The Renegade: A Reified Voice

The Renegade, or a Confused Mind has enjoyed high levels of attention from critics, although it appears less often than some other stories in anthologies. It is, in certain respects, the least accessible of the six stories. By comparison with the demented slave who is the work’s hero and central consciousness, the main characters of all the others seem like normal workaday folks. Moreover, they go about relatively familiar business for the most part, in settings that are exotic but memorable chiefly for a kind of blankness; certainly we find nothing to compare with the Renegade’s chosen task of assassinating the new missionary, or with Taghása, the city of salt. This alienating strangeness persists in Camus’s narration as well. The dominant mode of Exile and the Kingdom is a limited third-person viewpoint, sustained at, or very close to, the level of the character’s own consciousness, which is itself rational and coherent. The Artist at Work also breaks from this pattern, but the narrator then exploits his superior rationality for its ironic effect. In The Renegade, we hear the inner monolog—or schizoid dialog—of a man who has completely lost touch with reason, in our familiar sense of the term. All these factors combine to place The Renegade in a modernist tradition; it reminds us of Beckett, Kafka, or Conrad, whereas the others seem naturalistic, aspiring to a perfect transparency of style.

Nonetheless, the story itself is not hard to follow. The Renegade is a former Catholic missionary who rashly undertook
to convert the city of Taghâsa, an eerie desert fortress inhabited by a notoriously cruel people. Instead of converting the Taghâsans, the Renegade is enslaved, tortured, mutilated, and ultimately converted himself to worship of a fetish. One day he overhears the news that a new missionary is to arrive, supported by French soldiers and accepted by the Taghâsans. The Renegade steals a gun, escapes, and waits in ambush to murder the new missionary. All the foregoing is, in fact, remembered by the Renegade as he waits, for a day and a night, until he finally kills the missionary. His recollections are interspersed with reactions to his present situation—the growing heat, his impatience, for example—and with thoughts about his motives and his view of the world.

The reader's response to the narrator poses the most urgent problem of interpretation in *The Renegade*. The first lines announce both the first-person perspective, rigorously maintained until the next-to-last line, and the high degree of unreliability. The subtitle, indeed, had forewarned of the central figure's confusion. His language constantly reemphasizes his incoherence: he repeats as a kind of refrain the opening words, "What a jumble," and occasionally interjects the nonsense syllables "gra gra." The syntax relies heavily on parataxis, repetition, lists of nouns without verbs, and the suppression of conjunctions. From time to time, the discourse veers abruptly, addressing a question or command to the Renegade rather than to the phantom listener, to whom most of the story seems to be an apostrophe. In rare cases, even some of the punctuation is deleted. One sentence will suffice to illustrate most of these traits: "This long, this long dream, I'm awaking, no, I'm going to die, dawn is breaking, the first light, daylight for the living, and for me the inexorable sun, the flies" (60).²

The Renegade's speech is undermined still more by some of what he tells of himself. He does not contradict himself, despite some inconsistency in his attitude, nor does he claim anything that violates our own sense of the possible—there are no outbreaks of the supernatural, for example. The Renegade's life, however, reveals a recurrent blindness, especially to his own motives and capacities. His religious vocation is tainted by his
desire to escape his home, especially his father, about whom he mutters at one point, “one really ought to kill one’s father” (36);³ his self-abasement as a seminarian is motivated by his wish to set an example, “to be noticed” (37);⁴ his mission to Taghāsa is obviously prompted by a lust for power: “I dreamed of absolute power” (39).⁵ These incidents belong to a well-known tradition of self-delusion or hypocrisy; the Renegade’s confusion is such that he exposes his base motives more fully than most, certainly more than necessary for the perceptive reader to form suspicions about his trustworthiness. Not only has he misapprehended his own motives, moreover, but also he has frequently failed to carry out his plan, through failure of will. He is a renegade many times over: a priest who has renounced his God, a puritan who has attempted rape, a would-be conqueror who has accepted slavery. He has no more control of his behavior than knowledge of his motives. His final action, as we eventually learn, was to be another mission. The form it takes—murder—would suffice to warn us against believing him too readily; following on what we learn of his career, his final day seems equally solipsistic. The Renegade has always confused the demands of his own ego with the external world. He is cut off from the world because he is imprisoned within his own self.

