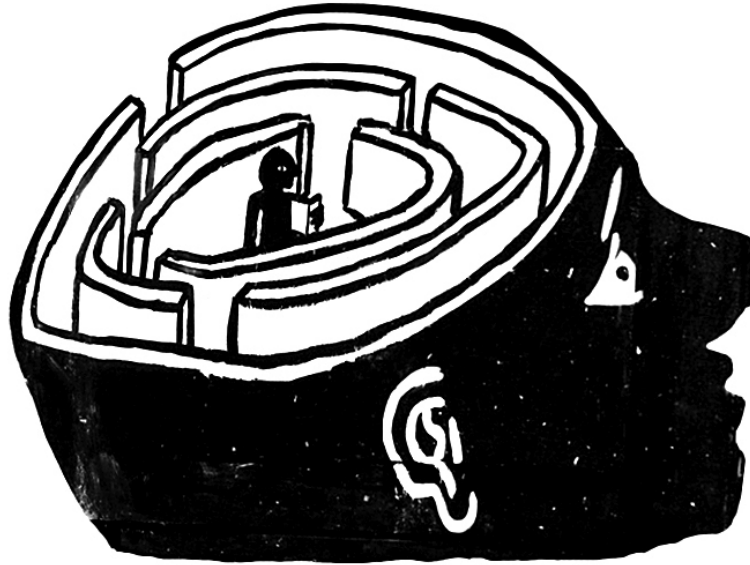


HAMISH HAMILTON PRESENTS

Five Dials



NUMBER 30

A Stranger Again

THE CAMUS ISSUE

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CURTIS GILLESPIE *The Complicated Legacy*

DEBORAH LEVY *The Death Drive*

ALBERT CAMUS *Summer in Algiers*

... Plus: rotated, distorted, warped street art & Camus's handwriting.



CONTRIBUTORS

ALBERT CAMUS was born in Mondovi, Algeria, in 1913. An avid sportsman, Camus claimed to have learned all he knew about morality and the obligations of men from football. He preferred to write whilst standing up and was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1957. While on a trip to the United States, Camus visited the New York Zoo twenty times. He was also the owner of a cat called Cigarette.

CURTIS GILLESPIE is the author of five books, including the memoirs *Almost There* and *Playing Through*, and the novel *Crown Shyness*. Gillespie has won three National Magazine Awards in Canada for his writing on politics, science and the arts. In 2010 he co-founded the award-winning narrative journalism magazine *Eighteen Bridges*, which he also edits. Like Camus, he was a football goalkeeper. He played for the University of Alberta in the early eighties.

DEBORAH LEVY is the author of many works, including, *Billy & Girl*, *The Unloved* and *Swallowing Geography*. In 2012 her novel *Swimming Home* was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize. Having trained at Darlington College of Arts, she left to become a playwright, creating work for the Royal Shakespeare Company among others. Levy was a Fellow in Creative Arts at Trinity College, Cambridge. Her most recent essay, *Things I Don't Want to Know* is a response to George Orwell's *Why I Write* and her next novel, *Hot Milk*, will be published by Hamish Hamilton in 2015.

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On Tony, on Dean, on Camus, on Algiers

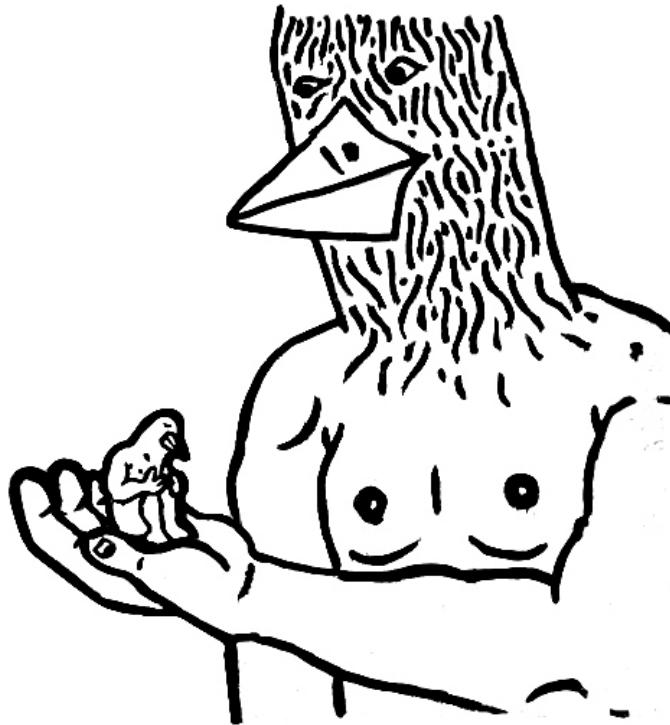
The illustrations adorning *Five Dials 30* came to us via a circuitous route. They were spray-painted on walls and tunnels and bits of concrete in Paris by a collective of Algerian-French artists known as the Zoo Project. Antonio de Luca, who takes over as *Five Dials* art director in this issue, lives for most of the year in Berlin, but while visiting Paris not too long ago he spent time in a cafe called Chez Jeannette in the 9th and began to notice the surrounding graffiti. ‘The 9th is primarily an area of French-speaking immigrants,’ he says, ‘including many from north-west Africa. The 18th is the same. I remember seeing Zoo Project murals in those areas and figured they were done by those of Algerian descent.’ He researched online and came across more of their work. The collective is mysterious; photos of new work only occasionally spring up. For de Luca, the patterns, the giant bird heads, the repetition of symbols, the ratio between figures and surface area all resemble ancient Egyptian hieroglyphic gods, both hieratic and demotic.

He was drawn to what he calls ‘the cannibalistic narratives’ of the pieces, as well as the strong graphic line of the work. ‘Only later,’ he says, ‘did I understand that the pieces were social commentaries.’

Years ago, while working at *The Walrus* magazine as its first creative director, de Luca isolated graffiti from the walls of other cities. This time he collected photographs of Zoo Project murals that complemented the themes of the three pieces in our issue: reportage by Curtis Gillespie from the streets of Algiers; an A-Z of the death drive written by the novelist Deborah Levy; and some reflections on

summer in Algiers by Camus himself.

De Luca digitally erased the creeping vines and cracked concrete of the surrounding Parisian landscape. ‘I then began to isolate the line work from its surface and the surrounding context. In a sense,’ he says, ‘it’s like restoring a mural.’ Street art is always being transformed,



erased, reshaped. Through photography, some of the Zoo Project murals have been preserved. In some cases he needed two or three photos of the same piece to restore the image. ‘I skewed,’ says de Luca. ‘I distorted, rotated, scaled, warped, merged and modified the aspect ratio to achieve an even surface. I wanted to make it look like the reader was standing dead centre, staring straight on.’

If we’re welcoming a new art director, we also must take a moment to celebrate our outgoing friend and colleague, Dean Allen, who was here from the beginning and guided us through the first 29 issues,

often making last-minute changes from the various high-speed trains of southern France. He made the final changes to our Paris issue while sitting at the Le Petit Chatelet on rue de la Bûcherie, steps away from Shakespeare and Company, while our copy-editor, Ellie, sat to his left with her red pen and told him to delete and

close up. We finished in time for the launch, though Dean’s laptop almost knocked the wine glass from the table. He was there in Cornwall when we launched an issue as the sun set behind the Five Dials stage at the Port Eliot Festival. (Laetitia Sadier pressed the button of his laptop.) He is responsible for the sparse white glow of the magazine, and because Dean is a text aficionado, he ensured the blocks of words on each page were always beautifully weighted. He is a book guy, but he’s also a tech guy, and we wish him all the best as he throws himself back into that particular world. Great advancements can come from small towns in France.

Over the years, Dean has been one of our stronger French connections. We

have another. With this issue we’ve been given the chance to celebrate our French hero, Albert Camus. The pressing question over the last few months has been: how? What’s left to be said about his centenary? Robert Zaretsky focused on Camus’s relationship with his mother in his essay in the *LA Review of Books*. In the *Times* Higher Education section, Matthew Feldman reminded us ‘he should be remembered as a leading twentieth-century intellectual, not simply humanism’s favourite quote generator.’ Over on *Public Radio International*, Claire Messud said he was ‘beautifully

idealistic and painfully out of touch with his times.’ There was praise in some places, anger in others, and also idiocy. (In our research we came across the dissatisfaction of an Amazon one-star review: ‘They sent me the wrong book,’ the customer complained, and then admonished the company: ‘It was *The Berenstain Bears Learn About Strangers*, instead of *The Stranger*. It was disappointing!!’)

Then, one day, out of the blue, we were sent a piece of reportage from Curtis Gillespie, a Canadian writer who has investigated everything from national politics to environmental policy in that frozen country, and who decided recently to travel from Edmonton to sunny Algiers to investigate the legacy of Camus.

‘I thought I’d be able to manoeuvre my way around just as I’d navigated other complicated places,’ he told us. ‘Moscow, Guatemala, Sofia, Riga, Cartagena. I’d dive in and make it happen. But Algiers was different, and I was naive to think it would be straightforward. Without my translator, Ben Ali, I’d have been lost. No one spoke English and even my rudimentary French didn’t always work because

it’s mostly the older people who speak French. It’s the same principle by which Camus is being erased; erase the French influence.’ Gillespie realized the city was a maze built on a maze overlaid with endless construction and no traffic laws. In a city of five million, where everyone seemed to own a car, he did not see a traffic light. ‘Maybe,’ he says. ‘I just missed them.’

