

Nuptials (Noces) Albert Camus

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Nuptials (Noces) 1938

The hangman strangled Cardinal Carrafa with a silken rope that broke: two further attempts were necessary. The Cardinal looked at the hangman without deigning to utter a word.

Stendhal, La Duchesse de Palliano

Note to the 1950 edition

THESE ESSAYS were originally written in 1936 and 1937, and a small number of copies were published in Algiers in 1938. This new edition reproduces them without any changes, in spite of the fact that their author has not ceased to consider them as essays, in the precise and limited meaning of the term.

Nuptials at Tipasa¹

In the spring, Tipasa is inhabited by gods and the gods speak in the sun and the scent of absinthe leaves, in the silver armor of the sea, in the raw blue sky, the flower-covered ruins, and the great bubbles of light among the heaps of stone. At certain hours of the day the countryside is black with sunlight. The eyes try in vain to perceive anything but drops of light and colors trembling on the lashes. The thick scent of aromatic plants tears at the throat and suffocates in the vast heat. Far away, I can just make out the black bulk of the Chenoua, rooted in the hills around the village, moving with a slow and heavy rhythm until finally it crouches in the sea.

The village we pass through to get there already opens on the bay. We enter a blue and yellow world and are welcomed by the pungent, odorous sigh of the Algerian summer earth. Everywhere, pinkish bougainvillea hangs over villa walls; in the gardens the hibiscus are still pale red, and there is a profusion of tea roses thick as cream, with delicate borders of long, blue iris. All the stones are warm. As we step off the buttercup yellow bus, butchers in their little red trucks are making their morning rounds, calling to the villagers with their horns.

To the left of the port, a dry stone stairway leads to the ruins, through the mastic trees and broom. The path goes by a small lighthouse before plunging into the open country. Already, at the foot of this lighthouse, large red, yellow, and violet plants descend toward the first rocks, sucked at by the sea with a kissing sound. As we stand in the slight breeze, with the sun warming one side of our faces, we watch the fight coming down from the sky, the smooth sea and the smile of its glittering teeth. We are spectators for the last time before we enter the kingdom of ruins.

After a few steps, the smell of absinthe seizes one by the throat. The wormwood's gray wool covers the ruins as far as the eye can see. Its oil ferments in the heat, and the whole earth gives off a heady alcohol that makes the sky flicker. We walk toward an encounter with love and desire. We are not seeking lessons or the bitter philosophy one requires of greatness.

Everything seems futile here except the sun, our kisses, and the wild scents of the earth. I do not seek solitude. I have often been here with those I loved and read on their features the clear smile the face of love assumes. Here, I leave

order and moderation to others. The great free love of nature and the sea absorbs me completely. In this marriage of ruins and springtime, the ruins have become stones again, and losing the polish imposed on them by men, they have reverted to nature. To celebrate the return of her prodigal daughters Nature has laid out a profusion of flowers.

The heliotrope pushes its red and white head between the flagstones of the forum, red geraniums spill their blood over what were houses, temples, and public squares. Like the men whom much knowledge brings back to God, many years have brought these ruins back to their mother's house. Today, their past has finally left them, and nothing distracts them from the deep force pulling them back to the center of all that falls.

How many hours have I spent crushing absinthe leaves, caressing ruins, trying to match my breathing with the world's tumultuous sighs! Deep among wild scents and concerts of somnolent insects, I open my eyes and heart to the unbearable grandeur of this heat-soaked sky. It is not so easy to become what one is, to rediscover one's deepest measure. But watching the solid backbone of the Chenoua, my heart would grow calm with a strange certainty.

I was learning to breathe, I was fitting into things and fulfilling myself. As I climbed one after another of the hills, each brought a reward, like the temple whose columns measure the course of the sun and from which one can see the whole village, its white and pink walls and green verandas. Like the basilica on the East hill too, which still has its walls and is surrounded by a great circle of uncovered ornamented coffins, most of them scarcely out of the earth, whose nature they still share.

They used to contain corpses; now sage and wallflowers grow in them. The Sainte-Salsa basilica is Christian, but each time we look out through a gap in the walls we are greeted by the song of the world: hillsides planted with pine and cypress trees, or the sea rolling its white horses twenty yards away. The hill on which Sainte-Salsa is built has a flat top and the wind blows more strongly through the portals. Under the morning sun, a great happiness hovers in space. Those who need myths are indeed poor. Here the gods serve as beds or resting places as the day races across the sky.

I describe and say: "This is red, this blue, this green. This is the sea, the mountain, the flowers." Need I mention Dionysus to say that I love to crush mastic bulbs under my nose? Is the old hymn that will later come to me quite spontaneously even addressed to Demeter: "Happy is he alive who has seen these things on earth"? How can we forget the lesson of sight and seeing on this earth? All men had to do at the mysteries of Eleusis was watch. Yet even here, I know that I shall never come close enough to the world.

I must be naked and dive into the sea, still scented with the perfumes of the earth, wash them off in the sea, and consummate with my flesh the embrace for which sun and sea, lips to lips, have so long been sighing. I feel the shock of the water, rise up through a thick, cold glue, then dive back with my ears ringing, my nose streaming, and the taste of salt in my mouth.

As I swim, my arms shining with water flash into gold in the sunlight, until I fold them in again with a twist of all my muscles; the water streams along my body as my legs take tumultuous possession of the waves and the horizon disappears. On the beach, I flop down on the sand, yield to the world, feel the weight of flesh and bones, again dazed with sunlight, occasionally glancing at my arms where the water slides off and patches of salt and soft blond hair appear on my skin. Here I understand what is meant by glory: the right to love without limits. There is only one love in this world. To clasp a woman's body is also to hold in one's arms this strange joy that descends from sky to sea.

In a moment, when I throw myself down among the absinthe plants to bring their scent into my body. I shall know, appearances to the contrary, that I am

fulfilling a truth which is the sun's and which will also be my death's. In a sense, it is indeed my life that I am staking here, a life that tastes of warm stone, that is full of the sighs of the sea and the rising song of the crickets. The breeze is cool and the sky blue.

I love this life with abandon and wish to speak of it boldly: it makes me proud of my human condition. Yet people have often told me: there's nothing to be proud of. Yes, there is: this sun, this sea, my heart leaping with youth, the salt taste of my body and this vast landscape in which tenderness and glory merge in blue and yellow. It is to conquer this that I need my strength and my resources.

Everything here leaves me intact, I surrender nothing of myself, and don't wear a mask: learning patiently and arduously how to live is enough for me, well worth all their arts of living. Shortly before noon, we would come back through the ruins to a little café by the side of the port. How cool was the welcome of a tall glass of iced green mint in the shady room, to heads ringing with colors and the cymbals of the sun! Outside were the sea and the road burning with dust. Seated at the table, I would try to blink my eyelids so as to catch the multicolored dazzle of the white-hot sky. Our faces damp with sweat, but our bodies cool in light clothing, we would flaunt the happy weariness of a day of nuptials with the world.

