


American Journals

Albert Camus

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This text consists of two notebooks that the Nobel laureate kept during a short trip to the U.S. in 1946 and during a longer stay in Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina and Chile in 1949 periods of stress and hectic public appearances, when he was tired, nervous, ill and vulnerable. If these journals were not by Camus, they might be regarded as "meaningless bits and pieces" (his own description) that do not merit publication. But 27 years after his death, almost anything from his pen possesses value for students of French literature. Since many of these fragments later turned up in his published writings, their major interest stems from the fact that they show how Camus passed from rough notes to a finished work. The introduction was written by the author's longtime editor at Gallimard.

American Journals Details

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Tim says

It would have been delightful if this book had been an exhaustive look at Camus's life during the two trips that he took to the Western Hemisphere, but, sad to say, this is not the case. Either he was not a big journal keeper, or his major journals have not yet been published (I don't think). Still, having said that, one can also say that this book does have some interesting descriptions and insights into the heart of its author.

This slim book covers two trips that he took – one to New York in 1946, and one to Brazil and Uruguay in 1949. At the time, his reputation was starting to grow, and he was doing lecture tours. By the time he made his visit to Brazil, he was a well-known author, and he was treated to large crowds and the opportunity to go face-to-face with many important Brazilians. These are generally quick descriptions of things that he saw and did, conversations that made an impression on him, and how he was feeling. Little of a deeply personal nature is communicated, and nothing is said about sex or romance, and he sometimes comes across as an aloof snob. He does reveal that, internally at least, he was struggling quite a bit with dark moods and illness. There is some dramatic irony here too, for during his South American trip he goes on quite a bit about the “grippe” that nags at him, but after he returned to France, subsequent medical tests showed a return of the tuberculosis that he had suffered from in his youth.

Apparently, he did not like New York or America very much. He thought NY was cold and monstrous, and being a leftist, he probably had a negative view of America's political power (although he does not go into this in his journal). Here is one passage I noted:

"Manhattan. Sometimes from beyond the skyscrapers, across the hundreds of thousands of high walls, the cry of a tugboat finds you in your insomnia in the middle of the night, and you remember that this desert of iron and cement is an island." (pg. 51)

He describes going to weird old theaters on the Bowery, meeting a few prominent individuals (such as writer Waldo Frank, who became his friend), seeing the Camel cigarettes sign in Times Square with real smoke coming out of the sailor's mouth. He liked the way America treated its young people – although I am not sure what he meant by that.

Brazil was more to his liking. He was a celebrity there, and he got to have some unique Brazilian experiences, such as going to a macumba (a sort of ritualized rave), and a drive thru the jungle to Registro, a mostly Japanese town. But he notes the sloppiness and lack of respect for life in such odd customs as the frequent pedestrian accidents (from which the drivers always flee), and also comments on Brasil's unique heat and humidity. Despite his genius and the stunning beauty of some his work, he was a man who struggled against a couple of demons. While on board the transatlantic ship, he would cure himself with long stretches of staring out at the sea. At one point he says he is in a “hellish depression” and close to “psychological collapse,” but he seems to pull out of it.

Here are some more passages I saved:

"A crowd of worldly women who become unmanageable after the third whiskey. Several of them literally proposition me. But they aren't even tempting. A French lady manages to construct an apology for Franco in front of me. Exhausted, I lay into her – and realize that I'd better leave. I ask the cultural attache to have a drink with me, and we escape. At least this pretty face helps me with the struggle of living. The light lies

softly on Montevideo. A pure sky, the rustling of dry palms above Constitution Place, pigeons taking flight, white in the black sky. The hour would be simple and my solitude – 18 days without news, without intimacy – could be eased a little. But my charming companion starts reciting for me, in the middle of the square, some French verses she has written, miming the tragic style, arms crossed on her breast, voice rising and falling. I wait it out. then go have a drink and I take her home. I go to bed, but anxiety and melancholy keep me from sleeping." (pp. 137-138)

"Two young, beautiful creatures have started a romance on this boat and immediately a kind of nasty circle has closed around them. These beginnings of love! I love and approve of them from the bottom of my heart – with even a feeling of gratitude for those who preserve on this deck, in the middle of the sun-glittering Atlantic, halfway between two insane continents, these truths which are youth and love." (pg. 54)