In some modernist fiction, that seems to be the point; the self is an absolute limit that cannot be transcended. The Renegade is not so mad as he first appears, however; in fact, his very awareness of his confusion distances him from it and secures a small area of agreement between him and the reader. For all its linguistic signs of irrationality, furthermore, the story unfolds with considerable structural coherence and even clarity. Peter Cryle has outlined in detail how the narration marks the time of day throughout a twenty-four hour period, dawn to dawn, and how the Renegade’s life parallels this day spiritually as well as chronologically.⁶ The events make a sequence and a sense, including the climactic murder.

In short, the Renegade is unreliable in his judgments, but apparently not in his facts. His judgments, moreover, concern primarily himself and his relationship to a god. He speculates infrequently about the motives of others, and completely ignores
their advice. Brute, physical force alone influences his beliefs about the ultimate meaning of the universe. Protracted subjection to pain and confinement within the city of salt have changed him from a believer in the God of mercy to a believer in a god of evil. And yet, as there are hints throughout and as it is clear at the end, he has never fully lost faith in the God of mercy. His insanity results far less from the psychological trauma than from his inability to reconcile his beliefs with each other or with reality. The kingdoms he tries to found—absolute monarchies every one—are doomed to fail in doubt. Hardly has the missionary been shot when the Renegade begins to worry that Christian soldiers will govern Taghâsa after all.

It should be clear that The Renegade is in no sense a plausible psychological portrait, whether of a madman or some other type. Camus deliberately severed the bonds of plausibility that might have linked his text to a real interior monolog. The Renegade portrays rather a moral and intellectual dilemma, and the Renegade is a metaphor of the text for a particular response to that dilemma.

Obviously, religious obsession defines the Renegade more than any other quality. Each of his many denials has occurred in the name of a faith: two apostasies—he leaves his Protestant village for a Catholic seminary, he renounces the Christian God to worship the Fetish; and two betrayals—he disobeys his superiors, robs the convent, and flees to convert Taghâsa; he disobeys the Sorcerer-priest, steals the gun, and flees to hasten the coming of the kingdom of evil by killing the missionary. From his youth, he translates the natural and physical world into religious imagery: “Catholicism is the sun” (35), “truth is square, heavy, thick” (54). One widely held interpretation of the story treats the Renegade primarily as a symbol, abstracted almost to allegory, of the Believer, the Man of Faith. His unreliability, his solitude, his destructiveness, and his failure to establish any kingdom on earth, all these mark him as a zealot and thus as an enemy of humanity, in Camus’s view. One can without difficulty extend the notion of belief to take in much more than the organized religions; any form of absolutism,
political and moral as well as religious, manifests the same
dehumanizing tendencies.

Camus explicitly associates the power motive to the Rene-
gade's ostensible religious faith. His arrival at the seminary was
like a Napoleonic victory for the Church—"they greeted me like
the sun at Austerlitz" (36)—and the Renegade never ceases
equating faith and power. The appeal of Taghâsa lies in its
challenge; before he went, the Renegade dreamed of his tri-
umph: "... I'd get the upper hand of those savages, like a
strong sun"—still Austerlitz—"Strong, yes, that was the word I
constantly had on the tip of my tongue, I dreamed of absolute
power, the kind that makes people kneel down, that forces the
adversary to capitulate, converts him in short ... ." (39). Of
course, it is the Taghâsans, whose sun subjugates the missionary,
who vanquish him, "thrown on my knees in the hollow of that
white shield" (44), who tear out the tongue on which he tasted
the fantasy of power. And it is precisely that power he now
worships in his lords and in the Fetish, about which his first
thought in the moment of conversion was, "Hail, he was
strength and power" (53). Even as the slave of the Taghâsans,
the Renegade cherishes his dream of power, and his deadly
mission is undertaken for power: "O Fetish, my god over
yonder, may your power be preserved" (58), prays the Rene-
gade as he loads the gun and takes aim; and when the victim
falls, he says, "he is raising his head a little, he sees me—me his
all-powerful shackled master" (59). The Renegade spiritually
accepted his own slavery because he thought it allied him with
the strongest god and the strongest people.

It is easy enough to castigate the Renegade as a villain, but in
Camus's world, fanatical believers, self-righteous judges, all the
powerful, must be human, too. No humanism that excludes
some humans, on whatever grounds, can claim to be any more
than another faith, temporarily masking its absolutist impera-
tive with a verbal screen of charity. The Renegade, after all,
suffers excruciatingly for his errors, and almost any other
rhetoric besides his religious self-justification would have made
him seem more a sympathetic victim than a symbolic villain.
Even within the context of religious imagery, Camus has given the Renegade some affinities with figures other than the absolute Believer.

