The Artist at Work:
An Ironic Self-Portrait

Jonas, or the Artist at Work breaks with the pattern of Camus's other stories in several obvious respects. It is the only story set in Europe, and the entire action takes place in the Paris of the post-World War II era. The events stretch over a considerable span of time, including several years at least; other stories recapitulate a life, but always within a carefully delimited present of one or two days. Jonas is therefore harder to summarize than the others, except in its barest essentials. Gilbert Jonas is the coddled child of a wealthy publisher; rather late in life he discovers a vocation as a painter and devotes all his energies to it. Meanwhile he meets and marries Louise, a devoted, intelligent, and resourceful wife. She finds them an apartment, despite the housing shortage; their architect friend Rateau helps make the inadequate space livable by ingenious fold-away installations. Louise and Gilbert have three children. Simultaneously, Jonas is discovered by art critics and dealers. The more famous he becomes, the less he is able to paint: would-be or actual patrons, disciples, visiting celebrities, dealers, critics, friends, and parasites (in addition to his family) take up more and more of his time, and force him to move his studio into smaller and smaller spaces. Eventually his vogue subsides, and his ability deserts him at the same time. He begins avoiding his family and friends, drinking excessively, and having tawdry affairs. Finally Louise confronts him. He is sufficiently remorseful to reform immediately, and builds a strange loft in the
hallway of their apartment. There he spends more and more time, saying he is working but in fact meditating; by the end, he is staying in the loft all the time. At the very end, he paints a canvas with a word that is either “solitary” or “solidary,” Rateau cannot be sure which; then he collapses, falls unconscious, and Louise calls a doctor, who reassures her that Jonas will recover.

All the stories in *Exile and the Kingdom* have ambiguous elements, and so it is not surprising that they have all occasioned diverse and sometimes contradictory readings. None, however, has given rise to such sharply opposing interpretations as *The Artist at Work*. At least one important point of fact has been questioned: many competent critics assume that Jonas dies at the end; others (myself among them) regard that view as a misreading, not as one of Camus’s deliberate ambiguities.\(^1\) When readers as reliable as Gaëton Picon, André Nicolas, and Dominique Aury all make the mistake, however, one must wonder whether the error does not reflect some truth, and we shall return to the question toward the end of this chapter. Obviously, one's conclusion about the tone and significance of the tale as a whole will be strongly influenced by whether one supposes that the hero lives or dies at the end; those who think he dies draw a pessimistic moral from the story, but they are joined by others who recognize that Jonas survives but still consider that he has failed in some way. On the other hand, several important critics, including Cryle, King, and Thody, see *Jonas* as basically optimistic.

In a less-pronounced manner, we have observed similar uncertainties about the conclusion of *The Adulterous Woman*, and we are in equally familiar territory regarding the biblical source. Jonas is the French form of the name Jonah, and lest there be any doubt about the allusion, Camus gave this story an epigraph: “Take me up and cast me forth into the sea... for I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you (Jonah 1:12).”\(^2\) Unlike “The Adulterous Woman,” critics have at least tried to relate Camus’s Jonas to his biblical counterpart, but the analogies are so general and intermittent that no single explanation has been agreed upon.

*Jonas* is narrated in the third person, as are four of the other
stories, but this narrator is uniquely distanced from the story and the characters. Even though he keeps Jonas at the center of attention throughout, he does not limit his perspective to Jonas's. Rather, he evidences a certain irony toward Jonas as toward everyone else; and as Brian Fitch comments, this narrative stance is found nowhere else in Camus's works. It gives Jonas a comic note that is absent from the first four stories of Exile and the Kingdom, and reminds one of a Voltairean tale. This humor also brings to mind Jean-Baptiste Clamence, the seductively witty protagonist of The Fall, which was originally intended to be one of the stories in this collection. In order to resolve some of the confusion and make sense of the anomalies, it seems reasonable to begin with the hero, and to analyze what Camus meant him to be.

