

TRIBHUVAN UNIVERSITY

**Emergence of the Existential Self: A Study of the Void in *The First Man* by
Albert Camus**

**A Thesis Submitted to Central Department of English
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Degree of
Master of Arts in English**

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Letter of Recommendation

Mr. Kiran Giri has completed his thesis entitled "Emergence of the Existential Self: A Study of the Void in *The First Man* by Albert Camus" under my supervision. He carried out his research from August 2009 to September 2010. I hereby recommend his thesis to be submitted for viva voce.

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This thesis titled “Emergence of the Existential Self: A Study of the Void in *The First Man* by Albert Camus” submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, by Kiran Giri, has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

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Abstract

In his posthumously published autobiographical novel *The First Man*, Camus recalls this period of his life with a mixture of pain and affection as he describes conditions of harsh poverty (the three-room apartment had no bathroom, no electricity, and no running water) relieved by hunting trips, family outings, childhood games, and scenic flashes of sun, seashore, mountain, and desert. It is the most sentimental and personal of all his works. The story of Jacques Cormery's return to Algeria and his reflections on his coming of age is filled with inchoate longing, for the Algeria of his youth, for the Father who died when he was just a child, for the love of a beautiful but deaf and distant Mother and for a moral code by which to live. "*The First Man*" records a mind in motion -- a mind creating a masterpiece.

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I. About the work *The First Man*

The First Man is the final, unfinished work of Albert Camus. The manuscript--144 handwritten pages--was found in the 46 on January, 4, 1960. At that time his family decided against publishing it. Finally, when it was published with little editing by his daughter Catherine Camus in 1994, it was widely acclaimed by the critics and the media worldwide. *The First Man* is solely autobiographical, relating the childhood of the character modeled on Camus himself, though named Jacques Cormery. In the existing draft, the characters are occasionally called by their real names, an indication of how the writer had only begun to fictionalize his material. "Serves as a magical Rossetta stone to Camus' entire career, illuminating both his life and his work with stunning candor and passion."(23) The children of Camus decided to publish as it is because of its importance as an autobiographical document. Rough and raw as it is, it is a splendid work of Camus-- to understand the man and his work more profoundly and more better, many readers today will read it as much for its biographical interest as for its confirmation of Camus' ability as a writer.

The First Man, an unfinished autobiography of the writer is a story of the void faced by the protagonist Jacques Cormery and his family. *The First Man* is all about how he succeeds on creating a existential self out of nothing. Jacques Cormey, a boy who lived a life much like his own with having nothing to confirm with, all his life is surrounded by void. He was the first man in the sense that he had no model to confirm to; he was self-made intellectually and ethically. Being the first man in this world who finds nothing already to confirm with Jacques Cormery affirms the value and the virtue and of human condition. He succeeds in the necessity of inventing the existential self which largely owes to his own sense of moral conscience, optimism amidst existential despair, non-involvement to any system and parties, compassion for the poor

and innocent people, filial love and duty, respect for every single human being and about gratitude, loyalty, beauty and love. Beyond the impressive description of his poor childhood, Camus was going to evoke a whole life close to his own. He keeps his eyes open to the painful truth of his existence without causing him to despair. “*The First Man* is the most honest book Camus ever wrote, and the most sensual . . . Camus is not writing at the height of his powers, he is at the depth of his powers . . . It is a work of a genius.”

More often *The First Man* seems to be none other than Camus himself, the son without a father to help him find his way in the world to transmit or tradition. He describes himself as the first inhabitant or the first conqueror (257).” A similar theme that recurs is sometimes as the split between this hard, empty traditionless Algeria and a Europe of measured spaces filled with centuries of culture, at the other times the two world of Jacques are those of the family without books, where he must read title of silent films for his illiterate grandmother and of school Lycee where books are sustenance of his imaginative life. “A beautiful paean to past, memory and the family . . . A moving novel and a welcome edition to the Camus oeuvre, *The First Man* underscores Camus’ lifelong celebration of existence itself.”(13)

The heart of the books is the portrait of young Jacques of Camus, as a child and what it tells about the experience that shaped his values. Unlike most other work of Camus it is not about ideas, here we are soaked in sensation and feelings. What he finds above all is this extraordinary bond to the silent mother whom he describes her with the heart breaking tenderness whom he never blames for allowing her mother to beat her boy, and whom reserves for her life of endurance, her lack of resentment, her gentleness.

“Fascinating . . . *The First Man* helps put all of Camus’ work into a clearer perspective and brings into relief what separates him from the more militant

literary personalities of his day, like Malraux and Sartre . . . there is humor, too, and evidence of a great capacity for affection, friendship and gratitude . . .

Camus's voice has never been more personal than in *The First Man*.”(63)

Indeed, *The First Man* is also a kind of pious poverty not what has sometime called pompously the culture of poverty because the poor as he shows are deprived of culture. In a life entirely eaten up by the need work so as to earn just enough money to keep going, there is no room for objects except the most indispensable, no room for art, no time for religion, no correction “to traditional values and stereotypes, poverty is a fortress without draw bridges.” (81)

The First Man is divided into two parts. In the first “the search for the father”, Camus tells the story of his father's arrival in the fall of 1913 in the higher land of Bone, where he was going to manage a farm, and of his own birth during the night of this arrival. Then, abruptly, he takes us to saint Brieux in Brittany, where the father is buried. His son visits the grave in 1954 and, realizing that he is much older than his father was when he was killed feels like an adult in front of a murdered child.

Attempts at finding out more about his father from his mother or from settlers who had known him, bring out very little. What Jacques discovers is the story of the French who settled in Algeria after the 1848 Revolution, attracted by the promise of land and work, which they didn't have in metropolitan France. His father's family had come from Alsace after 1871, his mother from Spain uprooted by misery or persecution and driven to a land where they would disappear without any trace, a “Land of oblivion where everybody is *The First Man*.”(21) Jacques returning to Algeria from Saint Brieuc, feels that “he too was a member of the tribes, despite his attempt to escape from it.”(23)

The chapters about the missing father are interspersed with chapters about the games played by Jacques as a child and about the family in which he was brought up. The formidable grandmother who had none children, the mother who was hard of hearing and her Brother Etienne (often called Ernest in the text who was deaf and explosive) and whom his old mother treated with surprising gentleness because he was hard some. “It is our weakness for beauty” that helps make the world bearable.”

These chapters about Jacques as a child continue in the second part of the manuscript the, *The First Man* or son in these chapters, readers are told that how the boy Jacques finds art of living around the void and creates a self i.e. existential self. They are most moving and vivid. In one of his notes, he wrote: “Free oneself from any concern with art and form Regain contact with intermediary thus innocence. To give apart here is to give up One’s self. Renouncing the self, not through virtuousness. On the contrary accept one’s hell.”(29)

Albert Camus and his Writing Techniques

Albert Camus French Algerian journalist, playwright, novelist, writer of philosophical essays and novels; ; ; though neither by advance training nor profession of philosopher Camus nevertheless through his literary work and in numerous articles, reviews, essays and speeches made important forceful contributions towards wide range of issues in moral philosophy- from terrorism and political to suicide and the death penalty. In awarding him its price for literature in 1957, the Nobel committee cited the author’s persistent effort to illuminate the problem of the human per-eminently as a writer of conscience and as a champion of imaginative literature as a vehicle of philosophical insight and moral truth that Camus was honored by his own generation and it still admired today. He was at the height of his career at work on an autobiographical novel (*The First Man*), planning new projects for theatre, film and television and still seeking a solution

lacerating political turmoil in his native Algeria while he died tragically in an automobile accident in January 4 1960.

