. The result of which advances an 'us' and 'them' environment. But since in *La Peste* Camus questions all language, official or otherwise, it is therefore the actions and not the words of the characters that impart a more straightforward meaning and those actions are the proof and definition of solidarity, even if these actions appear as minor episodes in relation to the main theme of plague.

Up until this point in the narrative, the only cadavers that have caused concern are the escalating number of dead rats. However, Cottard's suicide attempt, with its perverted desire of self-destruction, opposes the more 'natural' human instinct of self-preservation and as such brings the problem of our vulnerability as a species and human mortality into sharper focus:

C'est à peu près de cette époque en tout cas que nos citoyens
commencèrent à s'inquiéter. Car à partir du 18, les usines et les entrepôts
dégorgent, en effet, des centaines de cadavres de rats. . . .

Dans la ville même, on les rencontrait par petits tas, sur les paliers ou dans les cours. . . . On eût dit que la terre même ou étaient plantées nos maisons se purgeait de son chargement d'humeurs . . . Qu'on envisage seulement la stupéfaction de notre petite ville, si tranquille jusque-là, et bouleversée en quelques jours, comme un homme bien portant dont le sang épais se mettrait tout d'un coup en révolution. (2: 43-44)

The emphasis here in the text is on the bafflement of the citizens of Oran, that such a quiet town could change so quickly, that their daily routine and feelings of security could be swept away by the perplexing and seemingly inexplicable influx of dead rats. Their stupefaction lays bare the tendency to take good health and well-being for granted and thus exposes the vulnerability and fragility of human life.

Amidst this unnerving new reality in Oran, Cottard's attempted suicide remains an enigmatic part of the plot, not simply because it is not a plague-related brush with death and so is also not directly linked to the Nazi allegory, but moreover because it serves to reinforce the building momentum of unease. We, as readers, are never granted a clear and satisfactory reason for Cottard's decision to hang himself. Some details about him do emerge and they form the image of a shifty character who inhabits the fringes of the narrative and whose dubious activities render him an exile from society. For instance, Rambert turns to Cottard to ask for his help to be illegally smuggled out of the city, for he assumes Cottard has contact with Oran's criminal underworld (2: 131-135). When Dr. Rieux meets up again with Grand for the inquiry into Cottard's attempted suicide, Grand explains to the doctor that he hardly knows anything about his neighbor, but admits to

thinking he is a little strange: “Cottard était un homme bizarre” (2: 55). Later on, he tells the doctor:

Il ne pouvait dire que Cottard fût impoli, l’expression n’aurait pas été juste. C’était un homme renfermé et silencieux qui avait un peu l’allure du sanglier. Sa chambre, un restaurant modeste et des sorties assez mystérieuses, c’était toute la vie de Cottard . . . En toutes occasions, le représentant demeurait solitaire et méfiant. (2: 70)

From the early stages of the chronicle, Cottard is thus portrayed as a loner and a social misfit, whose life style is as mysterious as it is shady. These characteristics set him up as the perfect example of someone living on the fringes of society.

In *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, Camus associates the notion of the absurd with that of exile.

He writes:

Quel est donc cet incalculable sentiment qui prive l’esprit du sommeil nécessaire à sa vie ? Un monde qu’on peut expliquer même avec de mauvaises raisons est un monde familier. Mais au contraire, dans un univers soudain privé d’illusions et de lumières, l’homme se sent un étranger. Cet exil est sans recours puisqu’il est privé des souvenirs d’une patrie perdue ou de l’espoir d’une terre promise. (1: 223)

In this manner, Cottard’s character can be read as another link between *La Peste* and *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*. Since we never find out why Cottard wished to end his life at the beginning of the novel, or why he goes on the rampage shooting at passersby in one of the closing scenes, these unanswered questions can be understood as mirroring the unanswerable question ‘what is the meaning of life?’ that is at the center of the absurd. The

end of the plague marks freedom for the Oranais, but for Cottard it signifies his impending imprisonment. Ironically, that which imprisoned the populace freed him, but now that the plague is gone the reverse is the case. The effect of the arrival of the plague is very similar to the manner in which Camus describes the feeling of the absurd. The plague takes away any meaning that the inhabitants of Oran had given to their lives. The plague can thus be understood as having similarities with the absurd. It is a disease that appears one day out of the blue, in the same way one can become aware of the feeling of the absurd at any time in one's life. The plague acts without reason claiming its victims arbitrarily, and offers no justification for its presence in the lives of the Oranais. The plague itself is not absurd. However, the confrontation between the desire of those whom it threatens to understand why the plague has "chosen" them, and the impossibility of ever finding an answer reflects the same irrationality that is at the center of absurd; that is to say the hope of finding some sort of meaning to our existence.

The plague makes the Oranais feel like exiles in their own home. Likewise, the feeling of the absurd makes all humans feel like strangers on earth. Cottard's exile is even more troublesome, however, than the exile that the plague will bring, because his social exile is part of the world that exists beyond that of the plague. Furthermore, Cottard never catches the plague, but in an ironic twist, he instead profits from the arrival of the pestilence via the black market economy that springs up as result (2: 131). When invited by Tarrou to lend a hand and join the task force committed to combatting the plague, Cottard not only refuses this chance to work together with Rieux et al. in the fight against the disease, but is actually offended by the offer and angrily counters that he in fact is happy to live with the plague since, as he freely admits, he makes a good living from it.

“Pourquoi ne viendriez-vous pas avec nous, monsieur Cottard?”

L'autre se leva d'un air offensé, prit son chapeau rond à la main :

“Ce n'est pas mon métier.”

Puis sur un ton de bravade :

“D'ailleurs je m'y trouve bien, moi, dans la peste, et je ne vois pas pourquoi je me mêlerais de la faire cesser.” (2: 143)

Cottard goes as far as to admit that he does not even wish the plague to come to an end.

This alienates him from the rest of the characters and so he becomes an exile among exiles.

Cottard's suicide is an anecdote within the main tale of the plague that provides the reason for Grand and Dr. Rieux to meet up. Cottard's attempt to take his life is thus not obviously connected to the main issue of plague arriving in the town. In fact, throughout the entire chronicle, we never learn the exact reason as to why Cottard no longer wishes to go on living. Cottard's attempt to kill himself could therefore be read as less significant than the more important effects and main events pertaining to the plague epidemic. Yet actions like Cottard's attempted suicide and Grand's intervening to save him, which at first glance may not appear to be so significant, especially when compared to the enormity of the plague epidemic that is unfolding, do in fact carry great significance in the novel. This is partly because Cottard's suicide attempt allows us to observe Grand's heroism even before the plague has taken hold of the city. More fundamentally however, Cottard's suicide is significant because it speaks to the wider issue of the Absurd, through our incomprehension as to the reasons behind his singular actions. His role as an outsider and misfit is also significant in that it relates to issues of exile and belonging, core existential themes that underscore *La Peste*, as they do so much of Camus's work.

Section III

Significance and Insignificance

This issue of the significance of an event in the plot brings us back to our earlier analysis of Kafka's writing on Camus, as stated earlier in this chapter, on pages 155-163, as well to Tarrou's banal anecdotes and Grand's seemingly inconsequential opening sentence. Camus states his thoughts about the meaning behind insignificant actions in his *Carnets*: "Il y a de grandes actions, des projets sérieux et grandioses qui sont insignifiants . . . une chose insignifiante n'est pas forcément une chose qui n'a pas de sens . . . on voit que l'insignifiance tient dans la signification qu'elle n'a pas" (2: 987-8). An example of this is Grand's simple, insignificant act of knocking on his neighbor's door which leads to the significant saving of a life. Grand, who is described as having "toutes les mines de l'insignifiance" (2: 63-64), carries out small acts which are in fact very significant, whilst the more important, grander actions, like Rieux's attempts to save lives, can be read as having a less significant effect since he is not necessarily successful in halting death. The death of M. Othon's son (2: 183.) is one example. It can be argued that both Dr. Rieux and Grand carry out significant and yet also insignificant actions depending on the outcome of their conduct. This contrast between significance and insignificance shows how it is not so simple to determine one from the other and that these two opposites can blur into one another. Consequently, the characters in *La Peste* often find themselves existing somewhere between the two.

It is no coincidence therefore that Grand is the character who finds and saves Cottard. Cottard, we know, is his neighbor. The details that link Cottard with Grand allow for further underscoring of Grand's issues with language. When Grand explains to Dr. Rieux

what happened we learn how Grand chooses his words; we learn about his laconic and fastidious way of expressing himself. Grand explains to Rieux how he came to his neighbor's help: "Je l'ai décroché à temps,' disait Grand qui semblait toujours chercher ses mots, bien qu'il parlât le langage le plus simple" (2: 46). Grand's way of using the most simple language, "le langage le plus simple," is an important characteristic of his, but on closer examination of Grand's speech here, it can be debated if he actually does use simple terms since in his search for the 'right' words he often lapses into using euphemisms or adages whose meaning is not always one dimensional. When relating Cottard's suicide Grand actively avoids saying the words death, dying or suicide, instead he states, "Il est arrivé quelque chose chez mon voisin" (2: 45) which is not as straight forward as saying my neighbor has tried to kill himself. The first sentence that Grand uses to alert Dr. Rieux to Cottard's suicide does not even clearly convey that something has happened *to* Cottard, since it merely implies that something has happened *at* his neighbor's house, "chez mon voisin." Grand continues adding, "J'ai cru qu'il y passait" (2: 46) to express his fear that he may have arrived too late to save Cottard. Grand uses the verb "passer" instead of the verb "mourir", or the adjective 'mort.' He also refers to the suicide as "l'opération," "À mon avis, l'opération doit être douloureuse" (2: 46) and he later calls the suicide attempt Cottard's project, "Son projet" (2: 56). All these euphemisms call into question Grand's objective to speak in the clearest manner possible using simple language. More specifically they indicate his incapability to actually find the correct word to express exactly what he wants to say. Grand is the example par excellence of how *La Peste* presents characters who are caught in-between feelings and thoughts; in-between what one wishes to impart and the limit of words that one has at one's disposal to communicate.

