

Albert Camus' Absurdity and Rebellion in Kurt Vonnegut's "The Sirens of Titan"

Juan Pablo Santamaría Hernández

Código 201931929-3267

Directora

Carmen Cecilia Faustino Ruiz

Universidad del Valle

Escuela de Ciencias del Lenguaje

Departamento de Lenguas y Culturas Extranjeras

Licenciatura en Lenguas Extranjeras

Abril 2024

Table of contents

Table of contents	2
Abstract	3
Resumen	3
1. Introduction	4
1.1. Research question	5
1.2. Objectives	6
1.3. Justification	6
2. Literature Review	7
3. Theoretical Framework	14
3.1. Absurdism	14
3.1.1. The Absurd Man	18
3.2. Rebellion	21
3.2.1. Metaphysical rebellion	25
3.2.2. Historical Rebellion	28
3.3. Intertextuality	33
4. Author's biography	37
5. Summary of the novel	40
6. Analysis	45
6.1.1. Malachi Constant, Unk, Space Wanderer	45
6.1.2. Unk	48
6.1.3. Space Wanderer	50
6.2. Boaz	53
6.3. Beatrice Rumfoord, Bee	57
6.4. Winston Niles Rumfoord	61
6.4.1. Rumfoord's absurdism	61
6.4.2. Rumfoord's rebellion	67
7. Conclusion	78
References	82

Abstract

This literary analysis explores Kurt Vonnegut's characters in the novel *The Sirens of Titan* through Albert Camus' philosophy of absurdism. I analyze the four main characters' journeys from absurd awareness to the facing of absurdism as well as focusing on the actions of the character Winston Niles Rumfoord. This analysis takes into account Camus' absurdism and rebellion in *The Myth of Sisyphus* and *The Rebel*. The analysis shows the different ways and discrepancies in the evolution of the characters when accepting the absurd quality of life.

Keywords: Kurt Vonnegut, Albert Camus, absurdism, rebellion.

Resumen

Este análisis literario explora los personajes de la novela *Las sirenas de Titán* considerando la filosofía del absurdo de Albert Camus. Se analizan las historias de los cuatro personajes principales desde su conciencia del absurdo a la confrontación del mismo en particular en la evolución del personaje Winston Niles Rumfoord. Este análisis toma en cuenta los planteamientos del absurdo y la rebelión de Camus presentes en *El mito de Sísifo* y *El hombre rebelde*. Se concluye que cada personaje enfrenta el absurdo de manera diferente con base en las decisiones que cada uno toma a partir de su conciencia del absurdo de la vida.

Palabras clave: Kurt Vonnegut, Albert Camus, absurdo, rebelión.

1. Introduction

*A purpose of human life, no matter who is controlling it, is to love whoever is around to be loved.
(Vonnegut, 1959)*

Kurt Vonnegut was an American writer who would constantly belittle his writing. He would remark how, according to him, he could not “produce important art ” or how his writing was “(...) lower class” (Vonnegut, 2014). He suffered from depression throughout his life and had a suicide attempt in 1984 (Britannica, 2023). Despite this, over his *œuvre* one finds optimism and a humanist viewpoint in life, several calls for love and care for the neighbor and an overarching desire for humankind to be better to each other (Kehoe, 2022).

In addition, he was a declared atheist, and it is often remarked how he rejected religion. His satirical stories parodied dogma and institutions, interpreted it and even created new doctrines, all in an effort to echo the same message: “God damn it, you've got to be kind” (Vonnegut, 1965, p.85). Likewise, we see Vonnegut pondering on one question in his writing: “What is life about?” (2005, p. 66). His stories, following the previously alluded message, try to make meaning out of life while frequently stating how there is none, how our universe is an indifferent one and it is a fact that we must face.

Following these same topics, we find Vonnegut’s second novel, *The Sirens of Titan*, published in 1959 to good reception and almost winning the Hugo Award for best novel (The Hugo Awards, n.d). A dark comedy with science fiction diving into free will, the novel is a great example of Vonnegut’s sharp social critique, sense of humor and philosophy. The most important character, Winston Niles Rumfoord, is trapped in a “chrono-synclastic infundibulum”, making him “stretched through time and space” and physically present throughout the solar system. His consciousness becomes aware of the past, present and future at the same time; his actions changing the course of humanity forever. In this character’s actions and influence of other characters throughout the novel, Vonnegut’s text tackles the indifference of the universe, its

irrationality, the senseless meaning of life and our desire to make the absurd have meaning. The novel hence offers grounds for a literary analysis on the author's philosophy and thought previously mentioned, its different topics studied on different bases and authors.

Previous analyses have focused on varied concepts in Vonnegut's work: the concept of time in his fiction (Lynn Sieber, 2011), his views on god and religion (Kehoe, 2022), the meta aspect of his writing both in metafiction and meta-religion (Babaei & Wan Yahya, 2013), his notion of free will and determinism, (Radford, 2017) or Vonnegut's intertextuality to western philosophers and modernity in his *œuvre* (Simpson, 2022). Although the analyses on these topics over his broad literary career are international, analyses on Vonnegut in Colombia are scarce at best. That said, few studies have analyzed Vonnegut's *The Sirens of Titan* considering Albert Camus' absurdism and philosophy. Such analysis will complement the study of this American writer in Colombia, where his work is not widely read/known, and supplement analyses on this novel which is often overlooked in favor of his more famous novels. Considering the existentialist question the book ponders on, this literary analysis will study how the characters in Vonnegut's *The Sirens of Titan* deal with Camus' problem of the absurd, the actions the characters of the story make in relation to it and the presence of rebellion in the character of Winston Niles Rumfoord and his *revolt*.

In the process, I will examine how the characters of the novel face the problem of acknowledging the absurd. To do so, I will use a theoretical framework concerning the absurd, the absurd man and revolt in Camus' work. I will examine Camus' *The Myth of Sisyphus* and *The Rebel* to create said framework in order to analyze the character's journeys and philosophy found in *The Sirens of Titan* and in the process reviewing if they follow Camus ideas and/or fit in what the philosopher deems the absurd man and the rebel, as well as take into account the intertextuality between Vonnegut and Camus.

1.1. Research question

How do the characters in Vonnegut's *The Sirens of Titan* face the absurd?

1.2. Objectives

General objective

To analyze how the characters in the novel *The Sirens of Titan* face the absurd considering Albert Camus' philosophical perspective of absurdism and rebellion.

Specific objectives

- To identify how the characters become aware of the absurd.
- To examine the choices Malachi Constant, Boaz, Beatrice Rumfoord, and Winston Niles Rumfoord take related to the consciousness of the absurd.
- To analyze the intentions and plans of Winston Niles Rumfoord considering Camus' rebellion in *The Rebel*.

1.3. Justification

The importance of literature as a solace from the outside world cannot be understated. In the modern world where information is bombarded at us without delay or care for it, the silence one can find in a story is perhaps the only way out. In *The Sirens of Titan*, I did not only find that respite but I also found a powerful message, one worth sharing and diving into regarding our lack of purpose in this world.

Although Vonnegut's work has been connected to absurdism before, his point of view drawn in his second novel through the characters, specially that of Winston Niles Rumfoord, is something forever worth delving into due to how his actions can be judged considering Camus' rebellion and the conclusion one can reach considering both things.

In the Bachelor of Foreign Languages at Universidad del Valle, Cali, Colombia, there is a focus on the development of language learning, teaching and research skills. Within the language and research components, literature plays an important role as a cultural and language artifact. As language learners and future teachers, we need to read and analyze literature in order to not only improve our language skills but our critical thinking; only if we can engage with literature on

a deeper level can we attempt to encourage that analysis to others. Researching the literature necessary to do a comprehensive analysis of two celebrated authors who wrote in different languages provides the necessary practice in academic research and writing.

Additionally, the pedagogical exercise of a language teacher will include using literature of the language taught not only as reading and comprehension practice but also as a vehicle to explore that language's culture. To ask students to address a literary work in a deep and critical way teachers must develop the skills to do it themselves.

Finally, reading once more a novel previously read in our mother tongue in its original language gives new insight in comparison to the first experience; moreover doing so with the acquired intertextuality that may come from other authors. Moreover, the interlanguage proficiency necessary to understand and analyze texts in different languages is enhanced, which further improves the mastery of the languages one is learning. Dwelling in a story to improve our language skills and taking a critical position in regard to it is an essential part of our Foreign Language Teaching major, and as such, the writing of meticulous analysis is a demonstration of our progress.