In his book *Albert Camus*, Carol Paterson says:

The last secret of the breadth and depth of his appeal must, I think, be sought in the strength of his personality, which casts its spell on the reader the moment he takes up any one of Camus' works, whether it be a critical analysis of some question of the day, a reflection of his philosophical endeavor or a product of his creative genius. The man Camus is present in every sentence he ever wrote. The man Camus our fellowman, stands before us within the reach of our handshake. The reader feels himself to be a partner; he feels that the venture -whatever it be- is a shared endeavor. (24)

Although Albert Camus wrote a broad range of work including short stories, plays, essays, philosophical tracts, and a handful of novels--during his relatively short career, it is profoundly apropos that the single work for which he is most famous is entitled *The Stranger*. Meursault, that novel's famous main character, exists with a sense of the world and a morality that sets him apart from human society at large. Similarly, in his notebooks, Camus often hinted at an overriding sense of always being an outsider in the world, no matter his location or circumstances; once, for instance, he wrote, "It is constantly my lot to remain apart,"(11) though he was well-known for his charm, particularly his success with women; and, as an impoverished Frenchman who was born in colonized Algeria, he noted, "Yes, I have a native land: the French language,"(93) thus emphasizing the sense of displacement felt by a man who belonged in neither the rich, colonialist French society of Algeria, nor the native, poor, Moslem population.

In addition, late in Camus's life, his politics and personal beliefs, particularly regarding Communism and the struggle within Algeria, set him diametrically apart from the dominant members of Paris intelligentsia, including the existentialist peer with whom he's most often paired with Jean-Paul Sartre. But despite the fact that many critics, past and present, view Camus as an intellectual "lightweight" among the existentialists --producing contradiction-riddled philosophic tracts that presented the ideas of others with only a vague, oversimplified understanding of their work, and that touted a kind of "can't we all just get along" mantra that seemed unrealistic, bourgeois, and pithy to his peers--few twentieth century writers captured the imagination and interest of so many. Sartre may well have been Camus's intellectual superior, but Camus provided readers with something far more strangely, electrifyingly intimate: a naked demonstration of a man struggling doggedly to determine his literal and figurative place in the world. Commenting on Albert Camus's literary writing Richard Ellmann writes:

Camus brilliantly evokes the moment when a man discovers a lack of purpose and meaning in acts that he has performed habitually and unthinkingly or rather, when he begins to demand that they have a meaning for him and discovers that they can provide none. Other men, nature, metaphysical reality, the very forms of logic strike him as absurd- that is, radically incommensurable with the one who appeals to them for his meaning. He can confidently assert nothing but the bare fact that he exists and that he is bound in a relation of incompatibility and hatred of things other than himself. (804)

To this end, an unnerving contradiction persists in much of Camus's work: it is personal--in that we learn in great detail what likely kept Camus awake at night--but wholly impersonal as well, since, until the very end of his career, his personal experiences stayed outside the realm of his

writing. Even in Camus's own notebooks, translator/critic Phillip Thody's introduction notes that the journals kept between 1935 and 1942 "did not contain any open reference either to his first or to his second marriage, and provided no details about his membership in the Communist Party or his work as a journalist on *Alger-Républicain*" (Thody, iv). Scholar Paul de Man also noticed Camus's remoteness from his own journals:

Camus deliberately tore himself away from his natural inclinations and forced upon himself a number of alien concerns. As a result, the Notebooks reflect an increasing feeling of estrangement and solitude. One feels an almost obsessive commitment to work, a rejection of any moment of private experience as self-indulgence. (21)

However, in spite of Camus's fierce efforts to keep his work and personal life separate, the sudden and early end of his life--a car accident in France in 1960, when Camus was only forty-six--came shortly after a seemingly drastic change in his perspective; for inside that car was a working draft of his novel, *The First Man*, the most blatantly personal work he wrote. From this, as well as information provided by biographers Olivier Todd and Herbert R. Lottman, we learn about the major events of Camus's life, specifically those that left permanent scars and echoed throughout his writings: his widowed mother's illiteracy, partial deafness, and near silence; his family's extreme poverty in Algeria; his diagnosis, at age seventeen, of tuberculosis, which afflicted him on and off throughout his life; his life in Nazi-occupied France during World War II; and, finally, his quarrel and break with Parisian Leftist intellectuals after the publication of *The Rebel*, which worked in part to critique and condemn communism. Thus, if we interpret these turning points as Camus's raw material, we notice experience after experience that likely made the writer feel the full weight of his solitude, in ways large and small.

Not surprisingly, critics have long taken note of, and examined, the different ways in which emotional and physical separation manifests itself in Camus's texts. But as critic Germaine Bree noted, Camus's readers and critics "shared his concern with the ambient problems, political, ethical, or philosophical," and so "the terrain covered by critical studies of Camus's work is consequently very broad, and often reflects the strains and stresses of a particular historical moment" (Bree 2).

In 1937, Camus was a twenty-three-year-old journalist for the newspaper *Algérie Républicaine* and already divorced from his troubled, drug-addicted first wife, Simone Hié. His first collection of lyrical essays, *Betwixt and Between* was published that year, while *Nuptials* was published two years later. The essays in both books largely reflected Camus's love of Algeria, with long, winding, poetic sentences and sensuous descriptions of the landscape and its people. Hellenist and pantheistic elements thus pervade the essays, which is no surprise, given Camus's fixation on Greek thought and culture. In this way, we see Algeria's landscape and climate informing much of Camus's work, thematically and symbolically. In addition to presenting water as an element of renewal, connection, freedom, and rebirth, Camus also often refers to the sun as an oppressive, intolerant, violent force. For instance, in *The Stranger*, Camus describes the sun, in the critical murder scene, as a sort of accomplice--if not the main impetus--to Meursault in the shooting of the Arab on the beach, as critics like Roger Quilliot and John Erickson have noted.

Neither the employment of water or of the sun as symbols, of course, is original in any way, but some critics, like S. Beynon John, have noted how this conventional use of symbols places Camus among neo-Romanticists, and because of Camus's

intensely personal, sensual use of these familiar symbols, they remain free of the deliberate and rather artificial air they sometimes weave. (144)

In addition to introducing symbols, Camus's early work also briefly hinted at the heartbreak he felt at the inaccessibility of his nearly mute mother. Though the full picture isn't made clear until the publication of *The First Man*, thirty-four years after Camus's death, we do get, in the essay "Between Yes and No," a small window through which to view Camus's private agony. Speaking of "the child," rather than "I"--and thus emphasizing distance even from himself--Camus wrote, "He feels sorry for his mother; is this the same as loving her? She has never hugged or kissed him, for she wouldn't know how. He stands a long time watching her. Feeling separate from her, he becomes conscious of her suffering. She does not hear him, for she is deaf" (33).

This forecasts not only an image that will come back in subsequent works, but also seems to shape Camus's repeated failure to include female characters of any complexity or significance in his prose.