Cottard's attempted suicide and Grand's magnanimous reaction continue to draw attention to the issue of words and Grand's discovery of Cottard highlights once more the themes of truthfulness and interpretation through the suicide message on the front door. It also transpires that Cottard uses a piece of red chalk that in fact belongs to Grand to inscribe the fateful words. Grand tells Dr. Rieux how this came to be:

Il raconta cependant au docteur qu'il connaissait mal Cottard, mais qu'il lui supposait un petit avoir. Cottard était un homme bizarre. Longtemps, leurs relations s'étaient bornées à quelques saluts dans l'escalier.

"Je n'ai eu que deux conversations avec lui. Il y a quelque jours, j'ai renversé sur le palier une boîte de craies que je ramenaient chez moi. Il y avait des craies rouges et des craies bleues. À ce moment, Cottard est sorti sur le palier et m'a aidé à les ramasser. Il m'a demandé à quoi servaient ces craies de différentes couleurs."

Grand lui a expliqué qu'il essayait de refaire un peu de latin . . .

Il écrivait donc des mots latins sur son tableau. Il recopiait à la craie bleue la partie des mots qui changeait suivant des déclinaisons et les conjugaisons, et, à la craie rouge, celle qui ne changerait jamais.

"Je ne sais pas si Cottard a bien compris, mais il a paru intéressé et m'a demandé une craie rouge. J'ai été un peu surpris, mais après tout. . . Je ne pouvais pas deviner, bien sûr, que cela servirait son projet." (2: 55-56)

The use of chalk by both Grand and Cottard evokes images of school days and the teaching of correct grammatical usage when instructing pupils to master language. It is no coincidence that Cottard chooses the red chalk for writing his message since red is the

color used for drawing the eye's attention to written words. In pedagogic circles this is most often in the context of correction. Grand uses the color red to represent the root of the Latin words he studies, "celle qui ne changerait jamais." By making a connection between the two uses of red chalk, Cottard's message and Grand's Latin vocabulary, a subliminal message is imparted to the reader regarding facts and their certainty. Cottard's attempt at killing himself is linked to Grand's fixed verb stems via the red chalk. Hence the text shows us how death is the only part of life of which we are absolutely sure; it is that part that will never change, just like the root of Grand's Latin words. Nonetheless, even though Cottard's red chalked message communicates a definitive ending, it also loses this significance because he ultimately survives his suicide attempt due to Grand's intervention.

The duality of the significance of the red chalk, given that it represents certain immediate death, yet also a death that is thwarted, is also reflected in the main narrative regarding the plague epidemic. This is because Dr. Rieux, alongside his helpers, fights against the scourge, all the while knowing it can and almost certainly will return. Death is imminent or postponed, yet always remains inevitable. Once again we see the text offering up multiple meanings or interpretations centered around one given fact.

The red chalk which Cottard borrows and Grand uses to write his Latin vocab and grammar rules on his blackboard also acts as a link between the discarded character of Stephan and Grand because in Camus's first draft Stephan is a teacher of Latin and Greek and Grand, although not a teacher, is an autodidact of Latin as his blackboard attests. In a manner that Grand will somewhat imitate, Stephan, via a personal journal in the first manuscript, tells the readers about his unhappy marriage to Jeanne. Stephan's fate differs from Grand's because although both men catch the plague and survive, Stephan then

oscillates between choosing to join in the battle against the disease or writing a commentary on Thucydides and Lucretius (2: 1206). Stephan chooses to write his commentary instead of being “solidaire.” In a further twist to the tale, he also chooses to take his own life, ostensibly due to his pain at the loss of his wife, despite the fact that he has just escaped death by recovering from the plague. Stephan’s decision to not fight the plague appears at first to be the clear opposite of Grand’s choosing to be part of the sanitary squads. However, having survived being infected with the plague bacillus, the very texts that Stephan chooses to study instead of being “solidaire”, “prennent pour lui, étant donné les circonstances, une *signification* tout à fait neuve” (Demont, “Le Journal de Philippe Stephan” 721). This quote by Demont neatly brings together the various threads of our previous arguments that show how Grand and Stephan and Thucydides all have an important bearing on Camus’s own thinking about examples of significance and insignificance. Having survived a disease, which is considered for the most part fatal, Stephan rereads the texts of Thucydides and Lucretius in a new light. Because he has just experienced the plague of which they speak, their content now takes on a new signification for him. Furthermore, this feature of Stephan’s rereading of Thucydides and Lucretius in a new and different way brings us back once more to Kafka’s influence which encourages one to reread. The act of rereading will not be lost even when Camus eliminates Stephan, because Grand’s constant editing of his first sentence, regarding his lady protagonist riding her glossy mare through the Bois de Boulogne, also presents many rereadings. Grand’s sentence also maintains the aspect of the insignificant, which is the theme of Stephan’s anthology. At first glance Grand’s sentence appears innocuous enough given that its subject matter has nothing to do with the plague. Our rereading of the text however has shown

how Grand's sentence is not jejune, but is in fact significant in that it forces the reader to reread and also to note that small syntactical changes can convey larger more significant changes in meaning. Through rereading the text reminds us to remain open to the endless possibilities of re-interpreting that which we believe we have already understood because the insignificant can often appear more significant when reread and reinterpreted.

Vestiges of Stephan thus remain in the final publication, since not only does the red chalk act as a subtle link between Stephan and Grand, but so too does the theme of meaning and [in]significance connect them both. This theme also connects Stephan to Tarrou, since the latter dedicates his time to recording seemingly insignificant observations. Demont observes "... dans une note d'avril 1941, que la première version du roman de Camus comprenait le journal d'un 'professeur de latin-grec': 'Un philosophe y écrit une anthologie des actions insignifiantes.' Il tiendra, sous cet angle, le journal de la peste" (720). Stephan gleans new meaning from words that he believed he already understood. His new reading of Thucydides and Lucretius reiterates the message that Camus presents through other instances of insignificance; one must not presume the insignificant to always be without meaning. As already noted, Camus writes about his thinking on this subject in his *Carnets*, stating, "... une chose insignifiante n'est pas forcément une chose qui n'a pas de sens ... l'insignifiance tient dans la signification qu'elle n'a pas" (2: 988). The small fact that Stephan can glean a new understanding from reading his Greek and Roman texts anew takes on an important significance for precisely the reason that these words did not seem so significant to him before he contracted the plague.

The separation Stephan encounters between his pre-plague understanding of Thucydides and Lucretius as opposed to his post-plague reading is not lost despite his

elimination from the chronicle. According to notes that Camus made on his manuscripts and in his *Carnets*, Stephan's fate never sat easy with him and after struggling to accommodate Stephan's character into the narrative Camus decided to eliminate him altogether:

[Stephan] se trouverait en effet réduit à son seul commentaire sur Thucydide et Lucrèce, ce qu'envisagent les "Modifications" déjà citées, à moins que l'interrogation : "Pamphlet Thucydide ?" n'annonce la disparition du personnage qui se consacrerait alors à recopier un livre à l'envers. . . . Il est certain que, malgré la place importante qu'il occupe dans la première version, Stephan n'appartient pas véritablement à l'univers de la peste . . . Jeanne en changeant de mari, ne survit sans doute d'une version à l'autre que parce qu'elle est liée au thème de l'absence et de la séparation . . . (Blondeau 2: 1148)

The issue of separation remains, with some characters having to continue to endure their suffering, as is discussed earlier in this chapter with regard to Jeanne, (see pages 170-176.) Stephan and his work on Thucydides and Lucretius is of course discarded by Camus, but important elements remain since Camus incorporates Thucydides' narratorial style into his own narrative strategy. Likewise the theme of separation remains, with Grand becoming the man who is spurned in love. Grand also takes on Stephan's burden of the written word.

According to Demont's research in his article, "Le Journal de Philippe Stephan dans la première version de *La Peste* d'Albert Camus: Note sur une édition récente," "Camus a pris conscience du récit de Thucydide en lisant Lucrèce, un auteur qu'il connaît bien et apprécie, et qu'ensuite il a découvert et lu Thucydide lui-même, dans la traduction Bétant"

(721). We know that Camus comes to Thucydides from reading Lucretius and, as with Stephan, the plague comes to have new meaning for him through Thucydides' text because Thucydides' emphasis on objectivity inspires Camus to think anew on how to narrate an unbiased tale of plague that in and of itself will question the veracity of language and the meaning of words as well as the process of narration. This may have had bearing on Camus's decision to eliminate his original narrator and then conceal the identity of his successor, Rieux, until the end of the chronicle.

What is more interesting is that it may very well have been as a result of reading Thucydides' account of the plague hitting Athens that Camus links the plague to war. Demont, claiming to have sourced his research from a text entitled *Archives de la Peste*, provides us with evidence supporting this link. He states: "Camus . . . cite Thucydide d'après la vieille traduction Bétant: 'Viendra la guerre dorienne et la peste avec elle.' Thucydide sert donc ici de garant à ce qui devint la métaphore central du roman: la peste comme image de la guerre . . ." ("Le Journal de Philippe Stephan" 720). This possibility makes for a neat connection between Camus's use of Thucydides as early research for *La Peste*, which later leads to him formulating the Nazi allegory around the plague. Leo Strauss notes that, "Lucretius' description of the plague differs most strikingly from its Thucydidean model in being completely silent about the fact that the plague occurred during a war" (81). From this quote, we know that Lucretius's text could not have inspired such a connection since Lucretius fails to mention the Peloponnesian War in discussing the plague. Thucydides, on the other hand, as we have already seen, clearly states that due to the chaos of war, "Words had to change their ordinary meaning and to take that which was now given them" (3.82). This point made by Thucydides can help us understand how Camus was inspired to use the

upheaval of a plague epidemic to depict the difficulty of ever knowing how things are and as such shows us to be caught perpetually in-between many varying truths. This rereading or re-interpretation of Thucydides' account of plague ties back into the discussion between Dr. Rieux and Rambert, (see pages 177-178.) Rambert here criticizes the doctor for using the language of reason to support the notion that the plague concerns all and that actions for the greater good override any individual cases. Rieux's point of view is that the reality of the plague as a reality for all must be accepted and any other outlook is a denial of reality. He states: "Il faut la [cette histoire] prendre comme elle *est*" (2: 92). Nevertheless, the reality Rieux describes is simply his interpretation. As we have seen, the text shows in fact how the plague comes to mean different things for different people and that words and their meaning are not fixed, but vulnerable to change and variations of interpretation, leading to shifts in the perception of what can be regarded as significant and insignificant.

