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On Camus in Brazil: Mimesis and “The Growing Stone”

ABSTRACT

This essay shows how mimesis – defined by Luiz Costa Lima as the production of difference within an horizon of similarity – operates within the fiction of Albert Camus. In particular, this essay focuses on Camus’ short story, “The Growing Stone,” published in Exile and the Kingdom (1957). This story draws upon Camus’ 1949 trip to South America. The similarity between the story, “The Growing Stone”, and the events of Camus’ trip to Brazil has often been commented on by critics. But what is perhaps more interesting – and more pertinent to the purpose of this essay – is how the final story differs from the source material. For it is in this gap between the reality and the fiction whereby we can locate the operations of the imagination.

BIOGRAPHY

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ON CAMUS IN BRAZIL: MIMESIS AND “THE GROWING STONE”

This essay aims to show how mimesis – defined by Luiz Costa Lima as the production of difference within an horizon of similarity – operates within the fiction of Albert Camus. To show this, I am looking at the short story, “The Growing Stone,” the final piece in Camus’ *Exile and the Kingdom*. I have two reasons for choosing this particular story, both practical. First, by being a short story, even if an exhaustive analysis is not possible, at least a more thorough attempt may be made within the discrete limitations of this essay than if I had chosen one of Camus’ more well known novels. And second, this particular short story enables me to bring together my two principal concerns in a thematic whole: for the initial horizon of similarity out of which “The Growing Stone” emerged shares something with the country of origin whereby Luiz Costa Lima came to understand mimesis in its difference: they both come from Brazil.

I.

In 1949 – between June 30th and August 31st – Camus travelled to South America, with most of his visit confined to Brazil. The idea for the trip, ostensibly a lecture tour, was organised by the French Foreign Ministry. But for Camus, the purpose was not so much to go to South America, as it was a chance to get away from Paris. It is an indication of Camus’ precarious personal situation at this point that he agreed to the trip at all. For Camus greatly disliked travel, especially international travel, which he always associated with an increase in attacks of tuberculosis, as had happened in the past. This trip was no exception. As it turned out, Camus suffered a severe relapse of tuberculosis during the trip, in both lungs, at the lesional stage. He returned to Paris with insomnia, eczema and depression, and it took several months for him to recover.

What is interesting about this situation, however, is that Camus’ internal and physical state is not belied by his outward appearance, or by the way he conducts himself amongst his hosts. In short, he acts a role. The role that Camus played whilst in Brazil was that of ‘the author of The Plague’ (as he was introduced to a Brazilian professor and his wife at the beginning of the trip). His duties on the trip included lectures, round table discussions, radio interviews, press conferences, and endless luncheons and dinners with Brazilian professors, poets and politicians. Almost immediately upon arrival, however, Camus sought ways to deviate from the official program. On his first day in Rio de Janeiro (July 15), after negotiating his way through the press and photographers, he meets Abdias, an actor from a black theatre company that wants to put on Camus’ play, *Caligula*. Camus promises to work with them, and to meet with them on the weekend to go to a dance. ‘He’s delighted with the trick we’re playing on my official hosts with such a rendezvous and he keeps repeating to me: ‘Segreto. Segreto’[Secret, secret].’ The next day (July 16), Camus meets Abdias, and they go looking for a *macumba*, a ritual dance originating from Africa. They travel twenty-five miles outside Rio de Janeiro, to Caxias. Over lunch, the *macumba* is explained to Camus, which he later puts in his journal:

> The purpose of these ceremonies is always the same: through dance and songs, to attain the descent of the god into oneself. The goal is the trance. What distinguishes macumbas from other ceremonies is the mixture of Catholicism and African rituals. There is Echou, an African god and spirit of evil, but also Ogoun who is our Saint George. There are also Saint Cosme and Saint Damien, etc., etc. The cult of the saints is integrated here into rites of possession.

After a good deal of travelling, first by car, then through the jungle on foot, they arrive at the village. It is already after 10pm. Afterwards, Camus notes his impressions:

> My translator informs me that the songs are entreating the saint to authorize our presence in this place. The breaks between the songs are rather long. Near the altar one woman singer shakes a small bell incessantly. The dancing is hardly frenetic. The style is mediocre and it’s heavy. As it gets hotter, the breaks are almost unbearable. . . . One of the dancers approaches and speaks to me. My translator tells me that I am being asked to uncross my arms because this position impedes the descent of the spirit. I submit and keep my arms at my sides.

Camus does not seem very impressed, although the reason may partly be due to his own physical maladies: ‘I am told that this will continue incessantly until dawn. It’s 2 a.m. The heat, the dust, the cigar smoke, and the smell of bodies make the air unbreathable. I go out staggering, and breathe in the fresh air with delight.’ But here he adds an additional judgement: ‘I like the night and the sky better than the gods of men.’

