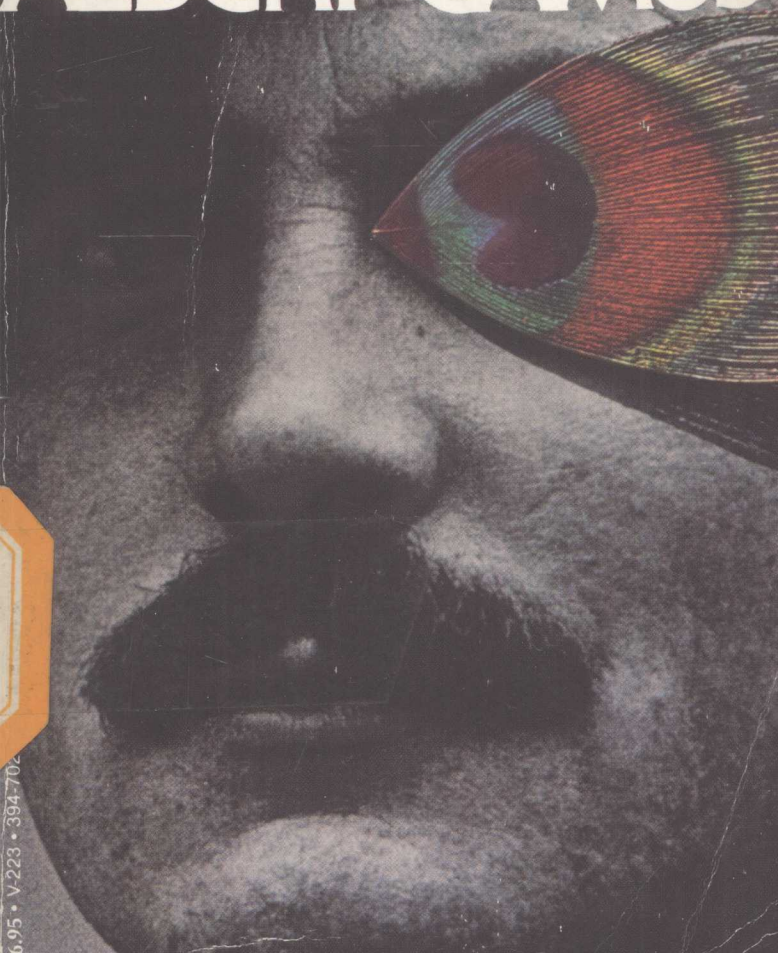


# THE FALL

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# ALBERT CAMUS



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# THE FALL

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*A Novel by*

ALBERT CAMUS

*Translated by*  
JUSTIN O'BRIEN



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*Some were dreadfully insulted, and quite seriously, to have held up as a model such an immoral character as A Hero of Our Time; others shrewdly noticed that the author had portrayed himself and his acquaintances. . . . A Hero of Our Time, gentlemen, is in fact a portrait, but not of an individual; it is the aggregate of the vices of our whole generation in their fullest expression.*

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*The Fall*

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**M**LAY I, *monsieur*, offer my services without running the risk of intruding? I fear you may not be able to make yourself understood by the worthy ape who presides over the fate of this establishment. In fact, he speaks nothing but Dutch. Unless you authorize me to plead your case, he will not guess that you want gin. There, I dare hope he understood me; that nod must mean that he yields to my arguments. He is taking steps; indeed, he is making haste with prudent deliberation. You are lucky; he didn't grunt. When he refuses to serve someone, he merely grunts. No one insists. Being master of one's moods is the privilege of the larger animals. Now I shall withdraw, *monsieur*, happy to have been of help to you. Thank you; I'd accept if I were sure of not being a nuisance. You are too kind. Then I shall bring my glass over beside yours.

You are right. His silence is deafening. It's the silence of the primeval forest, heavy with threats. At times I am amazed by his obstinacy in snubbing

civilized languages. His business consists in entertaining sailors of all nationalities in this Amsterdam bar, which for that matter he named—no one knows why—*Mexico City*. With such duties wouldn't you think there might be some fear that his ignorance would be awkward? Fancy the Cro-Magnon man lodged in the Tower of Babel! He would certainly feel out of his element. Yet this one is not aware of his exile; he goes his own sweet way and nothing touches him. One of the rare sentences I have ever heard from his mouth proclaimed that you could take it or leave it. What did one have to take or leave? Doubtless our friend himself. I confess I am drawn by such creatures who are all of a piece. Anyone who has considerably meditated on man, by profession or vocation, is led to feel nostalgia for the primates. They at least don't have any ulterior motives.

Our host, to tell the truth, has some, although he harbors them deep within him. As a result of not understanding what is said in his presence, he has adopted a distrustful disposition. Whence that look of touchy dignity as if he at least suspected that all is not perfect among men. That disposition

makes it less easy to discuss anything with him that does not concern his business. Notice, for instance, on the back wall above his head that empty rectangle marking the place where a picture has been taken down. Indeed, there *was* a picture there, and a particularly interesting one, a real masterpiece. Well, I was present when the master of the house received it and when he gave it up. In both cases he did so with the same distrust, after weeks of rumination. In that regard you must admit that society has somewhat spoiled the frank simplicity of his nature.