"When I go back up, we are already in the bay, immense and smoking a little in the newborn day with sudden condensations of light which are the islands. The mist disappears rapidly. And we see the lights of Rio running all along the coast, the 'Sugar Loaf' with four lights on its summit and, on the peak of the highest of the mountains, which seem to crush the city, an enormous and unfortunate illuminated Christ. As the light gradually increases, we get better view of the city, squeezed between the sea and the mountains, spread out lengthwise, stretched out endlessly. In the center enormous buildings. Every minute roar above our heads: an airplane takes off in the dawning day, at first inextricably blended with the hues of the land, then rising in our direction and passing above us with its great insect buzzing. We're in the middle of the basin and the mountains make an almost perfect circle around us. Finally, a blood-red light announces the arrival of the sun, which rises up behind the eastern mountains opposite the city and begins to ascend into a pale, cool sky. The richness and sumptuousness of the colors that play on the bay, the mountains, and the sky once again induce everyone to silence. One minute later the colors seem to be the same, but it's a postcard. Nature abhors miracles that last too long." (pp. 72-73)

Priscila Jordão says

"Não gosto de viajar porque eu sempre acabo indo junto" é um ditado ao qual "Diário de Viagem", de Albert Camus, poderia bem servir.

Camus pontua este relato da sua viagem para a América de observações perspicazes sobre a cultura local. Mas, apesar de ter momentos de relaxamento e imersão, nenhuma distração parece fazer o escritor sair de si mesmo e se abandonar ao passeio. E precisamente por esse motivo é enriquecedor ver como ele percebeu o Brasil.

Mesmo em terras tropicais, surpreendido pela natureza e pela hospitalidade humana, Camus sente os ares do absurdo e do distanciamento que caracterizam sua filosofia. A experiência de ver as macumbas no Rio e as procissões de Iguape, em São Paulo, mais tarde dariam origem a um dos contos mais fortes de "O Exílio e o Reino": "A Pedra que Cresce". Este conto, ainda mais que os outros da compilação, reforça o sentimento agudo de náusea presente no absurdo. Gosto de pensar nisso como uma certa honestidade intelectual.

Em Nova Iorque, em meio às luzes, à selva de pedra e aos espetáculos, o argelino sente tristeza nas boates, iguais para ele em todos os lugares do mundo. O pensamento de Camus prova-se, nesta leitura, ser universal.

Pelo menos para o escritor, que tanto lutou para não cair em contradição consigo mesmo. Qualquer lugar contém o absurdo da solidão. E seu humanismo europeu também prova ser até que bem acolhido em toda parte na época, a julgar pela lotação das suas conferências.

Interessante notar como Camus interpreta o espírito brasileiro, no qual as grandes distâncias do território teriam grande influência. Outro ponto digno de nota é o encontro com Manuel Bandeira e Oswald de Andrade.

Embora bastante polêmica no momento, a antropofagia de Oswald parece não ter impressionado muito Camus, ou pelo menos ele não deixou isso registrado. A não ser por uma citação preciosa pouco antes do fim do relato: "[no Brasil:] os sangues misturam-se a tal ponto que a alma perdeu seus limites". Uma imagem da antropofagia cultural e espiritual? Divertido pensar que sim.

Imen Benyoub says

it's a strangely intimate thing, a privilege..to know about the inner thoughts of a man you love and respect so much..

Daniel S says

"Mme. D. and I agree that most people don't lead the lives that they would like to lead and that it's a question of cowardice." [30:]

"One way to know a country is to know how people die there. Here, everything is anticipated. "You die and we do the rest," say the advertisements." [34:]

"They don't feel the real problem;however, their nostalgia is evident. In this country where everything is done to prove that life isn't tragic, they feel something is missing. This great effort is pathetic, but one must reject the tragic after having looked at it, not before." [43:]

"Remake and recreate the Greek thought as a revolt against the sacred. But not the revolt against the sacred of the romantic- which is in itself a form of the sacred- but revolt as putting the sacred in its place.

