The Adulterous Woman: New Forms of Judgment

The Adulterous Woman relates a day in the life of Janine, a woman in her forties who has accompanied her husband Marcel, a cloth merchant, on a business trip south into Algeria. The narration is in the third person, but limited to Janine’s point of view. The story begins on a bus, which arrives at an oasis town around midday. Janine and Marcel settle in their hotel room, walk through the town to visit the local merchants, go up late in the day onto the parapet of a fort, where Janine has intimations of a freedom she has only vaguely been aware of before, and then go back to the hotel. During the night, Janine returns to the fort, where she has another, more powerful experience, sensing her own place in the eternal wheeling of the stars. This moment of revelation, described in highly erotic terms, ends with the line “the whole sky stretched out over her, fallen on her back on the cold earth” (33).¹ She then returns to her husband. Obviously, the adultery promised by the title is purely symbolic.

Two questions seem to arise from this story. First of all, what is the exact nature of Janine’s experience at the fort? Did Camus, that is to say, mean for us to recognize this as a mystical revelation, a literary epiphany, or a psychological breakdown? Second, what is the significance of the cryptic final paragraph? Janine gets back into bed, apparently without Marcel’s knowing she was gone; but he awakens a moment later, says something Janine does not understand, goes to the bathroom for a drink of mineral water, and is about to slip into bed again when “he
looked at her, without understanding. She was weeping copiously, unable to restrain herself. ‘It’s nothing, dear,’ she said, ‘it’s nothing’” (33).² To some readers, this amounts to an authentic reconciliation with reality; to others, it signals a permanent loss of the “kingdom” and return to exile. Such endings are typical of Camus’s stories, and obviously, Camus intended the reader not to know the answer.

Thus, this apparently simple story, like the life it tells, contains some mysteries. In order to read them intelligibly, we must replace them in the context of the entire narrative sequence, and see how Camus builds to the climax on the parapet, what is resolved there, and what remains after Janine’s return to the hotel room. Ostensibly, most of the story follows the very routine events of the day, and sets within that framework Janine’s random thoughts and reminiscences. But the routine sales trip turns out to have a hidden pattern, at least as Janine perceives it; and the random ideas it evokes keep returning obsessively to a small number of themes, which eventually coalesce into a single clear pattern.³

Time is one of the broadest structuring concepts in human consciousness. In the beginning of The Adulterous Woman, the hours of the day are recorded with some regularity. By evening, a more general sense of time replaces the clock-watching chronology, preparing us for one important aspect of Janine’s revelation, the experience of eternity through the infinite expansion of the moment. The latter kind of time has, however, been present all along. We learn with precision that “the bus had left only at dawn” and that “for two hours in the cold morning it had been advancing,” but we read in the same passage that “it seemed to her as if she had been traveling for days” (5).⁴ A similar temporal disorientation occurs in the next paragraph, this time concerning Janine’s entire life: “Was that so long ago? Twenty-five years. Twenty-five years were nothing, for it seemed to her only yesterday . . .”⁵ In short, though Janine remains quite capable of reading the calendar or the clock, she makes the effort to do so primarily because, from the outset, she feels a discrepancy between real and felt time, between chronology and duration.
Besides the twin confusions about time, there are many hints that the journey, at least the bus trip, is a recapitulation of Janine's entire life. For example, at the start of the ride, the sky was clear and the horizon visible; but the wind-whipped sand had shrouded the bus until they "were silently progressing in a sort of sleepless night" (5). A few paragraphs later, remembering her married life, Janine thinks: "The years had passed in the semi-darkness behind the half-closed shutters. Summer, the beaches, excursions, the mere sight of the sky were things of the past" (8). A recurrent theme in Janine's reverie is summed up in the sentence, "No, nothing had happened as she had expected" (7). In the context, following on an interruption caused by the bus's honking and Janine's sudden awareness of a French soldier across the aisle, it is hard to say exactly to what this sentence refers. On the one hand, it fits her marriage: Marcel has provided neither the companionship nor the security she expected. On the other hand, it fits the trip; she had anticipated "heat, the swarms of flies, the filthy hotels . . . palm trees, soft sand" (9) and finds none of these—although it is a fly, "an odd sight here" (3) and therefore a reminder of her expectations, that sets off Janine's train of thought in the first line of the story. I could pursue the analogy of marriage and journey to include the bus's stalling, Marcel's stolid presence beside Janine, the couple's isolation from the other passengers, and so on. Critics have noticed a comparable device in the second story, where the Renegade's life parallels the day he spends waiting for the missionary. It is, in both cases, not a literal incident-by-incident transposition, but rather a general feeling of convergence of the life in the past with the present.