On the surface, Gilbert Jonas resembles Clamence in many respects. At the peak of their careers, anyway, both seem to be perfect Camusian heroes. Both work in the service of humanity, the one as a man of law, the other as artist. Both earn wide respect and enjoy great success in all the most conventional forms—money, power, friends. Both men appear happy. Yet their success, their happiness, even their virtues conceal, and to some degree depend on, less attractive qualities. Clamence, of course, comes to understand himself in a new light after he hears the mysterious laughter on the bridge. Jonas may not achieve any significant self-understanding; it is the ironic narrator who points out his weaknesses. Both are egocentric despite their apparent charity and benevolence. Jonas's generosity arises from his laziness, his indifference, his passivity; he simply cannot be bothered to organize his life. His wife Louise and his friend Rateau do it for him, insofar as possible, while he drifts unconcernedly along. Louise even does his thinking for him, to a significant degree, and this process extends even to his painting. Jonas's painting exists in isolation from his fellow artists and their work; it is Louise who "drags" Jonas to museums and exhibitions, and who remembers the names of the painters. Jonas "didn't quite understand what his contemporaries were painting" (116), and "had only a very vague idea of his own esthetic" (128). Clamence, to be sure, never appears as
simpleminded as Jonas, and his secret lust for power contains far greater potential for evil than does Jonas’s naïve selfishness. Nonetheless, in their heyday, both present the outward appearance of success and virtue while harboring improper motives and exploiting other people.

For both men, success gives way to self-doubt and confusion. In Clamence’s case, he dates the decline in retrospect from a precise moment, when he heard the laugh on the bridge. That laugh, of course, reminded him of an earlier incident, a suicide he failed to prevent. In any case, the decline is gradual; Clamence begins to change his ways, to argue a different side of moral questions. Then he tries to forget his anxiety in drink and with women. Jonas does not look back over his career as Clamence does, and thus never fixes a single moment as the crucial turning point. Indeed, each step toward success brings in its train some element of his eventual downfall. But Jonas does not become aware of what is happening until the process is far advanced. Long after he has really stopped producing, he still says to himself, “I love to paint” (144). Later, he deludes himself that all he needs is “a good system” (146); and as he starts to drink, it is because “he had discovered that alcohol gave him the same exaltation as a day of good productive work at the time when he used to think of his picture with the affection and warmth that he had never felt except toward his children” (147). This discovery contains no self-understanding, however; he is still thinking that “he was going to paint, that was certain, and paint better, after this period of apparent waste. It was all just working within him . . . ”(147). Jonas abandons his debauchery only when he sees one day the distress he has caused Louise. The next day he constructs his loft, where he works until the end of the story.

Clamence never recovers from his fall; he narrates his story in a bar in one of the lowest districts of Amsterdam, surrounded by derelicts and prostitutes. In this regard, The Fall differs sharply from Jonas. At the same time, both men trace the same movement at the end, withdrawing into a small isolated space: Clamence into his room, where the last day’s conversation
occurs, and Jonas into his loft. Both, moreover, have with them a painting with a paradoxical message: Clamence has the stolen panel of *The Just Judges*, around which he spins a complex web of ironies; Jonas has his own canvas, with the single, ambiguous word "solitary."

The plots, then, if one may call them that, offer many parallels, as well as some important divergences. It is equally significant that Camus has named both protagonists for prophets. Jean-Baptiste Clamence, which is actually, according to the narrator, a self-selected pseudonym, obviously alludes twice to John the Baptist, "vox clamantis in deserto." Other allusions are numerous, including the cell of the final scene, where he imagines himself arrested and decapitated, thus bringing to an end his "career as a false prophet crying in the wilderness and refusing to come forth." Many critics have discussed the biblical allusions in *The Fall*, which obviously go far beyond the character's name.