On July 23, Camus flies to Bahia, to a festival held near the ‘Church of the Good Jesus.’ The following day he is taken to see a *candomble*, a variation of the *macumba*. His initial impression of these rituals is reinforced:
Then we go and see a *candombe*, a new ceremony of this curious Afro-Brazilian religion which is the Catholicism of the blacks here. . . . One of them [the dancers], a tall thin girl, delights me. She’s wearing a green dress and a blue huntress’ hat with musketeer feathers and the brim turned up. . . . This black Diana is infinitely graceful. . . . All the rest isn’t worth much. Mediocre dances expressing degenerated rituals.\textsuperscript{xv}

Later, over a long weekend in early August, Camus is taken to the religious festivals in Iguape. The trip, however, is beset by problems. They leave at 10am instead of 7am. The car breaks down and they are stranded on a jungle road, until someone happens along with a monkey wrench. The driver – who Camus notes looks like ‘August Comte’\textsuperscript{x} – realises at one point that he has driven forty miles too far, and they turn back. Another few hours is added to the trip. They cross the Ribeira River on a ferry, then pass by Reigstro – ‘a true Japanese capital in the middle of Brazil, where I have the time to glimpse houses delicately decorated and even a kimono.’\textsuperscript{xi} – finally arriving in Iguape. Camus’ accommodation – the best available – is in a hospital, called ‘Happy Memory Hospital.’\textsuperscript{xi} It was repainted especially for his visit.

After ten hours of travel, fatigued and in the midst of his physical and psychological collapse, an incident causes Camus’ mask to slip:

> But a tall imbecile who can hardly stand on his own feet is struck with the curious idea of demanding to see my passport, and he tells me that it is invalid. Tired, I send him packing. Indignant, the personages huddle together for a moment, and then come over to tell me that they’re going to put this policeman (for that’s what he is) in prison, and that I will be able to choose the charges that I want to press against him. I beg of them not to put him in prison. They explain to me that this foul-mouthed imbecile has disregarded the great honor that I have done Iguape, and that his bad manners must be punished. I protest. But they’re determined to honor me in this way. The affair lasts until the following evening when I finally find the right approach, asking them, as a personal favour to me, to spare this scatter-brained policeman. They proclaim my chivalry and tell me that it shall be done according to my wishes.\textsuperscript{xii}

The next day, before the festival, Camus witnesses groups of people gathering to obtain pieces of ‘the growing stone.’ The story is explained to him: ‘In fact Iguape is a city where an effigy of the Good Jesus was found in the water by some fisherman who came to this grotto to wash it. Ever since, a stone grows there ineluctably, and people come to chisel off beneficent pieces of it. The city itself, between the forest and the river, is crowded around the large church of the Good Jesus.’\textsuperscript{xiii} Later that day, the procession begins, and here, amidst the crowd, he meets a sailor who claims to have been saved by the Good Jesus, and that he has vowed to carry a 130-pound stone on his head for the entire procession. The hour approaches. From the church come penitents in surplices: first the blacks, then the whites; then children dressed as angels; then the “children of Mary,” then the effigy of the Good Jesus himself, behind which the bearded man advances, bare-chested and carrying an enormous slab on his head. . . . We go to wait for the procession at another strategic point, and when it passes in front of us, the bearded man is wincing with fatigue and his legs are trembling. But he makes it to the end nonetheless.\textsuperscript{xiv}

Earlier in his trip, soon after witnessing the first *macumba*, Camus wrote in his journal: ‘Real life remains. But in this oversized land which has the sadness of large spaces, life is terribly banal and it would take years to integrate oneself. Do I want to spend years in Brazil? No.’\textsuperscript{xv} A few weeks after the festival of the ‘growing stone’ and the ‘Good Jesus,’ Camus leaves Brazil, never to return.

**II.**

In the mid-1950s, soon after the war for independence in Algeria had begun, Camus began work on a collection of short stories, which were finally published in 1957 as *The Exile and the Kingdom*. The last of these stories, “The Growing Stone,” is set in Brazil, and draws on all the raw material which I have cited above, drawn from Camus’ travel diaries: it is the story of a European named D’Arrast, an Engineer, who travels across the Ribeira on a ferry, passed the Japanese village of Reigstro, and into Iguape. Here, after settling into the ‘Happy Memory’ hospital, he meets the Judge and the Mayor, and is taken to a bar where a drunken Chief of Police demands to see his passport. The Chief of Police is arrested for disturbing D’Arrast (and later, as a personal favour, D’Arrast sees him released). Meanwhile, D’Arrast leaves the official party and wanders into the poor areas of the village, where he meets a cook who tells him the story of how he was saved at sea by the Good
Jesus, and so promised to carry a large stone in tomorrow’s procession in return. But that night the cook takes D’Arrast to a religious ritual – a sort of macumba – where he (the cook) dances all night. The next day, during the procession, the cook is thus too tired and weak to fulfil his promise, collapsing halfway and dropping the stone. So D’Arrast lifts the stone and carries it – not toward the Church of the Good Jesus, where everyone is shouting at him to go – but rather toward the hut of the cook, where the stone is placed in the fireplace at the centre of the room. Here D’Arrast is joined by the villagers, who sit around the stone and then clear a space for him beside them.