On the one hand, the Renegade appears in the beginning almost as an Everyman figure, as suffering humanity awaiting the savior. In the beginning of his monolog, the Renegade thinks of killing the missionary as a symbolic act; the missionary stands for a tradition that had failed him. Most immediately, the missionary takes the place of the Renegade's father, "my coarse father... my pig of a father" (35–36), whose drunkenness was responsible for the son's poor health: "because of the alcohol, they have drunk sour wine and their children have decayed teeth, gra, gra, one really ought to kill one's father" (36). Since the father has already drunk himself to death, "there's nothing left but to kill the missionary" (36), whose title is appropriately "Father"; but even the father is just the representative of a whole society: "I have something to settle with him and with his teachers, with my teachers who deceived me, with the whole of lousy Europe, everybody deceived me" (36). In a similar fashion, describing his conversion to the Fetish, he groups all his past: "down with Europe, reason, honor, and the cross" (54). The tragic irony of his condition is that the long experience of slavery and pain has so filled him with hate that the object of his hatred, the symbol of his disgust, is also his savior. As in many great religious myths, notably the story of Christ, people fail to recognize the savior when he comes and kill him; and it is only this consented sacrifice that brings understanding and conversion—as perhaps it does to the Renegade, in the last paragraph.

The Renegade is thus not a simple villain but a symbol of all humanity, evil but comprehensible in his worst excesses of violence. More than that, he is not only villain but victim. His death is perhaps not certain at the end, but very probable. He says as he awakens, "I'm going to die" (60); and to all appearances, he has been beaten and abandoned helpless in the desert. The figure he sees, or fancies he sees, coming to him only brutalizes him further. Moreover, the Renegade has foreseen
and accepted his punishment; as the Taghâsans rush upon him after the murder, he spurs them on: "Ah, yes, strike . . . strike! strike me first . . . strike the belly, yes, strike the eyes" (59). It does not, I think, vitiate his function as sacrificial scapegoat that he has throughout his life sought "to be offended," by the thinly dressed girls of Grenoble as by the cruel lords of Taghâsa. His masochistic quest for martyrdom is theologically wrong, and his death will not edify the Taghâsans. He dies, rather, for us, the readers. His very weakness, the renewed impulse to recant again, unknowable (like his life and death) outside the literary text, provides the redemptive significance to the event.

Without pride, indeed almost unconsciously, the Renegade has compared himself to Jesus. Recalling his feelings after his mutilation, and mingling them with his hatred as he waits for the missionary, he says, "he, the Lord of kindness, whose very name revolts me, I disown him, for I know him now. He dreamed and wanted to lie, his tongue was cut out so that his word would no longer be able to deceive the world, he was pierced with nails even in his head, his poor head, like mine now" (54). But it was, of course, the Renegade, not Jesus, who dreamed of bringing the word and had his tongue cut out. In the final scenes, the Renegade welcomes his masters' cruelty, saying "I love the blow that nails me down crucified" (60). The next morning, his delirious thoughts echo the last words of Jesus: "O Fetish, why hast thou forsaken me? All is over, I'm thirsty" (60).

The allusions are unambiguous, and cannot be dismissed as part of the Renegade's self-deception. The Renegade seems unaware of the comparison, and the author must therefore have suggested it for the reader. Unless Camus intended to discredit Jesus (and the parallels are not numerous enough, forceful enough, or close enough to support that analysis), he must have meant for the image of Jesus to infuse an element of goodness into the otherwise sordid life of the Renegade. Camus's Jesus is only human, however; neither God nor Fetish answers the dying Believer's anguished cry. What is perhaps most admirable in Jesus, from the humanist's perspective, is precisely his doubt before death. The Renegade's crime, in the same perspective, is
not his betrayals of his faiths but his flights to other faiths, his failure to abandon absolute faith altogether in favor of life and compromise.

The moment when the Renegade converts fully to worship of the Fetish is highly charged and merits close scrutiny. It follows immediately his most severe punishment, the mutilation. He brought that upon himself by daring to approach a woman, who had been left alone with him in the den of the Fetish. This act of desire has several rather obvious functions. In its contrast to his puritanical hostility to the girls of Grenoble, it marks the depth of his apostasy. At the same time, the horrible penalty confirms the view he has always held, that happiness, pleasure, human contacts, including sex, are evil; in this sense, the Taghâsan priest enforces the same code as the superior of his seminary. The Renegade's lust for the woman also belongs in the series of his vain efforts to usurp power and dominate; she belongs to the Sorcerer-priest and to the Fetish, and the Renegade has been disciplined not even to look during the priest's ritual copulations.