Jonas has posed more of a problem. As I have said, the epigraph makes the allusion unequivocal, and most readers accept the loft as some kind of analog to the whale. Father Goldstain has also suggested persuasive similarities between Jonas's simultaneously solitary art and solidary humanity, and Jonah's solitary mission and solidary humanity. Jonah was a strange prophet; first he tried to evade his mission, and then sulked because his predication worked so well that Nineveh reformed and was spared. At the end of his brief story, Jonah is alone in a booth outside Nineveh, and the Lord has had to teach him again a form of solidarity: by evoking Jonah's sympathy for a gourd, the Lord illustrates his own sympathy for Nineveh. In short, the adventure of Jonah is twofold: he demonstrates his solidarity first by self-sacrifice during the storm, but second by the more positive acceptance of human brotherhood with Nineveh. Both lessons are relevant to Camus's Jonas, whose story incorporates both parts of Jonah's at the same time. On the one hand, in the more famous part, Jonas's egotism nearly destroys his family, but by entering the loft/whale he saves them; on the other hand, his success as an artist wins disciples as
did Jonah’s predication, but its very success undermines its meaning and isolates the artist/prophet, who retreats to a loft/booth.

In comparing Clamence and Jonas, we must also bear in mind that Clamence’s great crime was precisely a failure to cast himself into the water. In fact, the epigraph to Jonas would seem much more intelligible if appended to The Fall. Clamence, of course, not only refuses to throw himself into the river when he might have saved the girl, but also avoids water ever thereafter. As he says at the end of the first day’s talk, “I never cross a bridge at night” (15); and the book ends with his observation, “The water’s so cold! But let’s not worry! It’s too late now. It will always be too late. Fortunately!” (147). He is by his own admission a false prophet, and his name is self-chosen. Jonas, on the other hand, is a true name, and it would appear that he does accept his responsibility for the misfortune. One must bear in mind that Jonah did not know beforehand that the Lord would send the whale, and it is precisely in the short interval between Jonas’s recognition of his errors and his construction of his whale that Camus has placed his symbolic leap into the sea, in terms, moreover, that point to The Fall. At the lowest point of his drunkenness, when alcohol has made him impotent, Louise asks Jonas if he has betrayed her, and he tells her the truth; “and for the first time, his heart torn within him, he saw that Louise suddenly had the look of a drowned woman . . . ” (150). Jonas resolves on the spot to reform; “The following day Jonas went out very early. It was raining. When he returned, wet to the skin, he was loaded down with boards” (150). That soaking in the rain represents his plunge into the water, to save the drowning Louise. It too is a fall, but as with Clamence, the physical fall merely repeats a spiritual fall that had taken place long before; but what Clamence refuses and Jonas accepts, the human appeal from the water, leads in the end to a redemptive baptism. As we have seen before in Exile and the Kingdom, Camus uses water in its traditional role as purifier.

The lives of both Jonas and Clamence resemble Camus’s own in too many respects for readers to ignore. In broad terms, the facile success followed by a stage of self-doubt and sterility
characterizes Camus as well as his protagonists. *The Fall* and *Exile and the Kingdom* seemed to signal a return of creative energy, cut short, as everyone knows, by Camus's death in an automobile accident. Peter Cryle, who himself mentions a criticism apparently aimed at Sartre and found in both *Jonas* and *The Fall*, is nonetheless correct to insist on basic differences of tone. Brian Fitch cites additional points of correspondence, but again without wishing to make the two works sound identical. Nor do I; but the self-portraiture constitutes a final link, and the differing results in the two works are important to note. That Camus portrays himself in *Jonas* does not mean necessarily that we must admire Jonas or even excuse him. There is obviously a great deal of self-satire in *The Fall*, some of it very bitter and despairing; but in the end, Clamence is not Camus, and what Clamence does is not to be imitated, nor is what he preaches to be obeyed. The satiric and ironic aspects of *Jonas* are gentler, and I see no cynicism in the character or in the narrator.