Section IV

“Ce qui me semble caractériser le mieux cette époque, c’est la *séparation*” (2: 978). Camus and separation

Camus’s reading of Thucydides’ *History of the Peloponnesian War* during his time in Oran provided him with the link between plague and war. However the plague that besieged Athens was not spread or brought about via rats. It was once Camus was back living in France, trapped in le Panelier, as of November 1942, experiencing first hand the German occupation of “la zone libre,” that he began to take more seriously the need to resist this occupation. His personal experience influenced his development of the Nazi allegory in *La Peste* where the rats symbolize plague in the guise of Nazi invaders.

The events that occur in Camus’s life from the winter of 1942 until the summer of 1943 are especially pertinent to our examination of *La Peste* because it is during this time that Camus sketches out his second draft (Blondeau 2: 1143), references to which abound in his *Carnets* (2: 975 – 994, 999, 1004, 1007, 1009). Significantly, it is also during this time that Camus’s biography coalesces with his creative work because as of early November 1942 Camus finds himself trapped in France, cut off from his family and friends. The separation that Camus experiences personally is connected to the separation he writes about in *La Peste* and, as such, his chronicle takes on a new and more personal significance. Blondeau comments on Camus’s personal life and connects it to *La Peste*: “Presque cinq ans, donc, pour écrire un roman *fortement ancré dans son époque et dans son existence* . . .” (emphasis added) (2: 1134). Thus we see that Camus’s long and arduous creative journey has deep connections to both his personal life and the historical events of these years

signposted by renewed versions of his novel. Interestingly, however, Camus's personal and professional circumstances, along with national political events, are never explicitly mentioned in the chronicle. Rather their imprint lies hidden under the surface of the narrative about plague and in this way their significance is marked by what could also be argued to be their insignificance.

Camus finished work on his first manuscript towards the end of 1942, yet he was not satisfied with his finished product (Blondeau 2: 1142). As we know, he would go on to create a second manuscript having made various significant changes regarding the characters, the plot and for our interest here, the title. Moya Longstaffe summarizes these stages:

Camus had begun to work seriously on the novel in 1941, when he first had the idea for the title, reading numerous medical and historical works on the great plagues of history. It was published in 1947. In the autumn of 1942, he had thought of changing the title, and calling the work *Les Prisonniers* (*The Prisoners*). (115)

In addition to Longstaffe's chronology, in April 1941 Camus notes in his *Carnets* what may constitute a first potential title for his *La Peste*, "Peste ou aventure (roman)" (2: 923), but he adds no more information. Sometime in the autumn of 1942, while editing his first version of his chronicle (ms. 1 and ms. 2), Camus further reflects on the question of a title in his *Carnets*: "Roman. Ne pas mettre 'La Peste' dans le titre. Mais quelque chose comme 'Les Prisonniers'" (2: 958). The later entry indicates that Camus was intent on highlighting the isolating and exiling consequences of the outbreak of plague by choosing the word "prisonniers" and actively avoiding the words 'la peste' for a novel about a plague epidemic.

By late 1942 Camus was suffering from a personal sense of separation due to the fact he was unable to go back to Algeria or even contact his wife and family. It is telling that he deliberated changing the title of his work to "*Les Prisonniers*" to emphasize the theme of confinement.

After becoming trapped in France due to the changing events of WW II and the invasion of "la zone libre," in November 1942, Camus passes the time during the winter of 1942 working on his second version of *La Peste*. Between December 1942 and March 1943, Camus covers several pages of his *Carnets* with a detailed plan of his second version of *La Peste*, dividing his work into separate sections (2: 978-989). One difference that stands out between this draft and his previous work is that emphasis is now heavily placed on the physical sense of *séparation* through the near constant reiteration of this word, which is found at least once on each of the following pages: 2: 976, 977, 979, 980, 982, 985, 992, 993, 1017. Camus also starts to call the inhabitants of Oran "les séparés" and uses these words as a heading for many of his entries where he discusses examples of separation, including Stephan's "journal de la séparation" (2: 992). Further examples of his use of "la séparation" and "les séparés" are: "*Peste, 2^e version. Les Séparés perdent le sens critique*" (2: 982). "*Peste, 2^e version. Les séparés ont "des difficultés avec les jours de la semaine. . . . Si bien que la séparation devient générale*" (2: 985). "*Poursuivre jusqu'à la fin le thème de la séparation*" (2: 976). The words "séparés" or "séparation" continue to appear in Camus's *Carnets* up until the autumn of 1944.

Not very long after Camus began the process of rewriting his chronicle with the renewed emphasis on physical separation, he decided to publish a section of *La Peste*, headed 'Les Exilés dans la peste' (2: 275-282). The publication of the extract took place in

Brussels because Nazi censorship was still in force in France. 'Les Exilés dans la peste' appeared in *Domaine français* in 1943. *Domaine français* was an offshoot project of the literary review *Messages* which had been created by Jean Lescure in 1939. In contrast to the secret nature of *Messages*, whose clandestine publications were signed with pseudonyms to protect the authors' identities, the anthology *Domaine français* took the form of a less overt protest against Nazi censorship and so could accredit the real authors' names to their work. Lescure's aim was to bring together, "tout ce que la France avait de plus illustre dans les différentes expressions de la littérature" in an attempt to assume "collectivement à la littérature française l'honneur de l'insoumission" (Lescure 217). Dangerous as this may appear for those contributing, Lescure's aim with his side project of *Domaine français* was to publish texts in which "le monde nazi (ou vichyste) serait tout simplement *absent*, comme si l'Histoire tenait déjà pour nul et non avenu ce petit accident de son cours et enchaînait sur un passé où il n'existait pas, un futur où il ne figurerait pas davantage" (219). Lescure further states that the revue had no intention of being "un outil fabriqué pour répondre à la littérature de complaisance de la Collaboration" (220). Camus's extract documents in great detail the sense of exile that is brought about by the quarantining of the city of Oran and brings together the varied examples of different types of separation that are major consequences of the plague. 'Les Exilés dans la peste' appears in the final publication of *La Peste*, having undergone some slight modification in places, but with large sections still identical word for word. It corresponds to the opening section of "la deuxième section" (2: 78-85).

The inclusion of Camus's 'Exilés dans la peste' could be seen in hindsight as evidence for an early covert attack on Nazism by Camus, even though this would not be in keeping

with Lescure's objective, which as he states was to not even acknowledge the existence of Nazi Germany. I instead argue that, in this early version, Camus was less concerned with affirming any connection between the plague and the Nazis and instead more bent on narrating exile and the theme of separation. Whatever the motivation for Camus's decision to publish an extract of his novel, 'Les Exilés dans la peste' still best reflects Camus's personal experience of isolation in le Panelier, his being unable to return back home or communicate freely with his loved ones. "Même s'il est dans la continuité du récit, il est très ancré dans l'expérience douloureuse de la séparation qui fut celle de l'écrivain à l'époque, et dans l'Histoire . . ." (Blondeau 2: 1174). This published extract of *La Peste*, as Blondeau observes, was eventually revised and incorporated into the beginning of the second section of the definitive novel (2: 1174). Despite this text being ultimately absorbed into the definitive manuscript, it is important to note that the title Camus gave to it includes the word "Exilés," meaning that themes of isolation, displacement and not belonging were paramount for Camus at this stage in his writing.

So what made Camus finally settle upon the shortened title, *La Peste*? The answer to this question may never be known, but we can better understand the evolution of his chronicle by examining the changes Camus made between the first and second drafts in conjunction with both the historical and private events that took place during those years. Ultimately, the preliminary titles, *La peste libératrice* (2: 923), *Les Prisonniers* (2: 958), and the title of the published extract, "Les Exilés dans la peste" (2: 275), alongside his personal comments in the *Carnets*, together all provide insight into Camus's technique of using the plague as a stylistic device through which he could emphasize issues of separation, isolation, loss and displacement.

While of course it must be remembered that the content of *La Peste* should not simply be read as an autobiographical reflection of the events in Camus's own life, it is necessary to understand that these early notations for possible titles emphasizing imprisonment and exile were made when Camus was experiencing an imprisonment of his own, living a hermitic life in the hamlet of le Panelier, in south eastern France during the war years. For this reason, I here present in detail the events and circumstances of Camus's life during this time to clarify how the changes made to the early drafts can be understood as having been incorporated into the later formulated allegorical portrayal of Nazism.