How best to describe the process which leads from this raw experience in 1949 to the published work of fiction in 1957? As with any work of fiction, it is perhaps only possible to trace the contours of the imagination by its results; its origins and inner process remaining forever a secret. But like Camus, on his first day in Rio de Janeiro, it may be permitted us to deviate from the official program and find a more circuitous route in order to better grasp this process.

The Brazilian intellectual, Luiz Costa Lima, has for the past thirty years, been following the secret life of mimesis. In doing so, he deviates from the ‘official program,’ which translates Ancient Greek mimesis, through Renaissance imitatio, as the Modern notion of imitation or representation. But, for Costa Lima, mimesis is the production of difference which operates within an horizon of similarity. This ‘horizon of similarity’ is characterised by being a socially acceptable standard which the subject initially attempts to identify with, or assimilate to; however, this is accomplished, or actualised, to a degree of lesser or greater difference. An exact copy is never achieved, even if aspired to – as is the case with certain ‘reality discourses,’ measured according to the standard of true or false.

Here fiction thematises the imaginary (as opposed to thematising reality), and as such, it exploits the potential for greater difference, and the critical remove this allows. It is a critical remove which thus operates outside of the standard of true or false, and so is concerned more with questioning the socially established ‘truths,’ or standard of assimilation, than with replacing it or erecting fresh standards to be followed. By understanding fiction as operating outside of the standard of true or false, Costa Lima is, in turn, distinguishing fiction from what is commonly conceived of as the fictitious, or ‘false’ discourse. Conflating fictionality with the fictitious, for Costa Lima, is a corollary of the historical shift which first translates mimesis as imitatio, effectively denying the potential for difference and reducing the operation of mimesis to imitation; subordinating the imagination to a secondary role in relation to reason, as being simply re-productive (instead of productive), confined solely to acts of representation. The cumulative effects of this lead to what Costa Lima calls the control of the imaginary, the domestication of the imagination, and the veto on fiction.

The question that interests me here is whether or not mimesis as Costa Lima theorises also emerges in Albert Camus’ practice of writing fiction; in particular, in “The Growing Stone.”

III.

The similarity between the story, “The Growing Stone,” and the events of Camus’ trip to Brazil has often been commented on by critics. Valerie Howells, for example, states: ‘What is striking about the story is the very close resemblance it bears (in its detail) to Camus’s account of his experiences during his visit to South America.’ But what is perhaps more interesting – and more pertinent to the purpose of this essay – is how the final story differs from the source material. For it is in this gap between the reality and the fiction whereby we can locate the operations of the imagination. There are, of course, minor variations: the drunk policeman who hassles Camus for his passport is promoted to ‘Chief of Police’ in the story, and Camus’ driver ‘August Comte’ becomes christened ‘Socrates.’ The two rituals Camus witnessed earlier – the macumba near Caxias, and the candomble in Bahia – are conflated and situated in Iguape, where the action of the story takes place. But there are also more significant differences. The protagonist of the story, D’Arrast, is obviously not Camus. His profession is that of an Engineer. And it is intimated that he comes, not from North Africa (where Camus hails from), but from mainland Europe: ‘Having reached the bank, he looked out in the distance at the vague line of the sea, the thousands of kilometres of solitary waters leading to Africa and, beyond, his native Europe.’ Another significant difference is that during Camus’ trip, the sailor carrying the 130-pound stone in the procession, despite his fatigue, completes his task; while in the story, the cook stumbles and collapses, and D’Arrast completes the task for him.