When, therefore, Janine goes up to the fort at night, her new experience of time comes not as an unexpected revelation but as the resolution of a problem of which she herself had been aware, if only dimly. Both chronology and duration are submerged in her identification with a vaster time, that of eternity: "She was turning with them [the stars] and the apparently stationary progress little by little identified her with the core of her being" (32). Time, which is in part an objective phenomenon, independent of the fiction but used by Camus to confer a classical
unity on *The Adulterous Woman*, is also a theme of the heroine’s growing self-awareness, which is the principal structuring element of the story.

The natural correlate of time is, of course, space. Janine feels her contact with the physical world about her in ways parallel to her sense of time. The progress of the bus across the desert and the walk around the town pose no problems; these are the objective measures, the equivalents to clock time and the calendar. Nonetheless, as we have seen, the fog and blowing sand obscure the horizon for part of the day. This spatial disorientation is developed in a series of problematic encounters with the material world.

To begin with the most literal, Janine has always felt herself to be somewhat large; Marcel is “a little shorter than she” (6). On the bus, the Arabs seem to have plenty of room in their seats, “where she and her husband felt wedged in” (7)—and so she pulls her coat tighter about her. As they set out after lunch, she “would have liked to take up less space” (16). Coming down from the first trip to the fort, “she felt too tall, too thick” (25). Her weight makes the bed rattle. On her way back to the fort, however, she encounters three Arabs on bicycles, and they have “vast burnooses” (31); moreover, instead of trying to shrink from them, she stands her ground and lets the burnooses brush against her. On the parapet, she forgets not only the destructive passing of time but “the weight of beings” (32).

Janine’s sense of her physical being takes in much more than her bigness, however; her size is just part of a complex of associations. As a girl, she had “won the first prize in gymnastics and hadn’t known what it was to be winded” (5-6), yet she cannot bend down to check Marcel’s sample case under the bus seat. In the hotel room, she feels the heaviness of her legs; and during the afternoon, she grows weary walking. When she goes to the fort at night, however, she runs the entire distance.

Throughout the early part of the story, Janine suffers from the cold. One of her earliest thoughts was, “The weather was cold” (3); and one of her disenchantments with the trip is that “she had not thought of the cold, of the biting wind, of these semipolar plateaux” (9). Upon arriving at the oasis, she sees
the palm trees, "and she would have liked to go toward them. But although it was close to noon, the cold was bitter; the wind made her shiver" (13). She goes to her room instead. During the first visit to the fort, however, it is Marcel who feels the cold and the fatigue; and when Janine returns by night, "breathing deeply, she forgot the cold" (32).

Her eating and drinking follow the same course. On the bus, the French soldier gives her a lozenge, which she takes hesitantly. It is a disappointment, however, for she thinks of it as an overture to something more; but the soldier does not even notice her afterward. The noon meal she eats with Marcel—pork and wine—"bothered her somewhat" (16). After their evening meal, both she and Marcel, exhausted, silent, sick, drag themselves to their icy room and sleep. Back at the fort, however, Janine finds her proper nourishment: "The cold air she was gulping down flowed evenly inside her and a spark of warmth began to glow amidst her shivers" (31-32); and it is the pure water of night that fills and satisfies her.

Camus has then provided an extensive range of physical sensations, all of which evolve simultaneously in the same way, and which reflect the same changing self-awareness as the sense of time. Much the most important of Janine's physical senses, however, is her sexuality. Despite the title of the story, and the unmistakably erotic language of the climax, critics have been singularly blind to this theme. The French soldier on the bus seems to initiate an ordinary seduction, but nothing comes of it at all. He serves to emphasize the symbolic nature of Janine's adultery, as others have pointed out. This need not imply, however, that real sexuality plays no important role in the story, for in fact it returns constantly in Janine's thoughts.