What struck Gillespie was the gap between expectation and reality, the plain physical state of the city. He expected chaos. ‘But I suppose I was expecting a city where the chaos and differentness is exciting. In Algiers it was heartbreaking, possibly because I’d pre-romanticized it through Camus’s influence on me. The Casbah is a UNESCO world heritage site, but it’s tragic what’s happening there. I don’t just mean garbage falling out of tins and so on. I mean heaps and heaps and mounds of stinking, steaming, rotting trash strewn all over the place.’ It wasn’t that different at Tipasa, the Roman ruin. ‘I saw 2,200-year-old tile flooring, that people had clearly recently ripped chunks off of,’ says Gillespie. ‘Anyone could walk

right over it. There have been very few places I’ve ever been where the tragic history of a country is so obviously felt on the street, like that history is a shattered window every Algerian has to view their own day through. And the current degradation of the place is even harder to witness because through it all you can still see the beauty of the land and the people.’

He had undertaken the journey to ask a question: if Camus is so important, why then, is his work and legacy, and even his name, inciting factionalism in France and facing outright erasure in Algeria, and what does this mean for the rest of the world amidst a fading Arab Spring? Would this piece, he asked us, fit in *Five Dials*? We paused a moment for dramatic effect. Yes, we replied.

Alongside it you’ll find Deborah Levy’s alphabetical exploration of the death drive, which features Camus, and we even unearthed a letter, written by the man himself, to our founder, Hamish ‘Jamie’ Hamilton, in 1956. ‘Croyez,’ he signs off in his jagged hand, ‘cher monsieur, a mes sentiments les meilleurs.’ ◊

—CRAIG TAYLOR

A Stranger Again

The complicated legacy of Albert Camus. By Curtis Gillespie



The Cercle Sportif Chabab Riadhi Belouizdad, or the CRB, as it is known, is a sports club that doubles up as a coffee shop on rue Mohamed Belouizdad, one of the major Algiers thoroughfares connecting downtown to the eastern edge of the city centre. Inside the CRB, faded portraits of former and current football heroes keep watch over haphazard combinations of chairs and tables. On a Tuesday morning in late June the place was busy, though most of the patrons were old men bent over newspapers as if peering down a well. In the 1930s, the CRB was the favoured coffee shop, and favoured football club, of Albert Camus, author of works such as *The Outsider*, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, *The Rebel* and *The Plague*. The CRB is a couple of blocks from the invisible line that once separated the neighbourhood's Muslims and *pieds-noirs* (Algerians of European heritage).

Camus was a Second World War Resistance fighter, stood up against the death penalty and Stalin's terror, fought spirited intellectual battles with Jean-Paul Sartre, was dashing and seductive, won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1957, and died, at forty-six, in a violent car crash outside Paris on 4 January 1960. But before all that, he lived in this neighbourhood, on this street. Prior to Algerian independence in 1962, the neighbourhood was called Belcourt, the CRB was Cercle Sportif Chabab Athlétique Belcourt, and rue Mohamed Belouizdad was rue de Lyon. The neighbourhood demarcation line is long gone because so are the *pieds-noirs*. That isn't all that's changed. Camus's reaction to the Algerian war of independence, a vicious struggle that ran from 1954 to 1962, set his legacy moving along a different and disturbing course, in Algeria and elsewhere, with implications that reach far beyond his literary meaning. Camus has long been

beloved and discussed by writers and thinkers around the world, but I went to Algeria carrying with me the notion that he might matter more today than ever. This proved to be the case, but for reasons I could not have predicted.

I had stopped in the CRB, knowing Camus spent many a happy hour here. As I stood at the bar, three elderly gentlemen sipped mint tea at a nearby table. They were watching the world go by, silent with one another in the way that only friends of decades can be. I remarked to Ben Ali, my translator, that one of them probably knew Camus, or at least knew of his life in this neighbourhood. 'We should talk to them,' I said, half in jest.

Ben Ali took me at my word. He strode over to the men. I followed, offered to buy them a coffee and asked if they would mind if we joined them. They motioned for us to sit.

'What do you know of Albert Camus?' I asked them. 'Did any of you know him, or know of him?'

'Yes, of course. We knew of him,' said one of the gents. He looked to be about ninety years old and had only one working eye, the other milky and half shut. 'He'd moved to France by the time of the war, of course.' He was referring to the Algerian war of independence, not the Second World War. 'He was a great man. But . . .' he held up an arthritic finger, '. . . he didn't support Algerian independence.'

The man beside him, a few years younger and all bone, skin and moustache, took exception to his friend's summary. 'That doesn't matter,' he said. 'He was an Algerian, and he loved Algeria. You know that.'

'But forget about us,' said the third, a hearty man in his seventies hiding behind what I assumed were fake Ray-Bans. 'The

young people, they don't even know who Camus is.'

I expressed my surprise. 'Why would they not read his work?' 'You're misunderstanding me,' he said. 'It's not that they haven't read him. They've never even heard of him!'

I laughed. 'I'm sure that can't be true.'

The Ray-Ban man looked back to me and shrugged, as if to say, *Don't believe me if you don't want to.*

'It's not just him,' said the one-eyed man, shaking a finger at me. 'They've never heard of any of the original freedom fighters, either.'

'Why?' I asked. 'Why aren't the young students of today taught about Camus, or about the others? And who do you mean by "they"?''

All three men collectively waved a dismissive hand towards the capital's central district, indicating the Bouteflika government that Ben Ali had labelled comically criminal and nakedly corrupt within five minutes of our meeting at the airport the day before. 'They want the glory,' said the moustache man. 'They don't want anyone else to get the credit for Algeria becoming Algeria.'

'Anyway, every revolution eats its young,' added the one-eyed man. 'I didn't make that up. But it's true. It's not just Camus, you see. It's all of them, even on the independence side.'

'Where did Camus live? I know where he went to school,' I said, pointing up the hill, towards the old *piéd-noir* quarter, 'but what about when he was working at *Alger Républicain* in the

Economist Intelligence Unit, but it is given a free pass in most geopolitical circles for two reasons: first, as bad as the regime of President Abdelaziz Bouteflika is, it's probably preferable to an Islamist state; and, second, Algeria possesses the world's eighth-largest oil supply and has forged links with major multinational oil firms and oil-thirsty nations.

Algeria's political and physical reality is a reflection of its psyche. The country grapples with its post-colonial legacy, trying to discover itself in the aftermath of French imperialism, the violent civil war of the 1990s and recent waves of Islamic radicalism. Street by devastated street, depending on which alley of the maze you turn down, Algiers can seem like Beirut, Marseille or Cairo; but never does the city, or the country, feel as if it actually knows what it is or wants to be. It is experiencing not just off-the-rack turmoil, but a full-bore existential crisis.

Which is fitting, because 7 November 2013 was the centenary of the birth of Albert Camus, who, along with Sartre, turned the word 'existentialism' into common global parlance (despite the fact that Camus argued until his death that he was not an existentialist). Camus lived a life of authentic moral deliberation, and this was never more the case than when he tried to understand his relationship to the land of his birth. For him the ideas of *Algeria* and *justice* were forever linked – philosophically, dramatically and literally. In his essay 'Summer in Algiers',

'But . . . ' he held up an arthritic finger, ' . . . he didn't support Algerian independence.'

thirties? Didn't he move back to Belcourt?'

The Ray-Ban man pointed to a building across the street. From my seat inside the cafe I could see it was a typical three-storey Algiers walk-up, with the requisite crumbling concrete facade, tattered striped curtains hanging in front of rusting window grates, and a battery of satellite dishes on the roof. 'Second floor,' he said. 'The window above the blue door.'

When we stood up to leave, I thanked the men in turn and offered to buy them another coffee, which they politely refused. I shook their hands. The Ray-Ban man held my hand a beat longer. 'You ask,' he said. 'Just ask.'

I held his hand. 'About what?'

'Ask the young ones. Ask them about Camus.'

Algiers is heaving and crumbling at the same time. The five million residents who walk its wide colonial boulevards and labyrinthine Casbah alleyways are forced with almost every footfall to step over broken stone and tile, random piles of dirt and rock, and heaps of loose and sometimes even bagged trash. The garbage – the stench, the flies, the decay, the degrading volume of it – is heartbreaking, since at times it can feel as if the entire city is not just dirty, but rotting, which is an apt metaphor. Algeria was ranked 132nd out of 167 countries and labelled 'authoritarian' in the 2010 Democracy Index conducted by the

published in the mid 1930s in a collection entitled *Nuptials*, Camus wrote:

One realizes that he is born of this country where everything is given to be taken away . . . To feel one's attachment to a certain region, one's love for a certain group of men, to know that there is always a spot where one's heart will feel at peace – these are many certainties for a single human life. And yet this is not enough. But at certain moments everything yearns for that spiritual home . . . It is not always easy to be a man, still less to be a pure man. But being pure is recovering that spiritual home where one can feel one's pulse-beats coincide with the violent throbbing of the two o'clock sun. It is well known that one's native land is always recognized at the moment of losing it.

Today, as the Arab Spring tracks a fitful path around the Mediterranean, as southern Europe remains in fiscal crisis, as radical Islam sinks roots into stable as well as unstable countries, as global moral resolve flickers in the wind of corporate returns, as drone wars are fought like video games, in these times it would have seemed appropriate, even essential, to believe that Algerian youth would be inspired by Camus's direct message, real heroism and uncontestable love for the land of his birth. And that the rest

of us would be lending an ear to his counsel that individual moral reflection conducted with constraint and humility is the only viable response to the fanaticism of mass revolution. In these times, it would seem both right and logical that these should be among the modern testaments to the work and life of Camus.

But it's not quite turning out that way, at least not in Algeria. Which was what the Ray-Ban man wanted to impress upon me.

After leaving the CRB, I walked the streets of east central Algiers for a couple hours. It was a sensory assault: squalid apartment blocks, grubby businesses, pop-up kebab stands, blanket-square sellers hawking toiletries, people yelling frantically from one side of the street to the other – all of it amidst a crush of traffic, always traffic, frenzied chaotic lawless traffic under a cloud of exhaust fumes. It was hard to imagine that this was once the elegant French colonial boulevard where Camus had lived, first at 17 rue de Lyons, then at 93 and then across from the CRB at 124.

