Appendix: The English Translation of
*L'Exil et le royaume*

Justin O'Brien's translation of *Exile and the Kingdom* is extremely well done.¹ It conveys the meaning with great clarity, accuracy, and readability, and also preserves many of the other qualities of Camus's style. Inevitably, however, there are places where something has to be sacrificed; English and French are not identical languages. In discussing the stories, I have based all my remarks on the original French version, commenting on discrepancies or lost nuances in the English whenever necessary.² For the convenience of English-speaking readers, I have listed in this appendix all the cases where it seemed to me that a notable difference existed between the two texts. Only a very few of these could be termed mistranslations; most of the time, literal accuracy has been subordinated to some other important quality, or vice versa.³

*The Adulterous Woman*

"A housefly" (3); "Une mouche maigre" (1557). "House" is a precision not in the original, and the epithet "maigre"—"meager," "skinny," "skimpy," or perhaps "frail"—is omitted. The detail has some value because of Camus's use of contrasting sizes in this story.

"splattered with the dark-red spots of peppers" (22); "ensanglantées par les taches rouge sombre des piments" (1567). The French word actually means "blood-spattered."

"the sky above her was moving in a sort of slow gyration" (32); "une sorte de giration pesante entraînait le ciel au-dessus d'elle" (1572). Camus insists on the theme of weight; "slow" for "pesante" weakens
this allusion. Recasting the sentence so as to make the sky the subject rather than the object similarly reduces the force of the image, which is based on gravity.

"the dead weight of others" (32); "le poids des êtres" (1572). The French is literally "the weight of beings."

"turned on the light, which blinded her" (33); "donna la lumière qui la gifla en plein visage" (1573). The French image is more striking than the English: "which slapped her right in the face."

The Renegade

"The Renegade" (34); "Le Renégat, ou un esprit confus" (1577). The subtitle "or a confused mind" has been omitted in English.

"then it all begins again—oh, I hear too many things" (34); "puis tout recommence, ô j'entends trop de choses" (1577). This illustrates a change in punctuation typical of the English version; more than a dozen such dashes have been added to clarify the syntax.

"Fetish, Sorcerer, House of the Fetish" (passim); none of these terms is capitalized in the French.

"gra"; "rà" (passim). The meaning of this interjection is a subject of debate. As an initial syllable in French, it seems to be associated with harshness, in words like "railler, râle, râpe," that is, "mock, death rattle, rasp." The rather arbitrary use of a circumflex accent gives the word an exotic air, and lends some credibility to the suggestion that it is meant to invoke the sun god Ra.4

"What a jumble"; "Quelle bouillie" (passim). The translation preserves the primary meaning faithfully enough, but some of the connotations of the French term are lost. The etymological sense of the word is "boiled," which is appropriate to the pervasive heat of the desert. In idiomatic usage, "mettre en bouillie" means "beat to a pulp," and "bouillie pour les chats" means "unreadable text"; both have relevance in this story.

"it seems" (34); "je ne sais pas" (1577). Like the other small modifications in this story, this tends to make the English clearer than the French.

"Order and method" (34); "De l'ordre, un ordre" (1577). The English avoids the repetition unnecessarily, and possibly alters the significance of the movement from order in general to an order, one among many.

"this country drives men mad and I've been here I don't know how many years" (34); "cette terre rend fou et moi, depuis tant d'années que
"je n'en sais plus le compte" (1577). "I've been here" is interpolated.

"Grenoble's hot sun" (36); "le soleil de Grenoble" (1578). "the blinding sun" (38); "le soleil torride" (1579). "the blinding scales" (42); "écailles éblouissantes" (1581). "dazzling whiteness" (42); "blancheur fulgurante" (1581). In the first phrase, "hot" is interpolated; in the second, "hot" or "torrid" would be more accurate, and in the third, "dazzling" would be closer to the original, and "withering" would be more precise in the fourth. Individually not very important, together these small differences vary significantly from the original, especially because blindness is mentioned by Camus.