This woman is different, however, and the Renegade recalls the event as a trap deliberately set for him. The Sorcerer wears no mask for once, perhaps tempting the Renegade to see him as an equal; in any case, the Sorcerer soon leaves the Renegade alone with the woman. Her appearance is extraordinary: "... a new woman followed him and her face, covered with a tattoo reproducing the mask of the Fetish, expressed only an idol's ugly stupor" (52). The Renegade confuses her with the Fetish, at the same time he is drawn to her body: "... the Fetish looked at me over that motionless body whose muscles stirred gently and the woman's idol face didn't change when I approached. Only her eyes enlarged as she stared at me, my feet touched hers, the heat then began to shriek, and the idol, without a word, still staring at me with her dilated eyes, gradually slipped onto her back, slowly drew her legs up and raised them as she gently spread her knees" (52). The woman's resemblance to a god ought to have warned the Renegade that he was about to commit a sacrilege; instead, it draws him to her. He lusts for union with the god far more than
he lusts for sexual gratification. What appears to be the Renegade’s only gesture toward any human contact turns out to be the boldest, or most desperate, of his efforts to unite with god. Punished in so exemplary a fashion that he reminds us of those mythic Greek figures in whom Camus saw the image of humanity, the Renegade does not, however, revolt, but takes the final leap of religious faith.

Recovering in pain from his mutilation, the Renegade converts to his new god: “For the first time, as a result of offenses, my whole body crying out a single pain, I surrendered to him and approved his maleficent order” (53). The Renegade has not yet found humility, however. Rallying to the forces of evil, he thinks at last that he has achieved the union he so desired. “Yes, I was to be converted to the religion of my masters, yes indeed, I was a slave, but if I too am wicked then I am no longer a slave despite my shackled feet and my mute mouth” (54). The Renegade’s rationalization may recall Caligula’s logic. It explains in Camus’s terms much of the human evil in the world. The Renegade is an extreme case, absolutely weak and subject to the absolutely cruel, but his pathetic illusion of solidarity with his god can be found everywhere. Worship, however, is not solidarity. If the Renegade ever glimpses the truth about his religion, it is only at the very end, when he at last realizes that all gods have abandoned him, for he was always alone.

In a brilliant analysis of the story, Victor Brombert writes, “The allegorical identity of the Renegade thus emerges. He is the modern intellectual” who denies “life in favor of abstraction,” and who “believes he is out to convert the barbarians; in fact he seeks tyranny in order to submit to it.” One can scarcely deny that aspect of his makeup, but he is also more; we must not reduce the story to a parable about intellectuals, with the Renegade as exemplary villain. Still less can we accept Lawrence Joiner’s vehement denunciation: “He is unsuitable for any society, unacceptable in any fraternity of man, exiled from all kingdoms, even that of evil, and fit only to be stuffed with salt.” It is true that the story ends with a handful of salt being stuffed into the Renegade’s mouth, but the fitness of that
savagery is precisely the unanswerable question. Of the various allegorical identities we have proposed, Intellectual, Zealot, Everyman, Scapegoat, which are punished fittingly? In a world constructed entirely by the Renegade’s own vision, how do we receive that single apparently objective statement, that verdict of guilty and sentence of death?

Brombert observes that the murder of the missionary is a suicide. We have already seen that the Renegade’s anger is directed against his father and his fatherland, for which the missionary becomes the surrogate or symbol. He comes to Taghâsa not merely as a representative of the Renegade’s “cultural heritage” and “spiritual guild,” in Brombert’s phrase, but more importantly as a double of the Renegade. He comes as the Renegade once dreamed of coming; he is an image of the younger self, the self that might have been. The murderous shots and the sadistic bludgeoning to finish the killing express self-loathing and self-destruction in an extreme degree. The “wrenching” of which Cryle speaks is given physical form. The Renegade not only remembers how he has changed, not only still believes without following; he must also confront the unchanged, still obedient self in the person of the missionary. The Renegade has never believed in reconciliations; the only cure he knows is conquest of one by the other. Therefore he kills his despised former self.