In front of an electronics shop, I saw two young men loitering as if waiting for a third friend. They were in their early twenties and tidily dressed. I approached them. Ben Ali introduced us, explained what I was doing. It turned out they were in university and spoke rudimentary English. I asked them what they were studying.

'I'm studying law,' said the thinner of the two. 'I want to be a judge.' He pointed at his friend. 'He's studying arts.'

His friend smiled. 'I want to teach. A teacher.' He patted his open palm against his chest, as if to say, *That'll be me.*

I smiled. 'How old are you?'

'Twenty-three,' said the law student. He pointed at his friend. 'Twenty.'

'I'm here writing about Albert Camus,' I said to them. 'The writer. He was born here. He lived just over there.' I pointed back towards the CRB. 'He won the Nobel Prize. I'm curious what you think of him, of Albert Camus.'

The law student, the future judge, gave me a puzzled look. 'Who?'

'Albert Camus,' I said. 'He wrote *L'Étranger*. *La Chute*. He grew up right here.'

He spoke briefly to his friend, who shrugged. 'We don't know that name.' He smiled politely. 'I'm sorry. You say he was a writer?'

'Yes,' I said. 'He was *pied-noir*, but people think of him as one of Algeria's, and France's, greatest writers. Did you not study him in school?'

'No.'

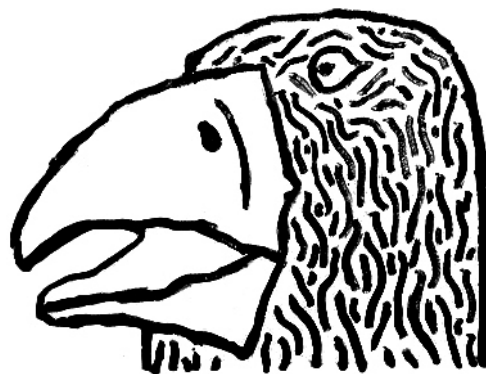
'You're missing something quite incredible,' I said. 'He's a powerful writer.'

The two young men smiled again, almost nervously now, as if partly embarrassed by not knowing and partly irritated by a foreigner pointing out their not knowing. 'We're sorry,' said the law student. 'He wasn't part of our curriculum, in school or university. It's not a name we're familiar with.'

Albert Camus's philosophy was humane and inclusive; even with his most bitter 'enemies' he sought common ground, that ground being that we are all consigned to the same struggle of trying to make sense of this life, and that we are all doomed

to fail. But it is the struggle that matters, because in that struggle lies our equality, our shared grace, our nobility. Algeria may not currently be at the forefront of the world's attention, but it is a depth charge that has already been released; when it will explode is difficult to say, but it *will* explode. Camus could not have predicted how many millions would die en route to creating Algeria, but in the 1950s he knew in his heart there was no right answer. He could not support France's repressive colonialism, yet he was revolted by the violence of the rebels. In 1957, while in Oslo to accept his Nobel Prize, a student in the crowd noisily hectored him for not publicly supporting Algerian independence. 'People are now planting bombs in the tramways of Algiers,' Camus said from the stage. 'My mother might be on one of those tramways. If that is justice, then I prefer my mother.'

Camus had become despondent over the conflict. He couldn't choose *yes* and he couldn't choose *no*, and that silence became his choice, which was then and since often and inaccurately characterized as an otherwise powerful political and philosophical voice failing to be heard when it counted most. In fact, Camus's silence was the strongest defence of justice he could invoke, since the only other option was to choose between what he saw as two injustices. In a letter to *Le Monde* he wrote clarifying some points from his encounter with the young student in Oslo, published a couple of days after the fact, Camus wrote that he felt more kinship with the Muslim student who shouted at him than with those 'Frenchmen who talk about Algeria without knowing it'. Camus wrote that he could see in the face of that young Algerian not hatred, but 'despair and unhappiness. I share



that unhappiness: his is the face of my country.' And Camus's 'silence' was, moreover, only a public refusal to choose sides. We know now that in the latter half of the 1950s, Camus intervened in over 150 cases by appealing to the French government for clemency with Arab prisoners facing imprisonment or execution, and although many of the letters were ignored, in some cases his intervention saved an Arab life. Camus's silence was active, not passive, a statement rather than a debilitation – it was an expression of sorrow, an expression of comprehension, an unwillingness to submit to the 'either/or' question as posed. The American historian Robert Zaretsky has noted that Camus's brand of silence was in fact a refusal 'to surrender his loyalty to *both* communities', namely, the *pieds-noirs* and the Arabs

'Ask the young ones. Ask them about Camus.'

and Berbers.

I put some of these ideas and questions to the well-known Algerian novelist Hamid Grine, as we sat in the tea room of the Hotel Al-Djaizir, known prior to Arabization as the Hotel St George (and which was, ironically, the very hotel where Camus stayed in 1956, when, risking his life, he travelled to Algiers to try to broker peace between the rebels and *pieds-noirs*).

'It's quite simple,' said Grine, once we had tea in front of us. 'The issue is that Camus is a great artist but can never be an Algerian hero. He did not support independence in 1954 or at any time.'

But, I asked, was it not relevant that he consistently wrote about his love for Algeria, for the country, and that he worked for peace between Algeria and France. I referenced the 1956 lecture and debate, reminding Grine that Camus had stayed in this very hotel.

'Yes, of course, but you're missing the point in some ways, if you'll forgive me for saying so.' He paused. 'Camus always called for dialogue, for peace, for reason, yes, but always with Algeria within France. He wanted peace, but that peace meant France keeping Algeria. For that reason, he can never be an Algerian hero.'

I told Grine of meeting with the old men in the CRB, of speaking with the students on rue Mohamed Belouizdad. 'Does he have to be a hero? Can he simply not be a valued part of Algeria's cultural heritage?'

'If we judge him as a Frenchman in Algeria rather than as an Algerian, then perhaps we can be more tolerant. But he was a

foreigner. He had no Algerian friends. He passed through here. Algeria asked him to take a stand, please take a stand. But he didn't. If he had, he'd be 200 per cent loved here.'

'But does that mean his literary achievement should be forgotten here?' I said. 'So much of his work is about his love for Algeria.'

'It was a complex time. I understand Camus. I do,' said Grine, who became emotional as we spoke. He took off his glasses and wiped them slowly. 'Independence was going to cut him in half and he knew it. But his connection with Algeria was never with Algerians, it was with the land, with his mother. He was actually a very sentimental man. But he just couldn't ever see himself carrying an Algerian passport. I'm not saying what's happening to him here is right. I'm just telling you why it's happening. If it was up to me, I would name a street after him or name his first school the Lycée Albert Camus.' Grine picked up his tea, took a sip, shrugged. 'But it won't happen.'

The next day, back in Belouizdad, in the industrial area near the dockyards and factories, I came across a schoolyard football pitch. A dozen youths were playing a half-field pick-up game. They looked about sixteen years old. I stopped to watch. After about ten minutes, the players took a break and gathered around one end of the pitch. I approached them. We chatted for a minute. I asked what level of school they were in: the equivalent of Grade 11 or Year 12.





‘What sort of subjects are you studying?’

Maths, science, history, they told me, jostling for position to get close, laughing and elbowing one another. I was foreign and spoke English, which made me a rare sighting for them.

‘Literature?’ I said.

Oh yes, they replied. ‘We have to read all the time.’ One of them rolled his eyes.

‘And do you study Camus?’ I asked. ‘Albert Camus?’

I was met by a dozen blank stares. ‘He is translated around the world,’ I told the boys. ‘Every country in the world reads Camus . . . He played football as a boy, the same age as you, right here, right in this very spot and around Algiers. He was a goalkeeper.’

They liked that. ‘Who did he play for?’ one of them asked.

‘Racing Universitaire d’Alger,’ I said, ‘and the CRB was called Chabab Athlétique Belcourt back then.’

More stares.

‘Anyway, what do you know about Camus? Do your teachers talk about him?’

No, they said. One or two of the boys began to break off the back of the pack and drift away. ‘What did he do again?’ said one near the front.

‘He was a writer, a novelist, a philosopher.’ I wasn’t too surprised to hear a group of secondary-school students hadn’t read Camus; perhaps Russians of the same age would not have read Tolstoy, or Americans Hemingway. But I suppose part of me thought the name ‘Camus’ would at least create a spark of recognition. ‘He’s studied around the world,’ I added.

‘Not here!’ joked one boy.

‘Yeah,’ said another. ‘He’s not on the programme.’

I laughed with them. ‘So who *is* on the programme?’

‘Not him!’

The boys ran off, laughing, turning around and waving as they left the pitch.

I left Belouizdad and turned inland, up into the massive stair-cased hills that move inland off the Algiers waterfront. The city has a dramatic setting and it’s not hard to imagine that in a different

time, in a different political climate, Algiers could be another Rio de Janeiro or Barcelona. After driving for an hour through the maze of an upscale neighbourhood called Hydra, I eventually found my way to Éditions Barzakh, a literary publishing house specializing in younger Algerian authors.

‘It’s bad for Camus here now,’ Sofiane Hadjadj, the Barzakh director, told me once we were seated in his stylish office. ‘But it’s important to say this is not just about Camus. He only represents the bigger problem we have here in Algeria. Part of the question is deciding who is an Algerian. We forget that we have been a hub for millennia. We are forgetting our history. We need new young Algerians to open this debate, to ask how we deal with memory and identity.’

Hadjadj drew comparisons between Camus and Messali Hadj, one of the fathers of independence, who was himself squeezed out of that movement, out of the political sphere and ultimately out of the country. He died in Paris in 1974, an exile, simply because he believed in seeking a less violent transition from French rule. His party lost out, and he is in many ways, says Hadjadj, the political equivalent of Camus: one of history’s losers.