When Janine first notices the French soldier, she thinks that he is ogling her, and she blushes. Not long afterward, she feels too big for the seat, and consoles herself with the reflection: "Yet she wasn't so fat—tall and well rounded rather, plump and still desirable, as she was well aware when men looked at her" (7). Yet at that very moment, her husband was "looking straight ahead"—perhaps not significant in a couple married for twenty-five years; but the soldier also, after having offered
Janine the lozenge, turned to “staring at the road, straight in front of him” (12). When they arrive at the oasis, outside the hotel, she “saw the soldier coming toward her. She was expecting him to smile or salute. He passed without looking at her and disappeared” (13). On the street in the late afternoon, Janine “had never seen so many men. Yet none of them looked at her” (21). They are all, to be sure, Arabs, and racial barriers would tend to make Janine invisible to them; but like Marcel, like the soldier, Janine has noticed them, and notices their failure to look at her.

Lying awake before her visit to the fort, Janine faces the truth about her sexuality:

They made love in the dark, by feel, without seeing each other. Is there another love than that of darkness, a love that would cry aloud in daylight? She didn’t know, but she did know that Marcel needed her, and that she needed that need, that she lived on it night and day, at night especially—every night, when he didn’t want to be alone, or to age and die, with that set expression he assumed which she occasionally recognized on other men’s faces, the only common expression of those madmen hiding under an appearance of wisdom until the madness seizes them and hurls them desperately toward a woman’s body to bury in it, without desire, everything terrifying that solitude and night reveal to them” (27–28).

Yet this particular night, “Marcel came to join her [in bed] and put the light out without asking anything of her” (26). It would be too strong to assert categorically that Janine is no longer sexually desirable, but the day has certainly given her cause to doubt her desirability. At every turn, she has been ignored by men, in many cases where she needed, and indeed expected, to be desired. The eroticism of her experience at the fort is no mere trick of style. Janine has been preoccupied with sex throughout the story, but in much the same way as with the other themes of her thoughts. Sexuality, too, has disappointed her expectations, but she discovers an entirely new resolution of the problem in her orgasmic union with the night sky.

To sum up the structure, Camus has interwoven many themes in Janine’s consciousness—time, her body, sexuality—all of which evolve in a roughly similar pattern. On the bus, she
gradually becomes aware of them; in the town, they return to plague her, especially after she has the inkling of a solution during her first visit to the fort; finally, during her night visit, all of them are resolved in some fashion. The nature of the resolution depends, of course, on how one interprets the end of the story, when she returns to the hotel room; but before discussing an interpretation, I want to consider another clue Camus has given about his intentions.

Some of the stories in Exile and the Kingdom seem to be reworkings of earlier writings by Camus himself, but the collection owes very little to literary sources. The Adulterous Woman in particular has some affinities with Noces, “Retour à Tipasa,” and La Mort heureuse, but otherwise appears to be composed of materials drawn from real-life observation. Yet the title bluntly announces a literary debt, which, with astonishing unanimity, critics have ignored, or worse yet, dismissed; Jean Onimus called the story “a humorous tale, beginning with the title itself.” True, at first glance the comparison holds little promise. In Camus’s version, the woman commits no actual adultery, nobody accuses her, and so nobody passes any judgment on her. To be sure, the familiar moral of the biblical story—“He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her” (John 8:7)—agrees with Camus’s own thinking, at least in broad terms; but it is hard to see how it applies to Camus’s story. On closer examination, however, we will see that there are many subtle connections.

The original version, in John 8:3-11 reads:

And the scribes and Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery; and when they had set her in the midst,

They say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act.

Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou?

This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him. But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not.

So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.
And again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground.
And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst.
When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee?
She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.\textsuperscript{34}

Most of the story is familiar to everyone, but the seemingly irrelevant detail of Jesus’ writing on the ground is so seldom recalled as to be the most striking element. This writing must represent the new law of Jesus, based on love and mercy, which is to replace the old law of Moses, based on retribution. Moreover, whereas Moses went up onto the mountain to bring back the central articles of his law, Jesus lowers himself to deliver his. They are written upon the earth itself, suggesting the importance of the material Creation to the God who has made himself man. Accordingly, Jesus has each man look within himself for the law.