The missionary is not the only double, however; in fact, the Renegade’s whole inner monolog is a phantasmagoria of self-projections. The Sorcerer-priest, first of all, realizes the very ambition the Renegade had cherished. The Sorcerer possesses power, the Sorcerer looks and does not turn his gaze away, the Sorcerer converts the missionary. Although the Renegade does not himself understand it, to the reader this ironic reversal exposes the Renegade’s real motives: lust for power. The Sorcerer, and indeed the Taghâsans of whom he is the spiritual representative, embody the Renegade’s unavowed ideals. We have seen how this will to dominate survives even his torture and enslavement; to the end, he dreams of union with the ultimate symbol of power and cruelty, the Fetish itself.
On the other hand, the woman whom the Sorcerer violates before the Fetish reflects a repressed animal self. The first time, when the Renegade watches, he stresses the animal-like elements in the scene, the woman "on all fours" (49), all the faces hidden by masks, by clothes, by turning to the wall, the priest, the woman, and finally the Renegade howling to the Fetish—after which he is kicked up against the wall like an annoying dog. From then on, he feels desire as he hears the daily cries of the woman and sees "the bestial shadows moving on the wall" (50). Finally the Sorcerer leaves the tattooed woman alone, and the Renegade succumbs to the desire for her body—"the only thing alive about her was her thin flat body" (52)—only to be torn from her and punished by having his tongue cut off—"was it I screaming with that bestial scream" (52)—and by being beaten "on the sinful place" (52). As with the other selves, the Renegade cannot integrate his sexuality. In Grenoble, he conquered it; in Taghása, it conquers him, until his masters by crude force destroy it.

In the final paragraph, the figure who appears to the dying Renegade represents yet another double, the merciful savior. However little he understood it himself, the Renegade's mission included the task of preaching love and forgiveness. Consequently, he sees in this figure a possibility of return to the beginning: "we'll begin all over again, we'll rebuild the city of mercy, I want to go back home. Yes, help me, that's right, give me your hand . . ." (61). This pathetic and doomed appeal is, however, apparently addressed to the Sorcerer, the Renegade's master; and so this last double combines elements of all aspects of the Renegade's confused spirit, even the sensual, for he has suddenly become "my beloved master" (61). Moreover, like the women, the Sorcerer has now become a victim, vanquished by the soldiers—or perhaps even punished by his own people, for he seems to have been mutilated like the Renegade: "Here, here, who are you, torn, with bleeding mouth, it is you, Sorcerer . . ." (61). The Renegade had imagined Jesus, too, with his tongue cut out (55). In this last vision, then, the Renegade finally succeeds in unifying his selves within a single self, ambiguous, of
course, for it is simultaneously master and victim, past and future, male and female, African and European, and all the other paradoxes of humanness.

The Renegade’s tendency to divide into doubles points to his role as a scapegoat. René Girard has analyzed the mechanism by which religious ritual reenacts a society’s founding violence, but in such a way as to mystify and legitimize it. The victim must be transformed into a monster, so that the expulsion or slaughter seems necessary and right. At the same time, the victim must remain a member of the society, like the survivor-judges, or else the transfer of their guilt onto the scapegoat does not take place.41

At the center of The Renegade is the primitive religion of fetish worship, with the daily sexual sacrifice of a woman and the continued sacrificial service of the enslaved and mutilated Renegade. The Taghâsans practice a cult of such barbaric cruelty that no reader can fail to perceive its origin in violence. Yet fetish worship is a double for the Renegade’s Christianity, just as the Sorcerer is a double for the missionary. In the end, both men become scapegoats, mutilated and cast out. The Renegade was from the start fatally other and monstrous to the Taghâsans; the Sorcerer becomes so only as his prestige wanes. Both, at least in the Renegade’s delirium, rejoin the archetypal scapegoat figure of the crucified Christ.

It is tempting for us as readers to regard the Renegade as our own scapegoat. His arrogance, intolerance, and lust for power make him monstrous to us, and we may well join in his execution by finding it justified. Yet the doubles must somewhere include the reader. If, as Girard argues, great works of literature demystify the ritual sacrifice by exposing the violent origins of the sacred, The Renegade belongs among them. In the final fusion of the Renegade’s doubles, his ultimate self is dominated by the best virtues of liberal humanism, hope, charity, courage, mercy, love. As we condemn him, we discover that he was one of us, deserving not death but a merciful hand.