‘It’s true that Camus is not widely read here,’ said Hadjadj. ‘In some ways we are proud of him, but he never did use the word “independence” in relation to Algeria. And we must remember that he died so young. He might have changed his mind. We don’t know.’

As I prepared to leave, Hadjadj asked that we remember Mouloud Feraoun, who published his ‘Letter of an Algerian Muslim to Albert Camus’ during the height of the Algerian conflict. Feraoun remained a friend to Camus throughout, and considered his death a tragedy. One of the fathers of Algerian literature, Feraoun was martyred when the French OAS captured and assassinated him in 1962. Feraoun gave his life to Algeria, Hadjadj told me, yet he was able to remain a friend to Camus to the end. ‘This is not insignificant,’ he said.

I thought of those words – ‘to the end’ – as I drove back to central Algiers. Algeria was a political question for Camus, but

it was also intensely personal, and he was grappling with it while preoccupied with many other issues: challenging Stalin and Communism, breaking with Sartre, coping with writer's block, working on *The Fall*, dealing with the hostile reception to *The Rebel*. His personal life was in turmoil, and he was increasingly worried about the safety of his blind and ageing mother, who refused to leave her Belcourt apartment. We must also remember that he was still a young man at the time, just forty when the conflict began in 1954. He was not trying to find an expedient solution, but rather was working his way through to an answer that would last another forty years and another forty lifetimes.

He never found that answer. Nor did anyone else. As Camus got older, it became ever clearer that the Algeria of his youth was gone and there was nothing he could do to bring it back.

An hour south-west of Algiers along the coastal highway are the Roman ruins of Tipasa, a UNESCO World Heritage site suffocating under the rot of garbage and neglect (in much the same ways as the Algiers Casbah, another UNESCO site). Near the main crossroads of the ancient Roman city – where Camus often came to sit and think – I was approached by a young couple who overheard me speaking English. The young man was twenty-four. He was small, dark, with a shy smile and a little English. He proudly told us they were engaged. The young

his most famous book,' she said. 'I am going to find it.'

'*L'Étranger*,' I said.

'The Outsider,' she said, translating to English. 'Thank you. Yes. He must be a great Algerian.' She paused. 'Should we not know about him?' Sadness occupied her face, an expression her hijab made all the more pointed and poignant. For a moment, it seemed tears were going to fill her gazelle eyes. 'Thank you. Au revoir. Saha.'

I continued through the ruins. On the western edge was the headland overlooking the bay of Tipasa and the mountains of Chenoua, which Camus stared at from that very promontory. It was a site, and a sight, etched on his soul. So important was this spot to Camus that the year after his death some friends erected a humble monument in his honour, a small stela, about five feet high. On it are inscribed words from his early lyrical essay 'Nuptials at Tipasa':

Je comprends ici ce qu'on appelle gloire, le droit d'aimer sans mesure.

Here I understand that which is called glory: the right to love without measure.

I went back to town, to the harbour. Astonishingly, as I walked along rue Frères Belouandja towards the pier, a painting

'Camus is a great artist but can never be an Algerian hero.'

lady, whose English was perfect, told me she was twenty-two years old. She wore full Islamic cover except for her face, which featured what the Algerians call 'gazelle eyes' – her irises were such a golden honey colour that they tinted the air in front of her. We chatted about the ruins, about Algeria. I asked her what she did, and she told me she was doing her Masters in Literature at the University of Blida, a large town about an hour south of Algiers.

'You're doing a Masters in Literature,' I said. 'You must know of Albert Camus, then. What do you think of his work? Do you think it's important to Algeria?'

She gave me a puzzled look. 'Who is this? Albert Camus?' She turned to her fiancé for explanation. He furrowed his dark brow.

I explained that Camus was one of the world's most influential writers, translated in over one hundred languages. That he won the Nobel Prize in 1957. That he was born and raised in Algeria. That he sat – *right over there*, I pointed – on that promontory, as a young man, to imagine his future. That he loved Algeria and had had his heart ripped out during the war of independence. I told her that he died in a car accident in 1960 at the age of forty-six.

She stared at me for a moment. 'Why do we not know about him?' she said. 'Why don't our teachers tell us about him?'

'I don't know,' I said. 'Perhaps it's political.'

She nodded. 'Yes, I think that must be it. Tell me the name of

of Camus appeared on a sidewalk slat board. Above his likeness were the words 'Restaurant Albert Camus'. I spoke with a couple of the patrons, asked if the owner was around. A couple of minutes later a man came out, shook my hand, introduced himself as 'the Captain' and told me that the owner was away on holiday, but that it didn't matter anyway, because he knew far more about this place than the owner.

'Why's that?' I asked.

He smiled. 'Because I've been working here and there in this harbour for seventy years.'

The Captain, who looked to be about eighty-five years old, sported a large belly under a sailor's shirt. He showed me into a back room with sofas and low tables, where Camus and his friends would smoke and drink and talk philosophy and art.

'He sat right there,' said the Captain. 'That's why we named this restaurant after him a few years ago. He spent a lot of time here. It was a house then, a sculptor's house. Camus was his friend.'

'Do the people who eat here know who Camus was?' I asked.

He shook his head. 'I doubt it. Some, perhaps.'

I explained to the Captain that since arriving I'd found that young Algerians had no idea who Camus was and that it appeared he was being erased because he hadn't supported Algerian independence. I told the Captain that one intellectual

I'd spoken to had said, 'Yes, Camus loved Algeria, but he didn't love Algerians.' Meaning 'Arabs'. 'Quite untrue,' said the Captain.

He told me that he witnessed Camus become enraged one day at the harbour, where he and his friends used to dive off the pier. Someone from the French authority had put up a new sign. 'It was right at the entrance to the pier,' said the Captain. 'It read, "It is forbidden for Arabs to swim here." Camus was furious when he saw that sign. He ripped it right off the post and threw it in the garbage. I saw it. I watched him do that, and then he looked at me and asked me to go and buy him some cigarettes from the market. He was always asking me to go buy him cigarettes. I'm sure I wasn't eight years old.' The Captain paused a moment, then winched out of his memory whatever it was he'd been seeking. 'Camelia Sports,' he said. 'That was the cigarette he smoked.' This brand of cigarette had a football as its logo.

The Captain finished by telling us of the time Camus gathered a group of Arabs together in the same area, the Tipasa harbour, to encourage them to build their own mosque. It made me think of Camus's 'Letter to an Algerian Militant', published in 1955 in the *Communauté Algérienne*, a progressive newspaper aimed at halting the growing tensions. Camus was ostensibly writing to the publisher Aziz Kessous. 'I am with you one hundred per cent, my dear Kessous,' wrote Camus. 'I want to believe with all my

whose life and philosophy could still speak to both the secular west and Islamic Arabs. Alice Kaplan, in her preface to the new edition of Camus's 1958 book *Algerian Chronicles* (a collection of articles and essays he'd previously published), wrote that 'giving speech to anger and helplessness and injustice is the task Camus set for himself' by publishing the book. 'His sense of impending loss,' she wrote, 'his horror of terror, even his vacillations, endow the book with an uncanny relevance.'

There do remain embers of optimism, signs here and there that his legacy could still yet be widely celebrated in Algeria. The Algerian writer Assia Djebar, exiled in New York City, has written poignantly of Camus's value to Algeria. There will be a presidential election in 2014 and the writer Yasmina Khadra announced his nomination on 2 November 2013 – Khadra has said in public lectures that *L'Étranger* is 'the greatest novel of the twentieth century'. He has also criticized Camus for not speaking about Algeria 'in its full diversity', and has said that in his own work he has 'tried to show that Algeria is a history, a saga, a bravery, a valour, an intelligence, a generosity. All those beautiful things that Camus failed to see. I've always wished to tell him that, despite the greatness of your talent, you've been unfair to the Algerian.' For all that, adds Khadra, 'We continue to love him. He's a great writer of Algeria. He's our only Nobel Prize winner.' The simple use of the word 'our' is of no little value,

'He'd sit there like that for hours, just watching, smoking, writing. Watching, smoking, writing.'

heart that peace will dawn on our fields, our mountains and our shores, and that Arabs and Frenchmen, reconciled in liberty and justice, will try hard to forget the bloodshed that divides them today. On that day, we who are together exiles in hatred and despair will together regain our native land.'

The Captain took us outside and showed us an old pock-marked Roman block, a ruin poached decades earlier from the ancient site nearby. It was a simple rectangular shape, about the size of a small refrigerator. A restaurant sign sat on top of it. 'Camus used to sit on this block and watch the harbour and the people and the waves and the weather. The rock was on its side then.' He indicated the block laid out like a sofa. 'See these holes?' He pointed at a variety of small openings and fissures in the rock. 'He'd stub his cigarette out in this one and prop his pen in this other one. He'd sit there like that for hours, just watching, smoking, writing. Watching, smoking, writing.'

Albert Camus was a womanizer, a fretter and took offence easily. But his life is studded with demonstrations of genuine courage under pressure. Given his example and the manner in which he often put his life on the line to fight injustice, had Camus lived out a fuller life he might have become an intellectual and moral symbol of the order of Nelson Mandela or Vaclav Havel, perhaps even a unifying figure in the Arab world, a man

though the odds of a writer winning a presidential election in a country with, at best, a flawed democratic record, is unlikely.