The food is bad in this café, but there is plenty of fruit, especially peaches, whose juice drips down your chin as you bite into them. Gazing avidly before me, my teeth closing on a peach, I can hear the blood pounding in my ears. The vast silence of noon hangs over the sea. Every beautiful thing has a natural pride in its own beauty, and today the world is allowing its pride to seep from every pore.

Why, in its presence, should I deny the joy of living, as long as I know everything is not included in this joy? There is no shame in being happy. But today the fool is king, and I call those who fear pleasure fools. They've told us so much about pride: you know, Lucifer's sin. Beware, they used to cry, you will lose your soul, and your vital powers. I have in fact learned since that a certain pride is good. But at other times I cannot prevent myself from asserting the pride in living that the whole world conspires to give me.

At Tipasa, what I see equals what I believe, and I am not stubborn enough to deny what my hands can touch and my lips caress. I don't feel the need to make it into a work of art, but to describe it, which is different. Tipasa seems to me like a character one describes in order to give indirect expression to a certain view of the world. Like such characters, Tipasa testifies to something, and does it like a man. Tipasa is the personage I'm describing today, and it seems to me that the very act of caressing and describing my delight will insure that it has no end. There is a time for living and a time for giving expression to life.

There is also a time for creating, which is less natural. For me it is enough to live with my whole body and bear witness with my whole heart. Live Tipasa, manifest its lessons, and the work of art will come later. Herein lies a freedom. I never spent more than a day at Tipasa. A moment always comes when one has looked too long at a landscape, just as it is a long time before one sees enough of it. Mountains, the sky, the sea are like faces whose barrenness or splendor we discover by looking rather than seeing.

But in order to be eloquent every face must be seen anew. One complains of growing tired too quickly, when one ought to be surprised that the world seems new only because we have forgotten it. Toward evening I would return to a more formal section of the park, set out as a garden, just off the main road. Leaving the tumult of scents and sunlight, in the cool evening air, the mind would grow calm and the body relaxed, savoring the inner silence born of satisfied love. I would sit on a bench, watching the countryside expand with light.

I was full. Above me drooped a pomegranate tree, its flower buds closed and ribbed like small tight fists containing every hope of spring. There was rosemary behind me, and I could smell only the scent of its alcohol. The hills were framed with trees, and beyond them stretched a band of sea on which the sky, like a sail becalmed, rested in all its tenderness. I felt a strange joy in my heart, the special joy that stems from a clear conscience. There is a feeling actors have when they know theyâ™ve played their part well, that is to say, when they have made their own gestures coincide with those of the ideal character they embody, having entered somehow into a prearranged design, bringing it to life with their own heartbeats.

That was exactly what I felt: I had played my part well. I had performed my task as a man, and the fact that I had known joy for one entire day seemed to me not an exceptional success but the intense fulfillment of a condition which, in certain circumstances, makes it our duty to be happy. Then we are alone again, but satisfied.

Now the trees were filled with birds. The earth would give a long sigh before sliding into darkness. In a moment, with the first star, night would fall on the theater of the world. The dazzling gods of day would return to their daily death. But other gods would come. And, though they would be darker, their ravaged faces too would come from deep within the earth. For the moment at least, the wavesâ™ endless crashing against the shore came toward me through a space dancing with golden pollen.

Sea, landscape, silence, scents of this earth, I would drink my fill of a scented life, sinking my teeth into the worldâ™s fruit, golden already, overwhelmed by the feeling of its strong, sweet juice flowing on my lips. No, it was neither I nor the world that counted, but solely the harmony and silence that gave birth to the love between us. A love I was not foolish enough to claim for myself alone, proudly aware that I shared it with a whole race born in the sun and sea, alive and spirited, drawing greatness from its simplicity, and upright on the beaches, smiling in complicity at the brilliance of its skies.

1 Tipasa is a village on the Mediterranean coast, about fifty miles from Algiers. Camus went there frequently in 1935 and 1936. A manuscript exists of a first sketch for this essay, written in 1936, but the first typewritten copy dates from July 1937. Certain phrases, however, already occur in the Carnets for 1936. â™ P.T.

The Wind at Djemila¹

There are places where the mind dies so that a truth which is its very denial may be born. When I went to Djemila, there was wind and sun, but that is another story. What must be said first of all is that a heavy, unbroken silence reigned thereâ™ something like a perfectly balanced pair of scales. The cry of birds, the soft sound of a three-hole flute, goats trampling, murmurs from the sky were just so many sounds added to the silence and desolation. Now and then a sharp clap, a piercing cry marked the upward flight of a bird huddled among the rocks.

Any trail one followedâ™ the pathways through the ruined houses, along wide, paved roads under shining colonnades, across the vast forum between the triumphal arch and the temple set upon a hillâ™ would end at the ravines that surround Djemila on every side, like a pack of cards opening beneath a limitless sky. And one would stand there, absorbed, confronted with stones and silence, as the day moved on and the mountains grew purple surging upward. But the wind blows across the plateau of Djemila. In the great confusion of wind and sun that mixes

light into the ruins, in the silence and solitude of this dead city, something is forged that gives man the measure of his identity. It takes a long time to get to Djemila. It is not a town where you stop and then move further on. It

leads nowhere and is a gateway to no other country. It is a place from which travelers return.

The dead city lies at the end of a long, winding road whose every turning looks like the last, making it seem all the longer. When its skeleton, yellowish as a forest of bones, at last looms up against the faded colors of the plateau, Djemila seems the symbol of that lesson of love and patience which alone can lead us to the world's beating heart.

There it lies, among a few trees and some dried grass, protected by all its mountains and stones from vulgar admiration, from being picturesque, and from the delusions of hope. We had wandered the whole day in this arid splendor. The wind, which we had scarcely felt at the beginning of the afternoon, seemed to increase as the hours went by, little by little filling the whole countryside. It blew from a gap in the mountains, far to the East, rushing from beyond the horizon, leaping and tumbling among the stones and in the sunlight.

It whistled loudly across the ruins, whirled through an amphitheater of stones and earth, bathing the heaps of pock-marked stone, circling each column with its breath and spreading out in endless cries on the forum, open to the heavens. I felt myself whipping in the wind like a mast, hollowed at the waist. Eyes burning, lips cracking, my skin became so dry it no longer seemed mine.

Until now, I had been deciphering the world's handwriting on my skin. There, on my body, the world had inscribed the signs of its tenderness or anger, warming with its summer breath or biting with its frosty teeth. But rubbed against for so long by the wind, shaken for more than an hour, staggering from resistance to it, I lost consciousness of the pattern my body traced. Like a pebble polished by the tides, I was polished by the wind, worn through to the very soul.

I was a portion of the great force on which I drifted, then much of it, then entirely it, confusing the throbbing of my own heart with the great sonorous beating of this omnipresent natural heart. The wind was fashioning me in the image of the burning nakedness around me. And its fugitive embrace gave me, a stone among stones, the solitude of a column or an olive tree in the summer sky.

