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Fictionalizing Fiction through the Metaphor of (De)Construction in Kamel Daoud's *Meursault, contre-enquête*

Abstract

Kamel Daoud's *Meursault, contre-enquête*, employs the metaphor of (de)construction to disassemble and reconstruct Albert Camus's *L'Étranger* on both the plot and lexical levels. Daoud creates a series of binary oppositions using Camus's original building blocks. His literary rebuilding on the unsteady canonical foundation ultimately valorizes plurality in the retrospective reconstruction of Algeria's past, and in an ever-deferred construction of its future. Daoud thus becomes inextricably part of the rebuilding process.

Keywords

Kamel Daoud, *Meursault, contre-enquête*, Camus, deconstruction, postcolonial, *L'Étranger*, Algeria

Fictionalizing Fiction and Kamel Daoud's Metaphor of (De)Construction in
Meursault, contre-enquête

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In his *Meursault, contre-enquête* (*The Meursault Investigation*), Kamel Daoud uses the metaphor of (de)construction as he fills in details involving the lived experience of the nameless fictional Arab victim and his family missing from Albert Camus's *L'Étranger* (*The Stranger*). Daoud's novel can be defined in many ways, including as a type of textual grafting characteristic of recent postcolonial literary remakes. Alice Kaplan calls Daoud's use of *L'Étranger* "a trampoline" (338), as well as both "what jazz musicians would call a 'riff'" (334), and a "reappropriation" (339) ("Making *L'Étranger* Contemporary"). It will become evident, however, that Daoud's novel is a literary masterpiece in its own right, ironically becoming a new textual architectural foundation upon which to now read and reconsider Camus's novel. Daoud must first disassemble the canonical foundational narrative in order to reconstruct a unique story that more closely approximates a truth found in the history that transcends both novels. The following close textual analysis will highlight how the metaphor of (de)construction becomes a central rhetorical device as a result. Referencing the way in which civilians reclaimed, took apart, and/or reassembled the houses of the fleeing French *pieds noirs*, Daoud uses the metaphor of a house that he takes apart stone by stone, a house that had been certainly masterfully constructed by Camus. Daoud's fictionalizing of fiction uncovers a truth about life in Algeria pre- and post-independence, one that can be paradoxically true although subjectively constructed within a multiplicity of narratives. Daoud forces the reader to consider just how out of proportion the foregrounded story (Meursault's fictional life and trial) and the historical background (colonial Algeria) are in Camus's novel. However, Daoud seems to acknowledge that coming to terms with Camus within Algeria's historical trajectory is essential to any forward-thinking and rebuilding process, for Camus and his works are one of its many foundational building blocks.

The term "deconstruction" refers in this study to the act of dismantling, on both the plot and lexical levels. With the added parentheses, the term "(de)construction" is further meant to emphasize that the disassembled narrative will in itself become a construction (or reconstruction) using the original building blocks of Camus's novel. This process is ongoing and forward-looking, and can itself be subject to future dismantling or reconstitution. This term is, of course, a loaded one with its reference to Derrida's theoretical corpus. One key aspect of Derrida's vast body of work is the idea of "*différance*," both oppositional difference, and future deferring (*Margins*, 7-8). Derrida's notion of "*différance*" is

used here to highlight both the idea of “difference,” through Daoud’s repeated juxtaposition of antithetical binary terms throughout his reconstructed novel, and the act of “deferring” to the future an ultimate reconciliation of each oppositional term in relation to the other. The novel leads to the search for some sort of justice for the fictional Arab victim and his family, and in turn for Algeria. These twin ideas (difference and perpetual deferring), which are a critical aspect of Derrida’s deconstructionism, function within Daoud’s reconstruction project. Derrida summarizes *différance* as follows: “Thus one could reconsider all the pairs of opposites on which philosophy is constructed and on which our discourse lives, not in order to see opposition erase itself but to see what indicates that each of the terms must appear as the *différance* of the other, as the other different and deferred in the economy of the same” (17). He adds: “And on the basis of this unfolding of the same as *différance*, we see announced the sameness of *différance* and repetition in the eternal return” (17). Daoud’s text moves away from the original text in its binary reconstruction, yet paradoxically returns to it in the construction of a “different” way of seeing and understanding, which will forever paradoxically be realized in relation to the original.