2. Literature Review

As a famous and prolific writer, Vonnegut's work has been analyzed from very different angles: as an American writer, as a satirist, as an atheist, as a science fiction writer and as all of them together. In English studies journals and books, his name can easily be found if looked for just once. It is worth noting that his most famous novel *Slaughterhouse-5* (1969), was a book used in high school English classes in his home country; however, it has often been banned throughout history due to some people considering it *anti-christian* or unfit for children (Morais, 2011). Vonnegut's impact, however, does not limit itself to only the USA, as many authors here cited are from varying nationalities, such as Hungarian Lynn Siber (2011), Spanish Laurate de Castro (1994), Australian Simpson (2022) or Malaysian Babaei and Wan Yahya (2013).

On that note, once I began to look for previous studies that analyzed Vonnegut's literary work —any of his novels, short stories, conferences or non-fiction books—, the gap in local literature around this author was clear from the start. It is therefore that for the local scene's previous work, the text chosen is not related to Vonnegut's work or *The Sirens of Titan*, but instead it is a different literary analysis of unrelated authors and topics with a similar goal of analyzing a text through the lens of another author(s).

One previous study analyzed *The Reader* by Bernard Schlink through the lens of the authors Hannah Arendt and Karl Jaspers (Campo Moncada, 2020), a pertinent methodological aspect in this work, that is to look at a novel using another author's ideas to examine a text. Campo Moncada (2020) analyzed the concept of guilt considering Arendt's *Responsabilité et Jugement* and Jaspers' *La Culpabilité Allemande* with a comparative analysis on *The Reader*. To do so, she defined the key concepts of morality and evil following Arendt, the categories of guilt including personal guilt and collective guilt following Jaspers, and totalitarianism; afterwards, the contextualization of the novel's WWII and the historical aspect of both the story and the philosophical authors previously mentioned. The novel is promptly summarized: *The Reader* follows Michael's life after he meets Hanna, a woman who in the Nazi regime worked for the SS, their love affair and reading ritual, her trial as a war criminal and his life as a father and Hanna's only correspondent.

Afterwards, the author begins her analysis divided in two parts, personal guilt and collective guilt. Personal guilt is seen through the story's main characters: Michael's guilt is related to his actions towards Hanna and his association with her, Hanna's guilt is more nuanced. First only a criminal guilt, through her trial and her newfound literacy in prison and after reading the history of the Nazi Regime and concentration camps she self-evaluates her actions and her personal guilt becomes moral guilt. Jasper's collective guilt, Campo Moncada argues, is seen through Michael's generation of the children of the Third Reich generation, who shamefully live knowing that their parents, at best, lived alongside the criminals. She exemplifies this with the

German student movement in the 60s, a youth whose collective guilt from their parents manifested in protest against their government. Although not legal or moral, it is just as real in post-war generations.

The author concludes that both Arendt and Jaspers' ideas and concepts are heavily intertwined in *The Reader* and such analysis is important to understand the consequences of WWII in Germany and to Germans. Reviewing this document allowed me to have a better understanding of my text's structure and objective as a literary analysis using literary and philosophical texts in conjunction. The importance of this text to my analysis is one in structure and methodology. The dialogue she starts with two philosophers to analyze *The Reader* is a great example to follow, as the objectives of this text, as different as they are in every other way to hers, would be accomplished following the same steps. The intersection of ideas between the philosophers Arendt and Jaspers with Schlink's novel to enhance her analysis is what this text seeks to do as well.

Regarding international studies, it is here we can find plenty of literature studying Vonnegut's oeuvre, themes and philosophy. Previous analyses have focused on the relation between Vonnegut's work and Camus philosophy considering the lack of purpose in life and how to cope with it. A comprehensive study by Simpson (2022) of Vonnegut's life and literary work and his views on the meaning of life considered different novels of his and compared the ideas found in them with different philosophical authors. In this comprehensive analysis of Vonnegut's philosophical worldview, Simpson offers a reading of Vonnegut as a philosopher: his attempts to answer the question "What is life all about". Creating a dialogue between Vonnegut and Camus, Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, and diasporic theory Simpson's goal is to explore Vonnegut's work in philosophical, anthropological, cultural, and individualistic terms, set firmly in modernity, and how Vonnegut attempts to guide us towards "the good life" (2022, p.vi).

Simpson's text is divided into four chapters. The first chapter focuses on analyzing his early work through Camus. The second chapter focuses on "Nietzsche and truth/self-deception

and how “harmless” lies are necessary to make life bearable in Vonnegut’s fiction” (p.6). The third chapter examines Vonnegut’s ideas on the importance of art considering Schopenhauer’s notion of art contemplating the American’s non-fiction work. In the fourth and final chapter, the author studies the need of a “diasporic community” in Vonnegut’s life. In each chapter, the author points out similarities and differences between Vonnegut and the philosophers or the theory studied, all of them following a thread of the one question that unites the American author’s work: “What are people for” (p.8).

Simpson’s dissertation is relevant and important to this study. His extensive analysis serves as a guideline and his references can nurture this text. Nevertheless, his analysis on *The Sirens of Titan* is not as thorough as the one done on the other novels; as such, there is a gap that this analysis intends to fill with a more specific analysis on the novel.

On a more specific approach to the novel *The Sirens of Titan*, rather than to Vonnegut’s work as a whole, the author Lerate de Castro (1994) analyzes the novel in a stylistic and structural way, pinpointing the analogies in the novel to Greek Mythology, the intertextuality in Alice in Wonderland or the Divine Comedy and how Vonnegut’s style works into humor. Quoting the book pinpointing examples of his analysis, Lerate de Castro concludes that the novel is a postmodernist example, it uses multiple voices to tell the narrative and in the meta-narrative; *decanonizing* the character of Rumfoord as a god and using it as a parody, as well as the parodies of Christianity, institutions, and science and physics itself found throughout the text (1994).

Lerate de Castro’s structural and stylistic analysis of *The Sirens of Titan* in a postmodern scope serves as an example of a meticulous reading of the novel. Although he makes a formal dissection of its parts and examples in postmodernity, he briefly mentions the philosophical aspect of the novel in its exploration around the meaning of life. Hence, he leaves a gap for a study to examine this topic.

Continuing the international review, Vonnegut’s views on religion and its satire are heavily considered by Kehoe (2022), who examines this in three of his novels: *The Sirens of Titan*, *Cat’s*

Cradle, and *Slaughterhouse-Five*. In her text, Kehoe examines how Vonnegut critiques the figure of *God Almighty* in each of the three novels, creating new religions and beliefs in the process: the Church of the Utterly Indifferent, Bokononism and determinism, respectively, and how said myth-making is done by Vonnegut. She concludes that in *The Sirens of Titan* God still exists albeit completely absent, the author leaving mankind responsible for their actions and meaning found despite God rather than in it. In *Cat's Cradle* we find the opposite, God is responsible for suffering, yet Bokononism offers comfort and meaning even though it is fake both in story and in reality. In *Slaughterhouse-Five* there is no counter-religion created in the story and instead we have the Tralfamadorians world-view and philosophy, which the protagonist of the story accepts as truth; Christendom and the Christian God is criticized as a creator and justifier of wars and an enabler of suffering and cruelty given that as an all-powerful being cannot be questioned and the same applies to its followers, it is thus that religious belief is disregarded and ethics of respect are held more important, as the story's arguably main character creates a new Church but ignores God as inconsequential in all regards but creation.

Kehoe's analysis is a great example of critical analysis of themes in a story, specifically in Vonnegut's work and ideas of religion. Her analysis on *The Sirens of Titan* is relevant to this text's analysis of the character Winston Niles Rumfoord, as he creates the counter-religion analyzed by Kehoe, her insights will help make the analysis all the more thorough.

Moving away from analysis on Vonnegut, it is important to also review authors analyzing texts considering Camus' philosophical views as it is intended in this text. Keren's (2012) analysis of McCarthy's *The Road* considering absurdity and revolt is especially pertinent in this regard. Although his object of study is a widely different book from *The Sirens of Titan*, the lens of the analysis is the same and is thus relevant for this study.

In this analysis, Keren briefly explains Camusian thought on absurdity and rebellion; the universe is unforgiving and disillusioned but in our suffering and pointlessness the struggle is our anchor, we must embrace the absurd and challenge it, we keep moving forward as Sisyphus or

the characters in Camus' *The Plague* do so. He analyzes *The Road* on 4 topics, shown through the journey of a father and child marching south on a post-apocalyptic world: "the realization that life is transient, the precedence given to existence over essence, the refusal to substitute storytelling about reality for reality itself, and a genuine commitment to succeeding generations." (2012, p.9). On transience, Keren remarks how the modern world's Internet and television have distracted us away from the real world and additionally, the struggle we go through to face the absurd; illusions cloud us and *The Road* tries to remind us precisely that none of it "will allow us to overcome the constraints of reality" (p.11), forgetting transience of life would be giving up. Existence over essence is shown through the father's regard of actions over names or semiotics of the past and the absurd is ever present, there is no world but the one we make, stories may try to shape reality but they are insignificant in the face of the absurd. Keren argues that the father and son's trip in adversity, a journey of endurance not from a superior pilgrimage, an ulterior motive or moral mission but just to live on is "a representation of revolt in the face of the absurd" (p.17). He concludes that the heart of this revolt is the solidarity between father and son, the solidarity necessary for revolt to exist.