Yet Jonas is like Clamence in a number of ways. Although he comes to his senses before the end, he has been a false prophet. He has lived up to his name as a synonym for one who brings misfortune. As an artist, he has failed to fulfill most of Camus's ideals; Cryle terms him a "shameless survivor of a pre-Sartrian age" who has "no sense of responsibility." He has no ideas about art, either, and, as we have seen, little interest in what other painters are doing. The real irony of his faith in his star is that he is right; pure luck has guided him, brought him friends, love, family, fame, money, success, without his ever having worked for any of it. In a sense, he is a pure fraud, a creation of the media. Cryle has commented that by using painting as Jonas's medium Camus avoids having to show us any examples of it. His vagueness is deliberate, however; Balzac or Zola writing about painters not only describes the pictures but explores the aesthetic ideas behind them. Without this conscious link between the world and the work, the artist is no more than a cipher.

For Camus, the artist has real work to do in the world. Thus the subtitle contains multiple ironies. As so often with Camus's
titles, we cannot be sure whether it refers to Jonas or to the painting of Jonas called *The Artist at Work*. And if it refers to Jonas, how should we take it? Is his long decline into sterility his work, or the ambiguous painting he produces at the end? And if it is the painting of Jonas, who is depicted painting a portrait of a wealthy lady, is the irony directed against him, or against the society whose government sent a painter to consecrate that absurdity, or against artists in general for their betrayal of their mission? Perhaps *The Artist at Work* is as absurd a title as *The Just Judges*.

Camus gave only two of the six stories a subtitle: *The Renegade, or a Confused Mind* and *Jonas, or the Artist at Work*. Unfortunately (in my opinion), the English translation reduced both to a single title, the former by dropping the subtitle, the latter by dropping the title. In both cases, albeit for somewhat different reasons, Camus was alerting the reader to the duality of vision in the story. The Renegade's story is a pure first-person narration, rather like a stream of consciousness, since the Renegade cannot actually talk and has no audience, but at the same time logically and chronologically very coherent and structured. Like Clamence in *The Fall*, the Renegade is not entirely to be trusted, and the reader must be put on guard against him. At the same time, the two titles offer alternative interpretations; the treachery of a renegade implies more will than is suggested by a mind's confusion. Thus, in more than one way, Camus invites the reader to entertain contradictory views of the Renegade.

With Jonas, the duality of vision is equally remarkable, although the tone is utterly different. The style of *Jonas*, as Fernande Bartfeld quite accurately said, reminds one of Voltaire's tales. Virtually all the devices of *Candide* or *L'Ingénu* appear in *Jonas*: the naïve hero whose faith and expectation encounters an indifferent universe, yet who repeats a consoling maxim long after its absurdity has become obvious; Jonas's star and his universal "Just as you say" echo Candide's "All is for the best" and his pursuit of Cunégonde. The comic-strip resiliency of Jonas and Louise likewise resembles a
Voltairean plot, although things turn serious at the end as in *L'Ingénu*.

For both Voltaire and Camus, however, the primary source of irony lies in wordplay. Both evoke a real world, recognizable to the reader despite a constantly falsified description. Voltaire even uses Oriental fantasy and science fiction, though clearly intending reference to a real Paris of the eighteenth century. Without the implicit contrast to our common sense of reality, neither Micromégas's superior perspective nor Candide's naïve one would be intelligible. Likewise, Jonas's world comes to us distorted by the narrator, but in such a way that the language still points to real referents.

One set of techniques emphasizes the impoverishing effect of language. Objects are thrown together grammatically with no acknowledgment of the meanings generated by their contact in real life. The device may be a simple juxtaposition, as in “supported simultaneously by the sentimental press and the philosophical reviews” (115), or a more flagrant antithesis, as “The less he worked, the more his reputation grew” (131), or an anticlimactic series: “With the same enthusiasm, of course, she entered that bed, then took care of the appointment with the mayor, led Jonas to the town hall two years before his talent was at last recognized, and arranged the wedding trip so that they didn't miss a museum” (117). Many other examples could be cited. In every case, no apparent misstatement occurs; but the sentence is designed to suppress the usual relationships among its elements. The complex cultural links between philosophical reviews and the sentimental press could be explained; their absence from the sentence makes an incongruous and therefore comic pair, and by the same gesture trivializes the ethical principle under discussion. In the last example, the emotional bonds of the couple have been ignored, as well as the relative importance of the various stages of the courtship.