This process is perpetual, and is hinted at in Daoud’s novel itself through all the potential authors within the diegesis—the main character of Haroun who appends the familial story of his brother identified only as the “Arab” onto Camus’s original, Haroun’s internal student listener at the bar who is preparing a work about Camus, and Meriem, a young woman who seeks out Haroun and his family for her scholarly research in order to (re)write Camus. Retrospective oppositional rebuilding poses a limitless future trap, which Haroun points out to the future author who sits with him at the bar declaring, “On devrait s’arrêter là, tu as de quoi écrire un beau livre, non? L’histoire du frère de l’Arabe. Une autre histoire d’Arabe. Tu es piégé...” (67) ‘We should stop here. You’ve got enough material to write a good book, no? The story of the Arab’s brother. Another Arab story. You are hooked...’ (John Cullen 58).¹ The ellipses further highlight the *non-dit* (the “unspoken”) of the

¹ Most translations will be from John Cullen’s *The Meursault Investigation* and will be so indicated. However, occasionally I have chosen my own translations of certain passages because they better highlight the omnipresent deconstruction metaphorical thread, and this will be indicated in parentheses. While an overall excellent translation, I note that Alice Kaplan also argues that Cullen’s translational choices do affect the meaning when, for example, he chose to use the name *Musa*, rather than *Moussa*, a name which hints at the name *Camus*, and may affect interpretations regarding character/author confluences (*Looking* 206). Readers of both French and English will notice that my translations are closely related to the original without embellishment, and not arbitrarily rendered to align with my argument.

yet-to-be written future retellings and future reckonings with the original text, reckonings whose effort is the pursuit of a final justice. In his defense of Derrida's work against critics who question the practical political ramifications of Derrida's theoretical formulae in the service of social justice, Lawrence D. Kritzman studies the importance of Derrida's forward-looking view of an elusive "final" justice. Kritzman writes, "Justice, then, for Derrida, is of a prophetic nature for it is conceived as something of a time yet to come, as never quite realizable in the present" (86). As Daoud takes apart and rebuilds Camus's novel, he highlights the stark differences between the two fictional perspectives of the same event, the killing of the Arab on the beach, and suggests that his rebuilt construction is likewise unstable in the present, for it is subject to its own potential dismantling as any final resolution is perpetually deferred in potential future retellings. Justice, in fact, is then elusive in the short term. The hoped-for dialectical synthesis, with its promise of some sort of justice for the fictional characters who are held up as representatives of non-fictional Algerians, does not happen in Daoud's novel. Justice will be deferred, in the Derridean sense, for as Kritzman summarizes, it is "a protean phenomenon that can never reach the teleological finitude as theorized in Hegelian-Marxist dialectics" (86).

Through the fictional brother (given the name of Haroun and who becomes the first-person narrator) of the unnamed Arab in Camus's story, Daoud carefully takes apart and reconstructs the reality of colonial Algeria of which we only have the slightest of glimpses in Camus's story. In *L'Étranger*, all the Algerians, referred to only as "Arabs," are unnamed, and are shadowy marginal figures, from the nurse in the retirement home of Meursault's mother, to the Arabs in the prison with Meursault, and of course to the Arab on the beach. Addressing his internal listener—a supposed student/scholar who is seated at a bar with Haroun and who is researching Camus for a book—Haroun suggests that it is easy to be dazzled by Camus's narrative formal craftsmanship as an architect of the written word:

Il [Camus] écrit si bien que ses mots paraissent des pierres taillées par l'exactitude même. C'était quelqu'un de très sévère avec les nuances, ton héros, il les obligeait presque à être des mathématiques. D'infinis calculs à base de pierres et de minéraux. As-tu vu sa façon d'écrire? Il semble utiliser l'art du poème pour parler d'un coup de feu! Son monde est propre, ciselé par la clarté matinale, précis, net, tracé à coups d'arômes et d'horizons. (12)

He writes so well that his words seem like stones carved to precision. He was very strict with nuances, your hero, he expected near mathematical accuracy. Infinite calculations based upon stones and minerals. Have you seen his way of writing? He uses poetic artistry to describe a gunshot! His

world is clean, chiseled by the light of dawn, precise and clear, tinged with aromas and horizons. (my translation)

Daoud reveals here a central concern in which form takes precedence over content and is given a hierarchical weight, for the gun shot that ends the life of an anonymous Arab is of little consequence. Haroun seeks to rectify the lack of concern for a fictionalized Arab, who represents quite clearly the larger truth regarding the lives of all-too-real Algerians whose stories were not so cleverly told. Here, and throughout the novel, Haroun conflates the character of Meursault with his gifted creator, Camus. Haroun emphasizes that pure artistic formal construction has been privileged over content, noting that “[t]ous sont restés bouches ouvertes sur cette langue parfaite qui donne à l’air des angles de diamant, et tous ont déclaré leur empathie pour la solitude du meurtrier en lui présentant les condoléances les plus savantes” (14) ‘Everyone was knocked out by the perfect prose, by language capable of giving air facets like diamonds, and everyone declared their empathy with the murderer’s solitude and offered him their most learned condolences’ (Cullen 4).