In Camus’s story, Janine sees writing on the earth during her first visit to the fort: “All around them a flock of motionless dromedaries, tiny at that distance, formed against the gray ground the black signs of a strange handwriting, the meaning of which had to be deciphered” (23).\textsuperscript{35} The strange script can thus be partly deciphered as an intertextual reference that explicitly associates Janine’s adventure to the theme of law and judgment.\textsuperscript{36}

Camus, of course, brings no god into his story; rather, the universe itself is the writing and the meaning. But just as adultery brought the biblical woman before Jesus, where she learned the new law, so too Janine’s symbolic adultery will force her to reencounter the world and to ask herself profound questions about its meaning. Ultimately, the adulteress must face her conscience alone. In the beginning, the scribes and Pharisees bring her against her will into the middle of the crowd of men in the temple, where Jesus was. In similar fashion, Janine has been reluctantly brought on this journey by her husband, and she finds herself alone in a throng of men: “Not a single
woman could be seen, and it seemed to Janine that she had never seen so many men" (21). These alien men, accusers, lawgivers, judges, and, in Janine's case, supporters and protectors, too, cannot take the place of the woman's own responsibility for herself. Jesus' indirect rebuke to the scribes and Pharisees is not the final point of the story; in the end, he tells the woman that she also must judge herself. Camus has emphasized that ending, replacing the concern about law and judgment with a concern for human freedom and individual responsibility.

Stone is so much a part of Camus's world that one might easily overlook its function as an allusion. Mosaic law called for adulterous women to be stoned, however, and the scribes and Pharisees specifically recall that punishment to Jesus, who repeats the citation in his famous reply. Reading the Gospel account with Camus in mind, we can easily see how well the stones fit into Camus's symbolic landscape. Indeed, the Ten Commandments were inscribed on stone, in contrast to the earth on which Jesus writes with his finger; stone represents harsh inflexible reality in the Gospel as well as in Camus's story.

Few of Camus's works use stone more obsessively than *The Adulterous Woman*. Among many references, the most memorable is the sentence where Janine becomes aware of how the desert has disappointed her expectations of it (and we have seen how this disappointment is echoed in many other aspects of her consciousness): "Now she saw that the desert was not that at all, but merely stone, stone everywhere, in the sky full of nothing but stone-dust, rasping and cold, as on the ground, where nothing grew among the stones except dry grasses" (10).

Janine's glum preoccupation with the stony desert constitutes a form of self-punishment, similar to the fear of lapidation that weighed upon the biblical adulteress. Camus has pressed the analogy further still. As the story opens, with Janine on the bus, she begins to observe her surroundings, and notices what Camus terms "the gritty fog" (4), the cloud of dust and sand through which they are driving. Janine perceives this fog as a willful, hostile force: "The sand now struck the windows in packets as if hurled by invisible hands" (4). Shortly afterward, when the bus has to stop, she is actually struck in the face by the grains of
sand. This is not to suggest that Janine is guilty, especially of adultery, and even less that she deserves to be stoned, but rather that the biblical story informs this one, in Janine’s mind as well as our own. The stoning of the bus by invisible accusers awakens her conscience. In some obscure way, she feels guilty; spurred by that anxiety, she achieves a new self-awareness.

The biblical story tells of a kind of trial, and as we have noted, the principle of law would have appealed to Camus. Camus’s story does not, however, present many elements of a trial. Although one can readily see the symbolic adultery in the climactic visit to the fort, who accuses Janine? who judges her? what law condemns her? and who would punish her? Perhaps one answer, suggested in the preceding paragraph, is that the entire process occurs within Janine’s mind: she accuses, judges, and ultimately forgives herself, replacing an old law of dependence and fear with a new law of independence and confidence. If so, the reader has been drawn into the procedure, and Camus has brought off an ironic reversal in the verdict, similar to Jesus’. For we readers and critics are Janine’s accusers and would-be judges; we are the scribes and the Pharisees.

Peter Cryle concludes his chapter on *The Adulterous Woman* by examining “the comments of critics who wanted to judge the heroine’s action in the light of the ideas expressed by Camus in other works.” His summation is stunning: “For various reasons, they all find that Janine is guilty.” I find it hard to believe that Camus wrote this story so that readers could overturn Jesus’ verdict on appeal. To be sure, the title invites a judgment, and Janine probably finds herself guilty. But here guilt is not the point, except as a condition for reprieve. Should we not suppose that Janine returns from the fort with a conscience instructed to go forth and sin no more? The New Testament adulteress, for all we know, may have lapsed into sin again, despite Jesus’ teaching; Janine may once again sink into parasitic passivity or pine once again for an impossible freedom. The revelation of the truth is nonetheless the significant moment of the story. The adulteress goes away with at least the hope of salvation; Janine lives on with at least the hope of entering her kingdom. The
lesson for the rest of us is that we should all look within ourselves and judge our own lives.

