Speechless Eloquence in Camus’ *L’exil Et Le Royaume* [Exile And The Kingdom]

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HARTS & Minds: The Journal of Humanities and Arts

Vol.1, No.4 (Spring 2014)

www.harts-minds.co.uk/sound-silence
Abstract

*L'exil et le royaume* has received far less critical attention than Albert Camus’ novels or even his plays, and yet the theme of exile aligns it with his most famed work, *L’Etranger*. Consequently, his short stories require reappraisal and reconsideration alongside his more popular works. Much of Camus’ writing is marked by his dual obsession with both expression and physical experience. Critics such as Germaine Brée have understood the importance of silence in Camus’ life, with particular reference to the muteness of his mother and the deafness of his uncle. However, this autobiographical reading has not been extended to his collection of short stories, *L’exil et le royaume*. English Showalter Jr reminds us that silence is ‘one of humanity’s first encounters with the absurd’; another key concept that Camus grapples with. However Camus’ preoccupation with the absurd and the (in)expressible has yet to be connected with his predilection for writing narratives whose dramas are often centred around non-verbal moments. This article establishes a connection between Camus’ use of silence in his collection of short stories, *L’exil et le royaume*, with his philosophical quandaries on the absurdist ‘void’, and his decision to move beyond language itself and reflect upon the natural universe that surrounds us.

Key Words: Albert Camus, silence, speechless, eloquence, *L’exil et le royaume*

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You’re talking a lot, but you’re not saying anything.
- Talking Heads, ‘Psycho Killer’

For Albert Camus, silence can be the most apt way of expressing the inexpressible. As a writer whose fiction has a philosophical slant (see *L’étranger*, *La chute*), and whose philosophical ideas are explained through stories (see *Le mythe de Sisyphe*), his writing often searches for a meaningful narrative in a confusing world – a search that is not always successful. Despite a recurring association with the work of Jean Paul Sartre, Camus did not consider himself to be an existentialist, and opposed the philosophy of nihilism; instead, his works acknowledge the absurdity of life while still looking for beauty within it.

David Sherman’s description of the absurd enables us to grapple with the difficulty of understanding a notion that, by its very nature, defies definition:

The Absurd is both an experience and a concept. As an exceedingly rough first approximation, we might say that it is a concept born of an experience, a deep, visceral experience that life, with its joys and its sorrows, with its loves and its hates, with its spectacular acts of magnanimity and its despicable acts of pettiness, with its grand victories and crushing defeats – in other words, life itself – finally adds up to absolutely nothing.¹

This ultimate negation takes us back to deep, universal silence that cannot be broken with speech; and it is the knowledge of this that I believe Camus grapples with in his collection of short stories, *L’exil et le royaume*. This, his final work of fiction, published in 1957, received a somewhat muted response from critics, with a letter to *France-Observateur* in 1958...
expressing ‘astonishment’ over the silence that greeted the publication. And yet, this response – or lack of response – is oddly in-keeping with the key themes of the work.

Michel Grimaud, among others, has highlighted how ‘the difficulty of human communication’ is a recurring motif in *L’exil et le royaume*. For Germaine Brée, the emergence of such a theme was inevitable: ‘the silence of his mother, the silence of the earth [meant that] writing, for Camus, would then first be an act of reverence, the difficult communication of an inner, guarded domain, brought forth out of the silence that had kept it intact’. Nowhere is this more relevant than in Camus’ short stories, which as we shall see equate exile with the voluntary or involuntary inability to communicate. The difficulty that his characters have expressing themselves is perhaps misread by Conor Cruise O’Brien, who claims that ‘the manner of the short stories is generally flat and grating, suggestive of painful effort’. However, the comment is generally indicative of precisely what Camus is trying to express: there is no method possible whereby human communication is always effective to everyone. It would be going too far to concur with Kurt Weinberg’s comment that Camus writes in a universe ‘in which all communication appears to have become impossible’, for Camus ultimately shows how writing – the definitive mode of silent expression - is the best way out of a communicative cul-de-sac. English Showalter Jr argues that silence is ‘one of humanity’s first encounters with the absurd’, and I believe Camus consciously examines the possibilities of this.