It may be interesting to develop this last point, which marks the dénouement of the story, and to consider the note of difference that is struck between the raw experience and the final fictional creation. It is a development we can follow, if we consider Camus’ notebooks during the intervening nine years.
a. First, the diary entry concerning the raw experience, August 1949: ‘We go to wait for the procession at another strategic point, and when it passes in front of us, the bearded man is wincing with fatigue and his legs are trembling. But he makes it to the end nonetheless.’

b. In January 1951, Camus makes the first entry in his notebooks for what will later become “The Growing Stone”: ‘Iguape. A man in front of the ferryboat. The city, the procession. The man and the stone collapse. The visitor takes the stone but passes the church and walks toward the river. He loads the stone onto a long rowboat and rides up the river toward the primeval forest where he disappears.’ Already there is a variation: the man fails to complete his task and the visitor helps him. But here the visitor (not yet D’Arrast), takes the stone on a boat and disappears up the river!

c. The following year, 1952, Camus makes the following amendment: ‘Finally, he carries the stone into the most pathetic of huts. Without saying a word, the natives squeeze themselves together to make room for him. In the silence, one hears nothing but the sounds of the river.—Here we are the last, the last place among the last.’ Here Camus shifts the action more closely toward what finally happens in the story. But there are two slight differences yet to be introduced: the hut does not yet belong to the cook, and the ‘natives’ here are silent, and make room for the visitor ‘without saying a word.’

d. And in the final draft, published in 1957, the hut chosen belongs to the cook, and, at the end, the cook’s brother (who earlier in the story is suspicious of D’Arrast’s presence in the village) speaks directly to D’Arrast: ‘At that moment, a firecracker went off that seemed very close. The brother moved a little away from the cook and, half turning towards D’Arrast but without looking at him pointed to the empty place and said: “Sit down with us.”’

In 1955, when Camus begins gathering material for his collection of stories, The Exile and the Kingdom (which is otherwise focused on Algeria and Paris), he includes an idea for a short story set in Brazil. It is at first a vague notion, based on one or two images, which he first considered in 1952: ‘Short Story, Brazil. An Urubu snorted, opened its beak, prepared to fly away, flapped its dusty wings twice against its body, rose two centimetres above the ridge of the roof and, almost at once, dropped back down to go to sleep. . . . One by one the stars fell into the sea, the sky drained of its last lights.’ He then, in 1955, draws on his earlier images of the man carrying the growing stone, helped by the visitor, and incorporates this into his proposed collection: ‘Short stories under the title: Short Stories of Exile.’ Here he lists brief, one sentence outlines, of seven stories, of which five made it into the final collection published in 1958. Here number two is the Brazil story: ‘2. Iguape – human warmth, friendship of the black cook.’ That Camus is concerned also with Algeria whilst composing this story is clear in another entry, made during early 1956, perhaps influenced by the increased violence of the Algerian war (although this imagined conversation never made it to the final draft):

   The Growing Stone.
   The cook – But he’s not bad. One’s enemy should be killed: has he not been?
   D’Arrast: He has been.
   The cook: Here, we kill out enemies, and afterward there’s the Good Jesus.

The war in Algeria began the following year and Camus’ concerns became more focused. But it has been necessary to outline here, as best we can, the background possibilities and variations and differences which this material underwent before finally arriving at its (by no means predetermined) destination. Here we have only reconstructed part of the outward process which accompanied the production of “The Growing Stone,” from experience, through image, to work of fiction. What we must now look at is the story itself, and how these marks of difference operate with it to produce a work of fiction.

IV.
Valerie Howells, in surveying the criticism surrounding “The Growing Stone,” states the typical approach to this story:

Comparison of the notation of events in Camus’s Journaux de voyage with the fictional representation of these events in ‘La pierre qui pousse’ forms the basis of many existing studies of the nouvelle. These studies highlight a central problem: the difficulty of distinguishing expressionistic realism from invention, in the mixture of documentary and fable out of which the story is crafted. Critical evaluations vary, but most agree that the story may be read as an optimistic myth. For some, ‘La pierre qui pousse’ is
remarkable for its sensitive and faithful representation of a people and their country, while for others, it is above all a symbolic work.\textsuperscript{xxix}

I have already suggested, however, that this ‘central problem’ may be misplaced; that critics, in focusing on the general and surface similarities between Camus’ journal entries for his trip to Brazil and his use of the associated imagery in the story, are thereby blinded to the particular and more structural differences that exist between the two; and how this difference operates at the level of the narrative. This blindness may, in part, be because such critics are operating on assumptions of fiction as representation, or imitation, and it may account for the main critical evaluations of Camus’ work, which tend to fall into two categories: expressive realism and symbolism, with the latter being a variation of formalism, in which the empty structure of the story is filled by some external, already pre-established system of thought, which the story is then held up to be a symbol of. A notable example of the former is Jaime Castro Segovia, who embeds the story in the reality of the Afro-Brazilian world, its geography, climate and culture;\textsuperscript{xxx} an example of the latter is Linda Forge Mellon, who subjects Camus’ story to a Jungian interpretation.\textsuperscript{xxxi}