Finally, the early essays also hinted at where he would progress next intellectually. Regarding death, he wrote, in *The Wind at Djemila*, "I do not want to believe that death is the gateway to another life. For me, it is a closed door. I do not say ... I have too much youth in me to be able to speak of death. But it seems to me that if I had to speak of it, I would find the right word here between horror and silence to express the conscious certainty of a death without hope"(17). And later, in *The Desert*, Camus wrote:

And what more legitimate harmony can unite a man with life than the dual consciousness of his longing to endure and his awareness of death? ... [this landscape] took me out of myself in the deepest sense of the word. It assured me

that but for my love and the wondrous cry of these stones, there was no meaning in anything. The world is beautiful, and outside it there is no salvation. (39)

Thus, in early passages such as these, we perhaps see Camus's first grappings with existentialism and the notion of the absurd, concepts that would absorb his thoughts and pervade his writing for the next several years. William H. Harris and Judith S. Levey in *The New Columbia Encyclopedia* present Albert Camus as one of the most important authors and thinkers of the 20th century. They comment on his style in this way:

Noted for his vigorous, concise, and lucid style, Camus soon gained recognition as a major literary figure. His belief that man's condition is absurd identified him with the existentialists, but he denied allegiance to that group; his works express rather a courageous humanism. The characters in his novels and plays, although keenly aware of meaninglessness of human condition, assert their humanity by rebelling against their circumstances. (437)

I should note that while Camus wrote and published the lyrical essays in *Betwixt and Between* and *Nuptials*, he also struggled with his first attempted novel, *A Happy Death*, which acted as a kind of writing warm-up for Camus's *The Stranger*. First published posthumously in 1972, *Happy Death* shows Camus asking, through the actions of Patrice Mersault (a clear forerunner of *The Stranger*'s narrator), whether one can possibly meet death feeling content with how he lived his life. In this case, Mersault, living and working as a clerk in Algeria, decides that a lack of money keeps him from the freedom he needs to live and be fulfilled, so he kills a rich, paralyzed man named Zagreus. Mersault soon quits his job as a clerk, travels, stays in a house with three women who are friends, leaves them and soon marries, then dies of an illness that began with a chill on the same night of the murder. In the end, Mersault does indeed die happy, telling readers,

And all those who had not made the gestures necessary to live their lives, all those who feared and exalted impotence--they were afraid of death because of the sanction it gave to a life in which they had not been involved. They had not lived enough, never having lived at all ... what did it matter if he existed for two or for twenty years? Happiness was the fact that he had existed. (103)

Camus believed there was no God, and he struggled with the consequences of that premise--i.e., if there's no afterlife, and life is meaningless, is it worth living? The first line of *The Myth of Sisyphus* cuts right to this point, stating, "There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide"(3). What strikes Camus as absurd is mankind's perpetual hope for an afterlife, or immortality, in spite of man's certain knowledge that death is inevitable. Near the end of his essay, Camus points to Sisyphus as the ultimate Absurd hero, in that the mythical Greek figure keeps pushing the rock uphill again and again, though it's rolling back down is a foregone conclusion, and Sisyphus himself is aware of this never-changing consequence and his life's fate. Camus concentrates most on that instant before Sisyphus heads back down the hill, and the last line of the essay claims that, "One must imagine Sisyphus happy"(64). Thus, Camus champions the person who is wholly aware of his/her absurd plight, but who nonetheless chooses not only to live, but to seek out happiness and embrace life, all of it, good and bad.

Camus's depiction of a meaningless, Godless universe quickly situated him as a peer of other existentialist writers (though Camus resisted this label throughout his career), such as Jean-Paul Sartre. It also caused him to be perpetually associated with the notion of the absurd throughout his career, which became a source of frustration for him--for although his works on the absurd made him famous, they were limited to the individual's understanding of himself, his circumstances, and his own death. Many scholars recognized, however, that Camus evolved from

the notion of the absurd to the next logical questions--how does that inevitably doomed individual conduct him/herself within a community, or society?

Camus's existence, from the outset of his life, lay among the fringe. He did not exactly belong among the indigenous, poor Arabs who populated North Africa, but neither was his family of the class of moneyed French colonialists who emigrated there and sought to "civilize" the Arabs. Instead, like the Mediterranean Sea itself, he lay somewhere between Algeria and France, always maintaining simultaneously his status as both an insider and an outsider--a position that permanently affected his literary style and colored his perspective.

And although Camus became far less detached in his writing style near the end of his short life, critics like S. Beynon John noted that his fixation on Greek myths and tragedies manifested itself in this "removed" style. Even works that are set in, or near, the present time have the feeling of an allegory or Greek tragedy, wherein people aren't psychologically realized, three dimensional beings with their own past, but are instead vehicles for beliefs or ideological systems. As John states, "Myth is a substitute for faith and the metaphors of religion, and myth, by its very nature, is anonymous and collective: it swallows up the individual life" ("Albert Camus" 91). Similarly, Paul de Man wrote that through the consistent depersonalization of Camus's style, "the writer always chose to hide behind the mask of a deliberate, controlled style or behind a pseudo-confessional tone that serves to obscure, rather than reveal, his true self" (19).

However, as we review the progression of Camus's work and ideas, one can't help but feel that Camus, though possibly flawed as a thinker, was never less than honest with his readers, and that he hoped--by working through, on paper, his own questions--to find not only answers for himself, but to share them with his vexed, cynical, post-war fellow citizens. Camus viewed

this as his job, a task he took very seriously; for we see a rigid intolerance in Camus's notebooks for personal experience or anecdotes, allowing only things relevant to work to appear. This reveals, as de Man notes, “the solitude that torments Camus is most of all an estrangement from what he considers his authentic former self “(22).

Thus, although Camus began with questions regarding nature and man's limits in the physical world, and moved on to questioning his function in the larger human community in times of crisis, he ended by arriving at his own memories, still perhaps searching for connection to others by way of finally, hopefully, understanding himself. And despite criticisms incessantly voiced during Camus's life (and since), we should note that great minds are very often out of sync with their times. Camus's reservations regarding communism were obviously well-grounded, we now see in retrospect, and his stance on Algeria, while perhaps idealistic, was both honest and understandable, and his "Civilian Truce" was wholly meritorious in principle. Such hindsight should thus render Camus's intellectual bravery imminently laudable. He likely knew the consequences of publishing *The Rebel*, but he did so anyway, cutting himself off from Sartre's pack, despite subsequent personal attacks from that powerful intellectual lobby. This is not to say, of course, that Camus's intellect exceeded his peers, but unlike others, he willingly admitted when his ideas changed and why, and he always stood by the controversial conclusions he so publicly struggled to attain. As critic Susan Tarrow put it, “Camus’s works will remain perpetually relevant not because he had the 'right' answers, but because he persistently asked the right questions” (200).

The world is nothing and the world is everything--this is the contradictory and tireless cry of every true artist, the cry that keeps him on his feet with eyes ever open and that, every once in

a while, awakens for all in this world asleep the fleeting and insistent image of a reality we recognize without ever having known.

Life and the other Works of the Author

Albert Camus was born on Mondovi, a small village south of Bone, west of Oran and east of Constantino. The date was November 7, 1913. His father Lucien Camus was a farmland of Alsatian ancestry. His mother was a Spanish maid. Both parents have grown up as illiterates. In adult life, the father learned with great difficulty to read and write. The mother never did she was hard of hearing and suffered from impediment both as aftermaths of a childhood illness that had not been properly cured. She was a woman of few words, to the point of leaving the impression that she was mute. There are in Albert Camus' works many moving passages that we can only read as descriptions of his mother, bearing witness to his deep-felt love for her.

Camus' father had been killed one year after Albert's birth in the First Battle of the Marne in 1914, wearing the uniform of Zouave. He was buried in a military cemetery in Brittany. Madame Camus took her two boys-- Albert had a brother who was four years older and who grew up to make a living in the insurance business in Algiers-- and moved to Bullecourt, a crowded slum area of the Algerian capital. There she rented a two-room apartment in the Rue de Lyon which she shared with her mother and a half-paralyzed uncle of the children who was a barrel maker.

To the end Camus never forgot or denied this world of calmly accepted silent poverty. On the contrary, even at the height of his fame when he had achieved material security to him, poverty under a Mediterranean sky, where under a Mediterranean sky, where an access of warmth and sunlight somehow makes up for it, reducing it, restraining it, as it were, within bearable limits,

was something quite different from the poverty which came to know as a young man in the cities of continental Europe.

I was born poor. I was born in workman's quarter. But I did not know what miserly was until I experienced the cold of our suburbs . . . in any event, the beautiful warmth that ruled over my childhood deprived me all of resentment I lived a life of want but also, in a sense of enjoyments. I felt within me unlimited powers. What was needed was merely that I should find the spot where they could be applied.”(24)

These lines are quoted from the preface to the second edition of Camus' earliest writings published in 1954.