The deconstruction of Camus’s narrative “house” begins right away with the novel’s opening lines, and presents a central reversal in a novel filled with binary counter-hegemonic proposals. This first reversal begins with the life-death dichotomy in the reversed opening line which states, “Aujourd’hui, M’ma est encore vivante” (8) ‘Mama’s still alive today’ (Cullen 1), a counter to the famous opening line in Camus’s novel: “Aujourd’hui, maman est morte” (*L’Étranger* 7) ‘Mom died today’ (My translation). Of course this central upending of a Western hierarchical binary view regards the privileging of life over death and of presence over absence. Indeed, the ghost of Haroun’s brother hovers over the family in the fictionalized fiction, and over the whole of a missing discourse regarding treatment of Algerians by the French (whether this neglect is at the hands of respected authors or colonial rulers). From the outset, Daoud’s narrator promises an inverted narrative construction, similar to the right-to-left Arabic script, when he asserts that the story he will tell is one that is “prise par la fin et qui remonte vers son début” (12) ‘that begins at the end and goes back to its beginning’ (Cullen 2). He adds: “C’est simple: cette histoire devrait donc être réécrite, dans la même langue, mais de droite à gauche” (16) ‘It’s simple: The story we’re talking about should be rewritten, in the same language, but from right to left’ (Cullen 7). As the mother figure goes from death to life, so too does the nameless Arab. In searching for the binary opposites that may serve as a corrective to Camus’s text, the reader easily falls into the trap of forgetting that both narratives are a fiction. Daoud forces the reader to face the conundrum that a deconstructed and reconstructed narrative “house” sits upon a foundation (Camus’s) that was never itself stable in the first place. Interestingly, Haroun himself identifies his profession as “fonctionnaire à l’Inspection des

domaines" (120) 'government housing inspector' (My translation. In Cullen, it's "I'm a government official. Land Administration," 110), and he becomes the vehicle through which Daoud is able to inspect and deconstruct the original narrative edifice.

The reader's expectation for Haroun to lead the way to some sort of new absolute truth within the diegesis collapses under the weight of this double fiction, however. In an apocalyptic post-war vision, Haroun describes the newly liberated Algerians as wantonly destroying, even "eating," everything in sight, and all comes crumbling down in this post-independence frenzy of destruction: "J'ai l'impression que les miens ne mangent pas uniquement avec les mains mais avec tout le reste: les yeux, les pieds, la langue et la peau" (108) 'As I see it, my countrymen don't eat exclusively with their hands but with everything else too: with their eyes, feet, tongue, and skin' (Cullen 98). He adds: "Tout se mange déjà depuis des années. Le plâtre, les pierres rondes et bien polies qu'on retrouve en bord de mer, les restes de poteaux" (109) 'They've been devouring everything in sight for years. Plaster, the well-polished stones you find on the seashore, the remains of all sorts of posts' (Cullen 99). Haroun and his mother participate in this process of destruction and reclamation when they take over the house of a fleeing French family for whom his mother had labored. According to Haroun, "Il a fallu, je crois, plus de dix ans pour qu'enfin nous touchions cette maison de la main et la déclarions libérée: notre propriété! Oui, oui, on a fait comme tout le monde dès les premiers jours de liberté, on a fracassé la porte, pris la vaisselle et les chandeliers" (40) 'I believe more than ten years passed before we finally got our hands on the house and declared it liberated: our property! Yes! Yes! We acted like everybody else during the first days of freedom, we broke down the door, took the tableware and the candlesticks' (Cullen 30). In the aftermath of the destruction, what remains to be reconstructed is an extradiegetic truth, in this case about an Algeria whose story has not been wholly reconstructed in either history or fiction alone. When considered in combination, narratives about Algeria that are either historical or fictional, that combine the two within historical fiction, or in this case that represent fictionalized fiction, can provide a blueprint for a more adequate reconstruction of Algeria's complex truth. Haroun invites his interlocutor in the bar, identified as a student himself working on a story about the story, to continue this process in a sort of never-ending future deferring of a reckoning with truth. He warns him of the dilemma of the slippery nature of truth-seeking and justice-seeking within a projected future narration: "Tenter de reconstruire le crime sur les lieux où il a été commis menait à une impasse, à un fantôme, à la folie" (67) 'My efforts to reconstruct the crime at the scene where it had been committed were leading me to an impasse, to a ghost, to madness' (Cullen 57). He adds that "cette histoire se passe quelque part dans une tête, la mienne et la tienne et celle des gens qui te ressemblent. Dans une sorte d'au-delà" (67) 'This story takes place somewhere in

someone's head, in mine, and in yours and in the heads of people like you. In a sort of beyond' (Cullen 57).