Olivier Todd, in his biography of Camus, *Albert Camus: Une Vie*, points out that the section "Deuxième partie" of *La Peste* narrates in great detail the effect on the town's folk of Oran of being cut off from the rest of the world and living under the close threat of death. Todd also links this information back to biographical facts concerning Camus's own life (450-55). In a similar vein, Patrick Henry, in his article "Albert Camus, Panelier and *La Peste*," also discusses how the writing of the first draft of *La Peste* and especially the extract entitled, "Les Exilés dans la peste," coincided with a time when Camus, suffering from ill health, was living in a remote mountain hamlet separated from friends and his wife Francine due to war time conditions. Henry states:

... [Camus] was alone, sick, and isolated from his wife, his friends, and the Algerian landscape that he loved so well. His sense of exile and its ramifications surface everywhere: "Quatre mois de vie ascétique et solitaire."
... In this vein, it is significant that Camus would send out to be published a section of the major text on which he was working. "Les Exilés dans la peste" is a very close earlier draft of what would become the first chapter of Part

Two of *La Peste*. This text – which begins, “En somme, le temps de l’épidémie fut surtout un temps d’exil” (“In short, the time of the epidemic was above all a time of exile”) – defines the plague in terms of isolation. (386-7)

Camus had returned to France in September 1942 after having spent almost a year and a half living with Francine in Oran, scraping a living through private tutoring jobs and meanwhile conducting research for *La Peste*. Camus’s entries in his *Carnets* for this period in Oran, before he moved to le Panelier, provide evidence of his early ideas for *La Peste*, including his musings on the absurd, Kafka and Greek mythology, history and culture.

We have already discussed the influence of Thucydides on Camus’s first draft of *La Peste*. The notes in his *Carnets*, from January 1941 to September 1942, tell of further influences that stem from his penchant for reading a vast array of canonical literature as well as historical texts. Camus penned comments about authors’ lives as well as their works. These are interspersed with notes on Oran and plague epidemics in history. Examples of writers who interested him include, but are not limited to, Thucydides (2: 935), T.E. Lawrence (otherwise known as ‘Lawrence of Arabia’) (2: 932), Melville (2: 936), Marcus-Aurelius (2: 937), Gide, Goethe (2: 938), Stendhal, Milton, Homer (2: 940-41), and Shakespeare (2: 945). We know that Camus was particularly fascinated with classical studies, especially ancient Greek history and Greek tragedy, references to which abound in his *Carnets* (Camus 2: 925, 934-37, 939, 940-41, 945), including comments as, “Les Grecs. Histoire – Littérature – Art – Philosophie” (2: 918) “Essai sur tragédie . . .” (2: 933) and “En attendant: plaquette sur Oran. Les Grecs.” This last note refers to Camus’s essay ‘Le Minotaure ou La Halte d’Oran’ (hereafter referred to as ‘Le Minotaure’). In the same manner that Camus’s reading of Kafka’s absurd extends beyond the text of *Le Mythe de*

Sisyphé to emerge in *La Peste*, aspects of 'Le Minotaure' can also be found to resonate in the novel, especially regarding Oran's physical features and its separation from the sea. In *La Peste* the Oranais will become even further separated from the sea since bathing will be forbidden. 'Le Minotaure' was published in 1954 and, like *La Peste*, is set in Oran, whose streets Camus likens to the mythical labyrinth at Knossos:

Oran est un grand mur circulaire et jaune, recouvert d'un ciel dur. Au début, on erre dans le labyrinthe, *on cherche la mer* comme le signe d'Ariane. Mais on tourne en rond dans des rues fauves et oppressantes, et, à la fin, le Minotaure dévore des Oranais: c'est l'ennui. Depuis longtemps, les Oranais n'errent plus. Ils ont accepté d'être mangés. (emphasis added) (3: 573)

The "ennui" that Camus describes in this short essay is reiterated in the introduction of *La Peste* where the narrator describes the languid banality of Oran's unique yet run-of-the-mill features (2: 35-38). Having given up on life, the citizens are resigned to be eaten by the Minotaur, that is to say they have resigned themselves to their boredom, and so do not resist it. Their lack of hope reminds us of the difficulties Rieux faces throughout the narrative of *La Peste*, in reconciling the fight for life when the plague – read death – will always win. Plague or no plague, the citizens of Oran will die eventually, be it from pestilence or the passage of life itself.

In 'Le Minotaure,' we read: "Forcés de vivre devant un admirable paysage, les Oranais ont triomphé de cette redoutable épreuve en se couvrant de constructions bien laides. On s'attend à une ville ouverte sur la mer . . . on trouve une cité qui présente le dos à la mer . . ." (2: 572) This position of missing out on the beautiful panorama of the shoreline is reiterated in *La Peste*: "La cité elle-même, on doit l'avouer, est laide. . . . On peut

seulement regretter qu'elle [la ville] se soit construite en tournant le dos à cette baie et que, partant, il soit impossible d'apercevoir la mer qu'il faut toujours aller chercher" (2: 35 & 37). The description of Oran in the introduction to *La Peste* closely resembles the image of the city presented in 'Le Minotaure.' Yet, whereas in 'Le Minotaure' the city has its back to the sea, "on trouve une cité qui présente le dos à la mer," in *La Peste* we are told that it is impossible to catch a glimpse of the Mediterranean and one must go looking for it "qu'il faut toujours aller chercher." In both descriptions of Oran, the presence and location of the sea is noted as being separated from the town. In 'Le Minotaure' it is dismissed and ignored; in *La Peste* however, the viewpoint has closed in on itself literally and figuratively. From the town, it is impossible to see the sea. The text indicates that one must actively pursue the image and go hunt it down. Once again Camus tells us that not everything is visible on the surface and, perhaps with reference to the chronicle itself, he is suggesting we must seek out that which is hidden.

During the time that Camus was living in Oran, he also gained insight into the reality of an epidemic because Typhus struck Algeria in the winter of 1941-2. This public health crisis provided Camus with useful information for *La Peste*. He had direct and easy access to accounts of the illness because the wife of his good friend, Emmanuel Roblès, who lived in nearby Turenne, became one of the many victims of Typhus. The symptoms are in fact not dissimilar to those of the plague and her comments on the situation were thus beneficial for Camus's research. It was a resurgence of Camus's own health problems in the Spring of 1942, when his TB returned, that eventually forced him to make the decision to return to France where he was to be treated by doctors in St. Etienne and live at a high altitude in the Massif Central. Henry details the time line of these events:

In July 1942, Albert Camus' Polish doctor and friend, Stanislas Cviklinski, advised him to leave Algiers and spend the winter in the mountains in France. Since January of that year both of his lungs had been infected with tuberculosis and he was in a weakened state. Before the end of August, Camus and his wife Francine, were settled in Panelier, a hamlet [...] in the Massif Central on the plateau Vivarais-Lignon. . . .

In early October, Francine went back to Oran to her teaching position. Albert remained on the plateau to continue taking treatments for his lungs ... Camus did not expect to spend much more time there. ... But the Allies invaded North Africa on the night of November 7, and four days later the Germans headed south to occupy the formerly Vichy controlled zone of France. As the November 11 entry in his *Carnets* indicates – “11 novembre. Comme des rats!” {(2: 966)} (“November 11. Like rats!”) – he was trapped.” (383)

The use of the metaphor of rats, here used in 1942, to express the occupation of “la zone libre,” indicates a turning point in Camus's treatment of the role of the plague in his novel. This sentence marks the point where war, exile and separation come together with the rat articulated as an allegorical symbol linking the bubonic plague with the invading Nazi soldiers. It is the rats that bring the plague to Oran and consequently cause all the suffering of the inhabitants, just as the German invasion is directly responsible for Camus's own exiled predicament. The war-pestilence imagery thus begins to be emphasized here; rats bring pestilence among other problems and the Germans bring Fascism among other horrors of war. It is from this moment of the invasion of “la zone libre,” in October

November 1942, that Camus is forced to unexpectedly remain in France and live separated from his family and friends in Algeria for an uncertain stretch of time. In fact, Francine and Camus are only re-united in the autumn of 1944, after the liberation of Paris, in August 25th. Furthermore, they were without news of each other for long stretches during their two-year separation. Evidence from Camus's personal notes written in his *Carnets*, (see pages 2: 983 & 993), make clear that, due to his illness and his sense of exile, he felt himself stranded, homesick and frustrated at living somewhere he did not want to be: "J'ai lié une intrigue avec ce pays, c'est-à-dire que j'ai des raisons de l'aimer et des raisons de le détester. Pour l'Algérie au contraire, c'est la passion sans frein et l'abandon à la volupté d'aimer" (2: 980). This quote clearly depicts Camus's struggle with finding a sense of belonging in France, a country he claims to both "aimer" and "détester." Camus's feelings of frustration and exile feature strongly throughout all the drafts of *La Peste*, but these emotions are intensified due to his own personal sense of exile and fear and uncertainty caused by being separated from his home in Algeria. He states in his *Carnets*:

Je veux exprimer au moyen de la peste l'étouffement dont nous avons tous souffert et l'atmosphère de menace et d'exil dans laquelle nous avons vécu. Je veux du même coup étendre cette interprétation à la notion d'existence en général. *La Peste* donnera l'image de ceux qui dans cette guerre ont eu la part de la réflexion, du silence – et celle de la souffrance morale. (2: 979)

Camus here analyses his own work and clearly states how he intends for the exile and separation felt by all who suffer from the plague to reflect not just the exile brought about by WW II, but that this interpretation should be extended to deeper more philosophical issues such as the "notion d'existence en général."

Henry, too, asks the question, to what extent did the circumstances of Camus's life during the war years that he spent in France influence the content of Camus's second novel. The definitive answer can never be known, but that is not to say parallels cannot be drawn between these events in Camus's life and similar themes expressed in the novel. The strained and difficult conditions can all be read as potential material and research for the situations Camus would go on to describe in the second draft of the chronicle. If the exile Camus experienced during his time in le Panelier can be read as influencing his work, then it can be surmised that similar correlations can also be drawn between the allegorical message of the novel and his experience working for the Resistance towards the end of the war. Thus the timing of Camus's work on *La Peste* lends importance to not only understanding the allegory, it is also useful for analyzing the significance of other aspects embedded in the narration, particularly exile and separation. The themes, so paramount in Camus's early notes and drafts, take on different significance according to the changes Camus makes as he edits his own work. Analyzing these alterations to the early manuscripts (which also remain essential to the text as well as connected to the overriding allegory) allow us to read beyond the anti-Nazi allegory. In sum, separation remains a theme from the beginning and is never dropped even when the Nazi allegory is incorporated and as Camus himself says in his *Carnets* dated late 1943, "C'est la séparation qui est la règle. Le reste est hasard" (2: 1007). He continues, "Mais les gens sont toujours réunis" (2: 1007), showing that a community resisting in solidarity also remained paramount for Camus. After all, before there can be a coming together there must exist a separation.