In 1918 Camus began attending elementary school in Belcourt while met for the first time a person ready and able to treat and respect him as a personality. This was his teacher Louis Germain, who evidently recognized even in those early days the boy's special gifts. It was thorough Germain's efforts that Albert was granted a scholarship enabling over to the Lycee. Albert was school education at Lycee, scholastic difficulties, passing the university examination in 1932. In 1930, when he was only seventeen years old, he had his first serious tuberculosis in the wake of an episode of pneumonia. Up to this time Albert had enjoyed excellent health.

It is indeed amazing that he managed in 1932 to prepare for and pass his bachelor's examination. That very same year he took up the study of philosophy at the University of Algiers. It was one of his teachers, this time at the Lycee, who had shown him the way. This was the philosopher and the man of the letters Jean Grenier, just as to his elementary- school teacher Germaine. Camus' works stand, in a way, as an honoring monument to these men.

Camus' personal life during his student days likewise took him to unusual heights and depths; In 1933, when he was only twenty years old he married Simone Hie, the daughter of an Algiers physician but this marriage lasted only a little more than a year.

In the same year 1934, he makes his membership in the communist party. There was the founding of the theatre du Travail and leaves the communist party in 1935. In 1936, his first literary work is brought out by publisher chariot: *L'Envers et L'Endroit*. In 1938, he makes his second publication, again with chariot: *Noces*. At this time Camus wrote his first drama *Caligula*. Through the mediation of Pascal Pia, editor-in-chief of the newspaper Alger Republican, Camus begins to work as a journalist for that publication.

In 1939 he publishes the essay *Le Minotaure Oula Halted'oran* and series of articles on social conditions. In the same year Camus begins work on *L' Etranger*. In 1940, after his second marriage, Camus is forced to leave Algeria and goes to Paris to work at the editorial offices of Paris-loir. In the same year he completes *L' Etranger*. *Mythe de Sisyphe* was completed on 1941.

In 1942, *L' Etranger* and *Mythe de Sisyphe* was published and Camus joins the resistance group "combat". Premiere of Camus' second play, *Le Malen-tendu* and begins for writing editorial for "combat" in 1944. In 1945, premiere of his first play *Caligula*. In 1946, Camus trip to the United States of America. In 1947, Camus leaves the editorial offices of combat and premiers the novel *La Peste*. 1948 was the year for the premiere of his third drama; *L' etat de Siege*. In 1949, his trip to South America and premiere of his fourth play *Les Justes*.

In 1950, he works on his philosophical book, *L' Homme Revolte*. In 1952, he breaks off relation with UNESCO. In 1959, new edition of *L' Envers et l' endroit*; also a series of more recent essays, *L'Ete* was published in 1955, he makes trip to Greece. He takes a stand on the

problems of Algeria in the newspaper *L'Express*. The publication of *Lachute* was in 1956.

Camus appeals to his fellow writers to approach the United Nations on the behalf of Hungary. In 1957, *L' exilet le Royaume* was published. It was the same year Camus is awarded the Nobel Prize for literature.

In 1958, Camus's collected articles on the problem of Algeria, written since 1939, are published under the title *ChroniquesAlgerieness*. He makes premiere of stage adaptation of Dostoevski's *The Demous*. It was in the same year; Camus begins work on an autobiographical novel *Le Premier Homme*. During the winter of 1959-1960, the Herbet Company was touring all of France and part of Switzerland with Camus' stage version of *The Demons*. The car in which he was traveling smashed at high speed into a tree by the roadside Camus was killed instantly. The day was January, 4, 1960, a day of mourning for the entire civilized world. We cannot take leave of him more fittingly than by letting him speak to us once again of what he regarded as the highest mission of the creative artist.

“As I see it, art is not a solitary enjoyment. It is a means to move great numbers of people by giving them an exquisite image of shared suffering and joy. It thus obliges the artist not to isolate himself. It makes him subservient to the most humble and most universal truth.”(17)

By the implication, the role of the writer cannot be separated from grave duties. By definition he cannot in this day place himself at the service of those who make history: he is at the service of those who endure it:

“He feels it to be his duty to understand not to judge. And if, in this world he must take sides, he can side only with a society in which, in accordance with

Nietzsche's great work is not the judge but the creator that rules regardless of whether he be a workman or an intellectual."(27)

II. Concept of Void and Self in Existentialism

Existentialism may perhaps be considered most fruitfully as a historical movement which is not easily definable. The nineteenth century philosophers, Soren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche, came to be seen as precursors of the movement. Existentialism, as a philosophical movement, flourished after the devastating World Wars, which destroyed the world physically as well as spiritually. As a result, the world is filled with uncertainty, despair, anxiety, absurdity and frustration. So, Existentialism became an appropriate philosophical perspective that could address the contemporary situation. Existentialism itself is a revolt against traditional philosophy which rejects the belief that life has an inherent meaning, but instead requires each individual to posit his or her own subjective values. Human beings are fundamentally different from objects in that they are first simply there, and only later define a purpose or identity for themselves. In Sartre's words: "We mean that man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world—and defines himself afterwards. If man as the existentialist sees him is not definable, it is because to begin with he is nothing. He will not be anything until later, and then he will be what he makes of himself" (2).

Existentialism believes that there is no essence of this world. Life has no meaning a priori. Before you come alive, life is nothing, it's up to you to give it a meaning and the value is nothing else but the meaning that you choose. The world is full of void and there is nothing already to confirm with but a condition to act and that act makes your existence. We cannot decide a priori what is to be done. Man makes himself. He is not ready made at the start. In choosing his ethics, he makes himself and force of circumstances is such that he cannot abstain from choosing one. Void implies that we ourselves choose our being. Void and self go together. In other words this is to say that the self emerges out of void.

Man is nothing else but what he makes of himself. Such is the first principle of the existentialism. So the existentialist self is subjective. Man is at the start a plan which is aware of itself and nothing exists prior to this plan. It is a conscious decision what you have planned to be not what you want to be. I may want to belong to a political party, write a book, get married; but all that is the manifestation of an earlier more spontaneous choice that is called 'will'. But if existence precedes essence, man is responsible for what he is. Thus existentialism's first effort is to make every man aware of his self.

The existentialist will never consider man as an end because he is always in the making. Man is constantly outside of himself; in projecting himself, in losing himself outside of himself, he makes for man's existing; and, on the other hand, it is by pursuing transcendent goals that he is able to exist; man being this state of passing-beyond, and seizing upon things only as they bear upon things only as they passing beyond, is at the heart, at the center of this passing-beyond. Existentialism declares that even if god did exist, that would change nothing.

The void – what else can it be for science wishes to know nothing of the nothing. Ultimately it is the scientifically rigorous conception of the nothing in that we wish to know nothing about it. We know it, the nothing. But even so it is certain what when science tries to express its proper essence it calls upon the nothing for help. The void is the complete negation of the totality of beings. The totality of beings must be given in advance so as to be able to fall prey straightaway to negation in which the void itself would them be manifested.

According to Existentialism there is no independently existing order or structure on which one could rely for ultimate purposes or guidance. Any honest reflection will reveal, according to most existentialists, that the universe is a looming unknown, and the experience of nothingness an inescapable characteristic of human existence. The first responsibility of

existentialism is, according to Sartre, “To make every man aware of what he is and to make the full responsibility of his existence rest on him. By existentialism, we mean a doctrine which makes human life possible and, in addition, declares that every truth and every action implies a human setting and human subjectivity.” (10)

Existentialism denies the concept of human nature or human essence. They claim that human is a being who exists before he can be defined by any concept. Existentialism views human being as an isolated existent who is cast into an alien universe with the freedom of choice. Since there is no guardian of human existence, human is totally responsible for his position in the world. But his freedom of choice becomes a curse for him- as Sartre says ‘man is condemned to be free’- because the very nature of the world that possesses no inherent truth, value or meaning. So the human condition in this world is absurd that is marked by futile struggle for existence. According to Sartre, it has developed into two major trends; theistic and atheistic, “There are two kinds of existentialists, first, those who are Christian, among whom I would include Jaspers and Gabriel Marcel, both catholic; and on the other hand the atheistic existentialists, among whom I class Heidegger, and then the French existentialists and myself” (13).