And yet, this also accounts for many of Howells’ own statements regarding the story. For example: ‘It is in many ways surprising that Camus seems to have taken a largely negative experience as the basis for a story which suggests the supreme value of fraternity.’\textsuperscript{xxxii} Later, in interpreting the alternative endings which Camus drafted in his notebooks, Howells states that these ‘suggest Camus’s difficulty in finding a satisfactory resolution to the story.’\textsuperscript{xxxiii} But it is in the differences opened by the composition of the story whereby Camus shifts his attention from reality to the imaginary. What is ‘surprising’ for Howells, is that this sense of reality does not retain a primary position in the composition of the story; and she thereby sees Camus’ exploration of the field of the imaginary as a ‘difficulty in finding a satisfactory resolution,’ in which Camus resorts to ‘rhetoric and lyricism, using emotional appeal to blur the reader’s critical judgement.’\textsuperscript{xxxiv} Ultimately for Howells, amongst others (such as A. J. Arnold, cited by Howell), this conclusion is a ‘failure’ because it upsets the reader’s expectations, because it steps back from using the guardrail of realistic discourse, and because it resists the imposition of a symbolic/rational system, which allows the critic to attribute a meaning (such as ‘the supreme value of fraternity’) to the work. In other words, Camus’ critics are impatient with him for attempting to write fiction.

Luiz Costa Lima argues, on the other hand, that if the imaginary is the negation of the concrete, then fiction is the negation of that negation; in other words, fiction is the critical use of the imaginary.\textsuperscript{xxxv} We have already seen the extent to which Camus, in the composition of this story, differentiates from his earlier experiences in Brazil in order to open up the field of the imaginary. It is now necessary to discern the extent to which he makes critical use of this field in the story; how the narrative itself creates the effects of difference. This can be seen (a) in the narrative structure itself; (b) operating within this structure, in the image of the engineer; (c) within the distinction between the individual promise of the cook to undertake the trial of the stone and the collective ritual which acts as an obstacle to the fulfilment of this promise; and (d) within D’Arrast’s intervention in the trial of the stone which enables him to achieve his difference from the role of the engineer.

(a) Caroline Scheaffer-Jones correctly points out the unique narrative structure of this story: ‘This double position, involving neither merely inclusion nor exclusion, is evident in the narration of “La Pierre qui pousse” which is not omniscient. The story is written in effect from D’Arrast’s perspective, yet not in the first but in the third person, resulting in a distancing effect. It is as if the protagonist were decentred, detached from himself, displaced; as if his place were always affirmed but also denied.’\textsuperscript{xxxvi} This gives the overall structure of the narrative a sense of critical remove or detachment. It is, however, a ‘distancing effect’ that only becomes noticeable as the narrative proceeds. The reader is led into the story via an omniscient narrator – which sets up certain expectations in the reader – but it is an omniscience that is severely curtailed by the story’s end – disrupting the reader’s expectations along the way – which creates the initial effect of difference. This effect is accentuated, in part, through exposing a rift between the individual promise of D’Arrast and his role in the town as visiting engineer. And it is a rift enacted by his deviation from the auspices of the town notables – the Judge and the Mayor – who have hired him as an engineer, and his gravitation toward the poor quarter of town – the ship’s cook, in particular, and his family – where he achieves, by the story’s end, his individuality.\textsuperscript{xxxvii}

(b) The questioning of omniscience is implicit, for example, in Camus’ decision to make D’Arrast’s role in the town that of an engineer. At first, this seems an odd choice, especially considering one of Camus’ main criticisms of Brazil was its adoption of certain trends of construction, better suited to Europe: ‘Brazil, with its thin armour of modernity, makes me think of a building being gnawed at by invisible termites. One day the building will collapse...’\textsuperscript{xxxviii} But it is a criticism initially softened somewhat in the story by the engineer being brought in to build a jetty and dam to stop the waters from periodically flooding the poorer quarters of town. As
And yet, a note of discord is introduced at just this juncture, with the narrator stating, in (significantly) the final omniscient statement of the story: ‘D’Arrast, captivated by such charm and eloquence, thanked him and didn’t dare wonder what possible connexion a judge could have with a jetty.’ xlvii A note of doubt is thus introduced that perhaps D’Arrast’s presence in the town, unbeknownst to him, is not for such a noble purpose after all. The Judge then takes D’Arrast to the club to meet the ‘leading citizens’ of the town, which he is informed by the Mayor can be distinguished from ‘a few others less important’ by the fact that they ‘don’t speak French.’ xlii D’Arrast soon meets a figure who cannot speak French, who challenges his presence there; D’Arrast only makes out the word for ‘passport.’ It is the Chief of Police, and he is given a dressing down by the Judge and imprisoned. The Judge then asks D’Arrast to ‘agree that nothing but drunkenness could explain such forgetfulness of the sentiments of respect and gratitude that the whole town of Iguape owed him.’ xlviii The implication, however, is that reasons other than drunkenness may be attributed to the Chief of Police’s behaviour, and that the ‘less important’ members of the town are not so thrilled with D’Arrast’s presence there; a sense which becomes more palpable in the narrative soon after when D’Arrast finally visits the poor quarter and is met with silence, resentment and looks of hostility. xlix The Judge perhaps gives away his own position when he praises the profession of engineer (the role, not the man) for being able ‘to command the waters and dominate rivers!’; especially as this is a capability which D’Arrast is going to supply to the ‘leading citizens’ of the town, to be used over and above ‘a few others less important.’ D’Arrast’s role as engineer is therefore an ambiguous presence in the town, and one which brings into sharp relief the lines of social asymmetry that operate within the town. This is brought out more explicitly in a conversation that D’Arrast has with the cook, regarding the existence of the ‘common people,’ defined by the fact that they are the ones who work and suffer:

‘In that way, yes, there is a common people. But the masters are policeman and merchants.’

The mulatto’s kindly face closed in a frown. Then he grumbled. ‘Humph! Buying and selling, eh! What filth! And with the police, dogs command.’ xlv

(c) Saved at sea, after calling out to God for help, the cook has made an individual promise to carry a 130 pound stone to the Church of the Good Jesus during the festival. The night before the festival, however, the cook takes D’Arrast to a ritual (collective) dance that goes all night, thus making the cook too tired the next day to fulfil his promise. Halfway through the parade, he collapses beneath the stone. D’Arrast lifts the stone and carries it; but instead of carrying it to the church, he turns and carries it to the cook’s hut, tossing it in the hearth at the centre of the hut. Here the narrative sets up a distinction between the individual promise of the cook and the collective ritual which subsumes the cook’s individuality and removes his strength to fulfil his individual promise. What is interesting here is that this distinction between ‘individual’ and ‘collective’ (as with the distinction within D’Arrast between the role of the engineer and his own individuality) is not a binary opposition. Both events – the promise and the ritual – are overseen by the same ‘God’; both subsequent events – the attempted fulfilment of the promise during the parade and the festival itself which the ritual dance inaugurates – are directed toward the same ‘Good Jesus.’ The critical difference seems to be that the individual promise was also, at the same time, a promise that the cook made to himself. And it was this promise which the physical toll of the collective ritual forced the cook to break; thus he loses the spark of his individuality to the collective.

(d) D’Arrast’s role as an engineer is not mentioned again after his first discussion with the cook, prior to the ritual dance and the parade the following day. This moment is preceded by the suggestion that ‘the work he had come to do here were merely a pretext for a surprise or for an encounter he did not even imagine but which had been waiting patiently for him at the end of the world.’ xlviii After experiencing the ritual, which D’Arrast leaves part way through, stumbling into the night, he realises for the first time that he wants to leave Brazil:

The whole continent was emerging from the night, and loathing overcame D’Arrast. It seemed to him that he would have liked to spew forth this whole country, the melancholy of its vast expanses, the glaucous light of its forests, and the nocturnal lapping of its big deserted rivers. This land was too vast, blood and seasons mingled here, and time liquefied. Life here was flush with soil, and, to identify with it, one had to lie down and sleep for years on the muddy or dried up ground itself. Yonder, in Europe, there was shame and wrath. Here, exile and solitude, among these listless and convulsive madmen who danced to die. xliv

The next day, during the parade, D’Arrast links his desire to leave the country with the cook’s completion of his task to carry the rock: ‘Once again he wanted to get away from this country; at the same time he thought of that
huge stone; he would have liked the trial to be over. It is at the end of this paragraph that D’Arrast sees the parade pass by and notices that the cook is not amongst them. It is at this point that he leaves the balcony which he shares with the ‘leading citizens’ and enters the thronging crowd, seeking out the cook and the stone.

What is important to note here, however, is that omniscient narrator is entirely undermined (as should the reader’s expectations of being able to assign motive and choice) by D’Arrast himself not being able to attribute any rational meaning to his actions. ‘Quick as lightning, without excusing himself, he left the balcony and the room, dashed down the staircase, and stood in the street...’56 ‘Without knowing how, D’Arrast found himself at his [the cook’s] right’57; ‘D’Arrast looked at him, not knowing what to say... Suddenly he tore the cork mat from the hands holding it and walked toward the stone...’58; ‘He had already gone beyond the centre of the square in that direction when brutally, without knowing why, he veered off to the left and turned away from the church...’59 ‘He didn’t understand what they were shouting...’60 And then, after taking the stone to the cook’s hut and hurling it into the hearth, he feels ‘rising up within him a surge of obscure and panting joy that he was powerless to name.’61 The whole scene, in other words, is structured in such a way as to resist the imposition of any meaning external to the scene itself – Quick as lightning... Without knowing how... not knowing what to say... Suddenly... without knowing why... He didn’t understand... he was powerless to name – and to maintain focus on what is transpiring within the scene itself, confined to the limits of the narrative structure which creates a sense of difference between D’Arrast and his actions.