The violent bath of sun and wind drained me of all strength. I scarcely felt the quivering of wings inside me, life's complaint, the weak rebellion of the mind. Soon, scattered to the four corners of the earth, self-forgotten and self-forgotten, I am the wind and within it, the columns and the archway, the flagstones warm to the touch, the pale mountains around the deserted city. And never have I felt so deeply and at one and the same time so detached from myself and so present in the world.

Yes, I am present. And what strikes me at this moment is that I can go no further—like a man sentenced to life imprisonment, to whom everything is present. But also like a man who knows that tomorrow will be the same, and every other day. For when a man becomes conscious of what he is now, it means he expects nothing further.

If there are landscapes like moods, they are the most vulgar. All through this country I followed something that belonged not to me but to it, something like a taste for death we both had in common. Between the columns with their now lengthening shadows anxieties dissolved into the air like wounded birds.

And in their place came an arid lucidity. Anxiety springs from living hearts. But calm will hide this living heart: this is all I can see clearly. As the day moved forward, as the noises and lights were muffled by the ashes falling from the sky, deserted by myself, I felt defenseless against the slow forces within me that were saying no. Few people realize that there is a refusal that has nothing to do with renunciation. What meaning do words like future, improvement, good job have here? What is meant by the heart's progress?

If I obstinately refuse all the "later on" of this world, it is because I have no desire to give up my present wealth. I do not want to believe that death is the gateway to another life. For me, it is a closed door. I do not say it is a step we must all take, but that it is a horrible and dirty adventure.

Everything I am offered seeks to deliver man from the weight of his own life. But as I watch the great birds flying heavily through the sky at Djemila, it is precisely a certain weight of life that I ask for and obtain.

If I am at one with this passive passion, the rest ceases to concern me. I have too much youth in me to be able to speak of death. But it seems to me that if I had to speak of it, I would find the right word here between horror and silence to express the conscious certainty of a death without hope.

We live with a few familiar ideas. Two or three. We polish and transform them according to the societies and the men we happen to meet. It takes ten years to have an idea that is really one's own—that one can talk about. This is a bit discouraging, of course. But we gain from this a certain familiarity with the splendor of the world. Until then, we have seen it face to face. Now we need to step aside to see its profile.

A young man looks the world in the face. He has not had time to polish the idea of death or of nothingness, even though he has gazed on their full horror. That is what youth must be like, this harsh confrontation with death, this physical terror of the animal who loves the sun. Whatever people may say, on this score at least, youth has no illusions. It has had neither the time nor the piety to build itself any.

And, I don't know why, but faced with this ravined landscape, this solemn and lugubrious cry of stone, Djemila, inhuman at nightfall, faced with this death of colors and hope, I was certain that when they reach the end of their lives, men worthy of the name must rediscover this confrontation, deny the few ideas they had, and recover the innocence and truth that gleamed in the eyes of the Ancients face to face with destiny.

They regain their youth, but by embracing death. There is nothing more despicable in this respect than illness. It is a remedy against death. It prepares us for it. It creates an apprenticeship whose first stage is self-pity.

It supports man in his great effort to avoid the certainty that he will die completely. But Djemila is; and then I feel certain that the true, the only, progress of civilization, the one to which a man devotes himself from time to time, lies in creating conscious deaths.

What always amazes me, when we are so swift to elaborate on other subjects, is the poverty of our ideas on death. It is a good thing or a bad thing, I fear it or I summon it (they say). Which also proves that everything simple is beyond us. What is blue, and how do we think "blue"? The same difficulty occurs with death. Death and colors are things we cannot discuss.

Nonetheless, the important thing is this man before me, heavy as earth, who prefigures my future. But can I really think about it? I tell myself: I am going to die, but this means nothing, since I cannot manage to believe it and can only experience other people's death. I have seen people die. Above all, I have seen dogs die.

It was touching them that overwhelmed me. Then I think of flowers, smiles, the desire for women, and realize that my whole horror of death lies in my anxiety to live. I am jealous of those who will live and for whom flowers and the desire for women will have their full flesh and blood meaning. I am envious because I love life too much not to be selfish. What does eternity matter to me. You can be lying in bed one day and hear someone say: "You are strong and I owe it to you to be honest: I can tell you that you are going to die"; you're there, with your

whole life in your hands, fear in your bowels, looking the fool.

What else matters: waves of blood come throbbing to my temples and I feel I could smash everything around me.

But men die in spite of themselves, in spite of their surroundings. They are told: "When you get well, and they die. I want none of that. For if there are days when nature lies, there are others when she tells the truth. Djemila is telling the truth tonight, and with what sad, insistent beauty! As for me, here in the presence of this world, I have no wish to lie or to be lied to. I want to keep my lucidity to the last, and gaze upon my death with all the fullness of my jealousy and horror. It is to the extent I cut myself off from the world that I fear death most, to the degree I attach myself to the fate of living men instead of contemplating the unchanging sky.

Creating conscious deaths is to diminish the distance that separates us from the world and to accept a consummation without joy, alert to rapturous images of a world forever lost. And the melancholy song of the Djemila hills plunges this bitter lesson deeper in my soul.

Toward evening, we were climbing the slopes leading to the village and, retracing our steps, listened to explanations: "Here is the pagan town; this area outside the field is where the Christians lived. Later on Yes, it is true. Men and societies have succeeded one another in this place; conquerors have marked this country with their noncommissioned officer's civilization. They had a vulgar and ridiculous idea of greatness, measuring the grandeur of their empire by the surface it covered.

The miracle is that the ruin of their civilization is the very negation of their ideal. For this skeleton town, seen from high above as evening closes in and white flights of pigeons circle round the triumphal arch, engraved no signs of conquest or ambition on the sky. The world always conquers history in the end.

The great shout of stone that Djemila hurls between the mountains, the sky, and the silence well do I know its poetry: lucidity, indifference, the true signs of beauty or despair. The heart tightens at the grandeur we've already left behind. Djemila remains with its sad watery sky, the song of a bird from the other side of the plateau, the sudden, quick scurrying of goats along the mountainside, and, in the calm, resonant dusk, the living face of a horned god on the pediment of an altar.

1 Camus went to Djemila in the spring of 1936, in a small tourist plane chartered by some of his friends. In the Carnets for 1936, there are references to this visit, but the actual essay does not seem to have been written until the following year.
"P.T.

Summer in Algiers 1 to Jacques Heurgon

They are often secret, the love affairs we have with cities. Old towns like Paris, Prague, and even Florence are closed in upon themselves in such a way as to delimit their domain. But Algiers and a few other privileged coastal towns open into the sky like a mouth or a wound. What one can fall in love with in Algiers is what everybody lives with: the sea, visible from every corner, a certain heaviness of the sunlight, the beauty of the people. And, as usual, such generosity and lack of shame emit a more secret perfume. In Paris, one can yearn for space and for the beating of wings. Here, at least, man has everything he needs, and his desires thus assured, can take the measure of his riches.

One probably has to live a long time in Algiers to understand how desiccating an excess of nature's blessings can be. There is nothing here for people seeking

knowledge, education, or self-improvement. The land contains no lessons. It neither promises nor reveals anything. It is content to give, but does so profusely. Everything here can be seen with the naked eye, and is known the very moment it is enjoyed. The pleasures have no remedies and their joys remain without hope.