The final form of deliberate impoverishment is the literal definition: “a disciple is not necessarily someone who longs to learn something. Most often, on the contrary, one became a disciple for the disinterested pleasure of teaching one's master.”
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(126–27). Voltaire was a master of such periphrastic substitutions, fixing on the most improper elements of his targets and making those elements central. Camus uses the reductive procedure less than Voltaire, at least in this sense. Sometimes language misses the point and deflates; more often, it obscures the point and magnifies.

Jonas's father offers examples of both over- and understatement. He separates from his wife on grounds of adultery, by which he means that she spent too much of her time on good works; he decides to have his publishing house, the leading one in France, go in for specialization, by which he means books dealing with sex. It is obvious that such liberties make it possible to transform meanings radically. The landlords can think of their lucrative business as "real estate philanthropy" (120), and an art lover can equate "on the decline" with "finished" (139). These, and many other examples, are evident abuses; the commonly accepted sense of the term is violated by the application.

Ultimately, these tricks of speech, which appear comic in isolation, appear as habits or full systems. Jargon makes a brief display, in the phrase "indirect humanization" (127), the term by which Jonas's disciples explain his work. Clichés are common. Repeatedly, in a way that reminds us of Janine and Marcel, or Yvars, the characters of Jonas attempt to express their complex situations and can do no better than reiterate some trite phrase. Louise justifies her (relative) neglect of Jonas, saying, "It can't be helped, each of us has his workbench" (118). "A contract's a contract," says the art dealer, to prevent Jonas from donating a picture to charity (133). The swarm of admirers who fill Jonas's apartment and interfere with his work are characterized by their self-serving aphorisms, such as "Lucky fellow! That's the price of fame!" (136) or "Aw, go on! There's plenty of time" (144).

Jonas himself is the principal culprit. His catchphrases, "Just as you say," and "This is the result of the star," both turn a formula into a means of evading reality. Most of Jonas's directly quoted speeches are similar clichés: "In art, as in nature, nothing
is ever wasted” (126);28 “After all, we never get a chance to see each other” (135);29 “I love to paint” (141) (144);30 “A little love is wonderful. Does it matter how you get it?” (145).31 He even masters a complete repertory of encouragement and praise for his disciples (129).32 These commonplace phrases serve in part to generalize Jonas, and make him express the average reaction to everything. At the same time, they reveal not only an astonishing shallowness in an artist but a serious moral weakness.

Many of the clichés function as euphemisms, constructing reality in the manner least likely to disturb the status quo. Sometimes Jonas acquires the clichés from others, as when he comments on an insistent and inflexible friend, “Isn’t he thoughtful?” (124),33 or makes excuses for his admirers: “Everybody is kind to me . . . many artists are that way . . . they’re so lonely . . . you have to love them” (140).34 Jonas is likewise taken in by the landlords and the art dealer. With Jonas, this banal Candidean optimism is a habit of mind as well as of speech. He feels gratitude for quite inappropriate reasons, and allegedly always has; for example, toward his parents, “first because they had brought him up carelessly and this had given free rein to his daydreaming, secondly because they had separated . . . ” (112).35 He is just as thankful toward the art dealer, the critics, the landlord, and more generally toward his “star” for such unlikely events as a motorcycle accident and the various obstacles to his work. Jonas has the logical pretext, which Candide does not, that until very late in the story everything has worked out well for him.

His language, however, has become a medium of evasion only. He differs from the hypocritical landlords and dealers in that he seems sincere, that is, self-deluded. His gratitude is presumably authentic, not a sociable pretense; so, too, his justification of his admirers, which offers no identifiable prospect of advantage to Jonas. Yet this self-deception is surely the most dangerous of errors, especially in the artist. Despite all the differences, Jonas here rejoins Janine, the Renegade, Yvars, and Daru, all of whom held comfortable false conceptions of the world they lived in. In Algeria, the sun or the desert can be
counted on to force a heightened awareness on the Camusian hero; for Jonas, in the cozy comfort of Parisian civilization, the discovery of one's exile comes about in other ways.