In *L’exil et le royaume*, Camus takes six scenarios and shows us the relevance of silence within each one. Whether revealing the difficulties of verbal communication, the use of silence as a weapon, or retreating from the world to get closer to one’s own soul, we see that silence is multifaceted. While this may seem paradoxical, the complexity of speechlessness renders possibilities rather than negating them. Choosing the right words is the most important thing for a writer, and by deciding to describe the contours of silence rather than the patterns of speech, Camus uses writing - in itself, an unspoken act - to express the poignancy of speechless eloquence. Daniel Berthold’s 2013 essay on ‘Suicide, silence and authorship in Camus’ argues that Camus’ works are ‘texts that seek to replicate the irrational silence of the world, texts that reply ‘nothing’ when interrogated for explanation or consolation’. For Camus, it is not that actions speak louder than words, but that muted thoughts can be more powerful than enunciated ones: unspoken feelings become the purest of thoughts, as they cannot be misinterpreted, misunderstood or simply misheard by others. We may, of course, search for our own meaning in life, but it is just that: our own meaning. It ought not be imposed upon anyone else’s unique experience and thus we cannot speak it aloud without allowing our own ideas to tyrannise others, or allow our ideas to be tyrannised by the language in which they are expressed. Perhaps, then, Camus is suggesting that the truest form of eloquence is to be found somewhere beyond verbal communication, within the awesome complexity of the natural world which surrounds us.

‘Mute resignation’
The impact of silence on Camus’ childhood is revealed in his autobiographical novel *Le premier homme*, as these passages about his mother and uncle elucidate:

[...] puisque cette maladie de jeunesse l’avait laissée sourde et avec un embarras de parole, puis l’avait empêchée d’apprendre ce qu’on enseigne même aux plus déshérités, et forcée donc à la resignation muette [...]  

[ [...] since that childhood illness had left her deaf and speaking with difficulty, then prevented her from learning what is taught to even the most wretched, so her mute resignation was forced upon her.]
In focusing on the deafness of his family members, Camus writes with simplicity and dignity despite the anguish and loneliness he may have felt as a child unable to speak adequately with those closest to him. Despite this, the emerging silence between him and his mother did little to dent the profound fondness that evidently existed between them. Germaine Brée’s study, *Camus and Sartre: Crisis and Commitment*, reminds us that:

From the outset, then, Camus was aware of a realm of human experience that lay beyond the realm of words, outside all conscious elaboration. The bond from which as a child he obscurely drew emotional sustenance was as fundamental as it was mute. ...His mother’s mute self-acceptance demanded something beyond pity – respect.¹¹

Consequently, Camus’ literary endeavours centre around a silence that affirms, not negates: although muted, the most personal of feelings are able to be communicated; perhaps the muting makes them all the more personal, as no one can overhear the words expressing the bond between mother and son and intrude upon their tenderness.

At times, the conscious decision not to communicate reveals an acknowledgment of the limitations of language; to quote Ludwig Wittgenstein, ‘whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent.’¹² An incident from Camus’ childhood helps illustrate this point. Camus’ father had chosen to witness the public execution of a man who had murdered a family; however, despite his condemnation of the killer’s acts, his horror of the execution induced him to vomit and refuse to speak of what he had seen.¹³ Berthold argues convincingly that Camus dedicated his authorship to ‘the refusal to consign the reader to the blade. His texts revolt against the privileged position of the author as the arbiter of meaning. Like his father, he too refuses to talk.’¹⁴

Born and raised by a working-class family in French-Algeria, Camus has been quoted on the growing problems of France’s colonial relationship with Algeria, saying, ‘between wisdom reduced to silence and madness which shouts itself hoarse, I prefer the virtues of silence.’¹⁵ The necessity of silence, even in the face of injustice – especially in the face of injustice – becomes clear as it reveals the need for introspection after the clamours of war, as Camus hints in his essay ‘Le Minotaure’ ['The Minotaur']:

Il n’y a plus de déserts. Il n’y a plus d’îles. Le besoin pourtant s’en fait sentir. Pour comprendre le monde, il faut parfois se détourner; pour mieux servir les hommes, les tenir un moment à distance[...]. Les villes que l’Europe nous offre sont trop pleine de rumeurs du passé [...] On y sent le vertige des siècles, des revolutions, de la gloire. On s’y souvient que l’Occident s’est forgé dans les clameurs. Cela ne fait pas assez de silence.