Though, both of these groups try to speak of human existence in a subjective sense, the relationship with God differs. One of them negates the existence of God and His relations with people and the world. This group says that humankind is God. All his functions depend upon his choices. But another group, which conceives of God as the source of inspiration and as the guiding principle, gives God the highest position in the world.

In *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, Sartre states explicitly that, in his view, God does not exist, and that it is necessary to draw the consequences of His absence to the end. In another place he says that existentialism is nothing else but an attempt to draw the full conclusions from

a consistently atheistic position. On the last page of this essay he specifies his position in the following way:

Existentialism is not atheist in the sense that it would exhaust itself in demonstrations of the non-existence of God. It declares rather, that even if God existed that would make no difference from its point of view. Not that we believe that God exists, but we think that the real problem is not that of His existence; what man needs is to find himself again, and to understand that nothing can save him from himself, not even a valid proof of the existence of God.(39)

From these statements it is clear that Sartre himself adopts an atheist point of view. He has even developed several arguments to illustrate the truth of this claim.⁴⁰ On the other hand, he says explicitly also that the question of the existence of God is not immediately relevant for his position in regard to ethics.

He never claims Camus seems, initially at least, to adopt a different point of view here. to be convinced that God does not exist; nor does he ever attempt to prove that there cannot be a God. He merely states that he himself, as well as many other people today, do not believe in God. He also says that he does not know whether this world has a meaning that transcends it, and then adds: "But I know that I do not know that meaning, and that it is impossible for me to know this. What could a meaning outside my condition mean to me?" (42).

In his book *Existentialism and Human Emotions*, Sartre states about the void in this way:

I did not asked to be borned. This is a naïve way of throwing emphasis in our facticity. I am responsible for everything, in fact, except for my responsibility, for I am the foundation of my being. Therefore everything takes place as if I were the world, not in the sense that I might remain abandoned and passive in a hostile

universe like a board floating on the water, but rather in the sense that I find myself suddenly alone and without help, engaged in a world for which I bear the whole responsibility without being able, whatever I do, to tear away myself from this responsibility for an instant. For, I am responsible for my desire of fleeing responsibilities. To make myself passive in the world, to refuse to act upon thing and upon Other's is still to choose myself, and suicide is one mode among others of being in the world .(35)

Existentialism is often associated with such themes as the absurdity of human existence and the worthlessness of our lives given our inevitable death. One might well wonder what view of happiness could arise from such a view. Sartre characterizes the human condition by our forlornness at the loss of external values and determinants of our nature; anguish at the resultant responsibility to create human nature ourselves; and despair of finding value outside of ourselves and reliance upon what is under our own control. Forlornness, anguish, and despair: Mr. Sartre, it would seem, was not a happy camper. For another 20th century French existentialist philosopher Albert Camus, however, the loss of any external source of value did not present quite such a dismal prospect. Camus compares our situation to that of the mythical figure Sisyphus. In his essay "*The Myth of Sisyphus*" he explains that:

The Gods had condemned Sisyphus to ceaselessly rolling a rock to the top of a mountain, whence the stone would fall back of its own weight. They had thought with some reason that there is no more dreadful punishment than futile and hopeless labor. (88)

It is easy to see the similarity between this situation and ours according to the Existentialist. Just as Sisyphus can find no end to his activities, no final resting place where he has finally reached

his goal or lived up to some set of pre-existing standards, so we find that all of our activities lead to nowhere. There are no external values that we can live up to, no external viewpoint from which our life can be viewed to be valuable. Our life is a series of meaningless actions culminating in death, with no possibility of external justification. Yet, Camus will say that we must imagine Sisyphus happy? “One must imagine Sisyphus happy.”(90) Why? Why should this fool be happy eternally rolling a ball up the hill to nowhere? At first, when one was still expecting to get ones value from outside of oneself, all this might seem depressing. Camus says:

When images of the earth cling too tightly to memory, when the call of happiness becomes too insistent, it happens that melancholy rises in man’s heart: this is the rock’s victory this is the rock itself. The boundless grief is too heavy to bear. These are our nights in Gethsemane. But crushing truths perish from being acknowledged. [...] Sisyphus, proletarian of gods, powerless and rebellious, knows the whole extent of his wretched condition: it is what he thinks of during his descent. The lucidity that was to constitute his torture at the same time crowns his victory. There is no fate that cannot be surmounted by scorn. (122)

As we saw before, no matter what his external circumstances, Sisyphus is always free to make of them what he will, to rebel against them within his island of subjectivity. No matter what the Gods make him do, he is always free to give the Gods one of these defiant gestures.

The despair and rebellion we feel at the loss of our external sources of value are the necessary price of a greater value and happiness that comes from within. One must lose all hope of external value before seeking value within. The theme that true happiness must come from within is one that is familiar to all of us, and it is the key to understand the existentialist conception of happiness.

If, after all sources of external value have been taken away, you can find value within yourselves, you would have found what philosophers haven't been looking for throughout the ages: a way of achieving human happiness that is not vulnerable to the uncontrollable contingencies of the natural world. If we find ourselves isolated from external value by our radical individuality, we can make a world of ourselves, a universe of our own experience, in which we can and must find ourselves happy. Camus writes of Sisyphus:

The absurd man says yes and his effort will henceforth be unceasing... he knows himself to be the master of his days. At that subtle moment when man glances backward over his life, Sisyphus returning toward his rock, in that slight pivoting he contemplates that series of unrelated actions which becomes his fate, created by him, combined under his memory's eye and soon sealed by his death. [...] But Sisyphus teaches a higher fidelity that negates the gods and raises rocks. He too concludes that all is well. This universe henceforth without a master seems to him neither sterile nor futile. Each atom of that stone, each mineral flake of that night-filled mountain, in itself forms a world. The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy. (91)

The Existentialist's secret of happiness, then, is to get one's value from within oneself. In doing so, one loses the promise of external value, but they find a more real happiness, one that cannot be taken away by the external forces beyond their control. We as individuals, owe nobody happiness and nobody owes us happiness. Happiness is ours to grasp or to surrender, as we choose, in any given moment. We must not willingly surrender to other persons our ability to experience happiness. Other persons cannot make us feel happy. We cannot make other people

feel happy. The feeling of happiness, of emotional well being rests solely, within ourselves, within our own grasp.

Sartre, denying God, put man in god's place: he ascribes to man a type of freedom and a type of responsibility that he cannot possibly possess, that only God can possess. He fails to see that human freedom is in no way diminished by an individual's free acceptance of an objective constraint on his behavior. This is because human freedom is finite freedom; only an infinite freedom, a divine freedom, would be diminished by objective constraints. Sartre says that what all existentialists, both aesthetic and Christian, share in common [...] is that they think that existence precedes essence, or, if you prefer, that subjectivity must be the starting point" (13). Sartre explains what this means by contrasting it with the opposite slogan: Essence precedes Existence. He uses the example of a paper-cutter to explain how the old view treated human being as artifacts, whose nature is tied to a preconceived essence and to a project outside of them, rather than as absolute individuals. He says in *Existentialism and Human Emotions*:

Let us consider some object that is manufactured, for example, a book or a paper-cutter: here is an object which has been made by an artisan whose inspiration came from a concept. He referred to the concept of what a paper-cutter is . . .