Much of the comedy and satire in *Jonas* arises from the narrator's exaggerated mimicry of Jonas's foolish optimism. The narrator regularly adopts the most unreliable point of view as a source of his language, which he then repeats with no comment. The very funny account of the apartment is given almost entirely in terms that rationalize the landlords' exploitation of the housing crisis; the inconvenience to the artist from having an infant in his studio is masked by the perspective of an indulgent father; the impositions and occasional insults of the disciples are viewed through the complacent eyes of the overly tolerant and naïve Jonas. Rateau provides the only continuous counterpoint to the bland smugness; Rateau's resourcefulness and cynicism mark him as a literary descendant of Cacambo or Martin. Voltaire, however, lets Candide speak for himself most of the time; the narrator's voice is distinct from the characters'. Camus has chosen to tell most of *Jonas* in a sort of indirect free discourse, and as always with that technique, one can never be quite sure how much the narrator endorses what he says. Our perception of irony depends in large measure on our own sense of reality and justice, and our desire to exonerate the author of any wrongs in the tale.

In adopting this variable perspective, however, the narrator resembles Jonas; and though he is in no sense a dramatized narrator, the tone of his discourse further establishes their affinity. This story is uniquely entertaining, the work of a sociable man, a gifted conversationalist. Unlike the other stories, this one does not pull us into the dreary, limited world of a character but chatters brilliantly, as it were, over the heads of the characters—who are, in fact, much more like the probable readers of Camus than the others, and whose lives need not therefore seem so alienating. No effort is made to give us the sense of constriction in the Jonases' cramped apartment, or the despair of the increasingly neglected Louise, or the eventual breakdown of Gilbert. This story is distanced from the reader,
and painless. The narrator's style is, in fact, very much like Jonas's, keeping everyone amused by avoiding commitment.

It has been observed long ago that the desert landscape has an allegorical value for Camus. The austerity, the hardness represent a form of clarity and truth. The hero, like Daru, tends to feel at home in this world of no illusions. The murky Amsterdam setting of *The Fall* is an obvious contrast, not only because of the fog, the dark, and the luxuriance, but also because it is a purely verbal world, spun out of the mouth of the witty Clamence, and perhaps not true. The Paris of *Jonas* is another such world, less evocative physically, for there is little emphasis on the setting, outside the apartment, and less obviously a verbal construction, since the narrator remains only implicit and never renounces his contract with the reader. Nevertheless, the narrator, like Jonas and like Clamence, is at home in this shifting world, where realities are mainly relationships—friendships, love, marriages, contracts, fame—that exist mainly in language; and everyone talks falsely. Philip Thody was right to speak of the feeling of relaxation in *Jonas:* Camus is not struggling with the language to wring truth out of it, but letting it run its ordinary way. This is, of course, not to say that Camus has abandoned his consistent moral and literary intentions, only that he has tried a different tactic.

As an artist, Jonas possesses mastery over his medium, and earns, or at least receives, success. It is clear, however, that mastery of it is not the same thing as superiority over it. Success is not the same thing as lordship of the kingdom. Jonas's pictures fail spectacularly as a fraternal bond. His critics, admirers, and patrons have no more than a commercial or egotistical interest in him; only Rateau, on that side of the business, accurately distinguishes between the inessential picture and the essential act of painting. His aesthetic theory works no better; he cannot produce the picture of *The Seamstress* that might have made his pictures a real communication. Until his final collapse, painting has in fact been a barrier to Jonas. Learned too easily, accepted too naively, used too thoughtlessly, painting has done nothing more than make Jonas comfortable.
Language is no different, except that everyone uses it. For everyone in *Jonas*, including the narrator, instead of being the instrument that reveals, language is the habit of concealment. It can be compared to the shuttered apartment where Janine has spent her life, to the passive silence of Yvars, to the complacent paternalism of Daru, to the divine Word of the Renegade. Each of these ways of living, not evil in itself, collapses on contact with the harsh real world. Since Jonas’s shelter is art, within the story he confronts the loss of that vocation. At the same time, Camus uses his own art form, language, to express the fraternal solidarity between Jonas, himself, and the reader.