[There are no more deserts. There are no more islands. Yet there is a need for them. In order to understand the world, one has to turn away from it on occasion; in order to serve men better, one has to hold them at a distance for a time [...] The cities Europe offers us are too full of the din of the past [...] The giddy whirl
of the centuries, of revolution, of fame can be felt there. There one cannot forget that the Occident was forged in a series of uproars. All that does not make for enough silence.]^{16}

Kevin Newmark writes that Camus ‘begin[s] speaking at the very moment his own philosophical and political tongues have been silenced, or repudiated, in favour of another, more garbled though less confused mode of speech’.^{17} Solitude emerges as a key theme in *L’exil et le royaume*, but rather than it being a source of anguish Camus believes that refraining from speech is not just inevitable, but necessary. Indeed, Berthold insists that ‘Camus’s silence is a refusal to seek to give meaning to what defies rational explanation. The absurd is portrayed in all its unintelligibility and strangeness but there is no authorial voice to provide understanding’.^{18} For the most effective retreat, the writer turns to nature. In some respects, natural beauty is the ultimate example of speechless eloquence, revealing self-sufficiency without language and relationships unhindered by the need for verbal communication. In her analysis of Camus’ short stories, Anne Minor has written that nature is where man can ‘for a fleeting moment commune with the unknown truth of the infinite universe’.^{19} While somewhat quixotic, Minor illustrates that it is only through the solitude of nature that we can become fully aware of ourselves and therefore, other people. Self-knowledge must preclude knowledge of others, and so the root of all communication must first be wordless silence, in imitation of the natural world. It is not that the problematic nature of an absurd existence disappears; it is that the nature of reason is instead superseded by the reason of nature.

‘It’s nothing’
In *L’exil et le royaume*’s first story, ‘La femme adultère’, the relationship between Janine and her husband Marcel is compromised by their inability to communicate and connect with one another. This emotional void between them is emphasised the first time we see Marcel, through his wife’s eyes. He is described in parts rather than as a whole:

Des épis de cheveux grisonnants plantés bas sur un front serré, le nez large, la bouche irrégulière, Marcel avait l’air d’un faune boudeur. A chaque défoncement de la chaussée, elle le sentait sursauter contre elle. Puis il laissait retomber son torse pesant sur ses jambes écartées, le regard fixe, inerte de nouveau, et absent. Seules, ses grosses mains imberbes, rendues plus courtes encore par la flanelle grise qui dépassait les manches de chemise et couvrait les poignets, semblaient en action.

[With tufts of greying hair sprouting on a low brow, a large nose, an uneven mouth, Marcel had the look of a sulky faun. At every bump in the road, she felt him bounce against her. Then he let his torso fall with its weight on his spread legs, his eyes glazed, once again inert, absent. Only his thick, hairless hands seemed to move, looking even shorter in the grey flannel that hung below his shirtsleeves and covered his wrists.]^{20}

The disconnection of his physical features, both from each other and from himself, implies how Janine views him: as someone with whom she cannot empathise. Even when tenderness is communicated between them, Camus expresses it indirectly: ‘il appelait Janine “petite”’ [‘He called Janine “baby”’].^{21} Showalter has noted that ‘It is not literally true that Janine and Marcel do not speak to each other, but Camus has told the story in such a way as to minimize
the actual speech.’ However, Camus reveals that the inability to connect through speech is a far cry from experiencing a sense of understanding that transcends verbal communication. It is only when Janine sees the vast expanse of the desert from the top of an Algerian fort that her perceptions about communication and existence begin to change:

Tout autour, un troupeau de dromadaires immobiles, minuscules à cette distance, formaient sur le sol gris des signes sombre d’une étrange écriture dont il fallait déchiffrer le sens. Au-dessus du désert, le silence était vaste comme l’espace. Janine, appuyée de tout son corps au parapet, restait sans voix, incapable de s’arracher au vide qui s’ouvrait devant elle.

[All around a herd of motionless dromedaries, tiny at this distance against the grey earth, formed the dark signs of a strange writing whose meaning had yet to be deciphered. Above the desert, the silence was immense, like space. Janine, leaning her whole body against the parapet, was speechless, incapable of tearing herself away from the void opening before her.]\(^23\)

Confronted by the vastness of nature, Janine becomes aware of a silence that is overwhelming. The description of the dromedaries as forming strange, indecipherable writing against the landscape is a particularly poignant way for Camus to symbolise the silent expression of the natural world, untranslatable yet beautiful. She recognises the thousands of stars above her ‘la réunissait peu à peu être le plus profond’ [‘reunited her little by little with her deepest being’], and she allows the silence ‘se fit en elle’ [‘to form in her’].\(^24\) David Carroll notes that ‘the intense, erotic experience of impossible freedom is thus “nothing” at all in itself – nothing except the desire for a radically different life, the desire for freedom. A nothing that is everything.’\(^25\) Indeed, the final words of the story are spoken by Janine, crying in front of her husband, protesting, ‘c’est ne rien.’ [‘it’s nothing.’]\(^26\) Her relationship with Marcel lacks meaning, but through her journey into the silent night, she opens herself up to a wider meaningless of the universe at large, indicating a move towards acceptance.