Alas, the hand held out to him was a punishing hand; his recantation in extremis, his return to love, is not to be rewarded by a providentially rigged conclusion. The world outside is
indifferent to the inner world; to a soul in need of mercy and forgiveness, the world is a hostile environment. The Renegade has tasted salt before, in the hut of the Fetish, "biting the salt, as I am biting this rock today" (49), and the bitterness is no doubt kin to the bitter wine he grew up on and dreamed of escaping. Such is the nourishment the world offers. At the end, of course, it is thrust upon him by another human as a judgment. But we are not meant to join in that judgment. Whatever disapproval, even hatred, we may feel for the Renegade, we cannot side with the brutal Taghâsans in executing him. Rather we should be aware of the irony in this understanding come too late. In fact, the Renegade has no language and no tongue with which to address his plea to the Sorcerer; he has doomed himself long ago to die in absolute solitude. Furthermore, it is his own double who administers the coup de grâce. Those selves he had tried to suppress, even by murder, those voices he had tried to silence, return together, but they survive only for an instant. Reunited with his dominant, negating self, they cancel one another in death.

A reading such as this, which turns the character and the story in upon itself, demonstrates a structural coherence and formal beauty that are agreeable, perhaps even instructive, to contemplate, but only skirt the question of the story's meaning. And Camus insists that writing have meaning. If the Renegade is more than just an allegorical figure of evil, specifically of the Western intellectuals' suicidal attraction to absolutism, how else can we relate so exceptional and isolated a case to our own concerns?

It is instructive, first, to replace the Renegade in its context in Exile and the Kingdom. It is the second story, following the Adulterous Woman; and despite the many obvious differences, there are also many surprising similarities. The setting of both is the Saharan desert, and in both, a spiritually isolated European experiences a new and overwhelming social isolation among an alien race and physical isolation in a desolate region. Both central characters are silent, both feel the decline of their bodies into painful burdens binding them to the ground, while Others appear to move effortlessly. In both stories, the narrative of a
brief present time—about a day and a night—told from the perspective of this central character is paralleled by a recapitulate life. Moreover, though the Renegade's story is a first-person monolog and Janine's is a limited third-person, they share a lyricism generally absent from the other stories. This extends even to a common image, "the water of night" (33, 51), symbol of an ineffably refreshing communion with nature. The themes of their thoughts are similar, too; Janine is obsessed with sexuality, with, as we have seen, latent religious implication; the Renegade reverses the emphasis, but in both cases, both themes are present and intertwined. Finally, both stories end on the same ambiguous note, with an abrupt change of narrative perspective and a punishment dealt to the central figure.

One could, therefore, propose similar readings of both stories. The central characters have misspent their lives, and the stories tell of a moment when they glimpse the truth they have missed previously. This truth, of course, lies in their own way of perceiving, rather than in any implicit cosmology. What they understand nevertheless remains incommunicable, and no uplifting transformation occurs in their lives. Only the intervention of the imaginative artist, Camus, enables us to sympathize with these remote and difficult beings.

Two important differences must be noted, however. First, in The Renegade, every comparable element is intensified. He goes deeper into the Desert, is more alone, is literally mute, is actually mutilated, is limited to the first person, and so forth. His revolt is not symbolic sin but a real murder. Second, the story ends with his death. Janine's future held at least the possibility of transformation, or of happiness through a transformed consciousness. For the Renegade, no hope is conceivable. His story is related from the very brink of eternal silence, and it is in this unique situation that we must look for the particular meaning of The Renegade.

Despite the links with the Adulterous Woman, The Renegade stands out in Exile and the Kingdom as strange. As we remarked at the beginning of the chapter, the characters, the setting, the technique are all exceptional. This is a story that seems to wrench away from its context.
The hero, moreover, is a character always in flight from his surroundings. He is a Catholic seminarian from a Protestant region, and he demanded to go to Taghása and went against orders when refused. There, as a captive, he has lived in perfect isolation. Yet, like a Chinese box, his mind has fled from its context, too. In desiring to go to Taghása, he recalls, "I was sure of reasoning logically on that subject, never quite sure of myself otherwise, but once I get an idea I don't let go of it, that's my strong point, yes the strong point of the fellow they all pitied!" (40).44 Hardly has he been taken captive, however, when this "strong point" deserts him before the Fetish: "no one spoke but me, the jumble was beginning in my head" (47).45 Since that time, a voice, detached, uncontrollable, has been speaking within his mind; on this image the story opens: "What a jumble! What a jumble! I must tidy up my mind. Since they cut out my tongue, another tongue, it seems, has been constantly wagging somewhere in my skull, something has been talking, or someone, that suddenly falls silent and then it all begins again—oh, I hear too many things I never utter, what a jumble, and if I open my mouth it's like pebbles rattling together" (34).46

The narrator is still another disembodied tongue. The hero's radical inability to communicate throws any purported transcription of his thoughts into high relief as an autonomous object, with no plausible context.