Keren's analysis takes a different approach to Camus and emphasizes on his teachings considering our modern world embedded in communication technologies contrasted with the story found on *The Road*. His interpretation of McCarthy's book through the lens of Camus may however serve as an example of a critical literary analysis considering the same philosophical ideas this text does.

All in all, previous analyses have examined Vonnegut's work considering different scopes, such as his philosophy and relation to philosophers, his stylistic choices and structure of his narratives or his ideas around religion. However, there are no analyses on *The Sirens of Titan* considering specific aspects of Albert Camus' philosophy into the characters, especially in the local scene. Therefore, the present work proposes to analyze the story and characters of *The Sirens of Titan* considering absurdism and revolt.

3. Theoretical Framework

To accomplish the objectives previously stated, I will define the following two concepts: *L'absurde*, and *La revolte*. The three deeply ingrained in Camus' philosophy of absurdism, they will be the cornerstones of my study of *The Sirens of Titan* and the examination of its different characters' struggles and conclusions facing their journey in the story. Their pilgrimages and reflections that stem from them will be examined considering the following concepts. I will also define the concept of intertextuality as a relevant element of consideration in the analysis of two authors who were deeply troubled by the same questions and the problem of war, as well as the influence the reading of Camus may have had on Vonnegut.

3.1. Absurdism

Albert Camus opens *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942) stating that the main philosophical problem is that of suicide. For him, "Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy."¹ (p.17). To arrive at the point of asking this question is a process of research of a more profound reason to exist than to do what we are supposed to, our habits, our duties, to suffer and its senselessness. The feeling one person gets once they try to decide whether life is worth living or not, that is the "absurd".

This absurd thought followed different inspirations and authors that heavily influenced the French-Argelian author. As Manrique (2022) points out, Kafka's work is one of those influences. Camus' essay *L'espoir et l'absurde dans l'oeuvre de Franz Kafka* was the beginning of *The Myth of Sisyphus*, now found in its appendix (1942) dwelling on Kafka's symbols and contradictions. As Camus puts it, the protagonist in Kafka's *The Trial*, Joseph K., regards as natural what happens to him, endeavors on in his life despite being accused and judged for things never clear to him. Thus we find the paradox of Joseph K.'s living despite his circumstances, his lack of

¹ Original text: Juger que la vie vaut ou ne vaut pas la peine d'être vécue, c'est répondre à la question fondamentale de la philosophie.

astonishment. Such a paradox we also find in Kafka's *The Castle's* protagonist, K., who endeavors in the impossible task of going up the eponymous castle's road, or as Camus puts it, "the individual adventure of a soul in quest of its grace."² (p.173). In *Metamorphosis*, the transformation of the protagonist into a giant bug is paradoxically not what worries him, but the fact that he will arrive late to work. These previous paradoxes, these contradictions are important to Camus' thought, the contrast between the natural and the unnatural and the absurd and the logical are, according to him, what gives Kafka's work meaning and more importantly, an example of what could be the Absurd. In Camus' eyes, Kafka's books are grand in how he managed to "represent so fully the everyday passage from hope to grief and from desperate wisdom to intentional blindness."³ (p.185) In both *The Trial* and *The Castle* we can find what can be deemed as an absurd deed (Joseph K.'s attempts to defend himself and figure out the mechanisms outside of his control and K.'s futile attempts in getting to the Castle and perform his duties as land surveyor) but the way in which each of the characters face it is what appealed to Camus, stories that he considered complement each other. While *The Trial* poses a problem devoid of hope, Joseph K. continues living on with his fate on the back of his head; *The Castle* is precisely about hope, K.'s attempts to find a way into the Castle, a perhaps senseless hope. Such ideas of hope or lack thereof are precisely inspiring to write *The Myth of Sisyphus*, ideas that can be followed to the notion of the absurd, as Camus would write.

The use of other authors is not exclusive to Kafka, as Camus' exposition of the absurd in *The Myth of Sisyphus* argues extensively considering Kierkegaard and Chestov's ideas as well as literary works such as Dostoyevsky's, examining them to draw his arguments. Whereas Kierkegaard recognizes the absurd and decides to take the leap of philosophical suicide and embrace christianity to escape it and Chestov embraces God as a necessity against the irrational

² Original text: l'aventure individuelle d'une âme en quête de sa grâce.

³ Original text: figurer avec tant d'ampleur ce passage quotidien de l'espoir à la détresse et de la sagesse désespérée à l'aveuglement volontaire.

and in the process erasing human's need for an answer, eliminating the absurd, Kafka's solution in his novels, however, is the same as Camus', that is, to struggle despite the realization of the absurd. It is then that he endeavors on defining the absurd and the absurd man.

To find the absurd, one may look into the passage of time, as we position ourselves in a line which ought to end. When we realize that all thought is human thought and whether we deemed something as beautiful or the contrary, good or bad, is as meaningless as any other rock we pass by as we walk. To Camus, only "If man realized that the universe like him can love and suffer, he would be reconciled"⁴ (p.34). But to take note of it is not enough, as what deems it absurd is the search for rational in the irrational, as he promptly puts it : "But what is absurd is the confrontation of this irrational and the wild longing for clarity whose call echoes in the human heart."⁵ (p.39).

The feeling of the absurd is that which a person finds once rationality attempts to explain irrationality. Camus (1942) remarks how through science humanity attempts to explain the universe, numbering it, reducing it to invisible smaller parts and drawing different hypotheses explaining its movement and work, but all that does not satisfy humans, as what they expect is a larger truth; as he puts it: "They have nothing to do with the mind. They negate its profound truth, which is to be enchained. In this unintelligible and limited universe, man's fate henceforth assumes its meaning"⁶ (p.39). This meaning is death; despite all of man's cavilations certain looming death is forever present and man's impotence in relation to it brings the absurd.

The French-Algerian philosopher argues that this is what so many Western philosophers tackled in their writing, Kierkegaard, Jaspers, Heidegger, Chestov or Scheler. As stated: "Whatever may be or have been their ambitions, all started out from that indescribable universe

⁴ Original text: "Si l'homme reconnaissait que l'univers lui aussi peut aimer et souffrir, il serait réconcilié."

⁵ Original text: "Mais ce qui est absurde, c'est la confrontation de cet irrationnel et de ce désir éperdu de clarté dont l'appel résonne au plus profond de l'homme."

⁶ Original text: Ils n'ont rien à voir avec l'esprit. Ils nient sa vérité profonde qui est d'être enchaîné. Dans cet univers indéchiffrable et limité, le destin de l'homme prend désormais son sens."

where contradiction, antinomy, anguish, or impotence reigns”⁷ (p.41). Our journey to find one undeniable truth is one that can only lead to madness; our ability to understand the world is hindered by the lack of meaning in it, realizing this is the notion of the absurd. As Camus states at the end of the first chapter in *The Myth of Sisyphus*: At this point of his effort man stands face to face with the irrational. He feels within him his longing for happiness and for reason. The absurd is born of this confrontation between the human need and the unreasonable silence of the world.⁸ (p. 46).

It is then that the question of suicide is born, should one live on in a world that only responds a plea with silence? What actions stem from this reflection are those which we all do every day. The notion of the absurd is, as the word implies, a contradiction, a “divorce”. This contradiction appears from a comparison, as one would compare a man armed only with a sword to attack a group of machine guns or a protesting student equipped with a traffic sign trying to defend against an armed anti-protest force. One would consider these acts as absurd in the disproportion intent of one side to the reality they are facing (Camus, 1942). The measurement of the situations compared draws the proportion of the absurdity in view, the greater the distance between one and the other the greater the absurd. Once this is accepted, there is no greater absurdity than human’s rationality against the, once more, “unreasonable silence of the world”; as Camus summarizes: “I can therefore say that the Absurd is not in man (sic) (if such a metaphor could have a meaning) nor in the world, but in their presence together.”⁹ (p. 50).

We arrive thus to the most important aspect of the absurd, the question that gives beginning to Camus’ book, the question of suicide. Now, a person fully aware of the absurd must

⁷ Original text: “Quelles que soient ou qu’aient été leurs ambitions, tous sont partis de cet univers indicible où règnent la contradiction, l’antinomie, l’angoisse ou l’impuissance.”