Jonas’s final painting is the concrete expression of this solidarity in several ways. Jonas paints language in the end, not images; in the most literal sense, his art rejoins the narrator’s. As I suggested before, Jonas has abused language throughout the story, substituting clichés for realities, using conventional terms to avoid facing the many unpleasant truths of his life. Although he is surrounded by people who do the same thing, Jonas collaborates by passively adopting the other person’s cliché or euphemism. Both with painting and with language, Jonas has been constructing his own isolation long before it happens in a physical sense in the story. In a curious way, the Camusian characters who live in the desert are fortunate; the truth forces itself on them. Jonas lives in a world without the hard stone, the brutal sun, the chill wind, the bitter salt of Camus’s Algeria. When at length he recognizes the barrenness of his life, he must build a place of exile for himself, his loft.

The half-silence of the loft “seemed to him the silence of the desert or of the tomb” (153), but Jonas begins his rebirth there, as do the other protagonists. He tells his friend Rateau, “I’m working,” although as the narrator immediately makes clear, “He was not painting, but he was meditating” (152). Meditation is work for the artist, and, in fact, only during these final pages, when he is in the loft and not actually painting, does Jonas say insistently that he is working. His proper work is to come to terms with his real condition, alone but among his own people.
It is obvious how the loft makes real the philosophical status of Jonas, like Janine's parapet, Yvars's balcony, Daru's plateau, or the Renegade's lookout. Superior and distant enough to permit a detached contemplation, but close enough to maintain some contact, all these lofts symbolize to a degree the paradox of solitary and solidary. They also belong within the individual stories to other sets of spaces, some prisonlike, some homelike, others terrifyingly or liberatingly open, and in most cases possessing paradoxically conflicting resonances for the character and for the reader.

In the loft, the blank canvas becomes the mysterious space of the desert, where the other protagonists trace a message. For Jonas as for the others, silence becomes the chief signifier of solitude, and the canvas represents the pure exile of speech. Painting ought to be mute, and Jonas's vocation ought therefore to have kept him free from the lies of language. Plainly, it has not—no more than the muteness of boredom in Janine's case, of pride in Yvars's, of monasticism in Daru's, or of barbaric mutilation in the Renegade's.

When Jonas's meditation comes to an end, then, he must return to the world of language. Many paradoxes are resolved at once in a single symbol, naïvely obvious like the loft itself, but solid and clear. All human communications are one, all human situations are one, solidary and solitary are one. The ambiguity of language, heretofore a source of deception, becomes the medium for a serious message.

It is important to remember, however, that it is a vision, not a saying. Jonas re-creates, re-presents; his word was never a prescription, or even a description, but a rendering of something perceived. Like the other heroes, Jonas has had to give up comforting certainties of all kinds and accept life in a world of uncertainties. His star never existed; what he sees toward the end may be the after-image of the lamp, the gleam of a chink in his loft, or simply a hallucination, but it is his only as the product of his own mind. Here again Jonas recalls Janine, falling in a swoon beneath the wheeling stars. Jonas likewise finds his star again by recognizing the indifference of the cosmos and ac-
cepting his place within it, not by reviving his smug confidence that providence was guiding him. His recovery from despair results from his own work.

That strange painting is the final version of *The Artist at Work*, capturing the full ambiguity of that status. Jonas the character and *Jonas* the story are versions of *The Artist at Work*, as are finally all the stories. Each one in its own way gives a material representation to the dual nature of human existence, both solitary and solidary; each shows the individual as artist in the effort, however feeble or belated or misguided, to transform solitude into solidarity through communication; each in some form makes perceptible the author’s function as artist within the story, using his own special privilege to effect that transformation.