‘They cut out his tongue so that his speech should no longer deceive the world’
There is no such catharsis in ‘Le renégat ou un esprit confus’ [‘The Renegade or A Confused Mind’]: it is a story that reflects on oppression, told from the perspective of an unnamed narrator who has been maddened by the fetishistic religious rituals he has witnessed. Peter Dunwoodie describes it as ‘a text on the violence of language perverted.’\(^27\) Furthermore, David Sherman notes the how the use of a monologue to structure this story further expresses Camus’ concern with absolutism: ‘for Camus, [the monologue is] the tyrant’s ideal communicative form, for it precludes the kind of genuine dialogue that might call into question its prerogatives.’\(^28\) There is an implicit comment on the tyranny of religious faith, with the narrator expected to show due reverence in ‘the house of the fetish’. One of the ways in which he is tamed is that his tongue is removed; an act which, according to Ena C. Vulor, ‘symbolically destroys “the word” of the Gospel.’\(^29\)

More than that though, the story raises many questions about the nature of communication itself, as the story is told through the thoughts of a tongue-less man. The text begins in confusion:

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 crane […]
What a muddle, what a muddle! I must put my head in order. Since they cut out my tongue, another tongue, I don’t know, goes on wagging inside my skull [...]30

The use of ‘langue’ to indicate both ‘tongue’ and ‘language’ is apt here, implying a link between meaning and how it is physically expressed. Yet despite his muted existence, we still read his thoughts, which noiselessly clamour on the page: the language babbling inside his head is in stark contrast to his muted voice. His inability to physically communicate ostracises him, thus making him an eternal exile wherever he is, and the natural world that surrounds him is a reflection of the renegade’s tormented mind:

[…] je sens le soleil sur la pierre au-dessus de moi, il frappe, frappe comme un marteau sur toutes les pierres et c’est la musique, la vaste musique de midi, vibration d’air et de pierres sur des centaines de kilomètres râ comme autrefois j’entends le silence.

[I feel the sun on the stone above me, it is striking, striking like a hammer on all the stones and it’s the music, the vast music of noon, the vibration of air and stones on the hundreds of kilometres, gha, I hear silence as before.]31

The silence of his mouth, combined with his ongoing madness, is a striking reflection of the wider absurdity of existence. Despite his constant search for patterns within religious symbols, he gets no closer to a sense of meaning that can comfort him. However, it is a deliberate speechlessness, rather than an enforced one, that interests Camus in his next story.

‘Strong and silent’
‘Les muets’ ['The Mute'] depicts the stubbornness of silence as well as its ability to humiliate. The story begins as a group of barrel-makers return to work after a failed strike, and remain uncommunicative with their employer: ‘[e]ux se taisaient, humiliés de cette entrée de vaincus, furieux de leur propre silence, mais de moins en moins capable de le rompre à mesure qu’il se prolongeait.’ ['They were quiet, humiliated by this defeated entrance, furious at their own silence but less and less able to break it the longer it went on.']32 There is a strong autobiographical streak within this story, as the working-class Camus was becoming increasingly irritated by people discussing manual labour without sufficient knowledge of its realities, and by Parisian assumptions that he had become a ‘privileged reactionary’. 33

While Dunwoodie argues that ‘the silence of the men becomes an instrument of their struggle’, Showalter believes that ‘Yvars and the workers have not so much adopted silence out of pride as had it imposed on them.’34 The divide in critical opinion reveals a discrepancy between whether the silence reflects the workers’ defeat or their defiance; however, such is the complexity and ambiguity of silence that their refusal to speak means it can adequately represent both, or at the very least the moral confusion of the situation. In this sense, Yvars’ silence is social rather than existential, and the story of a community refusing to communicate contrasts well with le renégat, who is not given such a choice.35 This marks a turning point in the collection of short stories, and reveals a question that will interrogate the final three tales: is silence an indicator of solidarity, or of stubbornness?