⁸ Original text: “À ce point de son effort, l’homme se trouve devant l’irrationnel. Il sent en lui son désir de bonheur et de raison. L’absurde naît de cette confrontation entre l’appel humain et le silence déraisonnable du monde”

⁹ Original text: “je puis donc dire que l’absurde n’est pas dans l’homme (si une pareille métaphore pouvait avoir un sens), ni dans le monde, mais dans leur présence commune.”

take a decision (Camus, 1942), what actions may take place after this reflection is what the absurd is about. Should we deem life not worth living after concluding the contradiction of human rationality and the universe's irrationality and end it all? Camus explains three ways one may proceed: the first one being suicide; the second way is what he calls the philosophical suicide or the "leap", the conscious choice of an explanation we deem irrational despite our acceptance of ourselves as rational beings, such as the belief of an afterlife; the third way is that of the absurd man.

3.1.1. The Absurd Man

The actions that a person may take upon acknowledging the absurd, rather than falling in despair from it or taking the pragmatic approach of deeming life not worth living and ending with it, may render what Camus calls "the absurd man". The absurd man "recognizes the struggle, does not absolutely scorn reason, and admits the irrational."¹⁰ (p.58), the main characteristic of the absurd man is that of not falling prey of hope, of hope of a beyond, of greater meaning or of god, but one of embracing death as part of his rationality, as the ultimate consequence of being and not one to flee from.

The absurd man does not "leap" as Camus puts it, into trying to understand the misunderstandable in a useless effort of attempting to lay meaning into the meaningless and forget that which the absurd man insists on not forgetting. The absurd man in his endeavor of life will find solutions, solace or circumventions to the final question, but will not accept them, content with the discontent found in the absurd. The absurd man agrees his sole reflection separating him from the world around him, his lucidity is an inescapable one and has casted him aside, but this he will accept as the contrary are plain lies. As Camus states: "is one going to die, escape by the

¹⁰ Original text: Il reconnaît la lutte, ne méprise pas absolument la raison et admet l'irrationnel.

leap, rebuild a mansion of ideas and forms to one's own scale? Is one, on the contrary, going to take up the heart-rending and marvelous wager of the absurd?¹¹ (p.77)

It is the absurd man who in face of the question of suicide decides to embrace his fate and to revolt against it; no thoughts or explanations such as religion or metaphysical cavilations, no attempts to make the inhuman into human may hinder his acting or "relieve (him) of the weight of (his) own life"¹² (p.80). In his everyday life the acknowledgment of the absurd is maintained, the process of revolt is apparent, the absurd man "gives proof of his only truth, which is defiance."¹³ (p.80)

The absurd man is also free, as he reconciles with the absurd he is conceded a freedom of action. The problem of whether he is free in a grander metaphysical scheme or of determinism is unimportant, as he "can experience only (his) own freedom"¹⁴ (p.81) and thus acts accordingly. The ultimate freedom is granted the moment one accepts death as its limit.

The previous stated, the absurd man then acts and lives to experience, constantly aware of said experiences. Camus expresses it as almost a duty brought to us by this revelation, if the path of the absurd is so chosen: "It is up to us to be conscious of them. Being aware of one's life, one's revolt, one's freedom, and to the maximum, is living, and to the maximum"¹⁵ (1942, p.89) The absurd man welcomes all experiences he will endeavor in throughout his journey; participating in the life he was cursed upon is the ultimate of joys, the principal act of revolt is to be conscious of the insignificance as we partake in life.

The beginning of the absurd man is then the result of the three consequences after embracing the absurd: revolt, freedom and passion. He prefers his reasoning over that of

¹¹ Original text: Va-t-on mourir, échapper par le saut, reconstruire une maison d'idées et de formes à sa mesure? Va-t-on au contraire soutenir le pari déchirant et merveilleux de l'absurde?

¹² Original text: me déchargent du poids de ma propre vie.

¹³ Original text: il témoigne de sa seule vérité qui est le défi.

¹⁴ Original text: Je ne puis éprouver que ma propre liberté

¹⁵ Original text: C'est à nous d'en être conscients. Sentir sa vie, sa révolte, sa liberté, et le plus possible, c'est vivre et le plus possible.

doctrines appealing to the eternal and revolts upon his fate, he acts on his own limited freedom as he so wishes and in said freedom he lives on his own, passionately appreciating each experience as his own revolt, conscious of what his own mortality entails and how, forever after, ultimate meaning will never come. Nevertheless, this does not entail an abandonment of ethics, as the absurd “merely confers an equivalence on the consequences of those actions”¹⁶ (p.96), actions that may be deemed good or bad on infinite unspecified moral compasses are in the end absurd. If all experiences are equivalent, acting in consideration of the absurd is to reflect on the consequences of said actions and act accordingly. As Camus argues :

All experiences are indifferent in this regard. There are some that do either a service or a disservice to man. They do him a service if he is conscious. Otherwise, that has no importance: a man's failures imply judgment, not of circumstances, but of himself.¹⁷ (1942, p.98)

The absurd man acts conscious of the absurd, embracing it in each of his indifferent actions and thoughts. He is freed in recognition of his shackles and embarks on his journey all the same, to experience what he can, to live despite it all.

Camus presents different examples of an absurd man and the most famous of them is that of Sisyphus. Using the Greek myth, Camus exemplifies the absurd struggle with that of the man that has to climb a boulder up a mountain only to see it fall again and forever. To Camus, the tragedy of the story is in Sisyphus' consciousness of his upcoming failure which is no different to the life of any other human that lives only for death to come, regardless of the precedent, but in his words: “if the descent is thus sometimes performed in sorrow, it can also take place in joy”¹⁸ (p.166). Sisyphus' fate (and humankind's) is his alone, a fact that he appreciates. To conclude

¹⁶ Original text: rend seulement leur équivalence aux conséquences de ces actes.

¹⁷ Original text: Toutes les expériences sont à cet égard indifférentes. Il en est qui servent ou desservent l'homme. Elles le servent s'il est conscient. Sinon, cela n'a pas d'importance : les défaites d'un homme ne jugent pas les circonstances, mais lui-même.

¹⁸ Original text: Si la descente ainsi se fait certains jours dans la douleur, elle peut se faire aussi dans la joie.

with Camus final words: “The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man’s heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy¹⁹” (1942, p.168).

3.2. Rebellion

Qu'est-ce qu'un homme révolté ? Un homme qui dit non. Mais s'il refuse, il ne renonce pas : c'est aussi un homme qui dit oui, dès son premier mouvement. (Camus, 1951)

Between the writing and publishing of *The Myth of Sisyphus* and *The Rebel* nine years happened. World War II ended, the horrors of the Holocaust were made public and the atomic bomb was now a reality, the power to destroy was absolute. These events would evidently change and influence Camus’ thought, this can be seen in the opening introduction of *The Rebel* (1951). To introduce his book, Camus starts with a consideration of crime and the importance of premeditation in consideration of penalty:

We are living in the era of premeditation and the perfect crime. Our criminals are no longer helpless children who could plead love as their excuse. On the contrary, they are adults and they have a perfect alibi: philosophy, which can be used for any purpose - even for transforming murderers into judges.²⁰ (p.11)

The consequences of the Nazi Holocaust would ripple on Camus philosophy, in so far as to open this book stating the purpose of it is to understand the time and era he finds himself in. He makes emphasis on the difference between the previous time, where the question was whether to kill oneself, or his writing of *Sisyphus*, to the modern time, where ideologies of hate ask whether we can kill others.

Coming back to the Absurd after nine years, Camus (1951) calls into question how in his absurd thought, nothing could be good or bad, as he states that:

¹⁹Original text: La lutte elle-même vers les sommets suffit à remplir un cœur d'homme. Il faut imaginer Sisyphe heureux.

²⁰ Original text: Nous sommes au temps de la préméditation et du crime parfait. Nos criminels ne sont plus ces enfants désarmés qui invoquaient comme excuse l'amour. Ils sont adultes, au contraire, et leur alibi est irréfutable : c'est la philosophie qui peut servir à tout, même à changer les meurtriers en juges.

If we believe in nothing, if nothing has any meaning and if we can affirm no values whatsoever, then everything is possible and nothing has any importance. There is no pro or con: the murderer is neither right nor wrong.²¹ (p.13)

What is left is then his lack of action, which is silent consent. Under these assumptions the absurd thought prepares us to kill, it may even make it completely justifiable. Camus argues, however, that by returning to the same idea of the absurd we find the answer. Following the axiom that one believes in nothing and that everything is absurd, the only thing left to believe in is this same axiom and the rebellion against it. If the absurd thought enables killing then it is through rebellion that we must find a solution to it (1951). In short, the rebel faces the absurd by living despite it, and since that is the one truth, that living is an act of rebellion, then killing would be taking away the possibility of rebellion from someone else, robbing them of their agency. This clarification of the role of the absurd in the morality of murder is important, as in *The Myth of Sisyphus* one could interpret the absurd as allowing everything. After World War II, Camus makes this very important distinction and expands his argument now with rebellion.