Part of Camus's genius as a writer is revealed in his choice of a subject like Janine, an unremarkable person in every respect, whose passivity and detachment have seemed to other critics the very negation of Camus's moral philosophy. The transformation of Janine's menopausal depression into an existential epiphany constitutes a literary tour de force. To be consistent with his own moral position, moreover, the author must acknowledge his solidarity with the heroine; he too must avoid passing judgment. Camus's narrative strategy in *The Adulterous Woman* sets a pattern for most of the stories that follow. In the beginning, and for the major part of the story, the reader sees through the eyes of Janine and conceptualizes through her mind. Although, as we have seen, Janine may not be a completely reliable observer, Camus does not exploit the ironic possibilities very much. In *The Adulterous Woman*, he appears to be striving for a simple and straightforward feeling of identification between reader and character. By the time of Janine's night visit to the fort, the reader should be fully involved with her.

The ending is therefore an abrupt break with the rest of the story. The narrator abandons his privilege of insight into Janine's consciousness, and gives us only a few external clues to her state of mind after the experience. We see and hear just what Marcel sees and hears: "he looked at her, without understanding" (33). Most of the final paragraph, in fact, relates Marcel's actions, and mostly in plain language, except for the "light, which slapped her right in the face" (33), a reminder of the sand that struck her face on the bus. Her last line—"It's nothing, dear, it's nothing" (33)—has been read either as a moan of despair occasioned by her return to normality, or as an expression of protective tenderness signifying a hopeful reconciliation of her dreams and reality. Such ambiguous endings are typical of these stories; the reader is not meant to feel certain about the future projected by the story.

The story gives us an illusion of solidarity with the heroine; the real problem of the ending is whether we will be able to
sustain the feeling of solidarity when we have lost the artificial support of the narrator's vision. For the reader, the problem is a reflection of Janine's own problem: can she sustain the vision of her night on the parapet? Obviously for both reader and heroine the seductive vision may turn out to be a mirage that dissipates as soon as the atmosphere changes. Janine's problem is, to be sure, a figment of the critical imagination; she has no future beyond her last words. The reader's problem, on the other hand, is real, as is also the author's. Camus wrote intending the reader's experience to be transforming. Whether or not we conclude that Janine probably will (would) find her "kingdom" or go on living in "exile," in order for her experience to affect ours, it must in some form show us how that can occur. Janine may be a person who never consciously deciphered the hieroglyphic text of reality, or one who read the text but failed to incorporate its message in her own life. But in the metatext Camus has provided us, there is a guide to a better reading, so that we may incorporate its message in our lives.

The moment of revelation for Janine requires isolation and deprivation. This setting seems to express Camus's vision of the true nature of reality, and the Algerian desert becomes almost allegorical as the mirror of humanity's existential aloneness in a barren, meaningless creation. The warm beaches and the shuttered apartment have deluded Janine about the world; but if the reality is less comfortable, it possesses its own beauty and its own glory, to which Janine, like the other heroes of these stories, suddenly awakens. In most cases, moreover, the awakening is solitary. How and why it happens, even what it is, have little importance, but it is crucial whether the newly enlightened person can communicate the vision to others.

Throughout his works, Camus portrays the anguish of trying to express one's vision. Joseph Grand, the improbable self-effacing hero of The Plague, most clearly illustrates the martyrdom of the artist; in Exile and the Kingdom, Jonas, Daru, the tongueless Renegade, and obviously The Silent Men all embody aspects of the failures of language and the temptations of silence. So do Janine and Marcel, who have never learned the language of the Arabs all around them, and who, in
the final paragraph, speak to each other without being understood. The story ends suspended between conflicting impulses. “She was weeping copiously, unable to restrain herself” (33), notes the author; is she mourning a failure, or is it that the self-restraint of a lifetime has been breached? Will Janine’s feelings overwhelm her reticence and establish real communication between her and Marcel, between her and others, perhaps for the first time? On the other hand, when Janine says, “It’s nothing,” is that a return to self-denial, or is it the ironic prelude to the disclosure of the truth, like her earlier negative mediation, “No, she was not alone . . .” (6)? We cannot know; we can only share her anxiety before the effort.