The idea of messianism at the base of all fanaticism. Messianism against man. Greek thought is not historical. The values are pre-existent. Against modern existentialism." [49:]

"Terrible feeling of being abandoned. Even if I hugged all the beings of the world to my breast, I would remain unprotected." [52:]

"Twice, the idea of suicide. The second time, still looking at the sea, I feel a dreadful burning in my temples. I think I understand now how one kills oneself. Conversation again- a lot of word, not much said. In the darkness I climb to the upper deck, and, after having made some decisions about work, finish the day facing the sea, the moon, and the stars. The surface of the waters are slightly illuminated, but you feel their profound darkness. That's the way the sea is, and that's why I love it! A call to life and an invitation to death." [60:]

"The wind whips my face brutally, coming at me head on, after traversing spaces the extent of which I can't even imagine. I feel alone and a little lost, finally delighted and feeling little by little the rebirth of my strength in the face of this unknown future and this immensity I love." [66:]

"In fact Chamfort is right: if you want to succeed in society you have to let people who don't know anything teach you a lot of things you already know. I say that I want to leave." [80:]

"I like the night and the sky better than the gods of men." [91:]

"Difficult waking. To live is to hurt others, and through others, to hurt oneself. Cruel earth! How can we manage not to touch anything? To find what ultimate exile?" [111:]

"I tell him that uncompromisingly sustaining a refusal is a positive act whose consequences are also positive." [137:]

Indra Barrios Lasso says

Relatos para se ver e reconhecer nos pensamentos.

Philippe Billé says

Journaux de voyage, d'Albert Camus (Gallimard, 1978). Il s'agit d'un voyage aux Etats-Unis, de mars à mai 1946, et d'un autre en Amérique du Sud (Brésil, Uruguay, Argentine, Chili) de juin à août 1949. Les deux fois, il a la crève et ça ne va pas. Il se fait chier au Brésil, ce doit être pour ça qu'on ne parle jamais de son séjour là-bas. C'est intéressant et pas extraordinaire. La partie Brésil est pleine de fautes d'orthographe dans les noms propres et les mots portugais. L'établissement et annotateur du texte, Roger Quilliot, semble largué. Dans une note à la page 121, il nous explique qu'une once est un «animal qui se rapproche du guépard et de la panthère», c'est-à-dire d'animaux qui n'existent pas en Amérique, alors qu'une onça, au Brésil, c'est tout simplement un jaguar. Mon passage préféré est le compte rendu, le 16 juillet 1949, d'une séance de macumba : «Il est 2 h du matin. La chaleur, la poussière et la fumée des cigares, l'odeur humaine, rendent l'air irrespirable. Je sors, chancelant moi-même, et enfin respire avec délice l'air frais. J'aime la nuit et le ciel, plus que les dieux des hommes.» (VI 2003)

Mevlüt Ceylan says

Gece oturdum yatmadan bitti. Albert Camus...

Kitap günlük tarzında. Albert Camus'nun a?z?ndan ç?kanlar? okuyoruz bire bir. Bu harika bir durum.

Ak?yor kitap. Özellikle k?sa kelimeler kullan?lmas? dikkatimi çekti. Ho? bir durum. Yormuyor sizi.

Kitabın arka kapa?nda yazarın kitapları'nın nas?l oldu?una ?ahit olaca??z diye yaz?yordu. Ancak bence yazarın iç dünyası'nı s?k s?k görmekteyiz. Camus'u tan?yorsunuz. S?k?l?yor. Bunal?yor. Kaçmak istiyor.

Uçakla yolculuk etmekten falan s?k?l?yor. Bunlar Camus'nun kendi iç dünyası?. Bo? verin siz ilerideki

kitapları'nı nas?l haz?rlad??n?. Camus'a odaklanın.

Nickolette says

I love how un-preconditioned he is in his travels.

Those, at first glance, disconnected notes from a trip led my thoughts to wonder in two or three just as disconnected directions. On one hand, it made me remember all the little discomforts a trip is inevitably accompanied by. As they say, a journey is only glamorous in retrospective, and yet it's hard not let yourself swirl into that silly touristy enthusiasm. There is none of the latter in here. In order to be able to enjoy anything outside ourselves first we need to feel good from the inside, we must have the comfort of Health. The minimum necessary. This gets me back to the so called primitive cultures, poor people, kung-fu and the 90s action movies, where all one truly possesses is his own physical body - his only strength, the source of confidence and means of survival. But the European mind works differently. In the absence of discontent there is no creative impulse; we need to bleed for it. And for Camus it's not about pleasure, it's about endurance.

On the other hand, I was thinking isn't there an ethical conflict in publishing works after the death of authors and without their explicit consent. Diaries, personal correspondence (Kafka's letters to Milena, Dora and the others, Joyce's letters to Nora), unfinished novels (Fitzgerald's Last Tycoon), and in that case – notes. Arrogantly intruding in their privacy and exposing them as if to make them more human will give us some comfort. In other words, to drag them down to our level. What if now they find new Salinger's writings?