Rebellion or to revolt entails two things: that there is a condition to which say no, and a condition to which say yes. One that is desired over the other. Hence, as Camus puts it, a slave may deem the situation his master has brought upon him unfit for himself, and may then say no, and in this process will also say yes, deeming to be treated as an equal is the preferable situation. The resistance to be humiliated has now changed the man, this revolt is now a part of him (Camus, 1951). In this act of rebellion, the slave now considers the good he has now found to be all the more important than anything else and in contradiction to what he once was, something which he cannot go back, or else he will face death (Camus, 1951).

Camus' idea of rebellion can be misunderstood as one of egotistical nature but it could not be farther from the truth, since the rebel man is willing to die over his rebellion; his life is lesser

²¹ Original text: Si l'on ne croit à rien, si rien n'a de sens et si nous ne pouvons affirmer aucune valeur, tout est possible et rien n'a d'importance. Point de pour ni de contre, l'assassin n'a ni tort ni raison.

than the greater value he pursues and therefore his revolt goes beyond him as an individual. As Camus states: "We see that the affirmation implicit in every act of rebellion is extended to something that transcends the individual in so far as it withdraws him from his supposed solitude and provides him with a reason to act²²." (p.23) Rebellion entails the recognition of suffering and imbalance, and the result of this recognition and desire for the opposite is revolt. Since everyone suffers, the desire to rebel is no longer of the individual but of the collective, i.e humanity as a whole. Rebellion is thus not limited to one person, it can and does occur with just witnessing the oppressed, it is in the action itself that the rebel identifies "himself with other men."²³ (p.25) It is imperative that in rebellion one realizes that "human reality, in its entirety, suffers from the distance which separates it from the rest of the universe"²⁴ (p.30). Camus makes it explicit that this solidarity with humanity is intrinsically rebellion, and only solidarity can justify rebellion; therefore any behavior that attacks this solidarity is not rebellion at all (such as murder).

To expand on the definition of rebellion, it can be contrasted to that of resentment. Resentment is passivity and envy of what one is not or does not have; rebellion is activity, a claim of what one knows one has. Resentment is against oneself, while rebellion is a fight for integrity (Camus, 1951). Resentment's final manifestation is of vengeance and rejoice in the pain of others, that of revolt's is a claim for "that part of man which cannot be confined to the realm of ideas should be taken into consideration- the passionate side of his nature that serves no other purpose but to help him live."²⁵ (p.27)

It is important where Camus' idea of rebellion appears. For someone to rebel that person needs to confront the absurd first; to find it, different circumstances must take place. According to Camus, rebellion is exclusive to Western society since it is the culture where it has stopped being

²² Original text: On voit que l'affirmation impliquée dans tout acte de révolte s'étend à quelque chose qui déborde l'individu dans la mesure où elle le tire de sa solitude supposée et le fournit d'une raison d'agir.

²³ Original text: l'homme se dépasse en autrui.

²⁴ Original text: la réalité humaine, dans sa totalité, souffre de cette distance par rapport à soi et au monde.

²⁵ Original text: On exige que soit considéré ce qui, dans l'homme, ne peut se réduire à l'idée, cette part chaleureuse qui ne peut servir à rien d'autre qu'à être.

ruled by traditions or the sacred. It can only exist in “a society where a theoretic equality conceals great factual inequalities.²⁶” (p.28) Evidently, in a society where everyone is supposed to be equal, to have political freedom and free will, the absence of it is the brightest; in our modern democratic western societies we think each is born equal and has equal rights, when looking outside is all you need to do to see this is not true; homelessness, poverty, inequality and oppression are forever present. Therefore we find a gradual awareness of humanity’s process in becoming worse, a process that apparently never ends, which entices revolt. This never-ending process brings us towards the absurd, the moment where we must choose what follows, the now classic philosophical question raised by Camus: “should I kill myself?”

We come back to the three answers Camus has shown in his previous work: the first one being suicide, the second one being philosophical suicide or taking the leap towards what’s sacred (i.e religion), and the third one being the choice of reason and constant revolt. Choosing the latter, Camus argues, causes the disappearance of the other, which brings into question the solidarity to humanity previously mentioned, and most importantly, responsibility; the act as rebellion raises the question: “Is it possible to find a rule of conduct (morals) outside the realm of religion and of absolute values?²⁷” (p.29) Camus concludes that there is a difference between the individualistic experience of the absurd and the collective act of revolt. As he puts it:

The first step for a mind overwhelmed by the strangeness of things is to realize that this feeling of strangeness is shared with all men and that the entire human race suffers from the division between itself and the rest of the world.²⁸ (p.30)

The rebel is then someone that in the face of a condition they consider unjust, chooses to deny it, rebelling against what is deemed proper to them; to put simply, the slave refuses his

²⁶ Original text: En société, l'esprit de révolte n'est possible que dans les groupes où une égalité théorique recouvre de grandes inégalités de fait.

²⁷ Original text: Peut-on, loin du sacré, et de ses valeurs absolues, trouver la règle d'une conduite?

²⁸ Original text: Le premier progrès d'un esprit saisi d'étrangeté est donc de reconnaître qu'il partage cette étrangeté avec tous les hommes et que la réalité humaine, dans sa totalité, souffre de cette distance par rapport à soi et au monde.

condition as the slave. In this process of rebellion, the slave must become the master, which binds them to new responsibilities they must face. Throughout this act, it is one of solidarity, not one rebel suffers alone, as the act of rebellion is intrinsically one of solidarity towards the others in the same struggle of existing.

3.2.1. Metaphysical rebellion

With the rebel defined, metaphysical rebellion then enters the picture. Promptly explained by Camus, metaphysical rebellion is “the movement by which man protests against his condition and against the whole of creation. It is metaphysical because it contests the ends of man and of creation.”²⁹ (1951, p.32) The metaphysical rebel, like the slave, denounces his situation, that of being human, as a contradiction. The slave finds inequality in the condition of his master as human and of himself as human, he uprisers and attempts to resolve this contradiction. Nevertheless, their conditions are inevitably linked to one another, as the master may only have power over the slave if there is submission on his side and, in rebellion of this submission, the existence of said power is accepted on part of the slave, as well as his power to rebel. As Camus argues “the two forces assert themselves alternately at the moment of rebellion until they confront each other for a fight to the death, and one or the other temporarily disappears.”³⁰ (p.33) Likewise, the metaphysical rebel affirms the power he objects to, and, in his revolt, there is an attempt to reconcile what he deems human and just, to what he finds outward in the universe, inhuman and unjust; put plainly, that which he cannot understand. As the philosopher states:

Metaphysical rebellion is a claim, motivated by the concept of a complete unity, against the suffering of life and death and a protest against the human condition both for its incompleteness, thanks to death, and its wastefulness, thanks to evil³¹ (1951, p.33).

²⁹ Original text: La révolte métaphysique est le mouvement par lequel un homme se dresse contre sa condition et la création tout entière.

³⁰ Original text: Les deux forces s'affirment alternativement, dans l'instant de la rébellion, jusqu'au moment où elles s'affronteront pour se détruire, l'une des deux disparaissant alors, provisoirement.

³¹ Original text: Protestant contre la condition dans ce qu'elle a d'inachevé, par la mort, et de dispersé, par le mal, la révolte métaphysique est la revendication motivée d'une unité heureuse, contre la souffrance de vivre et de mourir.

The outcome of revolt is one of responsibility, as the rebel seeks justice to the perceived injustice of the world, that is, suffering and death; the rebel wants to solve the contradiction of rationality against absurdity. Camus then puts forward the figure of God as a personification of the universe which the rebel must overcome. God is the master of the rebel as that of a slave, and in dethroning them, the origin of the perceived injustice, the rebel must create the justice they sought in the first place. In the act of “killing God”, the man is obligated to act (Camus, 1951).

It is of the utmost importance to remember that to Camus, the freedom rebellion may give us will also grant us new obligations. As the rebel acts, freedom is not absolute, if it was the liberty to kill would be granted, which goes against the absurdist consideration of life as the most precious thing despite how irrational it is. To reiterate, Camus draws on Nietzsche and how he truly understood the struggle for freedom, as he states “That is why (Nietzsche) understood that only the mind found its real emancipation in the acceptance of new obligations.”³² (1951, p.78). Without law there is no freedom. There is no freedom if there is either absolute liberty or absolute law, according to Camus, for there to be freedom there should be clear margins of what can be and what cannot be. In its core, rebellion “paradoxically expresses an aspiration for order”³³ (p.32). Hence, the path towards freedom in the absurd is one obtained through a struggle and it is not a relief but a responsibility.