The metaphor of deconstruction and perpetual reconstruction is also evident at the lexical level from the very beginning of the story when Haroun's overarching project appears in miniature as he wonders: "Que veut dire Meursault? 'Meurt seul'? 'Meurt sot'? 'Ne meurs jamais'?" (16) 'What does "Meursault" mean? *Meurt seul*, dies alone? *Meurt sot*, dies a fool? Never dies?' (Cullen 6). Dissecting this single word, reassembling it, and then finding hidden or novel meanings is precisely what the text as a whole does with language and story. This dissection of the protagonist's name finds its binary in the emphatic undivided repetition of the imagined brother's name: "Moussa, Moussa, Moussa...j'aime parfois répéter ce prénom pour qu'il ne disparaisse pas dans les alphabets" (23) 'Musa, Musa, Musa...I like to repeat that name from time to time so it doesn't disappear' (Cullen 14). The "ne meurs jamais" or the "never dying" is the crux of the lexical, syntactic, and thematic reversals in this rewriting of Camus, for story/history will remain alive. Alice Kaplan offers additional important insight regarding the names in the story, thus adding to the ongoing construction of textual and lexical meaning. Kaplan notes that in translating the book for English readers, John Cullen "followed English rather than French rules for transliteration from the Arabic," by using *Musa* instead of *Moussa*, a name, Kaplan argues, "is closer to Camus than to 'Meursault'" (*Looking* 206; author's emphasis). Kaplan argues that "Cullen has put Meursault's victim's name inside Camus's name (*Camus/Musa*)—a critical intervention that distinguishes this translation from the original" (*Looking* 207; author's emphasis). This translation represents an example of a continuous grafting process, which contributes to the architectural piling on of texts in a Tower of Babel type of confusion. Additionally, the fact that Daoud originally named the character in his book "Albert Meursault" in the first Algerian edition of the novel conflates author and character. Kaplan characterizes this conflation as Daoud's highlighting of the absurdity that through his novel "Camus is still on trial in Algeria for his intentions" (*Looking* 207).

Of course, Haroun must learn the colonist's language in order to engage in his own rewriting and interpretation. He slowly deciphers not just the story/history contained in the texts, but also what is absent from them, or indeed what has been memorialized or concretized in them, requiring deconstruction. Thus begins a continuous reconstruction project. Before Haroun is introduced to Camus's novel by Meriem, the woman who will come to represent unrealized promise for a different future, Haroun and his mother have only a tattered newspaper article as evidence of their son's/brother's death. Learning French to read the article has offered Haroun "la possibilité de nommer autrement les choses et d'ordonner le monde avec mes propres mots" (47) '[the possibility] to name things differently and to organize the world with my own words' (Cullen 37). He makes it clear here

that he will rename and reorder the world using previously opaque words as his building blocks, the very same building blocks used by the skilled wordsmith, Camus:

J'ai brièvement connu le génie de ton héros: déchirer la langue commune de tous les jours pour émerger dans l'envers du royaume, là où une langue plus bouleversante attend de raconter le monde autrement. C'est cela! Si ton héros raconte si bien l'assassinat de mon frère, c'est qu'il avait atteint le territoire d'une langue inconnue, plus puissante dans son étreinte, sans merci pour tailler la pierre des mots, nue comme la géométrie euclidienne. (109-110)

For a brief while, I knew your hero's genius: the ability to tear open the common, everyday language and emerge on the other side, where a more devastating language is waiting to narrate the world in another way. That's it! The reason why your hero tells the story of my brother's murder so well is that he'd reached a new territory, a language that was unknown and grew more powerful in his embrace, the words like pitilessly carved stones, a language as naked as Euclidean geometry. (Cullen 100)

Once he learns of the existence of Camus's novel and the French language, the building blocks are (re)appropriated, and Daoud is able, through Haroun, to imagine stories that could or should have been written, as well as a myriad of future stories that need to be written. Within the frame of the novel, possible future stories and rewritings of Camus multiply. As mentioned, these texts include Haroun's retelling, the future book by the student interlocutor in the bar, the texts Meriem writes, and "les livres qui s'en sont inspirés et les gloses infinies autour de chaque chapitre" (140) 'the books it inspired, and the infinity of commentaries on every one of its chapters' (Cullen 130). We, the readers and scholars of Daoud's story, could also be seen as doubles for the internal listener in the bar, although we are external listeners who must forevermore reimagine Camus's story now with Daoud's firmly in mind. In fact, we can never interpret either in the same way again since they form a contrapuntal diptych. As Yamina Bahi summarizes, "K. Daoud construit un édifice scripturaire avec, pour pierre angulaire, la subversion comme procédé esthétique et stylistique" (70) 'K. Daoud constructs a textual edifice with, for angular stone, subversion as an aesthetic and stylistic technique.' Bahi examines the unconventional and subversive qualities of Daoud's story—including Haroun as marginal (anti)hero, the frequent temporal and spatial dislocations, and the fragmented nature of the narrative structure—which reveal "un nouvel horizon d'attente" 'a new horizon of expectation,' requiring "un nouveau type de lecteur"

‘a new type of reader,’ one who recognizes his/her role in the truth-making process (79).