It is an anxiety Camus knew well. Many critics have suggested that the painter Jonas is a gently caricatured self-portrait, that his long sterility before the white canvas parallels Camus’s hesitations before the white page, and that his eventual work, a single word that could be either “solitary” or “solidary,” again represents the self-contradictory impulses and ambiguous results of Camus’s own writings. In a most interesting article, Brian Fitch has proposed the desert as yet another analog to the white page and the white canvas. The world lies spread before the writer, with that strange “writing” to be decoded; the temptation to succumb to the cold, to weariness, to despair, is always present. Janine may have exhausted her capacity for heroism in her brief dash to the parapet; having deciphered the message for herself, she may be incapable of translating it for Marcel. The author, however, has taken up the burden in her place, and like D’Arrast bearing the stone to the Cook’s hut in the final story, Camus has brought Janine’s message to us. The purpose, evidently, is not that we should lose ourselves in her humdrum existence, but that her moment of triumph should enter into ours.

Given the world as it is, the materials of the artist must inevitably be the rough and uninspiring stuff of life: solitude, silence, deprivation, despair, and death. On this bleak surface, humanity must inscribe its meaning, and the artist must create the work. *The Adulterous Woman* is a work in which the least likely of subjects plays the heroic role. If self-understanding
could come to Janine, one might say, it could come to anyone; Janine represents that much hope in the world. No matter that her inarticulateness dooms her revelation to go unreported, or that the dull ears of Marcel are doomed to misapprehend it; Camus is there to relieve them of the duty. The artist may be privileged in his gift of understanding, but the artist’s work is the same as everyone’s; Camus’s task is to write Janine’s dilemma for us. Author and character are partners, solidary with each other. The completed work of art, even if it portrays a failure, represents a victory for humanity; as it extends those bonds of solidarity to the reader, it can inspire only hope.

1. P. 1573: “le ciel entier s’étendait au-dessus d’elle, renversée sur la terre froide.”
2. P. 1573: “il la regarda, sans comprendre. Elle pleurait, de toutes ses larmes, sans pouvoir se retenir. ‘Ce n’est rien, mon chéri,’ disait-elle, ‘ce n’est rien.’”
3. Cryle discusses structure in his chapter on The Adulterous Woman, pp. 45–68. Inevitably, I repeat some of the details he cites, especially regarding the treatment of time. We reach rather different conclusions, however, and I consider more elements than he does and assign them different relative importance.
4. P. 1558: “le car etait parti a l’aube”; “depuis deux heures, dans le matin froid, il progressait”; “il lui semblait qu’elle voyageait depuis des jours.”
5. P. 1558: “Y avait-il si longtemps de cela? Vingt-cinq ans. Vingt-cinq ans n’étaient rien puisqu’il lui semblait que c’était hier. . . .”
7. P. 1560: “Les années avaient passé, dans la pénombre qu’ils entretenaient, volets mi­clos. L’été, les plages, les promenades, le ciel même étaient loin.”
8. P. 1559: “Non, rien ne se passait comme elle l’avait cru.”
9. P. 1560: “la chaleur, les essaims de mouches, les hôtels crasseux . . . palmiers . . . sable doux.”
11. P. 1572: “Elle tournait avec eux [les feux] et le même cheminement immobile la réunissait peu à peu à son être le plus profond.”
12. P. 1558: “un peu petit.”
13. P. 1558: “où son mari et elle tenaient à peine.”
14. P. 1564: “elle aurait voulu tenir moins de place.”
15. P. 1569: “elle se sentait trop grande, trop épaisse.”
17. P. 1572: “le poids des êtres.” O’Brien gives “the dead weight of others”; see my comment in the Appendix.
The Adulterous Woman