To arrive at this responsibility, metaphysical rebellion and the rejection of God comes to be in human protest, which “is only, and can only be, a prolonged protest against death, a violent accusation against the universal death penalty”³⁴ (Camus, 1951, p.108). The rebel, looking for unity, fights against the consequence that death implies: “If nothing lasts, then nothing is justified:

³² Original text: “C'est pourquoi il a compris que l'esprit ne trouvait sa véritable émancipation que dans l'acceptation de nouveaux devoirs”

³³ Original text: La rébellion la plus élémentaire exprime, paradoxalement, l'aspiration à un ordre.

³⁴ Original text: L'insurrection humaine, dans ses formes élevées et tragiques, n'est et ne peut être qu'une longue protestation contre la mort, une accusation enragée de cette condition régie par la peine de mort généralisée.

anything that dies has no meaning. To fight against death amounts to claiming that life has a meaning, to fighting for order and for unity”³⁵ (p.109).

The essence of this metaphysical rebellion, this claim for meaning and order, is a fight against the lack of justification for evil and death. The aforementioned injustice of the universe is the absence of a reason for suffering, and human justice is its rationality searching for a reason. Per the philosopher’s words: “In the eyes of the rebel, what is missing from the misery of the world, as well as from its moments of happiness, is some principle by which they can be explained” (1951, p.109)³⁶. Rebellion does not appear from the suffering of a child but from the lack of reason for that suffering. For the rebel the defiance is against a world whose only future is dead and lacks explanations; he claims for life and clarity. In the search for absolute clarity, for absolute freedom, the metaphysical rebel seeks to build a kingdom apart from God and injustice, the kingdom of men.

However, this noble goal is not one taken gently. In search of a just and rational universe, the rebel is without knowing it looking for a religion that gives exactly that. In consequence, as nihilism put it long before, the rebel kills God to create the stated kingdom of men. Camus mentions two types of rebels bearing from the hatred of the creator that may appear from this rationality, one that hates creation, and one that loves creation, what exists, in both cases recurring to absolutes. The philosopher states: “Hatred of the creator turns to hatred of creation or to exclusive and defiant love of what exists. But in both cases it ends in murder and loses the right to be called rebellion.”³⁷ (1951, p.110) The rebel is ravaged by the desire of life and in a

³⁵ Original text: Si rien ne dure, rien n'est justifié, ce qui meurt est privé de sens. Lutter contre la mort revient à revendiquer le sens de la vie, à combattre pour la règle et pour l'unité.

³⁶ Original text: Aux yeux du révolté, ce qui manque à la douleur du monde, comme aux instants de son bonheur, c'est un principe d'explication.

³⁷ Original text: La haine du créateur peut tourner en haine de la création ou en amour exclusif et provoquant de ce qui est.

search for rationality, their “reason becomes madness”³⁸ (p.110). In consequence, a contradiction is born:

If it is true that the instinctive rebellion of the human heart advances gradually through the centuries towards its most complete realization, it has also grown, as we have seen, in blind audacity to the inordinate extent of deciding to answer universal murder by metaphysical assassination³⁹ (Camus, 1951, p.110).

As the rebel contemplated the injustice in the world as victims they consider themselves innocent, and in that innocence the killing of God is justified. The rebel then lives by his own will, the responsibility of the new kingdom is apparent. This, however, does not engulf humanity in its entirety and the rebel must then try to accomplish this. What started as an attempt for the rebel to be his own master transforms into conquest. The path of conquest begins and the rebel “rejecting every aspect of servitude tries to annex all creation”⁴⁰ (p.111) using the rationality that started it all as a weapon. Camus concludes:

Man, on an earth which he knows is henceforth solitary, is going to add, to irrational crimes, the crimes of reason that are bent on the domination of man. To the “I rebel, therefore we exist,” he adds, with prodigious plans in mind which even include the death of rebellion: “And we are alone.”⁴¹ (1951, p.112)

3.2.2. Historical Rebellion

The search for freedom is the engine of all revolutions, Camus explains. Claiming for freedom and justice, rebels endeavor in a bloody path whose violence grows as it claims for a greater freedom (1951). For Camus, the different revolutions that have taken place in history show the intrinsic contradiction in a cry for freedom built in the guild of violence, outshining the optimism it looked for (1951). Revolutions are the logical consequence of metaphysical rebellion, the

³⁸ Original text: À ce degré d'indignation, la raison devient fureur.

³⁹ Original text: S'il est vrai que la révolte instinctive du cœur humain marche peu à peu au long des siècles vers sa plus grande conscience, elle a grandi aussi, nous l'avons vu, en audace aveugle jusqu'au moment démesuré où elle a décidé de répondre au meurtre universel par l'assassinat métaphysique.

⁴⁰ Original text: Nous sommes arrivés à ce moment où la révolte, rejetant toute servitude, vise à annexer la création entière.

⁴¹ Original text: Aux crimes de l'irrationnel, l'homme, sur une terre qu'il sait désormais solitaire, va rejoindre les crimes de la raison en marche vers l'empire des hommes. Au « je me révolte, donc nous sommes », il ajoute, méditant de prodigieux desseins et la mort même de la révolte : « Et nous sommes seuls »

philosopher argues: "The revolutionary spirit thus undertakes the defense of that part of man which refuses to submit. In other words, it tries to assure him his crown in the realm of time."⁴² (p.114)

On that note, revolutions by definition end something to start a new one, a demand for unity. Here, Camus distinguishes between rebellion (*révolte*) and revolution (*révolution*): the former being a notion, "an obscure protest which involves neither methods nor reasons" and the latter as an "attempt to shape actions to ideas, to fit the world into a theoretic frame"⁴³ (p. 115). A real revolution, therefore, has not happened yet as it would be the only one needed. Naturally, a revolution that seeks to shape the world into an idea of what it is not brings forth violence. A revolution against a government, such as the French Revolution, grants a "revolutionary government". A government can only be qualified as that it exists against other governments, creating a *war government*. For Camus, a total revolution thus demands total control.

According to the French philosopher, the path walked on by human revolutions, rather than show emancipation, shows an affirmation of man, of humanity, about dignity and what everything some think ought to be; yet never achieved. The one real revolution would finally bring unity to humankind, ending history. This inevitably leads the rebel to act revolutionary in an attempt to not appear futile, bringing us to a final consequence, as Camus explains:

It no longer suffices for the rebel to declare himself God or to look to his own salvation by adopting a certain attitude of mind. (...) Now that God is dead, the world must be changed and organized by the forces at man's disposal. The force of imprecation alone is not enough and weapons are needed for the conquest of totality. (p.117)

⁴² Original text: L'esprit révolutionnaire prend ainsi la défense de cette part de l'homme qui ne veut pas s'incliner. Simplement, il tente de lui donner son règne dans le temps.

⁴³ Original text: Alors que l'histoire, même collective, d'un mouvement de révolte, est toujours celle d'un engagement sans issue dans les faits, d'une protestation obscure qui n'engage ni systèmes ni raisons, une révolution est une tentative pour modeler l'acte sur une idée, pour façonner le monde dans un cadre théorique.

Therefore, the materialization of metaphysical rebellion, revolution, is shaped by violence. Camus uses the French Revolution as an example of a revolution that starts with revolt but results in a cycle of violence that claims to be guided by rationality while at the same time challenging and violating that same rationality. Once the rebels kill Louis XVI, they affirm he is no different from any other man and state that the will of the people is superior to him. The mere existence of the king is deemed a crime: "The crime of the king is, at the same time, a sin against the ultimate nature of things. (...) the crime of royalty is permanent, it is inextricably bound to the person of the king, to his very existence"⁴⁴ (1951, p.129). Considering that the king is a "God-appointed" figure, in consequence, the will of the people is superior to God and thus the republic is the most important figure to man. In these results of revolutions, Camus argues, absolutes are bound to happen. "Whoever criticizes it is a traitor, whoever fails to give open support to the republic is a suspect."⁴⁵ (p.135). Absolutes, such as "everything is permitted" can only lead to violence, which can only lead to murder. The murder of the king is not the first nor the last, a chain of murders is inevitably started, as he points out: "But to kill men leads to nothing but killing more men. For one principle to triumph, another principle must be overthrown"⁴⁶ (1951, p.118). Those who do not fall into the absolute, which is everyone, will become an obstacle in the search for an idealized revolution.