"pig-headed"; "mulet, tête dure" (passim). "pig of a father" (36); "mon père ce pore" (1578). Camus compares the son to a mule, and "porc" suggests swinishness rather than stubbornness.

"I have something to settle with him and with his teachers, with my teachers who deceived me" (36); "J'ai un compte à régler avec lui et avec mes maîtres, avec mes maîtres qui m'ont trompé" (1578). The secondary meaning "master" is very present in the French.

"the greatest of masters" (36); "le plus grand des seigneurs" (1578). Here the French term means "lord," and is used in the same passage capitalized: "le Seigneur," "the Lord."

"give credit" (36); "rendre hommage" (1578). The French is a metaphor, "pay homage," which sustains the implications of the term "lord."

"the children's teeth are set on edge" (36); "leurs enfants ont des dents cariées" (1587). The meaning is rather that the children have decayed teeth.

"I went out of my way for punishments, I groused at the normal" (37); "j'allais au-devant des pénitences, je rognais sur l'ordinaire" (1678). The second part of the sentence actually means "I cut back on my regular allotment of food."

"I'd get the upper hand of those savages like a strong sun. Strong, yes, that was the word I constantly had on the tip of my tongue, I dreamed of absolute power" (39); "je subjuguerais ces sauvages, comme un soleil puissant. Puissant, oui, c'était le mot que sans cesse, je roulais sur ma langue je révais du pouvoir absolu" (1579). "Subjugate" is the literal and cognate meaning of the first verb. "Puissant" is etymologically linked to "pouvoir," a connection not shown in the English "strong" and "power."

"They'll show you" (41); "ils t'apprendront" (1580). The more literal
they’ll teach you” would preserve the relationship to the Renegade’s seminary teachers or masters.

“I was going blind” (42); “je devenais aveugle” (1581). The habitual rather than the progressive would be more accurate in English: “I would go blind [at such times].”

“Just one rain, Lord! But what do I mean, what Lord, they are the lords and masters! They rule over their sterile homes” (43); “Une seule pluie, Seigneur! Mais quoi, quel seigneur, ce sont eux les seigneurs! Ils règnent sur leurs maisons stériles” (1581). The capital letter makes “Seigneur” or “Lord” refer to the Christian God. The Renegade lapses here momentarily in thinking of Him, but immediately corrects himself and then reveals the extent of his apostasy by confusing God with the men of Taghāsā. The English, by capitalizing the second “Lord” and adding the word “masters” makes this subtle point less clear.

“a wicked hope consumes me” (51); “un espoir méchant me brûle” (1586). The French verb means “burn”; once again, an allusion to the heat is lost.

“madness took away my tongue” (51); “la folie m’a pris à la langue” (1586). A more accurate rendering would be “went to my tongue” or “took me by the tongue.” In the same paragraph, the word “silence” is omitted from the enumeration “Not a bird, not a blade of grass, stone, an arid desire, silence, their screams,”

“a heaven moved to pity” (59); “le ciel qui s’attendrit” (1590). The French has both this meaning and a more physical one, “a softening sky.”

This story, stylistically the most remarkable in the collection, perhaps for that very reason presents far more problems in the translation than any other. It is the only one where the English version may be said to diverge consistently in one direction, making the Renegade’s inner monolog a bit more lucid than it was written by Camus, and weakening a few of the extended images.

The Silent Men

“cycling slowly” (62); “roulait lourdement” (1595). “got up slowly” (75); “se leva pesamment” (1602). Both French adverbs mean “heavily.”

“in a wheelchair” (63); “aux allongés” (1595). The French is a jocular phrase for “among the dead.”

“The union had to consider the other cooper’s shops that hadn’t
gone along. You couldn't really blame the union" (65); “Le syndicat tenait compte des autres tonnelleries qui n'avaient pas marché. On ne pouvait pas trop leur en vouloir” (1596). The French plural pronoun indicates that Yvars could not blame the other shops, rather than the union.