The consensus amongst critics is that the final scene ends on a note of ‘the supreme value of fraternity,’ with the story as a whole presenting an ‘optimistic myth.’62 It certainly ends on such an expectant note: ‘At that moment, a firecracker went off that seemed very close. The brother moved a little away from the cook and, half turning towards D’Arrast but without looking at him pointed to the empty place and said: “Sit down with us.”’63 But this is an expectation located in the cook’s brother and his family, and not in D’Arrast himself, who remains, at the end of the story, detached from the family, leaning alone against the wall with his eyes closed. And it is an expectation which is left suspended. However, the cook, his brother and the rest of the villagers, have already had their expectations of D’Arrast dashed before: first, in their initial expectation that he had come to the village as an emissary of the ‘leading citizens’ against their own interests; and second, the expectation that when he lifted the rock from the fallen cook he would take it to the church. By earlier linking his desire to leave the country with the completion of the trial of the stone (and, presumably, breaking his contractual agreement with the ‘leading citizens’ of the town to perform in his role as engineer), I think that this final expectation in the minds of readers is unfounded. It is a moment produced through a series of differential moves in the story, within the narrative structure itself, within the ambiguity of the image of the engineer, within the distinction between the cook’s individual promise and the collective ritual dance, and, finally, within D’Arrast himself.

Here the final scene explicitly directs D’Arrast away from perceptual reality: ‘Standing in the darkness, D’Arrast listened without seeing anything, and the sound of the waters filled him with a tumultuous happiness. With eyes closed, he joyfully acclaimed his own strength; he acclaimed, once again, a fresh beginning in life.’64 An earlier draft of the ending has the D’Arrast character take to a boat and disappear up the river, which would place the dénouement in an event occurring in ‘reality’; while here in the final draft, the river comes to D’Arrast, so to speak, and D’Arrast appears to himself, as if for the first time, which thus makes of the dénouement a ‘fresh beginning’ rather than an end, a moment oriented more by the imaginary than ‘reality.’ It does not offer itself to the attribution of a message or a formulaic moral.

One of the more interesting attempts to come to grips with Camus’ collection of stories is the early work of Peter Cryle. In an article that attends more to the ‘diversity’ between the stories which make up Exile and the Kingdom, Cryle makes a useful point: ‘In Exile, each story constitutes a new departure, each with a different premise: we are closer to the Nietzschean aphorism than to the saga novel.’65 Rosemarie Jones makes a similar point regarding the genre of the aphorism in another useful article, this time attending more to the ‘diversity’ within each of the stories of Exile and the Kingdom. Jones, too, recalls Nietzsche’s aphorisms and argues the Camus’ fiction is better understood in terms of attending to the ‘order of things in which contradictions occur,’ whereby the reader is asked not to choose between opposing ideas, but to consider their relationship.66 Here to assign a meaning or message to the stories would amount to choosing, and not using the experience of reading as an opportunity for further thought.

Jones examines the genre of the aphorism at some length and uses this discussion as the basis of her analysis of Camus’ short fiction. She states:

Whereas discursive writing depends upon a linear model, upon a sequence of exposition or argument, the aphorism breaks with linearity in three particular ways. It resists any excursus into a ‘what went before’
or a ‘what happens next’. Within itself it proposes an alternative model to the linear: thus it may be read reversed, or instead of pointing to a following, inevitable and invaluable sequence, it may propose a duality or a flurry of possibilities, or it may suggest circularity. The effect of this is that the aphorism declines to prove, discuss, or excuse – it simply asserts.18

Jones footnotes these three ways of breaking with linearity with references to La Rochefoucauld’s maxims. Significantly, Costa Lima has also examined the relationship between the aphorism and the development of modern fiction. Discussing, in particular, this relationship between La Rochefoucauld’s maxims and the ‘exploration of the fictional experience,’ Costa Lima argues that fiction draws on no events other than those that are part of everyday existence, and that it appears only when someone is able to single out some events from the general chain that naturalized them. Fictionality has no need for the sophisticated pastoralism of L’Astrée (1607–27) for it is neither this side of nor beyond everyday existence, but rather is detached from it by means of a discursive strategy. What does this strategy consist in? To begin with, its material must be separated, must be extracted from the other everyday events with which it was articulated, so that, isolated and depрагmatized, it can be the focus of the receiver’s concentrated attention. In this way, the receiver is able to identify critically the functioning of the chain of everyday events, to see critically what is taken to be the world.19