With what rebellion has become in history, at this point we come back to the core of rebellion mentioned at the beginning of this section. As stated before, murder is intrinsically contrary to Camus' idea of *révolte*. A rebel that kills is one that brings an equal to servitude again, a master making someone else a slave. The justice that the rebel sought with so much passion is not looked for because of an eternal purified ideal but because injustice "perpetuates the silent

⁴⁴ Original text: Le crime du roi est en même temps péché contre l'ordre suprême. Un crime se commet, puis se pardonne, se punit ou s'oublie. Mais le crime de royauté est permanent, il est lié à la personne du roi, à son existence.

⁴⁵ Original text: Qui critique est un traître, qui ne soutient pas ostensiblement la république est un suspect.

⁴⁶ Original text: Mais tuer des hommes ne mène à rien qu'à en tuer plus encore. Pour faire triompher un principe, c'est un principe qu'il faut abattre.

hostility which separates the oppressor from the oppressed”⁴⁷ (Camus, 1951, p.294). The solidarity the rebel feels towards its peers, towards humankind, is violated once murder is a choice; it can only be maintained through a dialogue between equals. Once a man rebels, the claim is not one supported by death but claiming life.

This rejection of murder is a part of a bigger refusal in rebellion, one of absolute freedom. The rebel, once the idea of rebellion enters their mind, denies an absolute freedom that enables someone to murder, to exert the limitless liberty of putting one life over the other. As Camus states: “Far from demanding general independence, the rebel wants it to be recognized that freedom has its limits everywhere that a human being is found, the limit being precisely that human being’s power to rebel.”⁴⁸ (1951, p.295). Once again, we are brought back to the beginning of rebellion and the absurd: just as a person may find the absurd and thus choose to rebel preferring life over suicide, the rebel that revolts thus considers other people’s life just as important as his, to the same degree that their capacity to reach the absurd and rebel to their position in the universe is just as valid as one’s own. Explained by Camus:

The rebel undoubtedly demands a certain degree of freedom for himself; but in no case, if he is consistent, does he demand the right to destroy the existence and the freedom of others. He humiliates no one. The freedom he claims, he claims for all; the freedom he refuses, he forbids everyone to enjoy⁴⁹ (p. 295)

Hence, Camus draws his point on the logic of rebellion comparing it to nihilism. While the rebel says no and in the process claims for limits, life, and clarity, nihilistic passion denies such a limit. The absolute freedom that nihilists come to accept is evident if one accepts that death, as the ultimate fate, condemns life to insignificance. Moreover, if life is considered insignificant any

⁴⁷ Original text: Si l'injustice est mauvaise pour le révolté, ce n'est pas en ce qu'elle contredit une idée éternelle de la justice, que nous ne savons où situer, mais en ce qu'elle perpétue la muette hostilité qui sépare l'opresseur de l'opprimé.

⁴⁸ Original text: Loin de revendiquer une indépendance générale, le révolté veut qu'il soit reconnu que la liberté a ses limites partout où se trouve un être humain, la limite étant précisément le pouvoir de révolte de cet être

⁴⁹ Original text: Le révolté exige sans doute une certaine liberté pour lui-même ; mais en aucun cas, s'il est conséquent, le droit de détruire l'être et la liberté de l'autre. Il n'humilie personne. La liberté qu'il réclame, il la revendique pour tous ; celle qu'il refuse, il l'interdit à tous.

effort in the name of revolution, in the name of making history and changing it, is accepted, no matter how evil it may be. As Camus explains: "If it is certain that the kingdom will come, what does time matter? Suffering is never provisional for the man who does not believe in the future."⁵⁰ (1951, p.218). For nihilists with "rebellion" (the historical rebellion Camus criticizes) in mind the terror of revolutions such as the French are no longer seen as *evil* and are deemed *necessary*. If the result is the desired kingdom of Men, then the means may justify that end. For Camus, this is the opposite of rebellion, since in principle the rebel denies death and affirms life.

Nevertheless, for someone to rebel there must be something to rebel against. The rebel proclaims no to their condition as slave, their metaphysical condition as human, and to the evil therein. If in rebellion they could take all of it away, they would be God, there would be no reason to rebel, therefore, evil is intrinsic to rebellion (1951). A rebel cannot claim to never kill or lie, engage in injustice or murder, because they would then reject their rebellion. Inversely, the rebel cannot engage in murder because doing so would legitimize the cause of their protest. In the end, as Camus concludes:

The rebel can never find peace. He knows what is good and, despite himself, does evil. The value which supports him is never given to him once and for all, he must fight to uphold it, unceasingly. Again the existence he achieves collapses if rebellion does not support him⁵¹ (1951, p.296)

Rebellion is, in the end, a condition branded by moderation, cut off from absolutes. A rebel does not engulf in history and tries to change it, but instead focuses on the present, on their peers and their life. Even though rebellion confronts evil and injustice, the measure of the change the rebel can create is only minimal. The injustice in the world remains and has always remained during the history of humanity. The historic attempts of rebelling against evil, through God and religion or through history and revolution, all in the promise of a better world while suffering runs

⁵⁰ Original text: S'il est sûr que le royaume arrivera, qu'important les années ? La souffrance n'est jamais provisoire pour celui qui ne croit pas à l'avenir.

⁵¹ Original text: Le révolté ne peut donc trouver le repos. Il sait le bien et fait malgré lui le mal. La valeur qui le tient debout ne lui est jamais donnée une fois pour toutes, il doit la maintenir sans cesse. L'être qu'il obtient s'effondre si la révolte à nouveau ne le soutient.

rampant. We come back to solidarity, solidarity to the same others who in their condition are equal to the rebel; no act of injustice committed to them in the name of the future is justified, murder is an oxymoron for rebellion; “Real generosity towards the future lies in giving all to the present”⁵² (Camus, 1951, p.316). The rebel rejects promises of an empty land, of an abstract man whose presence is in a non-existent future. To conclude with Camus words:

He who dedicates himself to this history dedicates himself to nothing and, in his turn, is nothing. But he who dedicates himself to the duration of his life, to the house he builds, to the dignity of mankind, dedicates himself to the earth and reaps from it the harvest that sows its seed and sustains the world again and again. Finally, it is those who know how to rebel, at the appropriate moment, against history who really advance its interests⁵³ (p.314)

3.3. Intertextuality

The origin of the term intertextuality, as proposed by Rodríguez (2008), can be traced to Julia Kristeva’s study in semiotics, defined by the Merriam-Webster dictionary (n.d) as the general philosophical theory of signs and symbols that deals especially with their function. As she studied Mijaíl Bajtín’s intersubjectivity, Kristeva identified the dialogue established between two texts, two pieces of art, in the creation process of each of them and established the term of intertextuality. This term would be considered by French literary theorist Gérard Genette, who would create different categories of “transtextuality”, that is, the relationship drawn between one text and another (Rodríguez, 2008). These categories of referencing would be punctual, summarized by Rodríguez: intertextuality encircles quoting, allusion and plagiarism; paratextuality encircles literal reference to a different text such as epigraphs and footnotes; metatextuality encircles comments in one text about other texts; architextuality would encircle what makes a text a part of its genre and that which is apart from it like a cover and back cover; hypertextuality encircles the general study of the relationship between texts in any way. Evidently, considering the definition of

⁵² Original text: La vraie générosité envers l'avenir consiste à tout donner au présent.

⁵³ Original text: Qui se donne à cette histoire ne se donne à rien et à son tour n'est rien. Mais qui se donne au temps de sa vie, à la maison qu'il défend, à la dignité des vivants, celui-là se donne à la terre et en reçoit la moisson qui ensemence et nourrit à nouveau. Pour finir, ceux-là font avancer l'histoire qui savent, au moment voulu, se révolter contre elle aussi.

hypertextuality, any transtextual relationship would be encircled by hypertextuality, as the relation between two or more texts; thus Genette defines two categories, hypotext as the first text and hypertext as the one created after the former (Rodríguez, 2008).

Rodríguez makes it important to note that, according to Genette, a reader's ability to comprehend the hypertext that lies in the previous knowledge of the hypotext. The profoundness of a text can only be considered if one is aware of the underlying meaning in it, the previous texts and art that inspired the author to create it in the first place. The active participation of the reader in their attempt to understand each of the hypertext layers in a piece of art, be it literature or any other kind is essential to a complete understanding of it. A hypertext would be limited to one meaning, the reader would be unable to expand unto the hypotext. We can thus conclude that the study of a text must consider the relationship it has with other texts; any art is a conversation between different forms of art; a novel, much like any other cultural product is greatly influenced by the vast network it is found in, be it theme, genre, form, etc. (Rodríguez, 2008).