What the land needs are clear-sighted souls, that is to say, those without consolation. It asks that we make an act of lucidity as one makes an act of faith. A strange country, which gives the men it nourishes both their splendor and their misery. It is not surprising that the sensual riches this country offers so profusely to the sensitive person should coincide with the most extreme deprivation. There is no truth that does not also carry bitterness. Why then should it be surprising if I never love the face of this country more than in the midst of its poorest inhabitants? Throughout their youth, men find a life here that matches their beauty. Decline and forgetfulness come later.

They have wagered on the flesh, knowing they would lose. In Algiers, to the young and vital everything is a refuge and a pretext for rejoicing: the bay, the sun, games on the red and white terraces overlooking the sea, the flowers and stadiums, the cool-limbed girls. But for the man who has lost his youth there is nothing to hang on to, and no outlet for melancholy.

Elsewhere — on Italian terraces, in European cloisters, or in the shape of the hills in Provence — there are places where a man can shed his humanity and gently find salvation from himself. But everything here demands solitude and young blood. On his deathbed, Goethe called for light, and this is a historic remark. In Belcourt and Bab-el-Oued, old men sitting at the back of cafés listen to the young, with brilliantined hair, boasting of their exploits.

It is summer in Algiers that grants us these beginnings and these endings. During the summer months, the town is deserted. But the poor and the sky remain. We go down with them to the harbor and its treasures: the water's gentle warmth and the women's brown bodies. In the evening, swollen with these riches, the people return to oilcloth and kerosene lamp, the meager furniture of their existence. In Algiers, you don't talk about "going swimming" but about "knocking off a swim." I won't insist. People swim in the harbor and then go rest on the buoys.

When you pass a buoy where a pretty girl is sitting, you shout to your friends: "I tell you it's a seagull." These are healthy pleasures. They certainly seem ideal to the young men, since most of them continue this life during the winter, stripping down for a frugal lunch in the sun at noontime every day. Not that they have read the boring sermons of our nudists, those protestants of the body (there is a way of systematizing the body that is as exasperating as systems for the soul).

They just "like being in the sun." It would be hard to exaggerate the significance of this custom in our day. For the first time in two thousand years the body has been shown naked on the beaches. For twenty centuries, men have strived to impose decency on the insolence and simplicity of the Greeks, to diminish the flesh and elaborate our dress. Today, reaching back over this history, young men sprinting on the Mediterranean beaches are rediscovering the magnificent motion of the athletes of Delos. Living so close to other bodies, and through one's own body, one finds it has its own nuances, its own life, and, to venture an absurdity, its own psychology.²

The evolution of the body, like that of the mind, has its history, its reversals, its gains, and its losses. With only this nuance: color. Swimming in the harbor in the summertime, you notice that everybody's skin changes at the same time from white to gold, then to brown, and at last to a tobacco hue, the final stage the body can attain in its quest for transformation. Overlooking the harbor is a pattern of white cubes, the Casbah. From water level, people's bodies form a bronzed frieze against the glaring white background of the Arab town.

And, as one moves into August and the sun grows stronger, the white of the houses grows more blinding and the skins take on a darker glow. How then can one keep from feeling a part of this dialogue between stone and flesh, keeping pace with the sun and the seasons? One spends whole mornings diving to peals of laughter in splashing water, on long canoe trips paddling around the red and black freighters (the Norwegian ones smell of all sorts of wood, the German ones reek of oil, the ones going from port to port along the coast smell of wine and old casks).

At the hour when the sun spills from every corner of the sky, an orange canoe laden with brown bodies carries us home in one mad sprint. And when, suddenly ceasing the rhythmic stroking of its double fruit-colored wings, we glide into the quiet inner harbor, how can I doubt that what I lead across the silken waters is a cargo of tawny gods, in whom I recognize my brothers?

At the other end of town, summer already offers us the contrast of its other wealth: I mean its silences and boredom. These silences do not always have the same quality, depending on whether they occur in shadow or sunlight. There is a noontime silence on the government square. In the shade of the trees that grow along each side, Arabs sell penny glasses of iced lemonade, perfumed with orange blossom. Their cry of "cool, cool" echoes across the empty square. When it fades away, silence falls again under the sun: ice moves in the merchant's pitcher, and I can hear it tinkling.

There is a siesta silence. On the streets around the docks, in front of the squalid barber shops, one can measure it in the melodious buzzing of the flies behind the hollow reed curtains. Elsewhere, in the Moorish cafés of the Casbah, it is bodies that are silent, that cannot drag themselves away, leave the glass of tea, and rediscover time in the beating of their pulse. But, above all, there is the silence of the summer evenings.

These brief moments when day trembles into night must swarm with secret signs and calls to be so closely linked to Algiers in my heart.

When I have been away from this country for some time, I think of its twilights as promises of happiness. On the hills looking down over the town, there are paths among the mastic and the olive trees. And it is toward them that my heart turns then. I can see sheaves of black birds rising against the green horizon. In the sky, suddenly emptied of its sun, something releases its hold.

A whole flock of tiny red clouds stretches upward until it dissolves into the air. Almost immediately afterward appears the first star, which had been taking shape and growing harder in the thickness of the heavens. And then, sudden and all-enveloping, the night. What is so unique in these fleeting evenings of Algiers that they free so many things in me? They leave a sweetness on my lips that vanishes into the night before I have time to weary of it. Is this the secret of their persistence? The tenderness of this country is overwhelming and furtive.

But at least our heart gives way to it completely. The dance hall at Padovani Beach is open every day. And, in this immense rectangular box, open to the sea all along one side, the poor youngsters of the district come to dance until evening. Often, I would wait there for one particular moment.

In the daytime, the dance hall is protected by a sloping wooden roof. When the sun has gone down it is removed. The hall fills with a strange green light, born in the double shell of sky and sea. When you sit far from the windows, you can see only the sky, and, like puppets in a shadow theater, the faces of the dancers floating past, one after another.

Sometimes they play a waltz, and the dark profiles revolve like cutout figures on a turntable. Night comes quickly and with it the lights. I shall never be able to describe the thrill and the secret

enchantment of this subtle moment. I remember a magnificent, tall girl who had danced all one afternoon.

She was wearing a necklace of jasmine on her close-fitting blue dress, which was damp with sweat right down the back. She was laughing and throwing back her head as she danced. Passing in front of the tables, she left behind a mingled scent of flowers and flesh. When evening came, I could no longer see her body pressed against her partner, but the white of her jasmine and the black of her hair swirled one after the other against the sky, and when she threw back her breasts I could hear her laugh and see her partner's silhouette lean suddenly forward. I owe my idea of innocence to evenings like these.

And I am learning not to separate these beings charged with violence from the sky in which their desires revolve. At the neighborhood movie houses in Algiers, they sometimes sell pastilles with engraved red mottoes that express everything needed for the birth of love: (A) questions: "When will you marry me?" ; "Do you love me?" ; (B) replies: "Madly" ; "Next spring." After having prepared the ground, you pass them to the girl next to you, who answers in kind or simply plays dumb. At Belcourt, there have been marriages arranged like this, whole lives decided in an exchange of mint candies. And this gives a good picture of the childlike people of this country.