The Algerian government's apparent, and unspoken, policy of gradual and undramatic erasure of Camus is not due simply to his refusal to say *yes* to Algerian independence then, but because his ideas remain a threat now. These ideas are, in their own way, one element of a plague the current regime wants to eradicate, using chauvinism as the inoculating agent. Ideas such as those expressed in his essay 'Return to Tipasa', written before the start of the war of independence. Camus returned to Algeria from time to time after the Second World War, in the dark days of early Stalinism, his Parisian battles with Sartre, his own artistic block and his growing realization that Algeria was reaching a crisis point. At times in this essay, he is ostensibly speaking of Europe's troubles, but it's clear that he is in many ways prefiguring the turmoil to come in the land he loved:

Violence and hatred dry up the heart itself; the long fight for justice exhausts the love that nevertheless gave birth to it. In the clamour in which we live, love is impossible and justice does not suffice. This is why Europe hates daylight and is only able to set injustice up against injustice. But in order to keep justice from shrivelling up like a beautiful orange fruit containing nothing but a bitter, dry pulp, I discovered once

more at Tipasa that one must keep intact in oneself a freshness, a cool well-spring of joy, love the day that escapes injustice, and return to combat having won the light. Here I recaptured the old beauty, a young sky . . . In the middle of winter, I at last discovered that there was in me an invincible summer . . . In the difficult hour we are living, what else can we desire than to exclude nothing and to learn how to braid with white thread and black thread a single cord stretched to the breaking point?

It would take a mind of the purest literalism to miss that Camus is talking about the dark clouds he sees massing on Algeria's horizon. And that the only way forward is through braiding white and black, through shared strength. If Camus's work remains as vital as ever, his political significance has never been more relevant. Yet in the country that might benefit most from his message of justice and acceptance of the other, he is instead in danger of being culturally disappeared.

Fatéma Bakhāï, once a lawyer but now a respected Oranian novelist, addressed and embodied this contradiction when I spoke to her over the phone from Algiers. I asked her why Camus cannot be embraced by Algerians, and why he is being scrubbed from the country's cultural memory. 'Well, that is wrong, and is not what should be happening,' said the thoughtful Bakhāï. 'Of course, he was a great humanist, a pacifist.

'Isn't that something that should be celebrated?' I said. 'Can Algeria not make a hero out of someone who was in an impossible situation?'

She paused. 'That's not the point. He had Algeria in his blood.

But Camus never learned Arabic or Berber, and although he saw what colonialism was doing to Algerians, he never touched it with his own hand. He was never an Algerian, he was always an Algérie-Française. For him, it was always about Algeria within France, never about Algeria without France. For him Algeria only began in 1830 when France colonized it. He never said *yes* to Algeria as Algeria.'

'But he was paralysed in the 1950s. He couldn't choose one side or the other.'

'Which became his choice. The wrong choice.'

I was silent for a moment.

'Still,' said Bakhāï, sensing perhaps that I perceived her words as harsh. 'Should we study him? Yes. He should be read here, I think. But that is all.'

I mentioned that another writer, who I didn't name, had suggested that Camus's first school should be called the Lyceé Albert Camus. I asked her if there should one day be a square or boulevard in Algiers named after Camus, even if only to spark the curiosity of Algerian youth.

'*Jamais!*' she said. 'There are too many who gave their lives for Algeria who we should honour first.'

I thanked her for her time, wished her well. I left Algiers the next day. As the plane arced up and over the bay before heading out across the Mediterranean, I could see the entire sprawling city from my window seat. It seemed less troubled, less chaotic, almost serene, a place easier to imagine as the one Camus had loved so much. But Bakhāï's words leapt back into my head. There had been so little hesitation, such intensity. *Jamais!* Never!

L'Étranger indeed. ◇



Summer in Algiers

by *Albert Camus*

For Jacques Heurgon

The loves we share with a city are often secret loves. Old walled towns like Paris, Prague, and even Florence are closed in on themselves and hence limit the world that belongs to them. But Algiers (together with certain other privileged places such as cities on the sea) opens to the sky like a mouth or a wound. In Algiers one loves the commonplace: the sea at the end of every street, a certain volume of sunlight, the beauty of the race. And, as always, in that unashamed offering there is a secret fragrance. In Paris it is possible to be homesick for space and a beating of wings. Here, at least, man is gratified in every wish and, sure of his desires, can at last measure his possessions.

Probably one has to live in Algiers for some time in order to realize how paralyzing an excess of nature's bounty can be. There is nothing here for whoever would learn, educate himself, or better himself. This country has no lessons to teach. It neither promises nor affords glimpses. It is satisfied to give, but in abundance. It is completely accessible to the eyes, and you know it the moment you enjoy it. Its pleasures are without remedy and its joys without hope. Above all, it requires clairvoyant souls – that is, without solace. It insists upon one's performing an act of lucidity as one performs an act of faith. Strange country that gives the man it nourishes both his splendour and his misery! It is not surprising that the sensual riches granted to a sensitive man of these regions should coincide with the most extreme destitution. No truth fails to carry with it its bitterness. How can one be surprised, then, if I never feel more affection for the face of this country than amidst its poorest men?

During their entire youth men find here a life in proportion to their beauty. Then, later on, the downhill slope and obscurity. They wagered on the flesh, but knowing they were to lose. In Algiers whoever is young and alive finds sanctuary and occasion for triumphs everywhere: in the bay, the sun, the red and white games on the seaward terraces, the flowers and sports stadiums, the cool-legged girls. But for whoever has lost his youth there is nothing to cling to and nowhere where melancholy can escape itself. Elsewhere, Italian terraces, European cloisters, or the profile of the Provençal hills – all places where man can flee his humanity and gently liberate himself from himself. But everything here calls for solitude and the blood of young men. Goethe on his deathbed calls for light and this is a historic remark. At Belcourt and Bab-el-Oued old men seated in the depths of cafés listen to the bragging of young men with plastered hair.

Summer betrays these beginnings and ends to us in Algiers. During those months the city is deserted. But the poor remain and the sky. We join the former as they go down towards the harbour and man's treasures: warmth of the water and the brown bodies of women. In the evening, sated with such wealth, they return to the oilcloth and kerosene-lamp that constitute the whole setting of their life.

In Algiers no one says 'go for a swim' but rather 'indulge in a swim'. The implications are clear. People swim in the harbour and go to rest on the buoys. Anyone who passes near a buoy where a pretty girl is sunning herself shouts to his friends: 'I tell you it's a seagull.' These are healthy amusements. They must obviously constitute the ideal of those youths since most of them continue the same

life in the winter, undressing every day at noon for a frugal lunch in the sun. Not that they have read the boring sermons of the nudists, those Protestants of the flesh (there is a theory of the body quite as tiresome as that of the mind). But they are simply 'comfortable in the sunlight'. The importance of this custom for our epoch can never be overestimated. For the first time in two thousand years the body has appeared naked on beaches. For twenty centuries men have striven to give decency to Greek insolence and naïveté, to diminish the flesh and complicate dress. Today, despite that history, young men running on Mediterranean beaches repeat the gestures of the athletes of Delos. And living thus among bodies and through one's body one becomes aware that it has its connotations, its life and, to risk nonsense, a psychology of its own.¹ The body's evolution, like that of the mind, has its history, its vicissitudes, its progress and its deficiency. With this distinction, however: colour. When you frequent the beach in summer you become aware of a simultaneous progression of all skins from white to golden to tanned, ending up in a tobacco-colour which marks the extreme limit of the effort of transformation of which the body is capable. Above the harbour stands the set of white cubes of the Kasbah. When you are at water-level, against the sharp white background of the Arab town the bodies describe a copper-coloured frieze. And, as the month of August progresses and the sun grows, the white of the houses becomes more blinding and skins take on a darker warmth. How can one fail to participate then in that dialogue of stone and flesh in tune with the sun and seasons? The whole morning has been spent in diving, in bursts of laughter amid splashing water, in vigorous paddles around the red and black freighters (those from Norway with all the scents of wood, those that come from Germany full of the smell of oil, those that go up and down the coast and smell of wine and old casks). At the hour when the sun overflows from every corner of the sky at once, the orange

¹ May I take the ridiculous position of saying that I do not like the way Gide exalts the body? He asks it to restrain its desire to make it keener. Thus he comes dangerously near to those who in brothel-slang are called involved or brainworkers. Christianity also wants to suspend desire. But, more natural, it sees a mortification in this. My friend, Vincent, who is a cooper and junior breast-stroke champion, has an even clearer view. He drinks when he is thirsty, if he desires a woman tries to go to bed with her, and would marry her if he loved her (this hasn't yet happened). Afterwards he always says: 'I feel better' – and this sums up vigorously any apology that might be made for satiety.

canoe loaded with brown bodies brings us home in a mad race. And when, having suddenly interrupted the cadenced beat of the double paddle's bright-coloured wings, we glide slowly in the calm water of the inner harbour, how can I fail to feel that I am piloting through the smooth waters a savage cargo of gods, in whom I recognize my brothers?

But at the other end of the city summer is already offering us by way of contrast its other riches: I mean its silences and its boredom. That silence is not always of the same quality, depending on whether it springs from the shade or the sunlight. There is the silence of noon on the Place du Gouvernement. In the shade of the trees surrounding it Arabs sell for five sous glasses of iced lemonade flavoured with orange-flowers. Their cry 'Cool, cool', can be heard across the empty square. After their cry silence again falls under the burning sun: in the vendor's jug the ice moves and I can hear its tinkle.

absorbed in the air. Almost immediately afterwards appears the first star that had been seen taking shape and consistency in the depth of the sky. And then suddenly, all consuming, night. What exceptional quality do the fugitive Algerian evenings possess to be able to release so many things in me? I haven't time to tire of that sweetness they leave on my lips before it has disappeared into night. Is this the secret of its persistence? This country's affection is overwhelming and furtive. But during the moment it is present one's heart at least surrenders completely to it. At Padovani Beach the dance hall is open every day. And in that huge rectangular box with its entire side open to the sea, the poor young people of the neighbourhood dance until evening. Often I used to await there a moment of exceptional beauty. During the day the hall is protected by sloping wooden awnings. When the sun goes down they are raised. Then the hall is filled with an odd green light born

hair and when she would throw back her swelling breast, I would hear her laugh and see her partner's profile suddenly plunge forward. I owe to such evenings the idea I have of innocence. In any case I learn not to separate these creatures bursting with violent energy from the sky where their desires whirl.