Interestingly, Haroun’s first retelling of an existing story involves the contents of a newspaper article, which he has learned to read, and which he constantly changes and embellishes for his illiterate mother. The Western privileging of the written over the oral is yet another binary-in-reverse structure in operation here, for Haroun’s oral retellings to his mother of the newspaper article’s contents become part of the “contre-enquête” of the novel’s title (131). Haroun only has two paragraphs in the article through which to add fabricated missing details of his brother’s death, but he insists that “M’ma a eu droit à toute la reconstitution imaginaire du crime” (131) ‘And so Mama got a complete imaginary reconstruction of the crime’ (Cullen 121). His role as yet another truth-seeking creator of fiction (within Daoud’s fictionalized fiction) is clear when he admits: “je pris l’habitude de transformer le contenu de l’article et me mis à enjoliver le récit de la mort de Moussa” (130) ‘I formed the habit of transforming the contents of the articles and embellishing the narrative of Musa’s death’ (Cullen 120). Like Daoud, Haroun authors a reconstructed text, but in oral form, based on a deficient existing written one. Haroun references the privileging of the written over the oral, for he seems to express regret that a book about the embellished events in the newspaper article remains unwritten, a book, he admits ironically, “que j’aurais peut-être dû écrire d’ailleurs, si j’avais le don de ton héros: une contre-enquête” (131) ‘which I perhaps should have written out, as a matter of fact, if I’d had your hero’s gift—a counter investigation’ (Cullen 121).

The stories Haroun’s mother has told become the counter discourse to the written, and her orally expressed “truth” certainly appears to be as valid as that expressed in the deficient written texts. Haroun learns and incorporates this lesson throughout his life as he listens to his mother’s reconstructed view of her dead son’s story: “Elle me décrivait non pas un meurtre et une mort, mais une fantastique transformation” (26) ‘She wouldn’t describe to me a murder and a death, she’d evoke a fantastic transformation’ (Cullen 16). There is not one truth, but many, and as a young child listening to his mother’s stories, Haroun noted that “M’ma avait mille et un récits et la vérité m’importait peu à cet âge” (26) ‘Mama had a thousand and one stories, and the truth meant little to me at that age’ (Cullen 16). The reference to the *Thousand and One Nights* highlights the ongoing constructions, transformations, translations, and interpretations of the many stories that constitute the collection, but also the fact that Scheherazade’s initial tale forms the foundation for the multiplicity of ever-deferred stories, much like Camus’s original novel constitutes the unstable foundation upon which the search for truth through narrative accumulations is built. The adult Haroun—once he decides that truth, or at least the search for it, is indeed important—echoes his mother’s fantastical reconstruction of initial story when he embellishes the contents of the newspaper

article for her in numerous retellings. He admits that “c’était un désordre indescriptible, une sorte de *Mille et Une Nuits*” (131) ‘it was an incredibly disordered jumble, a kind of *Thousand and One Nights*’ (Cullen 121). The “truth” they both seek in their imaginative reconstructions is elusive to be sure, and both mother and son reach an awareness of existential absurdity, a concept so often evoked in Camus’s writing on a philosophical level, but this time regarding the sense of the absurdity of a quest for ultimate truth and justice through narrative, whether oral or written. The binary hegemonic category of oral versus written is subverted in this process, but truth still remains elusive. His mother’s “untruthful” tales to Haroun accentuate this, for Haroun realizes that “[e]lle mentait non par volonté de tromper, mais pour corriger le réel et atténuer l’absurde qui frappait son monde et le mien” (46-7) ‘She lied not from a desire to deceive but in order to correct reality and mitigate the absurdity that struck her world and mine’ (Cullen 37).