As we have made our analytical journey through the text of *La Peste* as well as through Camus's personal notes and *Carnets* entries, it is fitting here to remark on the last note that Camus makes in his *Carnets* in reference to his chronicle, in which he discusses one last time the act of being separated. "Peste. 'Les choses qui gémissent d'être séparées'" (2: 1020). Camus, in alluding to the sound of pain or suffering through the verb "gémir," indicates that groans and wails are manifestations of separation, verbalized as opposed to being physical, psychological, spatial, temporal or simply implied. These groans of separation are profound existential expressions of the human animal suffering from being social and separate. Although "gémir" is itself a word, a verb, it signifies its meaning through sound. Whereas words have proved insufficient and wanting at various times throughout the novel, in particular for Grand, but also for other characters who have been faced with unanswerable dilemmas, Camus, in his *Carnets*, offers an ultimate demonstration of his continuing probing of the ambiguous nature of meaning and truth, one that reaches beyond words to connect the idea of separation to the realm of inarticulate sound.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we have established that Camus's principal objective with his last version of *La Peste* was to iterate the confinement of being imprisoned inside a quarantined town and to use the role of disease as a literary device through which exile and separation can be fully expressed. The theme of in-betweenness is inherently linked to separation because a space is created between two entities when they separate. In-betweenness is significant in understanding *La Peste* because it allows us to locate the characters in new spaces, caught between expression and meaning, caught between exile and belonging, ultimately, caught between life and death. In this space and "Dans cette révolte qui secoue l'homme et lui fait dire: "Cela n'est pas possible," il y a déjà la certitude désespérée que "cela" se peut" (1: 308). Camus thereby reminds us that the inexpressible does not automatically signify the impossible and because of this the understanding and interpretation of knowledge, events and facts, in short our reality, must remain open and endless.

My reading of Camus's emphasis of separation through the motif of plague combines his objectives in the published version with his intentions on how to express this theme before he found himself isolated in France or clandestinely fighting the Nazis as part of the resistance. My reading shows that the Nazi allegory evolved later and was not present in the earliest stages of the novel's creation. More importantly, I show that, despite making significant edits to his various drafts and manuscripts, Camus is successful at subtly maintaining much of his earlier thinking on separation as expressed through language and meaning. Camus's early research while reading Thucydides in Oran, at the beginning of the

1940's, led him to understand that Thucydides wanted "... to show that ... this Plague ... was indeed beyond ordinary human understanding" (Demont, "Causes of Athenian Plague & Thucydides" 76). Despite the fact that the theme of plague was always, from beginning to end, the essence of Camus's chronicle, underneath the surface of his narrative we have seen that it is actually the notion of human understanding which is of greater significance. This was expressed in the first drafts through Camus's probing of language and meaning and then it became incorporated into an analogy with war, out of which the Nazi allegory emerged. The theme of human understanding remained pertinent to Camus throughout both drafts of the novel, just as it remained pertinent to the extraordinary events that occurred in his personal life, whether he was frustrated, anxious and underemployed living in Oran, facing death through ill health and enduring isolation and exile in le Panelier, or carrying out dangerous resistance work in Paris. Yet the most striking factor of all and what in the end underscores the power of Camus's plague narrative, is not his conclusion that there are no finite answers. Rather he convinces us that even though much lies "beyond our human understanding" there exists a fundamentally human instinct inside all of us that, as incomprehensible as it may sometimes seem, refuses to simply remain at the point of incomprehension. Because of that we have the freedom to experience a sense of endless progression through what is a very finite existence.

Conclusion

Despite its arbitrary delineation of space, the idea of a unified and homogenous Mediterranean continues to be the subject of numerous historical, political and social constructions. A huge variety of images of the Mediterranean emerged during history and more are still being constructed today. In few cases, these realities might simply coexist, but mostly they are shaped and influenced by each other or are competing for interpretative hegemony.

The well-known and often cited Roman expression “mare nostrum” is one of the earliest evidence in support of such an idea . . . (von Rūden and Lichtenberger 9)

The Mediterranean indeed covers “multiple realities” as stated in the title of *Multiple Mediterranean Realities: Current Approaches to Spaces, Resources, and Connectivities*, published in 2015 and edited by Constance von Rūden & Achim Lichtenberger. It is in essence only a sea, but of course the Mediterranean represents much more than simply a large body of water. As von Rūden & Lichtenberger explain, there have been many varied images of the Mediterranean throughout history and more continue to be constructed (9) to the point that this maritime space is afforded its own academic field entitled Mediterranean Studies. Albert Camus’s declaration of the existence and grandeur of a Mediterranean culture that he puts forth in his inauguration speech at a new community arts center in Algiers (Camus 1: 565) is just one of these many constructs of the

Mediterranean. It has not been within the scope of this dissertation to analyze Camus's vision of a Mediterranean in comparison with others' evocations that came before or after his 1937 speech. Rather, it has been demonstrated that Camus's construction of the Mediterranean evolved; it waxed and waned, but did not disappear from his writing. Indeed, Camus returns to the very subject of his inauguration speech in the closing pages of *L'Homme Révolté*, published in 1951. In this non-fictional essay he once again sets out his arguments for a Mediterranean humanism, extolling his view that distinctly Mediterranean features of natural environment and human nature offer an equilibrium that allow historical excesses and political extremes to be kept in check: "Mais l'absolutisme historique, malgré ses triomphes, n'a jamais cessé de se heurter à une exigence invincible de la nature humaine dont la Méditerranée, où l'intelligence est sœur de la dure lumière, garde le secret" (3: 318). This quote from *L'Homme Révolté* demonstrates how, after WW II, Camus's Mediterraneanism continued to play a part in his philosophical thinking (see also pages 3-4 of the introduction.)

In these chapters, we have seen how Camus's Mediterranean thought can also be traced in *La Peste*, a work of fiction that was published ten years after Camus's public Mediterranean panegyric and four years before *L'Homme Révolté*. Additionally, it should be noted that *La Peste* hitherto has not been analyzed for its connection to Camus's Mediterraneanism. Camus's personal experience of working in the Resistance during WW II informed his writing of *La Peste*, especially his re-write, since the Nazi allegory came about due to the historical events of WW II. This dissertation has demonstrated how the influence of Mediterranean history, culture and civilization, principally symbolized by Ancient Greece, was also distilled into Camus's chronicle whose allegorical nexus includes the

notion of resistance. Furthermore, *La Peste* can be understood as being one of Camus's works which informed his more in-depth discussion on rebellion in *L'Homme Révolté*. What is significant for our purposes is that included in *L'Homme Révolté* is a more honed declaration of his Mediterranean thought set out in the section 'La Pensée de midi.' Thus Camus's Mediterranean thought is relevant to his ideas on solidarity and resistance. In his book *La Juste révolte*, Denis Salas comments on the germination of the resistance so central to *L'Homme Révolté*, as being part of *La Peste*: "La guerre nous a ravi le monde commun. La résistance le rend à nouveau possible. La paix le garantit. Le mythe de *La Peste* suggère que la généalogie des commencements est entre nos mains" (68). Denis Salas here suggests that through the WW II allegory of *La Peste*, we see how war can take away so much and yet resistance in war brings about new possibilities and positivity. This balancing out of war and resistance, or more generally, of evil and good that Salas sees in *La Peste*, is expressed as a conflict between 'mesure' and 'démésure' in the section entitled 'La Pensée de midi' in *L'Homme Révolté* (3: 317). *La Peste* as a work of fiction, yet with allegorical elements that clearly resonate with Camus's personal experience of WW II, is thus connected to the non-fiction *L'Homme Révolté* and provides us with apt material for examining the evolution of Camus's Mediterranean thought, which is the basis of 'La Pensée de midi.'

In this dissertation, it has been shown that the themes of separation and solidarity in *La Peste* are connected to Camus's Mediterraneanism. As chapter one reveals, Camus's vision for a new Mediterranean culture evolved out of a combination of factors: his need to identify with a culture beyond that of colonial France and a desire to articulate an alternative discourse to the extreme right-wing politics that were gaining ground during this period. Chapters two and three have shown through a close reading of the novel *La*

Peste, how Camus's Mediterraneanism remained in the writing of his second novel, albeit in a more latent manner, through expressions of in-betweenness stemming from consequences of the plague, such as exile, separation and what it means to belong. Camus's predilection for Mediterranean culture is also made manifest through the inspiration of the ancient Greek historian, Thucydides' narratorial style for recounting events in an objective manner. Camus's fashioning of a narrator for *La Peste* who sees himself in the role of amateur historian pays tribute to Thucydides' own account of the plague that struck Athens in 430 BCE. This appropriation of Thucydides' style reiterates Camus's fascination with the legacy of Ancient Greece that characterizes his vision of a new Mediterranean culture as set out in his speech.