The hallmark of youth, perhaps, is a magnificent vocation for easy pleasures. But, above all, the haste to live borders on extravagance. In Belcourt, as in Bab-el-Oued, people marry young. They start work very early, and exhaust the range of human experience in ten short years. A workingman of thirty has already played all his cards. He waits for the end with his wife and children around him. His delights have been swift and merciless. So has his life.

And you understand then that he is born in a land where everything is given to be taken away. In such abundance and profusion, life follows the curve of the great passions, sudden, demanding, generous. It is not meant to be built, but to be burned up. So reflection or self-improvement are quite irrelevant. The notion of hell, for example, is nothing more than an amusing joke here.

Only the very virtuous are allowed such fancies. And I even think that virtue is a meaningless word in Algeria. Not that these men lack principles. They have their code of morality, which is very well defined. You "don't let your mother down." You see to it that your wife is respected in the street. You show consideration to pregnant women. You don't attack an enemy two to one, because "that's dirty." If anyone fails to observe these elementary rules "He's not a man," and that's all there is to it. This seems to me just and strong. There are still many of us who observe the highway code, the only disinterested one I know.

But at the same time, shopkeeper morality is unknown. I have always seen the faces around me take on an expression of pity at the sight of a man between two policemen. And, before finding out whether the man was a thief, a parricide, or simply an eccentric, people said: "Poor fellow," or again, with a touch of admiration: "He's a real pirate, that one!"

There are peoples born for pride and for life. It is they who nourish the most singular vocation for boredom, they too who find death the most repulsive. Apart from sensual delights, Algerian amusements are idiotic. A bowling club, fraternal society dinners, cheap movies, and communal celebrations have for years now been enough to keep the over-thirty age group entertained. Sundays in Algiers are among the dreariest anywhere.

How would these mindless people know how to disguise the deep horror of their lives with myths? In Algiers, everything associated with death is either ridiculous or detestable. The people have neither religion nor idols and die alone after having lived in a crowd.

I know no place more hideous than the cemetery on the boulevard Bru, which is

opposite one of the most beautiful landscapes in the world. A fearful sadness rises from the accumulated bad taste of its black monuments, revealing death's true face. "Everything passes," the heart-shaped ex-votos read, "but memory." And they all insist on the ridiculous eternity provided at so small a price by the hearts of those who loved us.

The same phrases serve all forms of despair. They are addressed to the deceased and speak in the second person singular: "Our memory will never abandon thee" — a gloomy pretense by means of which one lends a body and desires to what is, at best, a black liquid.

In another spot, in the midst of a stupefying display of flowers and marble birds, is this reckless vow: "Never shall thy grave lack flowers." But one is quickly reassured: the words are carved around a gilded stucco bouquet, a great timesaver for the living (like those flowers called "everlasting," which owe their pompous name to the gratitude of those who still jump on moving buses). Since one must move with the times, the classical warbler is sometimes replaced by a breath-taking pearly airplane, piloted by a silly-looking angel who, disregarding all logic, has been provided with a magnificent pair of wings.

Still, how can I explain it, these images of death never quite separate themselves from life? The values are closely linked. The favorite joke of Algerian undertakers, driving by in an empty hearse, is to shout "like a ride, honey?" to the pretty girls they meet along the way. There is nothing to keep one from finding this symbolic, if in somewhat bad taste. It may also seem blasphemous to greet the news of someone's death with a wink of the left eye and the comment "Poor guy, he won't sing any more." Or, like the woman from Oran who had never loved her husband: "The Lord gave him to me, the Lord hath taken him away."

But when all is said and done, I don't see what is sacred about death, and I am, on the contrary, very aware of the difference between fear and respect. Everything breathes the horror of death in this country that is an invitation to life. And yet it is beneath the walls of this very cemetery that the young men of Belcourt arrange their meetings and the girls let themselves be kissed and fondled.

I fully realize that such people cannot be accepted by everyone. Intelligence does not occupy the place here that it does in Italy. This race is indifferent to the mind. It worships and admires the body. From this comes its strength, its naïve cynicism, and a puerile vanity that leads it to be severely criticized. People commonly reproach its "mentality," that is to say, its particular mode of life and set of values. And it is true that a certain intensity of living involves some injustice.

Yet here are a people with no past, with no traditions, though not without poetry. Their poetry has a hard, sensual quality I know very well; it is far from tender, even from the tenderness of the Algerian sky; it is the only poetry, in fact, that moves me and restores me. The opposite of a civilized people is a creative one. These barbarians lounging on the beaches give me the foolish hope that, perhaps without knowing it, they are modeling the face of a culture where man's greatness will finally discover its true visage.

These people, wholly engaged in the present, live with neither myths nor consolation. Investing all their assets on this earth, they are left defenseless against death. The gifts of physical beauty have been heaped upon them.

And, also the strange greediness that always goes along with wealth that has no future. Everything people do in Algiers reveals a distaste for stability and a lack of regard for the future. People are in a hurry to live, and if an art were to be born here it would conform to the hatred of permanence that led the Dorians to carve their first column out of wood.

And still, yes, one can find a certain moderation as well as a constant excess

in the strained and violent faces of these people, in this summer sky emptied of tenderness, beneath which all truths can be told and on which no deceitful divinity has traced the signs of hope or of redemption. Between this sky and the faces turned toward it there is nothing on which to hang a mythology, a literature, an ethic, or a religion—only stones, flesh, stars, and those truths the hand can touch.

To feel one's ties to a land, one's love for certain men, to know there is always a place where the heart can find rest—these are already many certainties for one man's life. Doubtless they are not enough. But at certain moments everything yearns for this homeland of the soul. "Yes, it is to this we must return." What is strange about finding on earth the unity Plotinus longed for? Unity expresses itself here in terms of sea and sky.

The heart senses it through a certain taste of the flesh that constitutes its bitterness and greatness. I am learning that there is no superhuman happiness, no eternity outside the curve of the days. These ridiculous and essential assets, these relative truths are the only ones that move me. I have not enough soul to understand the other, "ideal" ones. Not that we should behave as beasts, but I can see no point in the happiness of angels.

All I know is that this sky will last longer than I shall. And what can I call eternity except what will continue after my death? What I am expressing here is not the creature's complacency about his condition. It is something quite different. It is not always easy to be a man, even less to be a man who is pure. But to be pure means to rediscover that country of the soul where one's kinship with the world can be felt, where the throbbing of one's blood mingles with the violent pulsations of the afternoon sun.

It is a well-known fact that we always recognize our homeland at the moment we are about to lose it. Men whose self-torments are too great are those whom their native land rejects. I have no desire to be crude or to seem to exaggerate. But after all what denies me in this life is first of all what kills me. Everything that exalts life at the same time increases its absurdity.