The brother’s death story is thus told in a variety of ways in the diegesis: through his mother’s oral recollections and embellishments, through Haroun’s reading and embellishments of the newspaper article, and finally through what is revealed in the discovery of Camus’s written French novel when Meriem arrives to reveal its existence. However, “truth” collapses once again under the weight of these many stories (fictions of fictions), for the reader is brought back to the original, unreliable, and incomplete fictional universe of Camus’s *L’Étranger* as if it were ultimately going to be the container of elusive truth, which of course was the problematic initial fictional narrative of incomplete truth to begin with. This is the ultimate absurdity in Haroun’s stated goal of finding truth, and ultimately justice. In her study, “The Critical Pulse of the *Contre-enquête*: Kamel Daoud on the Maghrebi Novel in French” (2016), Lia Brozgal notes how Camus’s novel becomes the third “meta-récit” which “has brought us back to the beginning, to the original, the source text that prompted the *contre-enquête* in the first place. And while the readers *in* the text discover a story heretofore inaccessible to them, the reader *of* the text is no more illuminated than when she reached the end of *L’Étranger*” (43; author’s emphasis). In “Conversations with Camus as Foil, Foe and Fantasy in Contemporary Writing of Algerian Writers of French Expression” (2015), Valérie K. Orlando adds that “through his attempts to make the story more whole, Haroun realizes that the tale only becomes more and more opaque. Like his country, the details and truths are destined to remain buried” (872). What remains from the collapse of the binary discourses? Orlando argues that in fact what remains from the rubble is not a definitive answer to the meta-narrative of Algeria’s misappropriated history in Daoud’s counter novel, but rather a series of questions that need to be addressed, and that are resurrected through such postcolonial remakes as Daoud has presented here. Orlando lists some of these questions that help to link fiction to the reality of lived experience on a meta level:

How has this narrative been revealed before and after war, independence, in the past and in the present? What are the official stories of those buried beneath the rubble of absurdity? Which stories reveal the truth? Who has the right to narrate, to witness and to write down? How do, or can, Algerians differentiate between History and Fiction in the *histoire-fiction*, that has come to be the Master Narrative for Algeria? (871)

I would argue that deconstructing Camus's tale as Daoud has done is in itself a worthy act of reclamation, and while not getting at the truth regarding the life and death of a fictional brother in the rewriting of a fictional story, the unanswered questions on the level of the narrative force us to reckon with the unanswered and/or insufficiently answered questions regarding Algeria's past, present and its future construction using historical and fictional fragments.

Through Haroun, Daoud suggests that the act of deconstructing an existing text implies a certain level of violence. In fact, Haroun tells the university student in the bar that Camus's text has been analyzed, dissected, and reimagined so often that it now resembles "une vieille putain réduite à l'hébétude par l'excès des hommes" (61) 'an old whore dazed by an excess of men' (Cullen 51). The accumulation of adjectives further emphasizes this act of deconstructive violence: "Elle ressemble à un parchemin, dispersé de par le monde, essoré, rafistolé, désormais méconnaissable, dont le texte aura été ressassé jusqu'à l'infini" (61) 'It's like a text written on parchment and scattered all over the world; it's brittle, patched up, no longer recognizable, infinitely rehashed' (Cullen 51). Daoud, however, simultaneously and paradoxically articulates a degree of empathy towards Camus, manifested through Haroun's feelings of fraternity towards Meursault/Camus. The paradoxical fraternal leanings towards Camus are made possible through a doubling of the two authors. Several examples of doubling appear in the novel, including Haroun/Moussa, Meriem/Marie, Haroun/Daoud and Meursault/Camus. There are also biblical pairings in Moses/Moussa and Aaron/Haroun, as well as references to the fratricidal pairing of Cain and Abel. However, it is through the pairing of Daoud/Camus outside the world of the story-within-story that a surprising empathy is articulated. Daoud's character of Haroun requires the pedagogy of Meriem to understand Camus both within and beyond *L'Étranger*:

Elle m'apprit à lire le livre d'une certaine manière, en le faisant pencher de côté comme pour en faire tomber les détails invisibles. Elle m'offrit les autres livres écrits par cet homme, et d'autres livres encore, qui m'ont progressivement permis de comprendre comment ton héros voyait le monde. (142)

She taught me how to read the book in a certain way, tilting it sideways as though to make invisible details fall out. She gave me other books written by that man, and others besides, which allowed me to understand, little by little, how your hero saw the world. (Cullen 132)