Lili VI says

Pleins de choses intéressantes sur Camus, l'Amérique, et les années 40. Mais Camus ne semblait pas aimer voyager. Et il était déprimé.

"Ce qui m'est apparu clairement hier, et enfin, c'est que je désirais mourir".

Jorge Bessa says

Though I've read it a long time ago, this Camus' book doesn't measure up the books written before.

Jim says

The two feelings I got from reading Albert Camus's **American Journals** is that (1) the author really doesn't like to travel: In fact, he's something of a homebody; and (2) he traveled to the United States and South America under the worst possible conditions, being squired around by literati and embassy personnel and giving lectures. At one point in his South American travels, he complains, "Physically, I can no longer endure large gatherings of people."

The trip to the United States leaves Camus feeling alienated and rather disdainful of what passes for American culture, encompassing movies, cities, the countryside, and pretty much the whole shooting match. The trip to South America finds him more receptive, but it is still a horror of coming down with asthma and bronchitis and being dragged from place to place by locals who are impressed with his reputation as a writer. Still, he is more impressed by the lush South American landscapes:

And once again for hours I watch this monotonous nature and those immense spaces: one can't say they are beautiful, but they cling insistently in the soul. Country [Brazil] where the seasons are confused with one another, where the vegetation is so intertwined as to become formless, where bloods are so mixed up that the soul loses its borders. A loud splashing, the sea-green light of the forests, the varnish of red dust which covers all things, the melting of time, the slowness of the country, the brief and extravagant excitement of the big cities -- it's the country of indifference and blood explosions. Try as it might the skyscraper has yet to overcome the spirit of the forest -- the immensity, the melancholy. Sambas -- the authentic ones -- best express what I mean.

There are delightful moments amid all the discomfort, the forced association with mediocrities.

This is definitely a work in a minor key, but it tells me more about a writer whose work I love. And that's what makes it worth reading.

Seval Yılmaz Koşar says

Yolculuk Günlükleri, Albert Camus

"Julien Green kendi kendine, roman yazan bir aziz tasarlamanın olanaklı olup olmadığını soruyor. Doğallıkla olmaz bu çünkü bakıldığında roman olmaz. Ya da o durumda dünyevi yaşam ve insanı suçlayan bir roman tasarlamak gerekir - bütününe aksine bir roman. Olanaksız."

"Denizi hep seveceğim. O, içimdeki her şeyi hep yatıştıracak."

"Geceyi ve gökyüzünü insanların tanrılarından daha çok seviyorum."

"Yaşamak, bakılana ve bunun da ötesinde kendine kötülük yapmaktır. Acımasız toprak! Hiçbir şeye dokunmamak için ne yapmalı? Hangi kesin sürgünü bulmalı?"

"Öldürmek, bir anlamda acı çektirmekten daha iyidir."

Yolculuk Günlükleri (Journaux de Voyage), Camus'nün 1946 yılında ABD'ye ve 1949 yılında Güney Amerika'ya yaptığı gezilerde tuttuğu günlük notlarını kapsıyor. Bu notlar, Camus'nün Defterler'ine dahil edilmeyip ayrıca yayımlanmış. Kısacası bu yıl içinde (muhtemelen Aralık ayında) Camus'nün Defterler 1-2-3 adlı eserlerini okuyacağım. Camus, kitabın ABD yolculuğunu kapsayan birinci bölümünde ABD'yi sevmediği gibi görünmüyor, sanki bu koca ülkeye ve insanına duygusal olarak daha çok nötr kalmış. Ancak deniz yolculuğunda tuttuğu, denizle ilgili notları harikaydı. O kadar canlı tasvirler yapmış ki sanki Camus ile aynı gemideymi gibi hissettim. Kitabın, yazarın Güney Amerika yolculuğunu kapsayan bölümünde ise hasta, sıkılmış ve daha melankolik bir Camus gözlemledim. Camus, Güney Amerika'da (özellikle Brezilya'da) varoluş sıkıntısından daha yoğun yaşamı gibi. Belki de bu durum, yazarın hastalığından ve can sıkıntısından kaynaklanıyor. Ayrıca bu notların ilginç yanı ise Camus'nün deneyim ve izlenimlerinin zihninde nasıl şekillendiği ve eserlerine nasıl yansıtıldığını da satır aralarında görmeyi. Velhasıl, benim gibi Camus tutkunlarına tavsiye edebileceğim lezzetli bir kitap.