In the Algerian summer I learn that only one thing is more tragic than suffering, and that is the life of a happy man. But this can also be the path to a greater life, since it can teach us not to cheat.

Many people, in fact, affect a love of life in order to avoid love itself. They try to enjoy themselves and "to experiment." But this is an intellectual attitude. It takes a rare vocation to become a sensualist. A man lives out his life without the help of his mind, with its triumphs and defeats, its simultaneous loneliness and companionship. Seeing those men from Belcourt who work, take care of their wives and children, often without a word of complaint, I think that one can feel a certain shame.

I certainly have no illusions. There is not much love in the lives I am describing. I should say rather that there is no longer very much. But at least they have eluded nothing. There are some words that I have never really understood, such as sin.

Yet I think I know that these men have never sinned against life. For if there is a sin against life, it lies perhaps less in despairing of it than in hoping for another life and evading the implacable grandeur of the one we have. These men have not cheated. They were gods of the summer at twenty in their thirst for life, and they are still gods today, stripped of all hope.

I have seen two of them die. They were full of horror, but silent. It is better that way. From the mass of human evils swarming in Pandora's box, the Greeks brought out hope at the very last, as the most terrible of all. I don't know any symbol more moving. For hope, contrary to popular belief, is tantamount to resignation. And to live is not to be resigned.

Such at least is the bitter lesson of summers in Algiers. But already the season trembles and the summer passes. After so much violence and tension, the first September rains are like the first tears of a liberated land, as if for a few days this country were bathed in tenderness.

Yet at the same time the carob trees emit the scent of love across Algeria. In the evening or after the rain, the whole earth lies, its belly moistened with a bitter almond-scented seed, at rest from having yielded all summer long to the sun. And once again this fragrance consecrates the nuptials of man and earth, and gives rise in us to the only truly virile love in this world: one that is generous and will die.

1 This essay contains what is perhaps Camus's most highly idealized descriptions of the Algerian working class. Jacques Heurgon was, in 1939, professor at the Faculté des Lettres in Algiers, and editor of the review *Rivages* in which the passage on page 86 about the mint pastilles first appeared in February 1939.

2 May I be foolish enough to say that I don't like the way Gide exalts the body? He asks it to hold back desire in order to make it more intense. This brings him close to those who, in the slang of brothels, are termed "weirdies" or "oddballs." Christianity also seeks to suspend desire. But, more naturally, sees in this a mortification. My friend Vincent, who is a cooper and junior breast-stroke champion, has an even clearer view of things. He drinks when he is thirsty, if he wants a woman tries to sleep with her, and would marry her if he loved her (this hasn't happened yet). Then he always says: "That feels better!" "an energetic summary of the apology one could write for satiety.

The Desert

The Desert¹ to Jean Grenier

Living, of course, is rather the opposite of expressing. If I am to believe the great Tuscan masters, it means bearing triple witness, in silence, fire, and immobility. It takes a long time to realize that one can encounter the faces in these Tuscan paintings any day of the week in the streets of Florence or Pisa. But of course we no longer know how to see the real faces of those around us. We no longer look at our contemporaries, eager only for those points of reference in them that determine our behavior.

We prefer its most vulgar poetry to the face itself. As for Giotto and Piero della Francesca, they are perfectly aware that a man's feelings are nothing. Surely everyone has a heart. But the great simple, eternal emotions around which the love of living revolves "hatred, love, tears, and joys" these grow deep inside a man and mold the visage of his destiny, like the grief that makes Mary clench her teeth in Giotto's "Entombment." In the immense friezes of Tuscan churches I make out crowds of angels, their features scarcely traced, but in each mute and passionate face I recognize a solitude.²

What matters are not picturesque qualities, episodes, shades of color, or emotional effects. What counts is not poetry. What counts is truth. And I call truth anything that continues. There is a subtle lesson in thinking that, in this respect, only painters can satisfy our hunger. This is because they have the privilege of making themselves novelists of the body. Because they work in that magnificent and trivial matter called the present.

And the present always shows itself in a gesture. They do not paint a smile, a fleeting moment of modesty, of regret, or of expectation, but a face with the shape of its bones and the warmth of its blood. What they have expelled from these faces molded for eternity is the curse of the mind: at the price of hope. For the body knows nothing of hope. All it knows is the beating of its own

heart. Its eternity consists of indifference.

As in the "Scourging of Christ" by Piero della Francesca, where, in a freshly washed courtyard, both the tortured Christ and the thick-set executioner reveal the same detachment in their attitudes. This is because the torment has no sequel. Its lesson ends with the frame around the canvas. Why should a man who expects no tomorrow feel emotion?

The impassiveness and the greatness that man shows when he has no hope, the eternal present, is precisely what perceptive theologians have called hell. And hell, as everyone knows, also consists of bodily suffering. The Tuscan painters stop at the body and not at its destiny. There are no prophetic paintings. And it is not in museums that we must seek reasons to hope. The immortality of the soul, it is true, engrosses many noble minds. But this is because they reject the body, the only truth that is given them, before using up its strength.

For the body presents no problems, or, at least, they know the only solution it proposes: a truth which must perish and which thus acquires a bitterness and nobility they dare not contemplate directly. Noble minds would rather have poetry than the body, for poetry concerns the soul. Clearly, I am playing on words. But it is also clear that all I wish to do by calling it truth is consecrate a higher poetry: the dark flame that Italian painters from Cimabue to Francesca have raised from the Tuscan landscape as the lucid protestation of men thrown upon an earth whose splendor and light speak ceaselessly to them of a nonexistent God.

Sometimes indifference and insensitivity permit a face to merge with the mineral grandeur of a landscape. Just as certain Spanish peasants come to resemble their own olive trees, so the faces in Giotto's pictures, shorn of the insignificant shadows that reveal the soul, finally merge with Tuscany itself in the only lesson it freely offers: the exercise of passion at the expense of feeling, a mixture of asceticism and pleasure, a resonance common to both man and the earth and by which man, like the earth, defines himself as halfway between wretchedness and love. There are not many truths the heart can be sure of.

I realized this one evening as the shadows were beginning to drown the vines and olive trees of the Florentine countryside in a vast and silent sadness. But sadness in this country is never anything but a commentary on beauty. And as the train traveled on through the evening I felt a tension in me slowly relaxing. Can I doubt today that even with the face of sadness, one could call it happiness?

Yes, Italy also lavishes on every landscape the lesson illustrated by its men. But it is easy to miss our chance of happiness, for it is always undeserved. The same is true of Italy. And if its grace is sudden, it is not always immediate. More than any other country, Italy invites us to deepen an experience that paradoxically seems to be complete on first acquaintance.

This is because it begins by pouring out its poetry the better to disguise its truth. Italy's first enchantments are rites of forgetfulness: the laurel roses of Monaco, flower-filled Genoa with its smell of fish, and blue evenings on the Ligurian coast. Then finally Pisa, and with it an Italy which has lost the rather tawdry charm of the Riviera.