“He [Lassalle] had forced the union’s hand” (67); “Ils avaient forcé la main au syndicat” (1597). The French subject is plural; the workers themselves had forced the union’s hand.

“calamity” (81); “malheur” (1605). “Misfortune” would be the usual translation, and better preserves the implication that fate is to blame.

The Guest

The title poses an impossible problem, since the French word “hôte” can mean either “host” or “guest,” and the ambiguity about which is which is an important theme in the story.

“fought bitterly” (98); “se mordaient à la gorge” (1615). The French contains a discreet allusion to the Arab’s actual crime, cutting a man’s throat; literally it means “bit each other in the throat.”

The Artist at Work

The title once again poses a problem. In French, it is “Jonas, ou l'artiste au travail.” The English has retained only the subtitle, quite possibly because the name “Jonas” can mean either “Jonas” or “Jonah.”

“he poses as wicked or ugly” (115); “il se veut méchant ou laid” (1629). The French means literally “he wills himself,” and is part of a mild satire of existentialism.

“as you say”; “comme vous voudrez” (passim). Here again, the French verb expresses a will. This time the joke is on Jonas, who alternates between this cliché and “What luck!”

“constantly changing moods of the internal-revenue office” (116); “dispositions sans cesse renouvelées de la fiscalité” (1630). The term “dispositions” is a pun, meaning both “moods” and “legal provisions.”

The Growing Stone

“jetty”; “digue” (passim). The cognate “dike” or “levee” or “embankment” would seem more appropriate to the apparent function, which is to keep the river from flooding the town.

“urubu”; “urubu” (passim). It is a vulture.
"clumsily" (159); “lourdement” (1655). “solidly” (160); “lourdement” (1655). “intensified” (161); “alourdissait” (1656). “the slapping of the water” (164); “le clapotis des eaux lourdes” (1658). “the harsh sun” (167); “le soleil lourd” (1659). As in some of the other stories, Camus’s obsessive use of terms related to heaviness has not been carried over into English.

“each time he came back to life” (161); “à chaque résurrection” (1656). This is a metaphorical description of D’Arrast in the flashing headlights; the French term more explicitly suggests the religious analogy.

“Have no fear” (171); “Sois pas peur” (1661). The English is correct and even a bit elegant; the French is pidgin French. In this story, the problem of rendering the languages is no doubt insoluble. At times we would be reading the English translation of a conventional French rendering of Spanish spoken by native Portuguese speakers. This theme could be studied only by someone capable of reading the original.

“pea-jacket” (181); “vareuse marinière” (1667). A pea-jacket is too heavy for the climate.

“Noble” (182); “seigneur” (1668). Again, the possible fusion of the social, political, and religious images is not retained in the English, as it might have been with “lord.”

“‘You like to dance?’ ‘Oh, yes! I like’” (184). Between D’Arrast’s question and the Cook’s reply, a descriptive line has been omitted: “Les yeux du coq brillèrent d’une sorte de gourmandise” (1669), that is, the “The Cook’s eyes shone with a sort of greediness.”

1. See the Bibliography for details of the editions used. In this appendix, references to both the English and the French texts will be given in the text in parentheses.

2. Obviously, I assume that Camus’s text is the valid one, which implies belief in, and respect for, his intentions. I admit that I have both, in full awareness of the problematic status of authorial intentionality. Some contemporary theories of literature, emphasizing the production of meaning through the reader’s interplay with the text, might challenge that assumption, or at least insist on its arbitrariness, even with regard to translations. An interesting commentary on the theoretical problems of translation, based on German translations of Camus, can be found in Fritz Paepcke’s “Albert Camus en traduction.”
3. There is certainly nothing to justify the kinds of criticism that have been leveled at Stuart Gilbert's translation of *L'Etranger*. See John Gale, "Does America Know *The Stranger*?", and Helen Sebba, "Stuart Gilbert's Meursault: A Strange Stranger."