In the neighbourhood movies in Algiers, peppermint lozenges are sometimes sold with, stamped in red, all that is necessary to the awakening of love: (1) questions: 'When will you marry me?' 'Do you love me?' and (2) replies: 'Madly', 'Next Spring'. After having prepared the way you pass them to your neighbour who answers likewise or else turns a deaf ear. At Belcourt marriages have been arranged this way and whole lives been pledged by the mere exchange of peppermint lozenges. And this really depicts the childlike people of this region.

The distinguishing mark of youth is

But, above all, there is the silence of summer evenings

There is the silence of the siesta. In the streets of the Marine, in front of the dirty barber shops it can be measured in the melodious buzzing of flies behind the hollow reed curtains. Elsewhere, in the Moorish cafés of the Kasbah the body is silent, unable to tear itself away, to leave the glass of tea and rediscover time with the pulsing of its own blood. But, above all, there is the silence of summer evenings.

Those brief moments when day topples into night must be peopled with secret signs and summonses for my Algiers to be so closely linked to them. When I spend some time far from that town, I imagine its twilights as promises of happiness. On the hills above the city there are paths among the mastics and olive-trees. And towards them my heart turns at such moments. I see flights of black birds rise against the green horizon. In the sky suddenly divested of its sun something relaxes. A whole little nation of red clouds stretches out until it is

of the double shell of the sky and the sea. When one is seated far from the windows, one sees only the sky and, silhouetted against it, the faces of the dancers passing in succession. Sometimes a waltz is being played and, against the green background, the black profiles whirl obstinately like those cut-out silhouettes that are attached to a phonograph's turntable. Night comes rapidly after this and with it the lights. But I am unable to relate the thrill and secrecy that subtle instant holds for me. I recall at least a magnificent tall girl who had danced all the afternoon. She was wearing a jasmine garland on her tight blue dress, wet with perspiration from the small of her back to her legs. She was laughing as she danced and throwing back her head. As she passed the tables, she left behind her a mingled scent of flowers and flesh. When evening came, I could no longer see her body pressed tight to her partner, but against the sky whirled alternating spots of white jasmine and black

perhaps a magnificent vocation for facile joys. But above all it is a haste to live that borders on waste. At Belcourt, as at Babel-Oued, people get married young. They go to work early and in ten years exhaust the experience of a lifetime. A thirty-year-old workman has already played all the cards in his hand. He awaits the end between his wife and his children. His joys have been sudden and merciless, as has been his life. One realizes that he is born of this country where everything is given to be taken away. In that plenty and profusion life follows the sweep of great passions, sudden, exacting, and generous. It is not to be built up but to be burned up. Stopping to think and becoming better are out of the question. The notion of hell, for instance, is merely a funny joke here. Such imaginings are allowed only to the very virtuous. And I really think that virtue is a meaningless word in all Algeria. Not that these men lack principles. They have their code and a very special one.

You are not disrespectful to your mother. You see that your wife is respected in the street. You show consideration for a pregnant woman. You don't double up on an adversary, because 'that looks bad'. Whoever does not observe these elementary commandments, 'is not a man', and the question is decided. This strikes me as fair and strong. There are still many of us who automatically observe this code of the street, the only disinterested one I know. But at the same time the shopkeeper's ethics are unknown. I have always seen faces around me filled with pity at the sight of a man between two policemen. And, before knowing whether the man had stolen, killed his father, or was merely a nonconformist, they would say: 'the poor fellow' or else, with a hint of admiration: 'he's a pirate, all right.'

There are races born for pride and life. They are the ones that nourish the strangest vocation for boredom. It is also among them that the attitude towards death is the most repulsive. Apart from sensual pleasure, the amusements of this race are among the silliest. A society of bowlers and association banquets, the three-franc movies and parish feasts have for years provided the recreation of those over thirty. Algiers Sundays are among the most sinister. How then could this race devoid of spirituality clothe in myths the profound horror of its life? Everything related to death is either ridiculous or hateful here. This populace without religion and without idols dies alone after having lived in a crowd. I know no more hideous spot than the cemetery on Boulevard Bru, opposite one of the

most beautiful landscapes in the world. An accumulation of bad taste among the black fencings allows a dreadful melancholy to rise from this spot where death shows her true likeness. 'Everything fades,' say the heart-shaped ex-votos, 'except memory.' And all insist on that paltry eternity provided us cheaply by the hearts of those who loved us. The same words fit all despairs. Addressed to the dead man, they speak to him in the second person (our memory will never forsake you); lugubrious pretence which attributes a body and desires to what is at best a black liquid. Elsewhere, amidst a deadly profusion of marble flowers and birds, this bold assertion: 'Never will your grave be without flowers.' But never fear: the inscription surrounds a gilded stucco bouquet, very time-saving for the living (like those immortelles which owe their pompous name to the gratitude of those who still jump on to moving buses). Inasmuch as it is essential to keep up with the times, the classic warbler is sometimes replaced by an astounding pearl aeroplane piloted by a silly angel who, without regard for logic, is provided with an impressive pair of wings.

Yet how to bring out that these images of death are never separated from life? Here the values are closely linked. The favourite joke of Algerian undertakers, when driving an empty hearse, is to shout: 'Want a ride, sister?' to any pretty girls they meet on the way. There is no objection to seeing a symbol in this, even if somewhat untoward. It may seem blasphemous, likewise, to reply to the announcement of a death while winking

one's left eye: 'Poor fellow, he'll never sing again,' or, like that woman of Oran who had never loved her husband: 'God gave him to me and God has taken him from me.' But, all in all, I see nothing sacred in death and am well aware, on the other hand, of the distance there is between fear and respect. Everything here suggests the horror of dying in a country that invites one to live. And yet it is under the very walls of this cemetery that the young of Belcourt have their assignations and that the girls offer themselves to kisses and caresses.

I am well aware that such a race cannot be accepted by all. Here intelligence has no place as in Italy. This race is indifferent to the mind. It has a cult for an admiration of the body. Whence its strength, its innocent cynicism, and puerile vanity which explains why it is so severely judged. It is commonly blamed for its 'mentality' – that is, a way of seeing and of living. And it is true that a certain intensity of life is inseparable from injustice. Yet here is a race without past, without tradition, and yet not without poetry – but a poetry whose quality I know well, harsh, carnal, far from tenderness, that of their very sky, the only one in truth to move me and bring me inner peace. The contrary of a civilized nation is a creative nation. I have the mad hope that, without knowing it perhaps, these barbarians lounging on beaches are actually modelling the image of a culture in which the greatness of man will at last find its true likeness. This race wholly cast into its present lives without myths, without solace. It has put all its possessions





on this earth and therefore remains without defence against death. All the gifts of physical beauty have been lavished on it. And with them, the strange avidity that always accompanies that wealth without future. Everything that is done here shows a horror of stability and a disregard for the future. People are in haste to live and if an art were to be born here it would obey that hatred of permanence that made the Dorians fashion their first column in wood. And yet, yes, one can find measure as well as excess in the violent and keen face of this race, in this summer sky with nothing tender in it, before which all truths can be uttered and on which no deceptive divinity has traced the signs of hope or of redemption. Between this sky and these faces turned towards it, nothing on which to hang a mythology, a literature, an ethic or a religion, but stones, flesh, stars and those truths the hand can touch.

To feel one's attachment to a certain region, one's love for a certain group of men, to know that there is always a spot where one's heart will feel at peace – these are many certainties for a single human life. And yet this is not enough. But at certain moments everything yearns for that spiritual home. 'Yes, we must go back there – there, indeed.' Is there anything odd in finding on earth that union that Plotinus longed for? Unity is expressed here in terms of sun and sea. The heart is sensitive to it through a certain savour of flesh which constitutes its bitterness and its grandeur. I learn that there is no superhuman happiness, no eternity outside the sweep of days. These paltry and essential belongings, these

relative truths are the only ones to stir me. As for the others, the 'ideal' truths, I have not enough soul to understand them. Not that one must be an animal, but I find no meaning in the happiness of angels. I know simply that this sky will last longer than I. And what shall I call eternity except what will continue after my death? I am not expressing here the creature's satisfaction with his condition. It is quite a different matter. It is not always easy to be a man, still less to be a pure man. But being pure is recovering that spiritual home where one can feel the world's relationship, where one's pulse-beats coincide with the violent throbbing of the two o'clock sun. It is well known that one's native land is always recognized at the moment of losing it. For those who are too uneasy about themselves, their native land is the one that negates them. I should not like to be brutal or seem extravagant. But after all, what negates me in this life is first what kills me. Everything that exalts life at the same time increases its absurdity. In the Algerian summer I learn that one thing only is more tragic than suffering and that is the life of a happy man. But it may be also the way to a greater life because it leads to not cheating.

Many, in fact, feign love of life to evade love itself. They try their skill at enjoyment and at 'indulging in experiences'. But this is illusory. It requires a rare vocation to be a sensualist. The life of a man is fulfilled without the aid of his mind, with its backward and forward movements, at one and the same time its solitude and its presences. To see these men of Belcourt working, protecting their wives and children, and often

without a reproach, I think one can feel a secret shame. To be sure, I have no illusions about it. There is not much love in the lives I am speaking of. I ought to say that not much remains. But at least they have evaded nothing. There are words I have never really understood, such as 'sin'. Yet I believe these men have never sinned against life. For if there is a sin against life, it consists perhaps not so much in despairing of life as in hoping for another life and in eluding the implacable grandeur of this life. These men have not cheated. Gods of summer they were at twenty by their enthusiasm for life and they still are, deprived of all hope. I have seen two of them die. They were full of horror, but silent. It is better thus. From Pandora's box, where all the ills of humanity swarmed, the Greeks drew out hope after all the others, as the most dreadful of all. I know no more stirring symbol; for, contrary to the general belief, hope equals resignation. And to live is not to resign oneself.