Of course, “ton héros” ‘your hero’ can be read as Meursault or Camus, conflated here and elsewhere, but this passage makes it clear that Camus’s identity needs to be understood in the full context of all of his works, and not just based on the one novel in the perpetual act of *différance*. Kaplan argues that Daoud “wanted to mock a literary climate where people have always confused Meursault, who killed an Arab in a book, with the author of that book” (*Looking* 207). The empathy expressed towards Camus, relying ironically on just such a confusion with his character in Daoud’s book, conflates empathy towards Camus with a fraternity towards the despised fictional Meursault. Haroun realizes: “Je compris que c’était une sorte d’orphelin qui avait reconnu dans le monde une sorte de jumeau sans père, et qui, du coup, avait acquis le don de la fraternité, à cause, précisément, de la solitude” (142) ‘I gathered that he was a sort of orphan who had recognized a sort of fatherless twin in the world and who had suddenly acquired the gift of brotherhood, precisely because of his solitude’ (Cullen 132). Both character (Meursault) and author (Camus) were orphans whose solitary nature within a confounding judgmental world elicits this call towards empathy, again ironically conflating author and character. The words of both literary authors, who also have journalism in common, continue to be deconstructed and (mis)construed by the reading public, and both have been expected by partisans with a vast array of political opinions to be spokespeople for one deeply held position or another. The judgment expressed towards these two authors reaches a certain level of absurdity when their fictional characters are conflated to be absolute and unchanging mouthpieces for the authors themselves. In his study of criticisms leveled against Camus for similar lacunae in his novel *La Peste* (*The Plague*), David Carroll wonders “whether it is legitimate to criticize an allegorical novel for being ‘historically inaccurate,’ or, in the case of *The Plague*, for not giving a sufficiently detailed and accurate description of the city of Oran and its different populations” (53). I would argue that Daoud’s response to such a question is an emphatic “no,” even though paradoxically his novel seems to offer just such criticism.

Daoud’s novel does not end with justice for the fictional Arab and his family, nor with the restoration of Algeria as a central geographic and historical entity missing from Camus’s text. As Haroun surveys the postcolonial Algerian landscape at the end of the novel, what he describes does not offer the promised post-revolution reconstruction. Haroun—similar to Meursault when a representative of Catholicism visits him in prison in Camus’s novel—assails the religious leaders of his faith. He rails against those who would tell him that “les

pierres de ce pays ne suent pas que la douleur et que Dieu veille. Je leur crierais qu'il y a des années que je regarde ces murailles inachevées" (150) 'the stones of this country don't sweat with suffering, and that God is watching over us. I should shout out to them, say I've been looking at those unfinished walls for years' (Cullen 140). The image of disrepair, rather than a reconstructed Algeria, is also made plain in the unfinished mosques that constitute the new landscape: "Il y a, en face de mon balcon, juste derrière le dernier immeuble de la cité, une imposante mosquée inachevée, comme il en existe des milliers d'autres dans ce pays" (149) 'Facing my balcony, just behind the last building on the outskirts of the city, there's an imposing mosque standing unfinished, like thousands of others in this country' (Cullen 139). The dilapidated landscape in the end thwarts readerly expectations that Daoud's novel would fill in the blanks in Camus's novel, and thereby not just bring Algerian reality out of the shadows of the original novel, but also present an optimistic view of the post-Independence prospects. A failed reconstruction occurred when one authoritative monolithic presence in modern Algeria replaced the colonial one. Yet it is important to remember that silencing any voice that has contributed to shaping Algeria's current trajectory, equivalent to pulling stones out of the edifice that is Algeria's polyvalent history, threatens the integrity of the edifice under construction, for all have contributed, for good or for ill, to its story. Fictionalized fiction in Daoud's reconstruction suggests that unresolved counter narratives exist and should be considered as a whole, for they all are part of the Algerian story. Daoud's novel has emerged from the author's (de)construction project as an essential "counter" narrative grafting, one that cannot in the end be left out of the continued glossings of Camus's original text.

In spite of ourselves, we must remember that fiction does not equal autobiography, and that it alone cannot lead us to political or social judgments regarding the author. As Orlando explains: "Caught in the in-between, Daoud's Haroun, like Camus, is neither perpetrator nor victim. The writer (Camus and Daoud), like his characters, finds himself hemmed in by two sides to a story, locked in a constant battle that will never be won..." (876). Daoud has spent much of his career writing for the *Quotidien d'Oran* ('Oran Daily'), whose articles mix "lyrical anger tempered with compelling social commentary" (Kaplan, "Making" 338). Kaplan argues that "[j]ournalism was his writing workshop" and that "French literature has been his refuge from a murderous society" constituting what is "neither the official nationalist narrative nor the Koran" ("Making" 338). Their journalistic writings have rightfully opened both Camus and Daoud to more critical debates about their political intentions, but their novels operate in allegorical ways and remind us of the slippery distinction between author and character. For Camus, one central concern has been whether he was French, Algerian, Franco-Algerian, *pied noir*, or some other combination of all of these identities, and whether he was a traitor or loyalist to Algeria. Camus had clear blind spots in his perspective on