While Camus, to my knowledge, never uses the words "'mare nostrum' the well known and oft cited Roman expression" (von Rūden & Achim Lichtenberger 9), which is still to this day a recognized (if less used) term for the Mediterranean Sea, he did employ a discourse of Mediterranean collectivity. The label 'our sea' connotes a togetherness of people and place. The possessive pronoun indicates that this sea belongs to many and this 'many' is connected by the sea's geography and physicality. But the *nostrum*, in connecting people through inclusion, also sets up the dichotomy of exclusion. 'Our sea' does not belong to all – it only belongs to the 'us' of *nostrum*. The counter side to the 'us' is, of course, 'them.' Therefore, although this label for the Mediterranean Sea signifies a bond between those it encompasses, it also sets apart these people from others, outside the grouping, who are different and thus excluded. Camus, in imagining his 'New Mediterranean Culture,' tried to bridge this divide by claiming that his vision of the Mediterranean included "les aspects divers de cette culture," that is to say cultural aspects from the East (Camus 1: 570). In

sensing there was more to Mediterranean culture than simply a Roman centered view, Camus viewed his Mediterranean as a space in-between East and West: “Ce qu’il y a de plus essentiel dans le génie méditerranéen jaillit peut-être de cette rencontre unique dans l’histoire et la géographie née entre l’Orient et l’occident” (1: 569). This in-between space, between East and West, expresses the social and cultural ambit that Camus experienced as a young adult living in colonial French Algeria. More specifically, this space comprised the social strata occupied by non-French southern European emigrants (and their descendants), who lived “between” the wealthy and powerful colonial “Français de souche,” and the disenfranchised indigenous Muslim Algerians. This in-between space clearly portrays how euro-centric Camus’s vision of a Mediterranean culture remained. Nevertheless, his point of view was also an internationalist, if idealistic one, aimed at gesturing towards a less nationalistic community.

As discussed in chapter one, a group of young writers and artists, since coined the *École d’Alger*, emerged from this social fragmentation in French Algeria. This group was to have a great influence on Camus at the beginning of his literary career, where he and his fellow French Algerians, greatly influenced by the writings of Gabriel Audisio, self-identified with Mediterranean culture first and foremost. Because he experienced his cultural identity as something other than uniquely French, Camus saw, perhaps rather naïvely, a coming together of the history and culture of all the Mediterranean through the heterogeneity of those southern Europeans who dwelt in French Algeria.

While Camus’s Mediterranean thought demonstrates aspirations to connect local regionalities, it also can be understood to be born out of separation since Camus imparted his perspective of a new Mediterranean culture so as to disassociate his cultural identity

from fascist nationalism. We have seen how the plague epidemic that is the fulcrum of Camus's *La Peste* causes much separation. Nonetheless, the reaction and resistance to the scourge subsequently gives rise to fierce resistance and solidarity. This brings together otherwise disparate characters into a new in-between space. Thus the in-between position that Camus expressed in his speech can be read as resonating ten years later in *La Peste*, through circumstances of separation caused by the plague which are then juxtaposed with examples of connection and solidarity resulting from the resistance that ensues.

The inclusive / exclusive divide of *mare nostrum*, with the repercussion of in-between spaces appearing amid the fissure, is also a central repercussion of the plague, since the quarantining of Oran means that the city is isolated, rather like an island in the middle of a sea. No one can enter and no one can leave, separating those inside from those outside the city walls. The binary division in *La Peste* also fragments so that in-between sections emerge, because inside the quarantined city further divisions appear between those who contract the plague, those who are deemed contagious and others who are left living in fear of the possibility they will be next.

I have shown that in-betweenness is a feature of Camus's Mediterraneanism in that his new Mediterranean culture sits as an alternative between the European and Arab nationalist appropriations of this region. The re-positioning of Oran in *La Peste* as an isolated miasmatic space can also be read as an example of in-betweenness. Ultimately the entire population of this sealed off town remain in a betwixt and between position, separated from the outside and at times each other, until the plague has gone.

Camus looked to southern European communities of the Mediterranean, who shared the natural features of this region, along with its history and heritage, in the belief that this

was common ground upon which a cohesive sense of culture should be built. This was his way to resist and counter the alternative nationalist view of the fascists, whose ideology was structured around division. In some respect the anti-plague task force of *La Peste* comes together in a manner that echoes the motivation behind Camus's new Mediterranean culture. Those fighting the plague, portrayed by Rambert, Tarrou, Rieux and Grand come together despite differences, united by their common goal of resistance against the force of the plague, which is equally an agent of division. This is best portrayed by the turnaround in Rambert's position. He changes from someone who strongly feels himself as different from the Oranais and not connected to the city, to eventually feeling he belongs, that he is one of them. Rambert is at first reluctant to join in the fight against the plague and plots to illegally escape from Oran because he is not from there and wishes to rejoin his beloved who awaits him back home. Nevertheless, as time passes he eventually changes his mind. He decides that, although he is not from Oran, because of the plague his moral duty lies there and he chooses to stay because he is now one of them. "Ce n'est pas cela, dit Rambert. J'ai toujours pensé que j'étais étranger à cette ville et que je n'avais rien à faire avec vous. Mais maintenant que j'ai vu ce que j'ai vu, je sais que je suis d'ici, que je le veuille ou non" (2: 178). Rambert is now included and emphasizes this by stating: "Cette histoire nous concerne tous" (2: 178). When read in light of Camus's Mediterraneanism, this "nous" is an echo of the "nostrum" from the Roman *mare nostrum*. The inclusion of "tous" indicates a bid to render the "nous" universal.

This collective "nous" is also prevalent in the introduction to *La Peste*. The narrator opens the chronicle describing Oran. In his detailed sketch of the city he speaks of "notre petite ville" "chez nous" and "nos citoyens" (Camus 2: 35). By doing this he includes himself

and the reader in the world of *La Peste*. The narrator states that Oran is “*notre petite ville*” and so the reader knows that the narrator and those he speaks of are not alone, rather they make up a community, and that the narrator is included in it, the reason for which is disclosed at the end of the chronicle. “Notre,” “nous” and “nos” all denote possession. One can infer that Oran belongs to them and they belong there. Nevertheless, as examined in chapter two, Rambert struggles with this very issue of belonging and the character of Cottard also portrays a social outsider. This “notre,” used multiple times by the narrator in his introduction, is perhaps a hint at what is to come, in that it refers to the coming together of those who take up resistance against the plague and that precisely because their struggle unites them, they all feel that they belong. Cottard remains an outsider because he chooses not to join the anti-plague task force. Right from the beginning of the novel, this first person plural possessive pronoun subtly alerts us to the chronicle’s central themes, exile, belonging and separation, which I have further shown connect to Camus’s Mediterraneanism via in-betweenness.

In-betweenness in the reception of Camus’s writings

Throughout his lifetime, Camus grappled with issues of exile and belonging. In March 1940 he left Algeria for Paris. This was to be his first visit to France and whilst living there he experienced the melancholic awareness of not feeling at home, of not belonging. He writes in his *Carnets* of his first experience of life in Paris: “Je ne suis pas d’ici – pas d’ailleurs non plus. Et le monde n’est plus qu’un paysage inconnu où mon cœur ne trouve plus d’appuis. Étranger, qui peut savoir ce que ce mot veut dire” (2: 902). His words show the emotional complexity that comes with living in a place that is not where one comes from. Despite the close administrative, colonial and geographical connection between

France and French Algeria, Camus felt out of his element or at least enough of an absence of the familiar to ponder what exactly being an “*étranger*” (in Paris) means. The notion of belonging stayed with him and this very personal experience remains an important theme in his work. This sentiment can be traced in the in-betweenness present in his fictional and non-fictional writing, that is to say in his Mediterranean thought and in particular in *La Peste*, where it is evoked through situations that highlight what it is to be exiled and separated. These issues are as pertinent and acute today as they were in Camus’s lifetime and inform the writings of contemporary anglophone and francophone authors. Edwidge Danticat, Kamel Daoud and Hamid Grine are three such examples of writers who have used Camus’s work, as well as Camus the individual, as inspiration and catalyst for some of their own recent publications, tackling questions of truth, nuance, authority and exile through their literary discourses. These are all themes that I have shown emanate from the in-betweenness of Camus’s Mediterraneanism and thus these writers are connected through their shared inspiration of what I have examined in Camus’s Mediterranean thought.

Edwidge Danticat

Edwidge Danticat is a Haitian born writer who produces her work in English and lives in the United States. As a writer who inhabits an adopted country, her personal situation, family history and heritage all inform her fiction, as well as her non-fiction. In a published conversation with Danticat, Elvira Pulitano states: "Home, belonging, migration, and exile are recurrent themes in Danticat's work" (40). In Danticat's book *Create Dangerously: the immigrant artist at work*, she connects these themes to questions of authenticity and foreignness regarding her own identity as an immigrant artist at work. In her writing, Danticat tells how she learned from her parents, who were young adults living in Haiti during Papa Doc's brutal dictatorship, how Haitians would secretly stage performances of Camus's play *Caligula* as a means to resist the silence, fear and violence of Papa Doc's regime:

The legend of the underground staging of this [*Caligula*] and other plays, clandestine readings of pieces of literature, was so strong that years after Papa Doc Duvalier died, every time there was a political murder in Bel Air, one of the young aspiring intellectuals in the neighborhood where I spent the first twelve years of my life might inevitably say that someone should put on a play. (Danticat 8)

Stirred by her compatriots' defiance and courage in their risky admiration of literary playwrights, Danticat takes an essay written by Camus as inspiration to express her own admiration for those who write in exile and in fear, often jeopardizing their family's and their own safety through creative defiance. The words "Create Dangerously" form part of the title of her 2010 collection of essays, published as *Create Dangerously: the immigrant*

artist at work (hereafter written as *CD*). The beginning of Danticat's title comes from a translation of the heading of the lecture, *L'Artiste et son temps (The Artist and His Time: Create Dangerously)*, that Camus gave at the University of Uppsala after he received the Nobel Prize for literature in 1957.