This at least is the bitter lesson of Algerian summers. But already the season is wavering and summer totters. The first September rains, after such violence and hardening, are like the liberated earth's first tears, as if for a few days this country tried its hand at tenderness. Yet at the same period the carob-trees cover all of Algeria with a scent of love. In the evening or after the rain, the whole earth, its womb moist with a seed redolent of bitter almond, rests after having given herself to the sun all summer long. And again that scent hallows the union of man and earth and awakens in us the only really virile love in this world: ephemeral and noble. ◇

A–Z of the Death Drive

Deborah Levy takes a perilous road trip through death, celebrity and the automobile

A

AUTOMOBILE, ANGER, ACCIDENT, ACCELERATION

You are an accident waiting to happen. You are a complete wreck. What is driving you to do this? Will the automobile (a fusion of libido and machine) ever lose meaning as a sexualized instrument to be controlled and mastered? Or is it merely a transitional object such as a teddy bear, doll or soft blanket – the objects that helped us separate from our mothers? Our childhood dolls and toys survived being loved loathed and mutilated – we gave them names, personalities, made up lives for them to live on our behalf. We pulled their arms and legs off, hacked off their nylon hair, turned their heads the wrong way round. And then we cuddled and kissed them and left them out in the rain. The automobile simply can't survive this kind of behaviour. The design of your anger is as important as the design of your car. Remember, I am only a Mercedes SLS AMG. I do not have advanced emotions and I am not as attracted to you as you are to me. I do not have the capacity to feel invincible because I've overtaken a Datsun and I don't want sex with you. If you crash me you might live to see that I am only a lot of metal imported from Germany. I will be unmasked as a totally inanimate thing and you will be unmasked as someone who thought your four-wheel drive system loved you unconditionally.

'It was as if that great rush of anger had washed me clean, emptied me of hope, and gazing up at the dark sky spangled with its signs and stars, for the first time, the first, I laid my heart open to the benign indifference of the universe.'

Albert Camus, *L'Étranger*, 1942

B

MARC BOLAN, J. G. BALLARD

Just as Marc's famous lyrics claimed, we too could ride a white swan and fly away from the parents who made us cry. Our tears were righteous, our thighs were thin. We were the children of the revolution and life too short and brutal to take any notice of the posters forbidding 'petting' at the Victorian swimming pool down the road. Marc's voice was not really a voice, it was an attitude. It simpered and schmoozed, defied what the male voice was supposed to sound like and it got us through double maths. When we painted our nails green it was for him. Bolan died on 16 September 1977 at 3.50 a.m. when his car hit a sycamore tree near Barnes Common, London. In ancient Egyptian religion the sycamore was regarded as a personification of the goddesses Nut, Isis and Hathor. Early paintings show them reaching out from a tree to offer the deceased food and water. The 'death tree' on Barnes Common was made into a roadside shrine by his fans.

Ballard's post-traumatic novel *Crash* (1973) was described by its author as the 'first pornographic novel based on technology'. The writer Ballard stages and repeats a number of violent car crashes that always end with his wounded and bloody drivers eroticized by their own death drives. Ballard probably agreed with Freud's notion that we all take pleasure in smashing things up. He knew the car was more than a car and went into head-on collision with Thanatos and Eros until the pages of his visionary novel were heaped with body parts, car parts, blood, semen and tears. Bourgeois English literature, with its liking for Victorian bonnets and keeping the unconscious in its place (under the bonnet), was not ready for such hard truths about its own repressed desires and urges and suggested the author needed to see a psychiatrist.

'Science and technology multiply around us. To an increasing extent they dictate the languages in which we speak and think. Either we use those languages, or we remain mute.'

J. G. Ballard

C

EDDIE COCHRANE, ALBERT CAMUS

Son of an Algerian cleaner, Albert Camus must have secretly punched the air (despite being a bit of a miserabilist) when he won the Nobel Prize for Literature. Camus was killed in a road accident in 1960 while travelling from Provence to Paris with the manuscript of his unfinished novel, *The First Man*, packed in his briefcase. His publisher was driving the car. Police noted the dashboard clock had stopped at 1.55 p.m. when the vehicle slipped off the wet road. Camus, who was now a tragic celebrity as well as a celebrity of political thought, was found to have an unused train ticket in his coat pocket. Whether we are inclined to make more meaning or indeed desire less meaning from the death sites of the famous, we still wish Camus had boarded that train.

Eddie Cochran ('C'mon Everybody') is sometimes described as 'James Dean with a guitar'. Eddie didn't even get to crash his own car. In 1960 he travelled to the UK to tour with Gene Vincent. Early one morning in Wiltshire, England, his taxi (a Ford Consul) suffered a burst tyre, veered off the road and crashed into a lamp post. Eddie, twenty-one years old, was thrown through the windscreen. We can be certain he did not want this kind of exit. His friend Buddy Holly had died one year earlier in a plane crash.

D

PRINCESS DIANA, JAMES DEAN

Diana is the princess who made every young girl think twice about wanting a tiara for their birthday. Princess Diana did not want to end her life in a tunnel under the Place de l'Alma, Paris. She wanted to change her life. Kenneth Anger owns a mangled piece of Dean's cursed Porsche Spyder bought for \$300. The paparazzi all own a piece of Diana. Unlike James Dean, Diana was a rebel with a cause.

E

EGO

A passenger in any sort of car needs the driver to have a strong ego. Ego in this sense does not mean someone who is insufferably full of themselves. In Freud's structure of the psyche the ego is the rational side of the mind which tries to come to terms with the fact that we can't always get what we want. Mick Jagger knew this when he sang 'No, you can't always get what you want' with Keith Richards in 1968. If you can't always get what you want, luscious lips are a blessing. Thin lips might make you look bitter and twisted. The ego on the road tries not to be bitter and twisted. It knows it has to compromise. It is in touch with the reality principle (red traffic lights mean stop) and tries to swat away the smoky voice of the id when it tells the ego to go faster and how about a swig of bourbon and a couple of spliffs? The id is screaming 'I want it, I want it!' but the ego is calmly explaining 'You can't have it.' These are the conflicts your driver experiences on any sort of car journey. As a passenger you have to hope your life is in the adult hands of the ego – but if you think the teenage id will win, better to get out fast and catch the tube, metro, subway.

It's not what you want, but it's what you need to do.

F

FAME, FIFTEEN MINUTES, FUEL

To truly understand that celebrity in the twenty-first century is a human-shaped commodity is to have second thoughts about our own star-spangled dreams. Fifteen minutes is plenty of time to flirt with the fatal seduction of fame – needing your fans more than they need you is unsightly after a while. No matter how many trillions of gallons of fossil fuels are poured into fame, somehow its tank is never full.

G

GOD, GLOBAL POSITIONING SYSTEMS

God is a pair of (hidden) hands on the steering wheel, an ageless chauffeur driving us to an unknown destination. We will not know where the bathroom is when we arrive. God is free thought and God is a global positioning system inside us. Those of us who believe in sat nav (satellite navigation) have to hope that when 'the voice' leads us away from the main road to a dirt track that leads to the brink of a high cliff, it knows what it's doing.

H

HAUNT, HOROSCOPES, HIGHWAY

Fatal crashes haunt the highways of the world. Beeping police radios, twisted metal, exploded windows, the staring panicked eyes of the wounded. It doesn't bear thinking about, so we read horoscopes to know what lies on the road ahead. We want to hear the squeal of the tyres before they squeal. All highways everywhere are a wiped film.

I

ID

Id – the emotional and irrational part of the mind, constantly seeking pleasure. Like the ignition, the id is always turned on.

J

JAYNE MANSFIELD

Nickname: Jaynie

Jayne Mansfield died on 27 June 1967 when the driver of her Buick smashed into a trailer spraying the swamps of New Orleans with anti-mosquito insecticide at 2 a.m. Aged thirty-five, Vera Jayne Palmer was supposed to be all washed up, burnt out, nothing but a sex bomb ('a sexual icon of the 1950s and 1960s') past her prime, a poor man's Marilyn Monroe. A poor man should be so lucky. During the late 1950s, the front bumpers of some American cars came with extensions that resembled a pair of large conical breasts. These were nicknamed 'Jayne Mansfields'. The Buick used to be displayed at various car shows with the bloodstains still splashed across the seats.

K

GRACE KELLY

Alfred Hitchcock had a thing for what are sometimes called icy virginal blondes and actress Grace Kelly was one of them. Kelly starred in Hitchcock's *Rear Window* and *Dial M for Murder*. Her career as an Oscar-winning actress would later be forbidden by her husband, Prince Rainier III of Monaco. When Kelly married her prince, Hitchcock declared himself 'very happy that [Princess] Grace has found herself such a good part'. Was it a good part? Monaco is a small country where citizens love not paying taxes.

Tourists are lured into its casinos and waiters try not to scream when they carry silver platters of twitching langoustine, lobster and crab to senior management pretending to be Picasso for the afternoon. Monaco is where Tintin might wear a beret on a secret assignation to find a diamond necklace hidden in a baguette. Kelly's catastrophic accident on the road between Monaco and Roc Agel in 1982 was apparently caused by failed brakes. In fact she had a stroke at the wheel of her ten-year-old Rover, which eventually tumbled 100 feet down a ravine. A witness who was driving behind the princess said the car began zigzagging erratically some time before the crash happened.