Algeria as evidenced in his fiction. The broad use of the term “Arab” to identify his non-European characters, for example, feeds the narrative of his supposed anti-Algerian sentiment. On the other hand, Camus’s view of what he considered to be his beloved country was much more nuanced, and he was one of the first to point out, for example, that economic inequality was creating an explosive powder keg pre-revolution. A few years before the publication of *L'Étranger*, for example, Camus visited the rural mountainous and deeply impoverished region of Algeria, and subsequently “published a series of harrowing reports on social conditions in Kabylia for the leftist newspaper *Alger républicain*” (McDougall 130). It is easy to fall into the trap of defending or castigating Camus, of picking and choosing which parts of his life and work to use in constructing an image of the author, much as those who conflate his novel as autobiography have done. Daoud suggests that the worst possible outcome is that which not only selectively privileges some remnants of his life over others based on both his fiction and his journalism, but one which more alarmingly seeks to erase Camus from Algeria’s history entirely:

Faut-il donc enterrer Camus définitivement ? Non, ni le déterrer abusivement. Cet écrivain est l'une des plus intenses réflexions sur la condition de l'homme en ce siècle. L'homme sans nationalité. C'est ainsi qu'il faut s'en souvenir et c'est pour cette raison qu'il faut arrêter de disputer le cadavre de cet homme sans repos. Tranchons, provisoirement: il n'est ni français, ni algérien. C'était l'homme de son époque avec vue sur l'homme de toutes les époques. (“À qui appartient Albert Camus”)

Must we bury Camus definitively? No, nor abusively exhume him. This writer has one of the most intense reflections on the human condition in this century. The man without a nationality. It's thus that we must remember him and it's for this reason that we must stop disputing the cadaver of a man without rest. Let's resolve temporarily: He is neither French nor Algerian. He was a man of his era with a view on man of all eras. (my translation)

By extension, Daoud calls for a plural vision of what Algeria was and is, and Camus belongs firmly within this type of variegated historical reckoning, an idea mirroring Camus’s idea of the multifaceted nation that is Algeria. The binary oppositional view is deconstructed with no ultimate resolution in Daoud’s rewriting of Camus’s novel precisely because there exist no either/or reconstructions. Camus belongs within this polyvalent reconstruction of all aspects of Algeria’s past as Daoud makes clear:

Un jour, on l'espère, Camus nous reviendra. Et Saint-Augustin, et les autres, tous les autres, toutes nos histoires, nos pierres, architectures, mausolées et

croyances, vignes et palmiers, oliviers surtout. Et nous sortirons tellement vivants d'accepter nos morts et notre terre nous sera réconciliée et nous vivrons plus longtemps que le FLN et la France et la guerre et les histoires des couples. C'est une question essentielle: celui qui accepte son passé est maître de son avenir. (Daoud, "Repatrier un jour les cendres de Camus?")

One day, we hope, Camus will come back to us. And Saint Augustine, and the others, all the others, all of our stories, our stones, architectures, mausoleums and beliefs, vineyards and palms, and especially olive trees. And we will come out of this so alive in accepting our dead, and our land will be reconciled to us and we will live longer than the FLN and France and war and stories of couples. It's an essential question: whoever accepts his past is master of his future. (my translation)

Derrida's notion of *différance* is aptly applied to Daoud's (and Camus's) project for another reason: Derrida, like Camus, was born in Algeria pre-independence and witnessed its identity, and his own, shift through time. When filmmaker Safaa Fathy, who had made *D'ailleurs Derrida*, a 1999 documentary film, returned to Algeria to film places dear to the critical theorist, Derrida reviews the scenes of his youth on film that now appear as ruins, in a sense similar to the landscape at the end of Daoud's novel. Amy Hubbell remarks of this retrospective encounter, "[t]hat through the concept of ruins" Derrida expresses the idea that "each piece of the past, each monument that is revisited in the present cannot have the same meaning as it did before" (194). Camus's *L'Étranger* is the metaphorical equivalent of a monument that has been repeatedly deconstructed and reconstructed, and which does not have the same meaning in each future retelling, glossing or dissection. In an interesting final architectural shift, anyone who has read Daoud's textual grafting upon Camus's original textual foundation will never read the original source the same way again. Daoud's book has become a foundation in and of itself through which Camus's novel will be reimagined and reconstructed. Daoud's notion of Algeria requires that Camus's texts, reimagined, indeed be part of the reconstruction, and not erased in the (re)telling of Algeria's historical "truth." The lesson that emerges is for a representation of all the disparate and conflicting narratives and plural visions in history and story, for if any of them are selectively erased, Algeria will continue to struggle to define itself as a nation built upon a plurality of voices in its future (re)construction. For Algeria is not now, and was not in the past, a monolith.

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