18. P. 1558: “première en gymnastique, son souffle était inépuisable.”
20. P. 1560: “Elle n’avait pas pensé au froid, au vent coupant, à ces plateaux quasi polaires.”
21. P. 1562: “et elle aurait voulu aller vers eux. Mais bien qu’il fût près de midi, le froid était vif; le vent la fit frissonner.”
22. P. 1572: “Elle respirait, elle oubliait le froid.”
24. P. 1572: “l’air froid qu’elle avalait par saccades coula bientôt régulièrement en elle, une chaleur timide commença de naître au milieu des frissons.”
25. P. 1559: “Pourtant, elle n’était pas si grosse, grande et pleine plutôt, charnelle, et encore désirable—elle le sentait bien sous le regard des hommes.”
27. P. 1562: “fixait la route, droit devant lui.”
30. P. 1570: “ils s’aimaient dans la nuit, sans se voir, à tâtons. Y a-t-il un autre amour que celui des ténèbres, un amour qui crieraient en plein jour? Elle ne savait pas, mais elle savait que Marcel avait besoin d’elle et qu’elle avait besoin de ce besoin, qu’elle en vivait la nuit et le jour, la nuit surtout, chaque nuit, où il ne voulait pas être seul, ni vieillir, ni mourir, avec cet air buté qu’il prenait et qu’elle reconnaissait parfois sur d’autres visages d’hommes, le seul air commun de ces fous qui se camouflent sous des airs de raison, jusqu’à ce que le délire les prenne et les jette désespérément vers un corps de femme pour y enfouir, sans désir, ce que la solitude et le nuit leur montrent d’effrayant.”
32. See Cryle, pp. 55–58.
33. Quoted by Cryle, p. 52n: “un récit humoristique, à commencer par le titre lui-même.”
34. The French text is: “Alors les scribes et les pharisiens amenèrent une femme surprise en adultere; et, la placant au milieu du peuple, ils dirent à Jésus: Maître, cette femme a été surprise en flagrant délit d’adultere. Moïse, dans la loi, nous a ordonné de lapider de telles femmes: toi donc, que dis-tu? Ils disaient cela pour l’éprouver, afin de pouvoir l’accuser. Mais Jésus, s’étant baissé, écrivait avec le doigt sur la terre. Comme ils continuaient à l’interroger, il se releva et leur dit: Que celui de vous qui est sans pêche jette la première pierre contre elle. Et s’étant de nouveau baissé, il écrivait sur la terre. Quand ils entendirent cela, accusés par leur conscience, ils se retirèrent un à un, depuis les plus âgés jusqu’aux derniers; et Jésus resta seul avec la femme qui était là au milieu. Alors s’étant relevé, et ne voyant plus que la femme, Jésus lui dit: Femme, où sont ceux qui t’accusaient? Personne ne t’a-t-il condamnée? Elle répondit: Non, Seigneur. Et Jésus lui dit: Je ne te condamne pas non plus; va, et ne pêche plus.”
35. P. 1567: “Tout autour, un troupeau de dromadaires immobiles, minuscules à cette distance, formaient sur le sol gris les signes sombres d’une étrange écriture dont il fallait déchiffrer le sens.”
36. Besides the biblical allusion, this scene seems to be a quotation of Dostoevski, as Stirling Haig pointed out in “The Epilog of Crime and Punishment and Camus’s ‘La
Femme adultere.'" Like Janine, Raskolnikov looks out over the Siberian landscape, hears the distant sounds, sees the nomads on the horizon, and envisions another kind of life, lived in freedom. This reinforces the association with judgment.

37. P. 1566: "On n'y rencontrait pas une seule femme et il semblait à Janine qu'elle n'avait jamais vu autant d'hommes.

38. P. 1560: "Elle voyait à présent que le désert n'était pas cela, mais seulement la pierre, la pierre partout, dans le ciel où régnait encore, crissante et froide, la seule poussière de pierre, comme sur le sol où poussaient seulement, entre les pierres, des graminées sèches."

39. P. 1557: "la brume minérale."

40. P. 1557: "Sur les vitres, le sable s'abattait maintenant par poignées comme s'il était lancé par des mains invisibles."

41. P. 66: "les commentaires des critiques qui ont voulu juger l'action de l'éroïne à la lumière des idées exprimées par Camus dans d'autres ouvrages. Pour des raisons diverses, ils trouvent tous que Janine est coupable." My italics in the English.

42. P. 1573: "il la regarda, sans comprendre."

43. P. 1573: "lumière, qui la gifla en plein visage." O'Brien gives "blinded her"; see my comment in the Appendix.

44. P. 1573: "'Ce n'est rien, mon chéri, ce n'est rien."

45. P. 1573: "Elle pleurait, de toutes ses larmes, sans pouvoir se retenir."

46. P. 1559: "Non, elle n'était pas seule . . ." Ellipsis in the text.

47. See Brian T. Fitch, "Camus's Desert Hieroglyphics."