Mind you, I am not judging him. I consider his distrust justified and should be inclined to share it if, as you see, my communicative nature were not opposed to this. I am talkative, alas, and make friends easily. Although I know how to keep my distance, I seize any and every opportunity. When I used to live in France, were I to meet an intelligent man I immediately sought his company. If that be foolish . . . Ah, I see you smile at that use of the subjunctive. I confess my weakness for that mood and for fine speech in general. A weakness that I criticize in myself, believe me. I am well

aware that an addiction to silk underwear does not necessarily imply that one's feet are dirty. Nonetheless, style, like sheer silk, too often hides eczema. My consolation is to tell myself that, after all, those who murder the language are not pure either. Why yes, let's have another gin.

Are you staying long in Amsterdam? A beautiful city, isn't it? Fascinating? There's an adjective I haven't heard in some time. Not since leaving Paris, in fact, years ago. But the heart has its own memory and I have forgotten nothing of our beautiful capital, nor of its quays. Paris is a real *trompe-l'œil*, a magnificent stage-setting inhabited by four million silhouettes. Nearly five million at the last census? Why, they must have multiplied. And that wouldn't surprise me. It always seemed to me that our fellow citizens had two passions: ideas and fornication. Without rhyme or reason, so to speak. Still, let us take care not to condemn them; they are not the only ones, for all Europe is in the same boat. I sometimes think of what future historians will say of us. A single sentence will suffice for modern man: he fornicated and read the papers. After that

vigorous definition, the subject will be, if I may say so, exhausted.

Oh, not the Dutch; they are much less modern! They have time—just look at them. What do they do? Well, these gentlemen over here live off the labors of those ladies over there. All of them, moreover, both male and female, are very middle-class creatures who have come here, as usual, out of mythomania or stupidity. Through too much or too little imagination, in short. From time to time, these gentlemen indulge in a little knife or revolver play, but don't get the idea that they're keen on it. Their role calls for it, that's all, and they are dying of fright as they shoot it out. Nevertheless, I find them more moral than the others, those who kill in the bosom of the family by attrition. Haven't you noticed that our society is organized for this kind of liquidation? You have heard, of course, of those tiny fish in the rivers of Brazil that attack the unwary swimmer by thousands and with swift little nibbles clean him up in a few minutes, leaving only an immaculate skeleton? Well, that's what their organization is. "Do you want a good clean life?

Like everybody else?" You say yes, of course. How can one say no? "O.K. You'll be cleaned up. Here's a job, a family, and organized leisure activities." And the little teeth attack the flesh, right down to the bone. But I am unjust. I shouldn't say *their* organization. It is *ours*, after all: it's a question of which will clean up the other.

Here is our gin at last. To your prosperity. Yes, the ape opened his mouth to call me doctor. In these countries everyone is a doctor, or a professor. They like showing respect, out of kindness and out of modesty. Among them, at least, spitefulness is not a national institution. Besides, I am not a doctor. If you want to know, I was a lawyer before coming here. Now, I am a judge-penitent.

But allow me to introduce myself: Jean-Baptiste Clamence, at your service. Pleased to know you. You are in business, no doubt? In a way? Excellent reply! Judicious too: in all things we are merely "in a way." Now, allow me to play the detective. You are my age in a way, with the sophisticated eye of the man in his forties who has seen everything, in a way; you are well dressed in a way, that is as people are in our country; and your

hands are smooth. Hence a bourgeois, in a way! But a cultured bourgeois! Smiling at the use of the subjunctive, in fact, proves your culture twice over because you recognize it to begin with and then because you feel superior to it. Lastly, I amuse you. And be it said without vanity, this implies in you a certain open-mindedness. Consequently you are in a way . . . But no matter. Professions interest me less than sects. Allow me to ask you two questions and don't answer if you consider them indiscreet. Do you have any possessions? Some? Good. Have you shared them with the poor? No? Then you are what I call a Sadducee. If you are not familiar with the Scriptures, I admit that this won't help you. But it does help you? So you know the Scriptures? Decidedly, you interest me.

As for me . . . Well, judge for yourself. By my stature, my shoulders, and this face that I have often been told was shy, I rather look like a rugby player, don't I? But if I am judged by my conversation I have to be granted a little subtlety. The camel that provided the hair for my overcoat was probably mangy; yet my nails are manicured. I, too, am sophisticated, and yet I confide in you without



caution on the sole basis of your looks. Finally, despite my good manners and my fine speech, I frequent sailors' bars in the Zeedijk. Come on, give up. My profession is double, that's all, like the human being. I have already told you, I am a judge-penitent. Only one thing is simple in my case: I possess nothing. Yes, I was rich. No, I shared nothing with the poor. What does that prove? That I, too, was a Sadducee . . . Oh, do you hear the foghorns in the harbor? There'll be fog tonight on the Zuider Zee.

You're leaving already? Forgive me for having perhaps detained you. No, I beg you; I won't let you pay. I am at home at *Mexico City* and have been particularly pleased to receive you here. I shall certainly be here tomorrow, as I am every evening, and I shall be pleased to accept your invitation. Your way back? . . . Well . . . But if you don't have any objection, the easiest thing would be for me to accompany you as far as the harbor. Thence, by going around the Jewish quarter you'll find those fine avenues with their parade of streetcars full of flowers and thundering sounds. Your hotel is on one of them, the Damrak. You first, please. I live in the Jewish quarter or what