‘Nothing spoke of man’
‘L’hôte’ ['The Guest'] is set on a hillside, essentially in limbo between the French and Algerian communities, where the teacher Daru lives in ‘l’étendue solitaire où rien ne rappelait l’homme.’ ['the solitary expanse where nothing spoke of man.']36 There is also a sense of
being in limbo in terms of meaning: l’hôte’ can mean both ‘guest’ and ‘host’, and Camus remains silent over which character is thought of as being at home, perpetuating the moral and social ambiguities of colonialism. Daru is asked by a French policeman, Balducci, to accommodate an Arab who has committed murder. The next day, Daru must hand the Arab over to the authorities. Carroll notes the importance of Daru’s silence as the policeman approaches:

By not returning Balducci’s greeting, Daru distances himself not necessarily from his old acquaintance Balducci himself, but rather from the French gendarme on horseback who is leading an Arab prisoner through the snow attached to a rope like an animal […] To the French gendarme, as the agent of colonial (in)justice who is responsible for the prisoner’s condition, the schoolteacher thus initially refuses recognition.37

Daru shies away from immediately accepting what others see as his social responsibility: to whom this responsibility is owed depends entirely on which society one happens to be in, and Daru is on the edge of two different ones. He chooses to act kindly to the Arab, and eventually leaves him on the hillside with the choice to continue to prison at Tinguit, or flee. When Daru returns to his classroom, we are presented with the following conclusion:

Derrière lui, sur le tableau noir, entre les méandres des fleuves français, s’étalait, tracée à la craie par une main malhabile, l’inscription qu’il venait de lire: ‘Tu as livré notre frère. Tu paieras.’ Daru regardait le ciel, le plateau et, au-delà, les terres invisibles qui s’étendaient jusqu’à la mer. Dans ce vaste pays qu’il avait tant aimé, il était seul.38

[Behind him, on the blackboard, among the meanderings of the French rivers, a clumsy hand had traced in chalk the inscription he had just read: “You turned in our brother. You will pay.” Daru was looking at the sky, the plateau, and beyond at the invisible lands that reached all the way to the sea. In this vast country he had loved so much, he was alone.]38

The silent threat comes as a jolt, all the more sinister by its unspoken nature. The tone of the final words of the story, ‘il était seul’ [‘he was alone’], is hard to read: does the loneliness among the landscape reveal contentment and self-sufficiency, or loneliness and vulnerability in the light of the threat he has just received?39 He turns his back on the silent threat and gazes out over a natural landscape that also stares back in silence. Camus’ choice of setting, within the French-Algerian desert, creates a further sense of the moral void opening before Daru, as ‘in colonial rhetorics, the desert symbolizes an empty space for occupation.’40 It is as if the expanse is kind of geographical silence, a space with the potential to be filled – but for what meaning, and for what purpose?

‘He was listening to this silence within himself’

‘Jonas’ is a story about a promising painter who, surrounded by admirers, becomes distracted both from his work and the purpose of art. There is the curious choice of the artist’s name, with critics being quick to spot that ‘Gilbert Jonas’ can easily be read for ‘Albert Camus’, whose success also proved a distraction.41 In his analysis of ‘Jonas’, Showalter claims that an artistic block is ‘equivalent to a silence[,]’42 Yet in order to prevent his creative silence, Jonas must achieve another kind of silence: he must retreat from the intrusions into his work-life. Jonas’ eventual solution is to remove himself from the noise and bustle of his circle of friends...
and his growing family, building a raised platform within his apartment where he will not be distracted:

Il ne peignait pas, mais il réfléchissait. Dans l’ombre et ce demi-silence qui, par comparaison avec ce qu’il avait vécu jusque-là, lui paraissait celui du désert ou de la tombe, il écoutait son propre coeur.

[He was not painting, but he was meditating. In the darkness and this half-silence which, compared to his previous experience, seemed to him the silence of the desert or the grave, he was listening to his own heart.]

This reference to the ‘silence of the desert’ echoes the deserts the reader has already read about in ‘La femme adultère’ and ‘L’hôte’, revealing Camus’ fascination with voids of space and sound. And yet, Jonas’ final canvas refutes such a simplistic conclusion:

[…] Rateau regardait la toile, entièrement blanche, au centre de laquelle Jonas avait seulement écrit, en très petits caractères, un mot qu’on pouvait déchiffrer, mais dont on ne savait s’il fallait y lire solitaire ou solidaire.

[…] Rateau was looking at the canvas. It was entirely blank, though in the centre Jonas had written in very small characters one word, which could be deciphered, but it was hard to tell whether it should be read as independent or interdependent.