It is this process which I have attempted to reconstruct in the current essay. Camus’ journal for his trip to Brazil in 1949, plus his subsequent notebook entries, allows us the unique opportunity to follow this process of detachment from the everyday to their critical deployment in a particular work of fiction. His travel journal entries, these fragments from his experiences in Brazil, are already excerpted from the linear chain of events of his experience. In the years that follow, we have seen how Camus arranged these fragments according to the mimetic operations of the imagination, in order to create “The Growing Stone.” This story is not, therefore, concerned primarily with Brazil, anymore than it is concerned with Algeria or France. For it contains within it its own territory. As Costa Lima states: ‘For each discourse is a territoriality, with its own limits of expressive possibility. Since the territoriality of the fictional does not imply respect for the truth of facts, if it is not to be confused with the fictitious it must go beyond the world of the as-if and exploit the larger possibilities of imagination.’20 And it is this ‘exploitation of the larger possibilities of imagination,’ I would argue, which best characterises “The Growing Stone.”

V.

In the current essay I have tried to show how Camus’ practice of writing fiction operates within the limits of mimesis – defined by Luiz Costa Lima as the production of difference within an horizon of similarity – and that it is oriented toward rebelling against certain forms of the control of the imaginary. Costa Lima’s work has enabled us to raise fresh possibilities in approaching Camus. By way of conclusion, I offer here two (although there are undoubtedly others). First, that Camus’ theorising emerges from his practice of writing fiction (and not the other way around, as Sartre first suggested). This is a point borne out by the chronology of his writing. Camus’ first collections of lyrical essays in the 1930s – The Wrong Side and the Right Side (1937) and Nuptials (1938) – emerged out of his abandoned first novel. The Myth of Sisyphus (1942), in turn, emerged from the writing of The Stranger (1942); which itself grew out of a radical revision of his first completed novel manuscript – A Happy Death (published posthumously in 1971); a revision necessitated precisely because Camus had earlier tried – and failed – to illustrate the ideas and experiences detailed in his lyrical essays in this fictional form. Later, the penultimate chapter of his next major essay, The Rebel (1951), called “Rebellion and Art” emerged out of the practice of writing his second published novel, The Plague (1947). This last point is important to note – in connection with the concerns of my own essay – because an early draft of this chapter of The Rebel was presented as a lecture (under the title “Revolt and the Novel”), during Camus’ trip to Brazil in 1949.

The second possibility which an engagement with Costa Lima’s work raises is that, if Camus’ theorising emerges from his practice of writing fiction, then his ethics may be considered as operating within the limits of this practice. Commenting on the relationship between ethics and fiction in the work of Kafka, Costa Lima states: ‘But the decisive point is rather the link between the ethical and the aesthetic in Kafka – more precisely, the fact that the principle of operation of the former presupposes activation of the method proper to the latter.’21 It is a point which we could make about Camus, if Camus had not already made the point himself: ‘It introduces art into life by giving man the power of language in his struggle against his destiny. And thus we see that if this literature is a school for life, it is precisely because it is a school of art. To be more accurate, the lesson of these lives and these works of art is no longer simply one of art, but one of style. We learn from them to give our behaviour a certain form.’22
REFERENCES


iii Ibid., 279.


v Ibid., 76.

vi Ibid., 85.

vii Ibid., 89.

viii Ibid., 91.

ix Ibid., 104-105.

x Ibid., 118.

xi Ibid., 121.

xii Ibid., 122.

xiii Ibid., 122-123.

xiv Ibid., 124.

xv Ibid., 125-126.

xvi Ibid., 102-103.


xxiv Ibid., 42.

xxv Camus, *Exile and the Kingdom*, 152.


xxvii Ibid., 44.

xxviii Ibid.

xxix Ibid., 173.


xxxv Ibid., 280.


xxxviii Scheaffer-Jones, after noting this narrative structure, proceeds to close the gap, however, by interpreting Camus’s story in terms of Derrida’s concept of ‘hospitality,’ thus domesticating Camus’ fiction further.


xl Camus, *Exile and the Kingdom*, 123.

xli Ibid., 123.

xlii Ibid.

xliii Ibid., 125-126.

xliv Ibid., 127.

xlv Ibid., 131.
xlvii Ibid., 142.
xlviii Ibid., 147.
xlix Ibid., 147, emphasis added.
l Ibid., 149, emphasis added.
lx Ibid., 150, emphasis added.
lxi Ibid., emphasis added.
lxii Ibid., 151, emphasis added.
lxiii Ibid., emphasis added.
lxiv See, for example, the papers in Judith Suther, (Ed.) Essays on Camus's Exile and the Kingdom, (Mississippi: University of Mississippi Press, 1980).
xlv Ibid., Exile and the Kingdom, 152.
xlvii Ibid., emphasis added.
xl Ibid., 309.
xlii Ibid., 63.