In his speech Camus speaks of the public's expectation of writers, with regard to world affairs in the zeitgeist of post WW II Europe, resulting in increased pressure and responsibility placed on the artists of that time. Camus uses a telling metaphor in his lecture to describe the situation of artists at that time, that is to say he describes them as being in a redoubtable position on the high seas: "Nous sommes en plein mer. L'artiste, comme les autres, doit ramer à son tour, sans mourir, s'il peut, c'est-à-dire en continuant de vivre et de créer" (4: 247). Note that while the Mediterranean is not named per se, the notion of in-betweenness is present in this metaphor. According to Camus, artists must still struggle to create despite working in a situation of tension, caught between the desire to create and the danger they face if and when they do so. Camus continues:

L'art n'est ni le refus total, ni le consentement total à ce qu'il est. Il est en même temps refus et consentement, et c'est pourquoi il ne peut être qu'un déchirement perpétuellement renouvelé. L'artiste se trouve toujours dans cette ambigüité, incapable de nier le réel et cependant éternellement voué à le contester dans ce qu'il a d'éternellement inachevé. (4: 259)

Camus's insistence here on the artist's constant flux between articulating reality and eternally questioning it, echoes the plague's ability to unsettle the Oranais' understanding of their world as it changes their reality forever. The facts of their experience appear to be unequivocal and yet the style that the narrator of *La Peste* employs, zealous as he is in his

aim at authenticity, actually highlights areas of ambiguity in this fictional tale, as discussed in chapters two and three.

In an interview with Kam Williams, posted on the African American Literature Book Club website, Danticat is asked the following question: "When did you arrive at an understanding that your aesthetic coincided with that of Albert Camus in his essay of the same name, which served as the inspiration for your book's title?" She replies by saying:

I've always enjoyed the work of Camus, and found it very thought-provoking, especially his novels. But less universally read are his essays, which are very beautiful. I read that one (*The Artist and His Time: Create Dangerously*) when I was in college and starting to think seriously about writing. He always seemed to express more ambivalence than certainty. That's certainly how I feel, that this is all a kind of quest, and that things change in terms of what you're trying to accomplish as you go along. I like the fact that he talks about both sides and the ambivalence of artists."

The editors, Raymond Gay-Crosier et Maurice Weyembergh, in their editorial notes on Camus's lecture in the *OC*, 2008 edition, elucidate this very point of "both sides" which appeals to and heartens Danticat.

Tout artiste, . . . est divisé entre le consentement au monde et à sa beauté, et le refus de sa cruauté et ses injustices. L'écrivain est un créateur qui part de la création et s'insurge contre le Créateur. Il [Camus] entend, en somme, corriger la création en lui conférant, dans la fiction, une plus grande unité. C'est de cette position de base, la révolte, *cet entre oui et non*, que le métier procède. (emphasis added) (Gay-Crosier & Weyembergh 4: 1397)

Throughout the chapters of this dissertation we have seen that the concept of being in an in-between position is a central underpinning to Camus's Mediterranean thought as well as a basis to his novel *La Peste*. As we can read here in Gay-Crosier & Weyembergh's assessment of Camus's words in Uppsala, Camus's thinking was informed by in-betweenness, evoked by this oscillation between the "*oui et non*," as his creative evolution progressed from his 'cycle de l'absurde' to discussion about revolt and finally to his unfinished 'cycle de l'amour,' which he was working on at the time he received the Nobel Prize for literature. "À tous les moments charnières de son évolution Camus a voulu formuler ou reformuler son 'art poétique' . . . c'est dans les deux discours de Suède qu'il semble avoir donné l'analyse la plus systématique du métier qu'il avait fait sien" (4: 1395 & 1396). Receiving the Nobel Prize was one such pivotal moment in Camus's career and so in the speech he gave at the ceremony's banquet, Camus examines and defines his craft and explains how as a writer he creates from a situation of both consent and refusal.

Danticat and her family had some similar experiences to Camus and his family. Camus's maternal grandmother and her parents left Menorca out of poverty for French-Algeria, and Camus was exiled from his homeland for his communist affiliation in 1940 and could not return due to World War II. Danticat has been exiled through violence and poverty, her parents seeking a better life in the USA. Camus was and was not an immigrant artist at work. He can be placed in this category when one considers his Algerian-ness, his Mediterranean-ness, his non French-ness. Yet he also cannot be seen as an immigrant when portrayed as a French writer, a French journalist and a French thinker. Yet Camus didn't resist the ambiguity in who he was, but drew creative inspiration from the in-between

position which he inhabited. Moreover, this ambiguity in his identity inspired him to continually question issues of truth, belonging, authority and justice in his writing.

Kamel Daoud

Another more substantial example is Kamel Daoud's book, *Meursault, contre-enquête*, (hereafter written as *MCE*). Daoud simultaneously critiques and pays homage to Camus's first published novel *L'Étranger*. Haroun, the narrator of *MCE*, is the brother of the Arab murdered by the fictional Meursault and he (re)tells his version of the murder to a passive unidentified interlocutor in a bar in Oran: "Cela fait des années que j'attends et si je peux pas écrire mon livre, je peux au moins te le raconter, non?" (Daoud 16). Although Daoud does not refer to Camus's Mediterraneanism or to the novel *La Peste* directly, he does make ironic allusions, some more covert and erudite than others, to various works by Camus or details about those works. The fact that Daoud's narrator is from Oran paves the way for him to insert remarks about the city into his recounting of his brother's death:

Tu sais, ici à Oran, ils sont obsédés par les origines. *Ouled el-bled*, les vrais fils de la ville, du pays. Tout le monde veut être le fils unique de cette ville, le premier, le dernier, le plus ancien . . . Les premiers à avoir habité ici? Les rats, disent les plus sceptiques ou les derniers arrivés. C'est une ville qui a les jambes écartées en direction de la mer. (Daoud 21 & 22)

Haroun's comments wryly reference Camus's allegorical rats. His point that the most recent arrivals to Oran claim those animals were the first to have lived in the city, underscores how Daoud's text could be read as cannily allowing the reader to question what they are being told. For, it is questionable that "les derniers arrivés" (perhaps a reference to the former French colonists) would be the most knowledgeable about the origins of the city. Haroun's comments about origins and "les premiers" and "les derniers" read like sarcastic quips taken at Camus's chronicle and other writings, for example *Le*

Premier Homme. Moreover, Camus's narrator describes Oran as a city with its back to the sea, which is also an observation Camus chooses to insert into his essay 'Le Minotaure ou La Halte d'Oran.' Haroun intentionally turns this image around by stating, "C'est une ville qui a les jambes écartées en direction de la mer," a reference to the red light district of Oran, situated down by its port.

Daoud's entire novel is interested in the truth – specifically offering us the supposed true and full version of the murder of Haroun's brother. For Haroun, Camus's book *L'Étranger* is a lie. This position is of course more complex since as a work of fiction, by definition this novel contains no truth. Haroun can also be accused of peddling lies, since he conflates Camus, the person and writer, with Meursault the fictional character, indicating that he cannot distinguish fact from fabrication. The convoluted job of untangling the labyrinthine thread of truth is left to the reader. With Haroun, Daoud creates a character who falls in-between. He is torn between his love for his mother and his elder brother and yet resents them both. This is because the death of his elder brother and his mother's subsequent desperate and futile quest to find out the facts of Moussa's murder and locate his body, become a metaphorical ball and chain around Haroun's life, shaping and dominating it. As Haroun tells his story, the reader learns how he is alienated from everything, family and friends alike, even missing out on finding a partner in love. Haroun becomes a stranger in his own country since he is accused of being a traitor for not joining his brothers in the fight for independence. Haroun is resentful of his mother's grief and embittered by the injustices he and his family have suffered. Thus, his narrative is tinged with indignation and a bent for revenge. The constant mixture of fact and fiction means Haroun is left living between facts, trying to search out the truth of a fictional murder.

Unable to swear total allegiance to either his mother or his country (past or present) are the subtexts of Daoud's novel. Haroun discovers that the truth lies somewhere in the middle of motherland and the colonial past. Meursault is part of Moussa, Haroun is part of Camus, and they are caught in a perpetual trap of 'entre-deux' as Haroun remarks, sitting in a cell after having killed the Frenchman in 1962 . . . Caught in the in-between, Daoud's Haroun, like Camus, is neither perpetrator nor victim. The writer (Camus and Daoud), like his characters, finds himself hemmed in by two sides to a story, locked in a constant battle that will never be won, as Haroun cries out on the last page: "Deux inconnus avec deux histoires sur une plage sans fin. Laquelle est la plus vraie . . ." (Orlando 876)

The reader becomes aware that this is a story that has many truths and wrapped up in this is Haroun's reliability as narrator. The veracity of all he says cannot be taken for granted, especially seeing that his brother's murder gives rise to years fraught with grievances and injustices that cloud Haroun's recounting of it. In the opening lines to the novel, Haroun admits that, by dint of continually going over this sorry state of affairs, he scarcely remembers it at all: ". . . à force de ressasser cette histoire, [je] ne m'en souviens presque plus" (Daoud 11). Haroun, unlike Rieux, is a (self-confessed) unreliable narrator whose view is not objective, but in fact is somewhat biased due to his personal suffering, as scholars have already noted.

Despite his deep involvement in the story he accounts (Haroun makes it clear that his life has been forever altered by that fatal moment on the beach), he has difficulty piecing together the strands of his narrative, most of which

have been filtered first through the debilitating pain and quest for retribution of his bereaved mother and then further distorted by the nationalist and Islamist rhetoric that dominates the public sphere, powerful forces that converge as two sides of the same coin in post-independence Algeria. (Strand 453)

The in-betweenness that I have shown to be present in the narrative strategy of *La Peste* is thus also underlying Daoud's narrative, especially regarding the line between fact and fiction. The reader of *MCE* becomes aware of "... a constant tension in the book between its intertextual *pas de deux* and its references to verifiable reality" (Strand 458).