L

LIBERTY

'Greater liberty, greater fruitfulness of time and effort, brighter glimpses of the wide and beautiful world, more health and happiness – these are the lasting benefits of the motor-car.'

Herbert Ladd Towle, *The Automobile and Its Mission*, 1913

M

MIDLIFE CRISIS

You've bought a Ferrari California, stopped shaving, started wearing jeans again and asked your PA to order you a leather jacket. You play Florence and the Machine on your multimedia system (you prefer Steely Dan), connect your mobile via Bluetooth to the onboard computer, put your foot down and soar just as you're going past a camera in Camden Town. North London looks nothing like California.

N

HELMUT NEWTON

Fashion photographer Helmut Newton, who fled Germany in 1938 a month before the Nazi pogroms began, explored the death instinct all his professional life when he art-directed images of power and submission with his spiky-heeled dominatrix models. Newton's Cadillac hit a wall in Sunset Boulevard, Hollywood, in 2004.

O

ORAL SEX

Unlike throwing the javelin or jumping the high bar, everyone can do it. No one's allotment has ever been destroyed to build a stadium for this particular sport because it often takes place in an automobile.

P

JACKSON POLLOCK

Jackson Pollock was battling with booze and depression when he remarked to a friend, 'I've gone dead inside, like one of your diesels on a cold morning.' Pollock was speeding wildly in his green Oldsmobile convertible coupé when it crashed along an East Hampton Road in 1956, hurtling him 50 feet in the air. He smashed his skull on a white oak tree and was instantly killed. His girlfriend, Ruth Kligman, suffered a fractured pelvis but survived. Some newspaper reports at the time framed Pollock as a suicidal trickster. He could have done without this sort of thing. When Pollock laid out his massive canvasses on the floor, it was into them that he poured his life and death.

Q

QUESTIONS

What are we to do with our unconscious self-destructive impulses? The uncivilized death wish that simmers within us even though we always say please and thank you? Freud did not believe that accidents were chance events. All accidents in his view are manifestations of the death drive, the urge to walk into traffic when we cross the road or stand too near the edge of the platform when waiting for the tube. He even came to believe that to suffer from vertigo on a mountain is to suffer from the unconscious urge to throw ourselves off it.

Ballard agrees: 'Deep assignments run through all our lives . . . there are no coincidences.' If the car offers us an instrument to play with our destructive and aggressive impulses, it's no wonder behaviour on the roads often resembles the playground at school.

R

RIGHT-HAND SIDE OF THE ROAD

About a quarter of the world drives on the left-hand side, mostly the old British colonies.

It was believed by the ancients that evil spirits lived on the left side of man and the gods lived on the right side. For the Romans, left meant sinister and corrupt – which is probably what the colonized thought of the British.

S

SHRINES

In every pile-up we confront our own anxieties and fleetingly review the meaning of our own lives. Roadside shrines to the deceased are assembled. Car-crash victims become saints. We want to know the details of the collision in order to piece the fragments together. In this sense a car crash often becomes a fiction that is of equal interest to lawyers, poets, forensic scientists and shop workers.

T

TRAUMA

To experience trauma is to have knowledge we do not want. When we repeat the details of a crash and say out loud what happened, we feel we have more control over this unwelcome knowledge. It is well known that if an aeroplane crashes, investigators search for the cockpit voice recorder, also known as the ‘black box’, to reveal details of the events preceding the accident. When we repeat our memories of a crash, either experienced or witnessed, we are the black box.

U

U-TURN, UNCONSCIOUS

Hansel and Gretel laid a trail of bread in the forest so they could do a U-turn and find their way home. Birds ate the bread (road markings) and the wicked witch nearly ate Hansel and Gretel. The car is a womb to protect us from the wicked witch that lives in the forest with her green-eyed owls.

Attempt to run the hag over and you will fall asleep at the wheel for a hundred years. Your dreams unfold at 3mph. Deer slumber on the roof of your Volvo. Woodpeckers bury their beaks in the windscreen. Spiders spin webs in the wheels. If dreams are the royal road to the unconscious it doesn't matter what kind of car you drive, you will always get there in the end.

V

VOYEUR

To be a voyeur is to observe others without being seen ourselves. Sometimes it implies a clandestine sexual interest. A voyeur is 'one who looks' at an intimate action without any of the risks involved with engaging directly with intimacy. Yet to observe the fallout from a car crash does have its risks. It gives us voyeuristic spectators an intimate sense of our undoing, a foreboding collision with the spectre of our own ending. As we gaze in horror at the shattered debris on the road there is often a shameful glass shard of excitement and curiosity inside us too. It is as if the crash is the final edit of the imaginative games we all played as children (faking being dead, peekaboo) to prepare ourselves for the impossibility of accepting death.

W

WARHOL, WRECK

In Warhol's silk-screen paintings of car crashes – *Green Disaster* (1963), *Orange Car Crash* (1963), *Saturday Disaster* (1964) – the artist appropriated news photographs of everyday anonymous car crashes, repeating the trauma in multiple prints; as if the act of seeing them over and over numbs us to the spectacle of tragedy and death.

X

XANAX

A drug for panic disorders and anxiety

If you are taking this medication it is wiser to sit and have a picnic in your automobile (turkey sandwiches! Sardines! Lashings of ginger beer!) than attempt to drive in the rush hour. Alleged possible side effects include swelling of the tongue, confusion, fainting, hallucinations, muscle twitching, seizures, stammering. If Xanax appears to offer a pain-free existence, it might be a thrill to have more anxiety in your existence.

Y

YAWNING

In the Middle Ages it was believed that the devil entered our mouths every time we yawned. A hand clapped over this hole in our face was a kind of central-locking device to

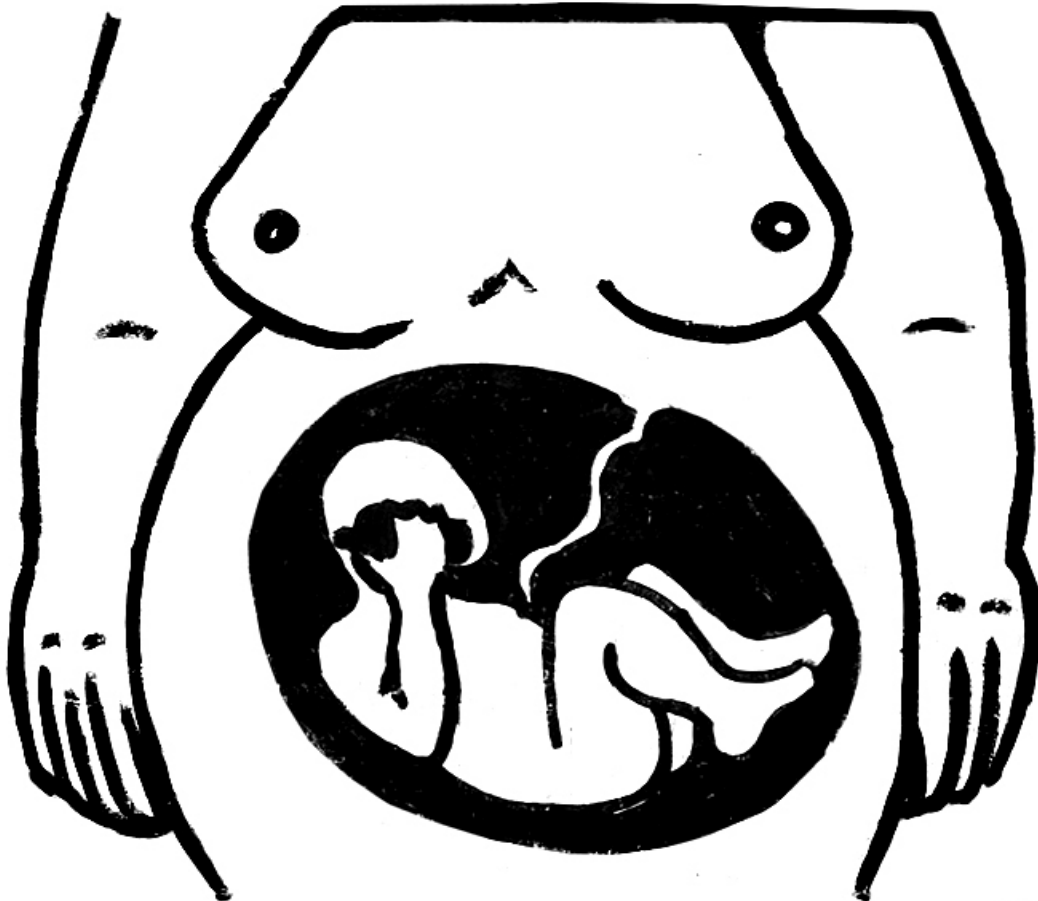
stop muggers getting in. In the post-Industrial Age we know that yawning is caused by lack of oxygen. Therefore yawning in an automobile suggests the windows should be hastily opened. Yawning is also contagious. A passenger must never yawn too near the driver.

Z

SLEEP

In his essay *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, Camus wrote, 'We value our lives and existence so greatly, but at the same time we know we will eventually die, and ultimately our endeavours are meaningless.'

When we stare in morbid fascination at photographs of car crashes, particularly those involving a celebrity presence, what is it we are hoping to find? It is possible the missing person we are searching for in the pile-up is ourselves. ◇



Zoo
Proj.

nrf

12 Août 1956

Cher monsieur,

M. Hamish Hamilton me prie de vous faire
connaître mon opinion sur l'étude de M.
P.M.W. Thody. Cette étude m'a beaucoup
intéressé et j'ai écrit longuement sur mes
réactions à M. Thody lui-même, qui
avait bien voulu m'écrire à ce sujet. Je
s'espère donc que M. Thody vous fera connaître
mon sentiment.

Croyez, cher monsieur, à
mes sentiments les meilleurs.

Alfred Carnoy