But it is still a land of easy virtue, so why not lend ourselves for a time to its sensual grace? There is nothing urging me on while I am here (I am deprived of the joys of the harried tourist,³ since a cheap ticket compels me to spend a certain time in the town "of my choice"). My patience for love and understanding seems endless on this first evening when, dead tired and starved, I enter Pisa, greeted on the station platform by ten loudspeakers bellowing out a flood of sentimental songs to an almost entirely youthful crowd.

I already know what I expect. After the life here has surged around me, the

strange moment will come, when, with the caf s closed and the silence suddenly restored, I will walk through the short, dark streets toward the center of the town. The black and gold Arno, the green and yellow monuments, the empty town how can I describe the neat and sudden subterfuge that transforms Pisa at ten each evening into a strange stage-set of silence, water, and stone. In such a night as this, Jessica! Here, on this unique stage, gods appear with the voices of Shakespeare's lovers ; We must learn how to lend ourselves to dreaming when dreams lend themselves to us.

Already I can hear in the depth of this Italian night the strains of the more private song that people come to look for here. Tomorrow, and only tomorrow, the countryside will round out in the morning light. Tonight I am a god among gods, and as Jessica flies off on the swift steps of love, I mingle my voice with Lorenzo's. But Jessica is only a pretext; this surge of love goes beyond her.

Yes, I think Lorenzo is not so much in love with her as grateful to her for allowing him to love. Why should I dream this evening of the lovers of Venice and forget Verona's? Because there is nothing here that invites us to cherish unhappy lovers. Nothing is more vain than to die for love. What we ought to do is live. A living Lorenzo is better than a Romeo in his grave, despite his rosebush.

Then why not dance in these celebrations of living love and sleep in the afternoons on the lawn of the Piazza del Duomo, surrounded by monuments there will always be time enough to visit, drink from the city's fountains where the water is lukewarm but so fluid, and look once more for the face of that laughing woman with the long nose and proud mouth. All we need understand is that this initiation prepares us for higher illuminations. These are the dazzling processions that lead to the Dionysian mysteries at Eleusis.

It is in joy that man prepares his lessons and when his ecstasy is at its highest pitch that the flesh becomes conscious and consecrates its communion with a sacred mystery whose symbol is black blood. It is now that the self-forgetfulness drawn from the ardor of that first Italy prepares us for the lesson that frees us from hope and from our history. These twin truths of the body and of the moment, at the spectacle of beauty how can we not cling to them as to the only happiness we can expect, one that will enchant us but at the same time perish?

The most loathsome materialism is not the kind people usually think of, but the sort that attempts to let dead ideas pass for living realities, diverting into sterile myths the stubborn and lucid attention we give to what we have within us that must forever die. I remember that in Florence, in the cloister of the dead at the Santissima Annunziata, I was carried away by something I mistook for distress, which was only anger.

It was raining. I was reading the inscriptions on the tombstones and ex-votos. One man had been a tender father and a faithful husband; another, at the same time the best of husbands and a skillful merchant. A young woman, a model of all the virtues, had spoken French *si come il nativo*. There was a young girl, who had been the hope of her whole family, *ma la gioia   pellegrina sulla terra*. None of this affected me. Nearly all of them, according to the inscriptions, had resigned themselves to dying, doubtless because they accepted their other duties.

Children had invaded the cloister and were playing leapfrog over the tombstones that strove to perpetuate their virtues. Night was falling, and I had sat down on the ground, my back against a column. A priest smiled at me as he went by. In the church, an organ was playing softly, and the warm color of its pattern sometimes emerged behind the children's shouts. Alone against the column, I was like someone seized by the throat, who shouts out his faith as if it were his last word. Everything in me protested against such a resignation.

âYou must,â said the inscriptions. But no, and my revolt was right. This joy that was moving forward, indifferent and absorbed like a pilgrim treading on the earth, was something that I had to follow step by step. And, as to the rest, I said no. I said no with all my strength. The tombstones were teaching me that it was pointless, that life is âcol sol levante, col sol cadente.â But even today I cannot see what my revolt loses by being pointless, and I am well aware of what it gains.

Besides, that is not what I set out to say. I would like to define a little more clearly a truth I felt then at the very heart of my revolt and of which this revolt was only an extension, a truth that stretched from the tiny last roses in the cloister of Santa Maria Novella to the women on that Sunday morning in Florence, their breasts free beneath their light dresses, and their moist lips.

On every church corner, that Sunday morning, there were displays of flowers, their petals thick and shining, bejeweled with spots of water. I found in them then a kind of âsimplicityâ as well as a reward. There was a generous opulence in the flowers and in the women, and I could not see that desiring the latter was much different from longing for the former. The same pure heart sufficed for both. Itâs not often a man feels his heart is pure.

But when he does, it is his duty to call what has so singularly purified him truth, even if this truth may seem a blasphemy to others, as is the case with what I thought that day. I had spent the morning in a Franciscan convent, at Fiesole, full of the scent of laurel.

I had stood for a long time in a little courtyard overflowing with red flowers, sunlight, and black and yellow bees. In one corner there was a green watering can. Earlier, I had visited the monksâ cells, and seen their little tables, each adorned with a skull.

Now, the garden testified to their inspiration. I had turned back toward Florence, down the hill that led toward the town lying open with all its cypress trees. I felt this splendor of the world, the women and the flowers, was a kind of justification for these men. I was not sure that they were not also the justification for all men who know that an extreme level of poverty always meets the wealth and luxury of the world.

Between the life of these Franciscans enclosed among columns and flowers and the life of the young men of the Padovani beach in Algiers who spend the whole year in the sun, I felt there was a common resonance. If they strip themselves bare, it is for a greater life (and not for another life).

At least, that is the only valid meaning of such expressions as âdeprivationâ and âstripping oneself bare.â Being naked always carries a sense of physical liberty and of the harmony between hand and flowersâthe loving understanding between the earth and a man delivered from the humanâah! I would be a convert if this were not already my religion. No, what I have just said cannot be a blasphemy any more than if I say that the inner smile of Giottoâs portraits of Saint Francis justifies those who have a taste for happiness. For myths are to religion what poetry is to truth: ridiculous masks laid upon the passion to live.

Shall I go further? The same men at Fiesole who live among red flowers keep in their cells the skull that nourishes their meditations. Florence at their windows and death on their tables. A certain continuity in despair can give birth to joy. And when life reaches a certain temperature, our soul and our blood mingle and live at ease in contradiction, as indifferent to duty as to faith.

I am no longer surprised that a cheerful hand should thus have summarized its strange notion of honor on a wall in Pisa: âAlberto fa lâamore con la mia sorella.â I am no longer surprised that Italy should be the land of incests, or at least, what is more significant, of admitted incests. For the path that

leads from beauty to immorality is tortuous but certain.

Plunged deep in beauty, the mind feeds off nothingness. When a man faces landscapes whose grandeur clutches him by the throat, each movement of his mind is a scratch on his perfection. And soon, crossed out, scarred and rescarred by so many overwhelming certainties, man ceases to be anything at all in face of the world but a formless stain knowing only passive truths, the world's color or its sun. Landscapes as pure as this dry up the soul and their beauty is unbearable.