If, in conventional thinking, we can dovetail these levels of perception as we have just done—that is to say, the story generates a situation, which in turn generates a character, who generates thought, which generates a text—in reality only the text exists and begets all the others. The Renegade presents a text that declares its independence from any ostensible contexts; all the generative connections are severed. The story is simultaneously image, analysis, and example of the absurd, of a universe where no meaningful relations exist. To take cognizance of this fundamental meaninglessness, however, reveals only half of a paradox. The story may signify meaninglessness, but all the acts surrounding the story—writing, reading, criticizing—reveal at least the desire to deny, overcome, or transcend that meaninglessness. The Renegade, even though he cannot
discover the order he seeks, produces a highly structured “jumble”; and Camus, although he denies his hero the solace of an answer to his quest, provides an answer for the reader.

That answer cannot be the simple discovery of an order, but rather a discovery that takes place within ourselves. It will not transform the world. All the stories stop short of depicting the hero after the moment of illumination. *The Renegade* belongs to a special type of story, like Flaubert’s *A Simple Heart* and Tolstoy’s *Death of Ivan Ilych*, where the novelist’s privilege of omniscience takes us beyond the limits of human communication to the very edge of nonexistence. The deathbed revelation has no practical value to the dead person; it seems almost a parody here of the Christian doctrine that a repentance in the instant of death may have occurred and would suffice for God to save the sinner’s soul. The Renegade does not pass over into the Hereafter.

His end nonetheless helps explain the other stories. His excesses have taken him as far as one can go away from human solidarity. He has made an ideal of exile and has tried to follow it. At the end, however, he still yearns for human contact, and from an exile beyond all possibility of communication, Camus dares to transmit that yearning. For Camus himself, this story risks being a betrayal. The hero lies outside the bounds of Camus’s moral sense, and the text lies outside the bounds of credibility. Yet in risking this double breach of his principles, Camus effectively transcends a barrier to solidarity. Even this lost creature, abominable in his slavery as in his pride, denied all means of communication, even he was one of us, suffering in exile, longing to return to his kingdom. In this universal longing, Camus found the best hope, if not for order, for human happiness.

Despite its barrenness and horror, *The Renegade* is not necessarily angry or pessimistic. At the end, we are left to judge, as we were with Janine. The Renegade, whose real voice is that of the stony desert itself—“if I open my mouth it’s like pebbles rattling together” (34)—has tried to make an ethical order of the indifference of nature. As he lived, so has he died; perhaps we may admire the relentless consistency of that universal principle.
Yet we need not ourselves reaffirm the sentence of death, nor should we join in the execution. Camus has shown how the human mind can construct a meaning around that creature reduced to bestiality; in the same way, we can construct a meaning around a formless universe.

1. The English edition eliminates the subtitle; see the Appendix for comments on problems of translation, which are numerous in this story.
2. P. 1591: "Ce long ce long rêve, je m'éveille, mais non, je vais mourir, l'aube se lève, la première lumière le jour pour d'autres vivants, et pour moi le soleil inexorable, les mouches."
3. P. 1578: "tuer son père, voilà ce qu'il faudrait."
4. P. 1578: "pour qu'on me voie."
5. P. 1579: "je rêvais du pouvoir absolu."
6. Cryle, pp. 69–70.
7. P. 1578: "le catholicisme c'est le soleil."
8. P. 1587: "la vérité est carrée, lourde, dense."
9. P. 1578: "ils m'ont vu arriver comme le soleil d'Austerlitz."
10. P. 1579: "je subjuguerais ces sauvages, comme un soleil puissant. Puissant, oui, c'était le mot que sans cesse, je roulais sur ma langue, je rêvais du pouvoir absolu, celui qui fait mettre genoux à terre, qui force l'adversaire à capituler, le convertit enfin . . . ."
11. P. 1582: "jeté à genoux au creux de ce bouclier blanc."
12. P. 1587: "Salut, il était la force et la puissance."
13. P. 1590: "Ô fétiche, mon dieu là-bas, que ta puissance soit maintenue."
14. P. 1590: "il dresse un peu la tête, me voit, moi, son maître entravé toutpuissant."
16. P. 1578: "à cause de l'alcool, ils ont bu le vin aigre et leurs enfants ont des dents cariées, râ râ tuer son père, voilà ce qu'il faudrait."
17. P. 1578: "il ne reste qu'à tuer le missionnaire."
18. P. 1578: "J'ai un compte à régler avec lui et avec ses maîtres qui m'ont trompé, avec la sale Europe, tout le monde m'a trompé."
19. P. 1588: "à bas l'Europe, la raison et l'honneur et la croix."
20. P. 1591: "je vais mourir."
22. P. 1588: "lui, l'autre, le Seigneur de la douceur, dont le seul nom me révulse, je le renie, car je le connais maintenant. Il rêvait et il voulait mentir, on lui a coupé la langue pour que sa parole ne vienne plus tromper le monde, on l'a percé de clous jusque dans la tête, sa pauvre tête, comme la mienne maintenant."
23. P. 1591: "j'aime ce coup qui me cloue crucifié."
Exiles and Strangers