To reflect artistic truth, should the artist shut himself off from the world or immerse himself in it? In some respects, the struggle to decide which of the two words is correct is indicative of Camus’ own conflicts:

He was personally tormented by the conviction that the artist as an artist is not obliged to intervene in the melee of history, but that as a man, he is, since an otherwise noble silence before “the repulsive aspects of our human condition” becomes criminal when it serves to perpetuate evil.

Yet ultimately, Jonas reconciles this conflict by both speaking and remaining silent: ‘Jonas paints language in the end, not images’, thus silencing language while still using it to express an idea – albeit an ambiguous one. His painting of the word ‘independent/interdependent’ becomes a reflection of the wider idea of L’exil et le royaume: exile results in dependence, whereas kingdoms promote interdependence. By having Jonas conflate the two, we see language break down into a signifier that can mean both one thing and its opposite: both the meaning of everything and the meaning of nothing. This disconnection reminds us of our fundamental difference from one another; and the idea that the expression of experience can never be the same as experience itself brings us now to Camus’ concluding tale.

‘The wave of joy surging inside him, dark and panting, which he could not name’
The final story in this collection is ‘La pierre qui pousse’ [‘The Growing Stone’]. D’Arrast is a French engineer who travels to a Brazilian town where he must build a sea-wall to prevent flooding. As in ‘La femme adultère’, indirect speech is used to illustrate a lack of communication; Camus records the conversation rather than animates it. In doing so he reveals the difficulty of expression between different people and different cultures (‘Le juge vint aussitôt expliquer à d’Arrast, d’une voix redevenue harmonieuse.’ [‘The judge
immediately came over to explain to d’Arrast, in a voice once again harmonious.’). What speaks more directly to d’Arrast is ‘l’odeur de fumée et de misère qui montait du sol et prenait à la gorge’ [‘the odour of smoke and poverty that rose from the ground and caught him by the throat’]. He inhales the wretchedness of poverty and it becomes a part of him in a way that words describing such misery could not. A non-verbal moment at a party later that evening also helps d’Arrast to understand the Brazilians:

En même temps, tous se mirent à hurler sans discontinuer, d’un long cri collectif et incolore, sans respiration apparente, sans modulations, comme si les corps se nouaient tout entiers, muscles et nerfs, en une seule émission épuisante qui donnait enfin la parole en chacun d’eux à un être jusque-là absolument silencieux.

We see here how sound can be speechless, and yet still be a cause for connection; the moment unites both people within the community and d’Arrast who had previously been outside it.

The stone of the story’s title is a large rock that a Brazilian cook must carry to church. The cook had survived a shipwreck and swum to shore despite being a weak swimmer; as thanks for this, he promised God that he would make the pilgrimage with the heavy stone. However, the weight proves too much for him, and d’Arrast takes on the burden. Yet, instead of delivering it to the church, he carries it to the cook’s home:

Et là, redressant toute sa taille, énorme soudain, aspirant à goulées désespérées l’odeur de misère et de cendres qu’il reconnaissait, il écouta monter en lui le flot d’une joie obscure et haletante qu’il ne pouvait pas nommer.

The joy within him is unnameable, yet its existence is palpable. Although its meaning is ambiguous, it is an irrefutable emotion. This literal change of direction, from the house of God to the house of the cook, seems significant: rather than showing reverence for a belief-system rooted in ascribing meaning to symbols, d’Arrast chooses to help his fellow man. The story ends with d’Arrast being invited to sit down with the community, and notably, the text culminates in this speech act. Before, he was treated as a superior through the differences in their communities. Now, through wordless understanding, he has actually improved his status – by becoming an equal.

A kingdom of exile
In the beginning was the word; but with the death of God, we return to silence. Valerie Howells argues that the kingdom in L’exil et le royaume ‘involves a feeling of unity with one’s fellow-men and with the natural world.’ Yet this sense of solidarity is nothing without the solitude that provokes its necessity. Camus’ silences both reflect the absurd and allow us to embrace it, and the conflicted characters in Camus’ short stories are frequently
overwhelmed by this realignment of perspective. Throughout his stories, we see how Camus is able to escape the encroachment of the absurd simply by choosing to accept it. In this way, the absurdist universe becomes consoling not in its ability to provide answers, but its inability to ask questions: its speechless eloquence speaks for itself.

Notes

22. Showalter, Exiles and Strangers, p.66.
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Primary texts


Secondary texts


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**Biography**

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