Thus, the paper-cutter is at once an object produced in a certain way and, on the other hand, one having a specific use . . . Therefore, let us say that, for the paper-cutter, essence...precedes existence. (13-14)

On this view, Sartre is attacking; we get our nature from outside of us, from a being that created us with a preconceived idea of what we were to be and what we were to be a good for. Our happiness and our fulfillment consist in our living up to the external standards that God had in

mind in creating us. Both our nature and our value come from outside of us. According to the existentialist, however, Existence precedes Essence. Sartre explains:

What is meant here by saying that existence precedes essence? It means that first of all, man exists, turns up, appears on the scene, and, only afterwards, defines himself. [...] Not only is man what he conceives himself to be, but he is also only what he wills himself to be after this thrust toward existence. Man is nothing else but what he makes of himself. (15)

Thus, there is no human nature which provides us with an external source of determination and value. Sartre says: “If existence really does precede essence, there are no explaining things away by reference to a fixed and given human nature. In other words, there is no determinism, man is free, man is freedom” (18).

Nothing outside of us can determine what we are and what we are good for; we must do it ourselves, from the inside. What we will be and what will be good for us is a radically individual matter. If we are radical individuals, there is no place else for our nature and value to come from, except from within us. It is this view of human nature, or the lack thereof, from which the existentialist conceptions of freedom and value flow. Sartre says in *Being and Nothingness*:

Freedom can not determine its existence by the end which it posits. Of course it exists only by the choice which it makes of an end, but it is not master of the fact that there is a freedom which makes known to itself what it is by means of its end. A freedom which would produce its own existence would lose its very meaning as freedom. Actually freedom is not a simple undetermined power. (624)

As an existentialist Sartre views human reality is free because it is not enough. It is free because it is perpetually wrenched away from itself and because it has been separated by a nothingness from what it is and from what it will be. He further exclaims in *Being and Nothingness*:

Man is free because he is not himself but presence of himself. The being which is what it is can not be free. Freedom is precisely the nothingness which is made-to-be at the heart of man and which forces human-reality to make itself instead of to be. As we have seen, for human reality, to be is to choose one self; nothing comes to it either from the outside or from within which it can receive or accept. (568)

Sartre also argues that in order to be free, we must desire the freedom of all men. To see others as slaves of our desire is to make ourselves a slave of desire. To be free, we must desire the freedom of all men. Freedom exists only within specific conditions. But within such given conditions, according to Sartre, people always have choices to make. They are not predetermined like objects or animals; they always live within a space, as it were, of possible alternatives. Even a man on death row, a person with hardly any choices left, still has decisions to make--even if it amounts to nothing more than the choice to die willingly or in some sort of inner rebellion. The point, according to Sartre, is that human being exists in a fundamentally different way than animals or objects: they exist as beings who, within certain conditions, define themselves and their lives.

III. Void and the Emergence of the Existential Self in *THE FIRST MAN*

This autobiographical work of Albert Camus is a life journey of the protagonist Jacques Cormery and his family through memory. Being unfinished the book covers only the seventeen years of the protagonist's life. The book is divided in two parts; Search for the Father and The Son or The First Man. At the age of forty as Jacques attempts to find something about himself, he finds void all around him. He finds that his self was made out of nothing. It was all about how he has created his existential self where there was nothing already to confirm with. The circumstances in which he lived; early death of his father when he was one year old, deaf and mute mother who rarely speak, extreme poverty in which lived in Algeria, no guidance on religion, ethics, morality and so on, illiterate family members, difficult historical context (first and second world war, colonialism in Algeria, migration of Algeria), complex ancestry (mixed blood of French father and Spanish mother), were enough to create void in his all life.

It seemed that he himself had gone far afield in search of what was close to him in time and in blood. To tell the truth, he had gotten no help. In a family they spoke little, where no one read or wrote with an unhappy and listless mother, who would have informed him about this young and pitiable father? No one had known him but his mother and she had forgotten him. Of that he was sure. And he died unknown on this earth where he had fleetingly passed, like a stranger. No doubt it is up to him to ask, to inform himself. But for someone like him who has nothing and wants the world entire, all his energy is not enough to create himself and to conquer and to understand that world.(27-28)

In the first part of the book, "search for the father", Camus tells us a story of his father's arrival in the fall of 1913 in the hinterland of Bone, where he was going to manage a farm and his own

birth during the night of this arrival. Then abruptly, he takes us to Saint Briec in Brittany, where the father is buried. His son visits the grave in 1954 and, realizing that he is much older than his father was when he was killed, feels like an adult in front of a murdered child.

Jacques Cormery did not answer. Surely too many had died, but, as to his father, he could not muster a filial devotion he did not feel. For all these years he had been living in France, he had promised himself to do what his mother, who stayed in Algeria, what she for such a long time had been asking him to do: visit the grave of his father that she herself had never seen. He thought this visit made no sense, first of all for himself, who had never known his father, who knew next to nothing of what he had been, and who loathed conventional gesture and behavior; and then for his mother who never spoke of the dead man and could picture nothing of what he was going to see. Since his old mentor had retired to Saint Briec and so he would have an opportunity to see him again, Cormery had made up his mind to go to visit this dead stranger, and had even insisted on doing it before joining his old friend so that afterwards he would feel completely free. (24)

The heart of the book is the portrait of young Jacques, of Camus, and what it tells us about the experiences that shaped his values. Unlike most other works of Camus, it is not about ideas; here we are soaked in sensations and feelings. What we find above all is this extraordinary bond to his mother, whom he describes with a heart breaking tenderness, whom he never blames for allowing her mother to beat her son, and whom he reveres for her life of endurance, her lack of resentment, her gentleness. When Camus writes about child's "despairing love for something in his mother that did not belong or no longer belonged to the world and to the triviality of the days," or describes himself endlessly watching "her in the shadows with a lump in his throat, staring

at her thin bent back , filled with an obscure anxiety in the presence of adversity obscure anxiety in the presence of adversity he could not understand,” the depth and immediacy of his feelings lead to the purest form of art.

“Yes” said Jacques. He was going to say: “you’re very beautiful,” and he stopped himself. He had always thought that of his mother and never dared to tell her so. It was not that he feared being rebuffed nor that he doubted such a compliment would please her. But it would had meant breaching the invisible barrier behind which for all his life he had seen her take shelter – gentle , polite, complaisant, even passive, and yet never conquered by anyone or anything , isolated by her semi deafness, her difficulty in expressing herself, beautiful s, beautiful surely but virtually inaccessible, and never more so than when she was full of smiles and when his own heart most went out to her- yes, all his life she had had the same manner , fearful and submissive, yet also distant , the same look she had thirty years ago when she watched without intervening while her mother beat Jacques with a whip she who had never touched or even really scolded her children ; there are no doubt that those blows wounded her too, but she could not intervene because she was exhausted, because she could not find the words, and because of the respect she owes to her mother ; she had not interfered , she had endured through the long days and the years, had endured those blows of her children , just for herself she endured the hard days of working in the service of others, washing floors on her knees, living without a man and without solace in the midst of the greasy leavings and dirty linen of other people’s lives, the long days of labor adding up one by one to a life , by dint of being deprived of hope , had become

also a life without any sort of resentment , unaware, preserving, a life resigned to all kinds of suffering, her own as well as that of others. He had never heard her complain, other than to she was tired or that back hurt after a big washday. He had never heard her speaking ill of anyone, other than to say sister or aunt had not been nice to her, or was “stuck up”. But on the other hand he had seldom heard her laugh wholeheartedly. (58-59)

What Camus also tells us is the story of the child whom poverty condemns to repeated humiliations. He keeps a few pennies from the money that his grandmother had given him to buy groceries and pretends to have dropped them in the hole that serves as a toilet. When the old woman goes looking for them in it, he feels ashamed to have deprived his family of the coins, which he had wanted to go watch a soccer game. When he goes to the Lycee and has to indicate his mother’s profession on a form, he is ashamed of having to write “domestic”. When he has to seek a summer job- so that he will be able to compensate his family for failing to earn any money while at Lycee- he discovers that he cannot get one if he does not lie about his intention to return to Lycee in the fall, and he suffers bitterly for having “to lie for the right to have no vacation, to work far from the summer sky and the sea he so loved”.