The conflation of the protagonist Meursault with his creator Camus is central to Haroun's story. Moussa's murder sits between fiction and reality, which have at times been intermingled in the reception of Camus's work in postcolonial times and especially where Meursault is concerned. Moussa's death was imagined and then immortalized by the pen of Camus, but carried out by the character Meursault. Most contentiously, Camus never gave his Arab victim a name. Daoud gives Haroun's brother a name in the retelling of the murder from his younger brother's perspective. But, naming Moussa does not simply resolve the problematic anonymity of Camus's murdered Arab. This is because, although Haroun criticizes Meursault, complicating matters further still, as the retelling progresses, Daoud's narrator comes to resemble Camus's protagonist more and more (Brozgal 40). By the end of the novel, Daoud's narrator has also committed a murder which serves to link him even more to Meursault.

MCE therefore offers an erudite, intertextual and often ironic commentary on not just Camus's work and thinking, but also on his controversial legacy as a public and

historical figure and writer. Daoud's re-telling of Camus's famous story, juxtaposing and yet aligning his main character, Haroun, with *L'Étranger's* protagonist Meursault, can be seen as imitating Camus and creating his own unique work. By having Haroun berate both Algeria's colonial past as well as its contemporary society, Daoud's narrator occupies an uncomfortable and lonely space that lies in-between the past and the present. This space can be seen as imitating Camus's Mediterranean in-between position as I have investigated in chapter one. With *MCE*, Daoud chooses to forge a new position outside of the thorny binary that has dominated the post-colonial relationship between Algeria and France. Daoud carves out a new (post post-colonial) literary space through which he shows the complexity and interconnection between the injustices of the past along with a critique of contemporary Islamic Algerian society, so much so that a call for a *fatwa* has been made against him.

Hamid Grine

Hamid Grine is both politician and writer. He has held the position of minister of Communication in the Algerian government since 2014 and has also published several novels. He has written extensively on the subject of sport, specifically football, and published commentaries on a wide range of subjects including philosophy, Algerian society, culture and politics. His recent novel, *Camus dans le narguilé*, published in 2011, (hereafter written as *CDLN*), draws on the person, as well as the legacy, of Albert Camus for its storyline. Furthermore, Grine's protagonist is inspired by Camus's Mediterranean humanism, which he uses as a sort of moral code through which he considers his country's status quo: "Grine's nuanced celebration of truth and justice are rooted in a certain moral code reminiscent of Camus's humanism, and *la pensée méditerranéenne*" (Orlando 879).

In the introduction to her article "Conversations with Camus As Foil, Foe and Fantasy in Contemporary Writing by Algerian Authors of French Expression," Valérie Orlando touches on the subject of *la littérature-monde*, which draws from Edouard Glissant's theory *Tout-monde*, (the term, *la littérature-monde*, comes from the manifesto, instigated by Michel Le Bris and Jean Rouaud, 'Pour une littérature-monde en français' published in *Le Monde des livres* on 16 March 2007). Orlando brings Hamid Grine's 2011 novel *CDLN* in to her discussion because she considers it to befit the category of *la littérature-monde*, and she makes the point that contemporary Algerian authors have long been expressing, in French, the core ideas behind this manifesto, ideas which demand equal recognition for all literature written in French. In her view, the authors of these works, *CDLN* included, offer a less centralized view of French and Francophone literature since their writing is not focused solely on the Hexagon and so is not limited by its borders.

The plot line of *CDLN* is that of an Algerian professor of French who learns, from his uncle, while attending the funeral of his father, that his real father was Albert Camus. This revelation prompts the protagonist, Nabil, to go in search of the truth, a quest that takes him across Algeria in a nostalgic trip that encompasses sites connected to Camus, for example downtown Algiers, Tipasa and Cherchell. Although Nabil eventually discovers his Uncle's claim to be false, the road trip he embarks on provides him with the opportunity to ruminate on more than just his family ancestry. Throughout the narrative he also ponders Camus's contentious place in post-colonial Algeria and scrutinizes his country's current controversial socio-political as well as religious issues. This he does in the manner of one nostalgic for an idealized past, pining for a return to those better times. Nabil's idealistic and naïve hankering for a past that in all reality was as problematic and complicated as today's present, brings to mind the shortcomings of Camus's own idealistic vision of a humanist Mediterranean society that was blind to its contemporaneous colonial injustices.

Camus's rarely explored *pensée de midi* is Hamid Grine's linchpin for traversing a host of other issues concerning identity, politics, the colonial legacy and how it should be remembered in contemporary Algeria. Like Camus, Grine evokes a particular Mediterranean humanist view, or humanist world view, as he wanders the labyrinths of contemporary Algerian culture in the post-*années noires* of the mid 2000's. Grine follows in Camus's footsteps to explore both the pied-noir's conception of Mediterranean humanism rooted in moral justice . . . and his own, as he seeks answers to questions about why his country has failed to found a just and equitable society in the post-colonial era. (Orlando 877)

There are similarities between Grine's work and both Camus's and Daoud's, since not only does Grine's journey for the truth resonate with the issues of veracity that enlase *La Peste* and *MCE*, but Grine's use of Camus's Mediterranean humanism offers another example of in-betweenness being revived in the reception of Camus's work. Grine's protagonist is caught between truths, wondering who his real father was, and while carrying out his search he comes to wonder who the real Camus was: a colonial sympathizer and traitor for not supporting Algerian independence or a literary hero of Algeria's past? "Like Daoud's Haroun, Nabil feels the squeeze of the *entre-deux*, the pulling from both sides of a history, neither one of which has all the answers, nor contains all the truths" (Orlando 879).

The in-betweenness that these chapters have demonstrated to be fundamental to Camus's Mediterranean thought and also his second novel *La Peste*, has been sensed by contemporary authors who are inspired by Camus's work. Camus's position as a French Algerian writer with strong emotional links to his Mediterranean self was a complicated one.

... Camus as a figure, both real and fictitious, serves as a subject to facilitate multiple contacts through plural, linguistic and historical zones which engage with the unrealized and unsatisfied aspects of a postcolonial Algeria that is still searching for its identity. These explorations propose a new mode of being, or a third way of being, that is neither French nor Algerian, but rather a melding of the two. (Orlando 869-870)

All three of these contemporary authors have produced works that respond to the uncomfortable position from which Camus wrote, that is to say feeling somehow both French and Algerian, but yet also neither one completely. Daoud and Danticat write about

spaces that can be characterized as being betwixt and between. For Danticat this space floats between the USA and Haiti. For Daoud it is more multi-faceted and compounded since the space is no longer limited to being, as it was for Camus, simply between France and (French) Algeria. Daoud's novel also responds to a homegrown in-betweenness that is the product of extremes in the politics and religion of contemporary Algeria, issues which are also wrapped up in, but not limited to, the history and fallout from France's colonial occupation. Grine's novel *CDLN*, however, is more focused on a return, a hankering powered by nostalgia, to an idealized time when Camus was alive and France still occupied Algeria and as such the in-betweenness he responds to lies between the past and the present. In this way the nostalgia in Grine's text resembles Camus's Mediterraneanism in that it is inspired by a by-gone European era. For Camus this begins with Ancient Greek culture and history; for Grine, it is the first half of the twentieth century when European mores dominated French Algerian society and culture, due to the French colonial rule. The role of nostalgia in Grine's text connects his novel even more strongly to Camus's predisposition to Mediterranean history because the definition of the word nostalgia itself also harks back to Ancient Greece and the Homeric texts. The term was applied to the exiled Odysseus who struggled relentlessly in his twenty year-long absence from his homeland. The strong drive or nostalgic feeling that propels Odysseus home forms a major part of this foundational text, which to this day is still studied for its dealings with issues of origin and identification of the self, the meaning of belonging, of home and what it is to live in exile and the suffering this causes. Homer used the term νόστος to mean return or homecoming. The word nostalgia was formed when νόστος was then joined to the Greek word ἄλγος meaning pain or ache. It was only in the seventeenth century that a Swiss

physician called Johannes Hofer coined the term officially in his medical dissertation based on his research with Swiss mercenaries who were missing their homeland while fighting in France. The meaning of nostalgia has since been understood and used in different ways from its original definition of pining for and/or missing one's home (land) as we can see through Grine's novel, since his narrator does not pine for his homeland from a place of exile, rather he hankers after a bygone time.

Additionally, Grine's, Daoud's and Danticat's novels all address exile in slightly different ways. Grine's narrator feels exiled or cut off from a better past, Daoud's narrator is exiled from the truth and Danticat writes about a more personal and literal exile experienced by artists creating outside of their homeland, sometimes at a risk to their personal safety. But, these authors all acknowledge that to know who one *is* and where one *belongs* is not always so simple and often begins from a place of knowing who one *is not* and where home *is not*.

The Welsh have a word, *hiraeth*, which has no equivalent direct translation into English or French, although there is a similar word in Breton, *hiraezh*, and there are equivalents in other languages, such as the Portuguese *saudade*. *Hiraeth* is best understood as meaning a kind of homesickness, or longing, combined with a suffering of intense nostalgia. It can also be employed when this longing is for a home one can never return to, perhaps because this home may never have existed at all. In a manner, Camus and Grine's texts can both be read as expressing *hiraeth* because the in-between space that informs Camus's writing and Grine's protagonist is built precariously upon idealism and nostalgia.

Nevertheless, while Camus's penchant for an idealized Mediterraneanism displays naivety with regard to his political discourse, the manifestation of in-betweenness in his

fiction has inspired other writers to produce illuminating work. Furthermore, the analysis of in-betweenness in *La Peste* allows us to have a richer reading and a more complex understanding of that text. Camus's vision of a new Mediterranean culture can be understood as expressing a sense of belonging to a home that never really existed, since his imagined Mediterranean cultural identity constantly floated between France and French Algeria. Camus's *hiraeth*, that is to say his pursuit of cultural identity beyond the borders of French Algeria, informs his Mediterranean thought and as these chapters have shown permeates his fiction, specifically *La Peste*. This allows readers of *La Peste* to grasp the complexity of what it means to belong, exiled or not, since the notion of belonging is itself a polymorphic concept.

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