With *Jonas* as with the others, the story ends without complete resolution. The doctor is categorical: “He will get well.” A literal death has surely not occurred. But what of the doctor’s other comment: “He is working too much” (157)? We are back in the land of cliché and empty rhetoric, and Jonas’s future is as dubious as Janine’s or Daru’s. He has passed through a symbolic death, at least; the silence was not only like the desert but also like the tomb. He may be reborn transformed by his experience and incapable of painting; or he may have recovered his inspiration in rediscovering his star. The latter would seem to be Camus’s intention; but it seems certain that the new Jonas will not enjoy the worldly success of the old. The artist’s popularity was a delusion of human solidarity, and in reality the worst of exiles. The reborn Jonas must stay faithful to his own work. If there is a star, he must follow it, and not expect it to follow him.

1. Cryle calls it “une erreur de lecture” (p. 171); see his chapter, pp. 149–74, for a more complete account of critical debate on *Jonas*.

2. P. 1625: “Jetez-moi dans la mer . . . car je sais que c’est moi qui attire sur vous cette grande tempête.”

3. “*Jonas* ou la production d’une étoile,” p. 63.

4. Pp. 1630, 1636: “comprenait mal ce que peignaient ses contemporains”; “n’avait qu’une idée obscure de sa propre esthétique.”
5. P. 1645: “J’aime peindre.”
6. P. 1646: “une bonne organisation.”
7. P. 1647: “Il avait découvert que l’alcool lui donnait la même exaltation que les journées de grand travail, au temps où il pensait à son tableau avec cette tendresse et cette chaleur qu’il n’avait jamais ressenties que devant ses enfants.”
8. P. 1647: “Il allait peindre, c’était sûr, et mieux peindre, après cette période de vide apparent. Ça travaillait au-dedans, voilà tout.”
9. P. 147; other references will be given in the text. The French, from the same volume as L’Exil et le royaume, p. 1549: “ma carrière de faux prophète qui crie dans le désert et refuse d’en sortir.” The biblical quotation is from Matt. 3:3.
10. “Camus et la Bible.”
12. P. 1648: “Et pour la première fois, le cœur déchiré, il vit à Louise ce visage de noyée.”
15. P. 150: “Survivant éhonté d’une ère pré-sartrienne, Jonas n’a aucun sens de la responsabilité.”
17. P. 1629: “à la fois soutenue par la presse du cœur et les revues philosophiques.”
18. P. 1638: “Sa réputation, par chance, grandissait d’autant plus qu’il travaillait moins.”
19. P. 1630: “Du même élan, aussi bien, elle entra dans ce lit, puis s’occupa du rendez-vous avec le maire, y mena Jonas deux ans avant que son talent fût enfin reconnu et organisà le voyage de noces de manière que tous les musées fussent visités.”
20. P. 1636: “un disciple n’était pas forcément quelqu’un qui aspire à apprendre quelque chose. Plus souvent, au contraire, on se faisait disciple pour le plaisir désintéressé d’enseigner son maître.”
22. P. 1642: “Un artiste qui baisse est fini.”
23. P. 1636: “humanisation indirecte.”
25. P. 1639: “Un contrat est un contrat.”
26. P. 1641: “Heureux gaillard! C’est la rançon de la gloire!”
27. P. 1645: “Bah! Tu as bien le temps!”
28. P. 1635: “En art, comme dans la nature, rien ne se perd.”
29. P. 1640: “Finalement, on ne se voit plus.”
30. PP. 1644, 1645: “J’aime peindre.”
32. P. 1637.
33. P. 1634: “Est-il gentil, celui-là!”
34. P. 1643: “Tout le monde est gentil avec moi... beaucoup d’artistes sont comme ça... ils sont seuls... il faut les aimer.”

35. Pp. 1627-28: “d’abord parce qu’ils l’avaient élevé distraintement, ce qui lui avait fourni le loisir de la rêverie, ensuite parce qu’ils s’étaient séparés....”


37. P. 1649: “lui paraissait celui du désert ou de la tombe.”

38. P. 1649: “Il ne peignait pas, mais il réfléchissait.”