24. P. 1591: "ô fétique pourquoi m'as-tu abandonné? Tout est fini, j'ai soif."

25. P. 1586: "une nouvelle femme le suivait dont le visage, couvert d'un tatouage qui lui donnait le masque du fétique, n'exprimait rien qu'une stupeur mauvaise d'idole."

26. Pp. 1586-87: "le fétique me contemplait par-dessus ce corps immobile, mais dont les muscles remuvaient doucement et le visage d'idole de la femme n'a pas changé quand je me suis approché. Ses yeux seuls se sont agrandis en me fixant, mes pieds touchaient les siens, la chaleur alors s'est mise à hurler, et l'idole, sans rien dire, me regardant toujours de ses yeux dilatés, s'est renversée peu à peu sur le dos, a ramené lentement ses jambes vers elle, et les a élevées en écartant doucement les genoux."

27. P. 1587: "Pour la première fois, à force d'offenses, le corps entier criant d'une seule douleur, je m'abandonnai à lui et approuvai son ordre malfaisant."

28. P. 1588: "Oui, je devais me convertir à la religion de mes maîtres, oui oui j'étais esclave, mais si moi aussi je suis méchant je ne suis plus esclave, malgré mes pieds entravés et ma bouche muette."


31. P. 72: "déchirement" is Cryle's term.

32. Onomasiologists will observe that the new missionary's name is Father Beffort (56). His role as surrogate for the Renegade's father has already been mentioned. His name is a complex bilingual pun; in French it once again suggests strength ("fort," "effort"), in English the return to the past ("before") and to faith ("be for").

33. P. 1585: "à quatre pattes."

34. P. 1585: "les ombres bestiales qui s'agitaient sur la paroi."

35. P. 1586: "Seul vivait son corps mince et plat."

36. P. 1587: "était-ce moi qui hurlais de ce cri de bête"

37. P. 1587: "à l'endroit du péché."

38. P. 1591: "nous recommencerons, nous referons la cité de miséricorde, je veux retourner chez moi. Oui, aide-moi, c'est cela, tends ta main, donne . . ." Ellipsis in the text.

39. P. 1591: "mon maître bien-aimé."

40. P. 1591: "Voici, voici, qui es-tu, déchiré, la bouche sanglante, c'est toi, sorcier. . . ."

41. See La Violence et le sacré, and "The Underground Critic" in To Double Business Bound", pp. 36-60.

42. P. 1585: "mordant le sel, comme je mords aujourd'hui le rocher."

43. Pp. 1573, 1586: "l'eau de la nuit."

44. P. 1580: "j'étais certain de bien raisonner là-dessus, jamais très sûr de moi autrement, mais mon idée quand je l'ai, je ne la lâche plus, c'est ma force, oui, ma force à moi dont ils avaient tous pitié!"

45. P. 1584: "personne ne parlait, que moi, la bouillie commençait déjà dans ma tête."

46. P. 1577: "Quelle bouillie, quelle bouillie! Il faut mettre de l'ordre dans ma tête. Depuis qu'ils m'ont coupé la langue, une autre langue, je ne sais pas, marche sans arrêt dans mon crâne, quelque chose parle, ou quelqu'un qui se tait soudain et puis tout recommence, ô j'entends trop de choses que je ne dis pourtant pas, quelle bouillie, et si j'ouvre la bouche, c'est comme un bruit de cailloux remués."