The message of these gospels of stone, sky, and water is that there are no resurrections. Henceforth, from the depths of the deserts that the heart sees as magnificent, men of these countries begin to feel temptation. Why is it surprising if minds brought up before the spectacle of nobility, in the rarefied air of beauty, remain unconvinced that greatness and goodness can live in harmony. An intelligence with no god to crown its glory seeks for a god in what denies it.

Borgia, on his arrival in the Vatican, exclaims: "Now that God has given us the papacy, let us hasten to enjoy it." And he behaves accordingly. "Hasten" is indeed the word. There is already a hint of the despair so characteristic of people who have everything.

Perhaps I am mistaken. For I was in fact happy in Florence, like many others before me. But what is happiness except the simple harmony between a man and the life he leads? And what more legitimate harmony can unite a man with life than the dual consciousness of his longing to endure and his awareness of death? At least he learns to count on nothing and to see the present as the only truth given to us "as a bonus."

I realize that people talk about Italy, the Mediterranean, as classical countries where everything is on a human scale. But where is this, and where is the road that leads the way? Let me open my eyes to seek my measure and my satisfaction! What I see is Fiesole, Djemila, and ports in the sunlight. The human scale? Silence and dead stones. All the rest belongs to history.

And yet this is not the end. For no one has said that happiness should be forever inseparable from optimism. It is linked to love "which is not the same thing. And I know of times and places where happiness can seem so bitter that we prefer the promise of it. But this is because at such times or places I had not heart enough to love "that is, to persevere in love. What we must talk of here is man's entry into the celebration of beauty and the earth.

For now, like the neophyte shedding his last veils, he surrenders to his god the small change of his personality. Yes, there is a higher happiness, where happiness seems trivial. In Florence, I climbed right to the top of the Boboli gardens, to a terrace from which I could see Mount Oliveto and the upper part of the town as far as the horizon.

On each of the hills, the olive trees were pale as little wisps of smoke, and the stronger shoots of the cypresses stood out against their light mist, the nearer ones green and the further ones black. Heavy clouds spotted the deep blue of the sky. As the afternoon drew to a close, a silvery light bathed everything in silence.

At first the hilltops had been hidden in clouds. But a breeze had risen whose breath I could feel on my cheek. As it blew, the clouds behind the mountains drew apart like two sides of a curtain. At the same time, the cypress trees on the summit seemed to shoot up in a single jet against the sudden blue of the sky. With them, the whole hillside and landscape of stones and olive trees rose slowly back into sight. Other clouds appeared. The curtain closed. And the hill with its cypress trees and houses vanished once more.

Then the same breeze, which was closing the thick folds of the curtain over

other hills, scarcely visible in the distance, came and pulled them open here anew. As the world thus filled and emptied its lungs, the same breath ended a few seconds away and then, a little further off, took up again the theme of a fugue that stone and air were playing on a world- scale. Each time, the theme was repeated in a slightly lower key.

As I followed it into the distance, I became a little calmer. Reaching the end of so stirring a vision, with one final glance I took in the whole range of hills breathing in unison as they slipped away, as if in some song of the entire earth.

Millions of eyes, I knew, had gazed at this landscape, and for me it was like the first smile of the sky. It took me out of myself in the deepest sense of the word. It assured me that but for my love and the wondrous cry of these stones, there was no meaning in anything. The world is beautiful, and outside it there is no salvation. The great truth that it patiently taught me is that the mind is nothing, nor even the heart.

And that the stone warmed by the sun or the cypress tree shooting up against the suddenly clear sky mark the limits of the only universe in which "being right" is meaningful: nature without men. And this world annihilates me. It carries me to the end. It denies me without anger. As that evening fell over Florence, I was moving toward a wisdom where everything had already been overcome, except that tears came into my eyes and a great sob of poetry welling up within me made me forget the world's truth.

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It is on this moment of balance I must end: the strange moment when spirituality rejects ethics, when happiness springs from the absence of hope, when the mind finds its justification in the body. If it is true that every truth carries its bitterness within, it is also true that every denial contains a flourish of affirmations. And this song of hopeless love born in contemplation may also seem the most effective guide for action.

As he emerges from the tomb, the risen Christ of Piero della Francesca has no human expression on his face "only a fierce and soulless grandeur that I cannot help taking for a resolve to live. For the wise man, like the idiot, expresses little. The reversion delights me.

But do I owe this lesson to Italy, or have I drawn it from my own heart? It was surely in Italy that I became aware of it. But this is because Italy, like other privileged places, offers me the spectacle of a beauty in which, nonetheless, men die. Here again truth must decay, and what is more exalting?

Even if I long for it, what have I in common with a truth that is not destined to decay? It is not on my scale. And to love it would be pretense. People rarely understand that it is never through despair that a man gives up what constituted his life.

Impulses and moments of despair lead toward other lives and merely indicate a quivering attachment to the lessons of the earth. But it can happen that when he reaches a certain degree of lucidity a man feels his heart is closed, and without protest or rebellion turns his back on what up to then he had taken for his life, that is to say, his restlessness. If Rimbaud dies in Abyssinia without having written a single line, it is not because he prefers adventure or has renounced literature.

It is because "that" how things are, and because when we reach a certain stage of awareness we finally acknowledge something which each of us, according to our particular vocation, seeks not to understand. This clearly involves undertaking the survey of a certain desert. But this strange desert is accessible only to those who can live there in the full anguish of their thirst. Then, and only then, is it peopled with the living waters of happiness.

Within reach of my hand, in the Boboli gardens, hung enormous golden Chinese persimmons whose bursting skin oozed a thick syrup. Between this light hill and these juicy fruits, between the secret brotherhood linking me to the world and the hunger urging me to seize the orange-colored flesh above my hand, I could feel the tension that leads certain men from asceticism to sensual delights and from self-denial to the fullness of desire.

I used to wonder, I still wonder at this bond that unites man with the world, this double image in which my heart can intervene and dictate its happiness up to the precise limit where the world can either fulfill or destroy it. Florence! One of the few places in Europe where I have understood that at the heart of my revolt consent is dormant.

In its sky mingled with tears and sunlight, I learned to consent to the earth and be consumed in the dark flame of its celebrations. I felt a ; but what word can I use? What excess? How can one consecrate the harmony of love and revolt? The earth! In this great temple deserted by the gods, all my idols have feet of clay.

1 This essay is based largely on the visit that Camus made to Italy in September 1937. This was his second visit to Italy, and he had been there for the first time in 1936, immediately after the disastrous stay in Prague described on this page-this page. Many of the ideas expressed in this essay were first elaborated in the Carnets for September 1937. â P.T.

2 In his notes to this essay in *PlÃ©iade II*, p. 1361, Louis Faucon points out that Malraux expressed similar ideas on Piero della Francesca in a review entitled *Verve* in 1937â “8, before developing them in *Les Voix du Silence*. â P.T.

3 The reference here is to Henry de Montherlantâ™s series of novels entitled *Les Voyageurs traquÃ©s*, published in the 1930â™s. â P.T.

The end