Jacques had grown up in the midst of a poverty naked as death, among things named with common nouns; it was at his uncle’s that he discovered on this plain shiny furniture, there was nothing except an Arab ashtray made of chased copper, there because he was coming, and a post office calendar on the wall. There was nothing to see here, and little to say, and that was why he knew nothing about his mother except what he learned from his own experience. Nor about his father. (60-61)

What gives the book its tension and keeps it from ever slipping into sentimentality is the drama of Jacques' ambivalence. He is tied forever to his mother and to his milieu by "two or three favorite pictures that joined him to them made him one with them". But at the same time the boy had a thirst for learning and a "hunger for discovery". School provided him both escape from his "destitute home" and with a "powerful poetry", which Camus describes minutely – the smell of the ink, the vanished rulers and pen cases, the joy of finding out about the world in textbooks. If Mr. Bernard had not come pleading to Jacques home, the grandmother would not have allowed him to go on the Lycee.

No one had actually taught the child what was right and what was wrong. Some things were forbidden and any infractions were severely punished. Others were not only his teachers would sometime talk about morality, when the curriculum left the time, but there again prohibitions were more explicit than the reasons for them. All that Jacques had been able to see and experience concerning morality was daily life in a working class family where it was evident no one had ever thought there was any other way other than the hardest kind of labor to acquire the money necessary to their survival. But that was a lesson in courage, not morals. Nonetheless Jacques knew it was wrong to hide those two francs. And he didn't want to do it. And he would not do it; maybe he could do what he had done before, squeeze between two boards to get in the old stadium at the parade grounds and the match free. (88-89)

The intensity of Camus' feelings, the delicacy and the beautiful aptness with which he renders them, make one realize that the reason why they had been either expressed obliquely or fleetingly or else transposed and distanced in his fiction and plays was because he struggled

between a flood of passionate emotions and the drive to control and master them, a drive inculcated by the school , but also by the need not to let himself be engulfed by his love for his mother and by his empathy , his pity, for his family's condition.

Only school gave Jacques and Pierre these joys. And no doubt what they so passionately loved in school was that they were not at home, where want and ignorance made life more harder and more bleak, as if closed in on itself; poverty is a fortress without drawbridges. (145)

Camus describes himself as a mixture of lifelong attachments to those he loves and indifference, as a man who felt at ease with “what was inevitable . . . everything in his life he had not been able to avoid , his illness his vocation, fame or poverty . . . the heart , the heart above all is not free. It is inevitability and the recognition of the inevitable.”

“You don't need me anymore,” he said, “you'll have teachers who know more. But you know where I am, come see me if you need me to help you.” He went out and Jacques left alone , lost among the women, then he dashed to the window and looked at his teacher, who waved at him one last time and who was leaving him alone henceforth and, instead of the joy of success , a child's immense anguish wrung in heart , as if he knew in advance that this success had just uprooted him from the warm and innocent world of the poor – a world closed in on itself like an island in the society, where poverty took the place of family and community – to hurtled into a strange world , one no longer his, where he could not believe the teachers were more learned than the one whose heart was all knowing, and from now on he would have to learn , to understand without help , and become a man

without a aid of the one man who had rescued him ; would have to grow up and bring himself up alone , and it would be at the highest cost.(175-176)

The First Man is both a familiar story – the story of emancipation through learning and of the mix of innocent pleasure and obscure guilt that is childhood – and a revelation of the roots of Camus' thought. It is not a book of about politics, and those who, one more time, attack Camus for his views on Algeria are the victims of their own obsessions.

Jacques had always devoured any books that came to hand, and he consumed them with the same appetite he felt for living, playing or dreaming. But reading enabled him to escape into a world of innocence where wealth and poverty were equally interesting because both wee utterly unreal. (244)

The Algerian tragedy is going to be dealt with in a part of the book Camus never got to. This does not mean that we do not find here some essential clues about his feelings for Algeria. When he deals with the past – the arrival of the colons, and the life of the Pieds noirs at the time of his childhood, he expresses, again, mainly compassion for the settlers who came from many lands and disappeared after having lived and toiled without roots.

The war was there, like an evil cloud thick with dark menace, but you could not keep it from invading the sky, no more than you could stop the locusts or the devastating storms that would swoop down the high plains of Algeria. The Germans were forcing France into war once again and we are going to suffer – there were no causes for it, she did not the history France, nor what history was. She knew little of her own history barely knew the history of those she loved, and those she loved had to suffer as she did. (68)

He mentions the xenophobia of the workers, afraid of losing their jobs to the Spaniards, to the Jews, or the Arabs and fighting for “the privilege of servitude”. There are few Arabs in the story: to young Jacques, they are companions.

Whole mobs had been coming here for more than a century, had plowed, dug furrows, deeper and deeper in some places, shakier and shakier in others, until the dusty earth covered them over and the place went back to its wild vegetation; and they had procreated, then disappeared. And so it was with their sons. And the sons and grandsons of these found themselves on this land as he himself had, with no past, without ethics, without guidance, without religion, but glad to be so and to be in the light, fearful in the face of the night and death. All those generations, all those men come from many nations, under this magnificent sky where the first portent of twilight was already rising, had disappeared without a trace, locked within themselves. An enormous oblivion spread over them, and actually that was what this land gave out, what fell from the sky with the night over the three men returning to the village, their hearts made anxious by the approach of the night, filled with that dread that seizes all men in Africa when the sudden evening descends on the sea, on the rough mountains and the high plateaus, the same holy dread that has the same effect on the on the slopes of Delphi’s mountain, where it makes temples and altars emerge. But on the land of Africa the temple had been destroyed, and all that is left is soft unbearable burden on the heart. Yes how they died! How they were still dying! In silence and away from everything, as his father had died in incomprehensible far from his native land, after a life without a single free choice – from the orphanage to the hospital, the inevitable marriage

along the way, a life that grew around him, in spite of him; until the war killed and buried him; from then and forever unknown to his people and to his son, he too was returned to that immense oblivion that was the ultimate homeland of the men of his people, the final destination of a life that began without roots – and so many report in the libraries of the time about the use of foundlings for this country's settlement, yes, all these found and lost children who built transient towns in order to die forever in themselves and in others.(193-194)

It was always a mistake to read Camus as a political thinker or as a philosopher. He was haunted by the issues that rose: suicide, murder, the impossibility of communicating fully with those one loves. But metaphysical questions and philosophical systems are not his domains. Insofar the public life was concerned; it was the ethical preconditions that bothered him. He had no solutions to offer, only barriers he wanted to erect. He had one obsession, like Proudhon, with whom he shared enthusiasm for the artisans and hatred for the work that is boring, work “so interminably monotonous that it made the days too long and, at the same time, life too short.” He wanted fairness for the human beings and, especially, for the poor.

Memory which is fallible in itself played very crucial role in the life of Jacques Cormery and his family. There needed forgetfulness in order to live in this world like his mother did but on the other hand Jacques needed to be informed about his past family life. What his mother can do is only endure not to understand what kept Jacques in void throughout all of his life.

She said yes, maybe it was no; she had to reach back in time through the clouded memory, nothing was certain. To begin with, poor people's memory is less nourished than that of rich; it has fewer landmarks in space because they seldom leave the place where they live and fewer reference points in time throughout

lives that are gray and featureless. Of course there is the memory of the heart that they is the surest kind, but the heart wears out with sorrow and labor, it forgets sooner under the weight of fatigue. Remembrance of things past is just for rich. For the poor it only marks the faint traces on the path to death. And besides, in order to bear up, well one must not remember too much, but rather stick to the passing day , hour by hour, as his mother did, somewhat by necessity no doubt, since that childhood illness.....(80-81)

The politics had to be modest: grand Salvationist schemes always led to more misery and oppression and deprived people of their right to their private lives; ideologies that subordinates means to ends and the present to a distant dubious future are evil; and the state is no more than a tool, not the culmination of history. What Jacques taught was limits: do not do anything that adds human misery, such as terror, torture, wanton violence.

Actually no one could have given them advice. Pierre and he realized very soon that they were on their own. Mr. Bernard himself, whom they in any case would not dare disturb, could tell them nothing about this Lycee he did not know. At home ignorance was still complete. For Jacques' family, Latin, for example was actually a word that had absolutely no meaning. That there had been (besides primitive times, which they on the other hand could imagine) times when no one spoke French, that civilizations (and the word itself meant nothing to them) had succeeded each other with such different customs and languages – these truths had not reached them. In this home where there are no newspapers, nor, until Jacques brought them in, any books no radio either, where there were only objects of immediate utility, where no one but relatives visited, a home they rarely left

and then only to meet other members of the same ignorant family – what Jacques brought home from the Lycee could not be assimilated, and the silence grew between him and his family. (202-203)

It is in the light of all of these political and psychological circumstances in the 1950s that we must read *The First Man*. What appears to be facile nostalgia floats over an immense abyss. Amid the Algerian apocalypse and personal troubles, Camus was trying to preserve an image of youthful innocence from total oblivion and perhaps make a statement as well. The critic Paul deman, writing without knowledge of *The First Man* and before his own past as a pro Nazi writer was known, took Camus to task for believing that, “he could shelter mankind from its own contingency merely by asserting the beauty of his own memories.” de man wickedly went to conclude that Camus the writer was like Camus the young man and soccer goalie: he did not enter the fray but merely defended a disappearing society from attack against it.

Yes , that was how he lived, in those games by the sea, in the wind, in the street, under the weight of the summer and the heavy rains of brief winter, with no father, with no heritage handed down, but finding a father for a year, just when he needed him, and learning through the people and the things of, through the knowledge that revealed itself to him to fashion something that resembled a style (sufficient at the time for his circumstances, insufficient later on when confronting the cancer of the world) and to create his own heritage. (184)

All around the void Jacques Cormery has his own choice and acted much like his own which created his existential self. The self of Jacques is individual and guided by his own individualistic faith. Jacques Cormery is guided by his own sense of moral conscience. He is aware of his responsibilities and is not ever pessimistic. Jacques Cormery loved and lived his life

truly and in his own way. Along with the childhood days of hard poverty he also experienced the happiness of life from nature, friends and his family. Everything he knew is by himself but he was never wrong. He always made a right decision. He has got the great sense of compassion for the poor and innocent people. He can never forget the poor and innocent people of Algeria. Those poor and innocent people of Algeria were the lifelong inspirations in his whole creative life.

Wandering through the nights of the years in the land of oblivion where each one is the first man, where he had to bring himself up, without a father, having never known these moments when a father would call his son, after for him to reach the age of listening, to tell him the family's secret, or a sorrow of a long ago, or the experience of his life, those moments when even the ridiculous and hateful Polonius all of a sudden becomes great when he is speaking to Laertes; and he was sixteen, then he was twenty, and no one had spoken to him, and he had to by himself, to grow alone, in fortitude, in strength find his own morality and truth, at last to be born in a harder childbirth, which consist of being born in relation to others, to women, like all the man born in this country who, one by one try to learn to live without roots and without faith, and today all of them are threatened with eternal anonymity and the loss of the only consecrated traces of their passage on this earth, the illegible slabs in the cemetery that the night has now covered over; to the immense host of the conquerors, now dispossessed, who had preceded them on this land and in whom they now had to recognize the brotherhood of race and destiny.(195-196)

Jacques Cormery had his own single world. Except the school teacher Bernard Germain, there was no one to show him way in his life. Through education he became able to create a world, and survive within in it. He enjoys his free will to live which is almost subjective. Jacques Cormery believed in a individual existence and never confirms to any system and political parties. He always held the humanistic position. He believed that true ideology must respect every single human being.

For he too believed he was living; he alone had created himself, he knew his own strength, his vigor, he could cope and he had himself well in hand. But in the strange dizziness of that moment, the statue every man eventually erects and hardens in the fire of the years, into which he then creeps and there awaits its final crumbling – that statue was rapidly cracking , it was already collapsing. All that was left was this anguished heart eager to live, rebelling against the deadly order of the world that had been with him for forty years, and still struggling against the wall that separated him from the secret of all life, wanting to go farther, to go beyond, and to discover, discover before dying, discover at last in order to be, just once to be, for a single second, but forever. (26-27)

As Jacques Cormery is able to discover his self out of nothing, Camus' tale *The First Man* affirms the value and virtue of human condition and celebrates the human existence on this earth. The acceptance of the suffering gives Jacques a kind of inner strength to bear up and find way in the world full of void. Jacques proves his existence being alone in this world. Jacques' existence makes his essence.

IV. Conclusion

The First Man, an autobiographical classic of Albert Camus is a bittersweet story about finding one's place in the world without betraying one's origins. With *The First Man* we encounter a new Camus, more personal and personable. Drawing explicitly for the first time on the circumstances of his life, he is, as ever, wisely human. But this time, he is more human as well.

In his final project, Camus vigorously captures the tactile truths his childhood and adolescence within a formal frame of fiction. In *The First Man*, isolated young Albert Camus speaks painfully through the sentences of the world-wise artist, revealing the spare, poignant origins of his exceptional moral conscience.

The First Man neither stark nor anguished. Instead, a naked exuberance and love animate its pages. *The first man* also reveals how Camus, throughout his career, was both shadowed and inspired by the voiceless mass of people who, like the Algerians of his youth, go through their lives leaving barely a trace of their existence.

Every page of *The First Man* bears the clarity of the Camus we have read, and beyond that the lyric sense of longing. Camus's story is the oldest story, yet he infuses the intensity of childhood and the beneficence of his love for the people of Algeria. *The First Man* expands posterity's judgement of Camus and leave the reader sandblasted by feeling. *The First Man* has an overwhelming emotional integrity.

The First Man is an utterly absorbing and evocative work of art. Much can be gleaned along the lines from the appended interleaves and notes and sketches that detail the author's wider vision. these items provide an unusual and privileged window into the writer's craft. They

demonstrate the in a simple and haunting way what Albert Camus was thinking as he penned his last words.

The very unfinished quality of *The First Man* lends it an appealing directness, these pages shimmer with a lyricism and sensuousness is movingly memorialized in this book, its brilliant colors, spectral light and lush scents conjured up in luxuriant detail.

Although it is always very difficult task to give certain theoretical framework to the autobiographical work of art, existentialism is best applied for a perspective to study *The First Man* as the book renders on the forlorn existence and the discovery of individual and personal existential self of Jacques Cromery. Furthermore, *The First Man* had successfully contemplated on the issues like existential despair, freedom of choice, responsibility, freedom, happiness and about love, gratitude and so on. *The First Man* covers up the wide range of existential issues of our time.

To those of us for whom Camus' voice in the 1940s and 1950s was always the voice of refined beauty, deep and humane wisdom, controlled passion, and noble art, the publication of *The First Man* is an invaluable gift.

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