Following the previous authors on the origin of the concept of intertextuality, we can move to expanding on intertextuality as a part of study in the humanities. To study and interpret texts we consider their many influences, taking as an axiom that every writer was first and foremost a reader. As Zengin (2016) argues:

In its simplest sense, intertextuality is a way of interpreting texts which focuses on the idea of texts' borrowing words and concepts from each other. Every writer, both before writing his text and during the writing process, is a reader of the texts written before his text. (p.301)

Intertextuality as used in literary criticism is the acceptance that "all texts are intertexts because they refer to, recycle and draw from the preexisting texts" (Zengin, 2016, p.300). The manner in which a text alludes to another one can vary greatly and can be direct or indirect and explicit or implicit. The consideration of the relationship between texts can be both up to the readers and the authors themselves. In consequence, a writer's creation of meaning is forever guided by all the work before them, but as Zengin points out, this intertextuality does not limit to the writer's pre-existing knowledge of past works as it also includes the readers' own

preconceptions and ideas brought before reading a text. The reading process, as an active and critical practice, is also an intertextual activity (*Ídem*). My reading process of *The Sirens of Titan* and interpretation is directly related to this axiom of intertextuality, as Zengin states; and per Genette, it cannot be a complete reading until it is scrutinized by this same study.

Upon inspection, Vonnegut's *The Sirens of Titan* and Albert Camus' ideas predominantly found in *The Myth of Sisyphus* and *The Rebel* are deeply intertextual due to the nature of what can be called timeless philosophical question of the meaning of life, examined by humanity throughout millennia and the consequences of this reflection; in the case of the texts examined, once we face the indifferent universe and we try to find an interpretation to its silence (Camus, 1942). This timeless question is also, arguably, the greatest theme and topic Vonnegut in the entirety of his work attempted to answer (Simpson, 2020); in countless quotes -such as the epigraph opening this text- we can find him posing the question, and to the characters on the story, different answers may emerge. Consequently, this is not the only connection, since Vonnegut was inevitably familiar with existentialists text and as many of his contemporaries, he was greatly moved by the greater events of his time, mainly WWII. Vonnegut would quote Camus' greatly (in)famous line: "There is but one truly philosophical problem, and that is suicide" in his novel *A Man Without a Country*. Like Camus with *The Stranger*, Vonnegut expressed his existentialist views through literature and for both of them the question of suicide would be a cornerstone in their writing.

With this in mind, the exploration of the two authors and novels must consider how Camus' ideas are reflected in *The Sirens of Titan* and how a reader may consider said position, ideology and relationship in the process of reading it critically, which brings us to the intertextuality of one text upon the other; following Genette, Vonnegut's book would be the hypertext, and Camus' would be the hypotext.

Then, on a more personal note regarding this same process of intertextuality and reading interpretation, it was my cultural baggage and interest in philosophy that brought me to reading

Camus in the first place and my interest in existential philosophy caused by my reading of him would lead me to Vonnegut's works. As Zengin (2016) argues, an intertextual analysis made by the reader is a search of the "intertextual echoes in a text in order to get the text's meaning(s)." (p.302) Therefore, the active process of interpretation and intertextual analysis to be done in this text is fueled by my experience reading *The Sirens of Titan* after Camus' philosophy and hence identifying such echoes.

Consequently, the analysis of *The Sirens of Titan* per Camus' philosophy in this text is a subjective critical analysis and exploration of texts that share extraliterary aspects and also an intertextual analysis in Camus' philosophy as influence and inspiration to Vonnegut's novel.

4. Author's biography

Kurt Vonnegut Jr. was born on November 11 1922 in Indianapolis, Indiana, U.S.A. Son of German immigrants and a wealthy family, in his first childhood years he was raised by the housekeeper, who he accredits as a great influence in his life. The Great Depression destroyed all wealth the family had and Vonnegut was raised differently from his older siblings who had the privilege of growing up before the Depression. He studied biochemistry at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York. Dropping out of college, he enrolled in the military during WWII and in the time of his training his mother killed herself; her suicide would greatly influence him, his life, his writing and his depression (Simpson, 2020). When he was deployed, he was captured and as a prisoner of war he worked in Dresden, where he would eventually witness its bombing. After he came back and got married, he worked in General Electric and started writing, getting his first story published. After a second story he left the company and tried to write full time.

Vonnegut's writing would be quite autobiographical. His first novel *Player Piano* (1952) drew from his experiences in General Electric and would show some marks of his later work: science fiction to some degree, humanist critique, anti-war and/or counter-culture themes and the pondering of the oldest questions such as the meaning of life. His next novels would greatly vary in themes, with *The Sirens of Titan* (1959), *Mother Night* (1962), *Cat's Cradle* (1963) and *God Bless you, Mr. Rosewater* (1965) varying in mild success economically but critically esteemed. He drew from his experience in war and his difficult life as a father of 7 children, out of 4 were adopted nephews.

His sixth novel, *Slaughterhouse-five* (1969) catapulted Vonnegut to fame and economic success, starting his stardom as an anti-war icon. Unfortunately, it would be followed by a divorce after her wife embraced christianity and a mental breakdown of his first son would throw him into depression. His follow-up novel, *Breakfast of Champions* (1973) would receive negative reviews

and so would the following novel, *Slapstick* (1976). Both novels would feature to some regard his depression and separation from his wife.

The negative reviews he received in the 70s would decay after his second marriage in the 80s, he would write a variety of different novels. His themes of social critique would continue with novels such as *Galapagos* (1985) and *Bluebeard* (1987). His personal turmoil however, was a constant of his life and work, including an attempted suicide in 1984 (Britannica, 2023). He would also publish different non-fiction work and autobiographical texts as well as attend conferences in universities and become a spokesperson supporting nuclear arms control and advocating for the environment (Vonnegut Library, 2023).

Vonnegut's last book, *A Man without a Country* (2005), is a collection of essays expressing his views on politics, the world and his legacy. His critique of American society, greed and capitalism and human negligence was always clear, and after his death in 2007, his family would expand on his work further.

Considering his upbringing, Vonnegut's thoughts on literature varied to what he acknowledged critics expected him as a writer to be a literature connoisseur. Recognizing his education as a chemist, he thought it is unnecessary for writers to read in order to write, as "The most valuable thing that each author has in him or her is already coded inside" (Rodney, 1988, p.47). This educational background, in his opinion, was a target of criticism; critics would attack his bluntness and lack of systematic knowledge of literature. He would often mention that we can find writers in any field such as chemistry like himself and that "it can be tremendously refreshing if a creator of literature has something on his mind other than the history of literature so far." (Rodney, 1988, p.120) As so, he spoke of the writing process as a "trade" or a "mechanism", focusing on the practicality he would tell students to "make their characters want something right away - even if it's only a glass of water." (Rodney, 1988 p.122) His discourse would focus on the idea of entertaining the reader, of giving them satisfaction rather than an accurate representation

of real life. This pragmatism is evident in his writing style where sentences are short, paragraphs are uncomplicated and the messages are blunt and sincere.

5. Summary of the novel

The novel follows Malachi Constant, the richest man in America. Malachi is not a smart or virtuous man, attributing his inherited fortune to divine luck. The story starts as he is invited to meet the eccentric figure of Winston Niles Rumfoord. Rumfoord is a man from a wealthy family, smart, cultured and curious, with a fortune big enough to finance a trip from Earth to Mars only accompanied by his dog Kazak. In the trip, they are entangled in a “chrono-synclastic infundibulum” and become wave phenomena, their existence now spread across the Solar System in both time and space. In the meeting, Malachi meets Rumfoord in one of his every-59-days-occurring materialization on Earth, and his wife Beatrice. Beatrice is a woman displeased by other human beings, feeling herself too clean to engage with them. Rumfoord, as he is both present in past and future at the same time, tells Malachi of his future: he will meet him 2 more times, on Earth and on one of Saturn's moons, Titan, and he will only be on Titan after he travels to Mars, then Mercury and then Earth. Malachi will impregnate Beatrice and will fall in love, dying in Titan.

Both Beatrice and Malachi do what they can in their power to avoid this fate. Beatrice buys stock of the company in possession of the spaceship Malachi's company sold to distance himself from his space trip only for the stock market to crash and in the process lose everything, and Malachi throws a party so big that leaves him bankrupt. They are both eventually kidnapped and recruited by Martians to participate in the Martian War effort. On the spaceship, a drunk Malachi rapes Beatrice.

On Mars, everyone was originally from Earth. Almost all Martians are brainwashed and brain controlled by people in higher command, most have been kidnapped, and everything about the Martian war effort and the invasion the Martians plan to do to planet Earth has been organized and started by Rumfoord. Malachi, now called Unk by his fellow soldiers, who loses his memory every time he attempts to figure out why he is there, now amnesic after the seventh occasion,

kills a man by orders of the brain-controlling antenna in his skull, a man who in a last breath tells him to search for something in a specific place. Unk finds a list someone left of things they find out to be true by ignoring the pain the antenna gave them as they searched and asked questions, including the following: how his bunk mate, Boaz, is the one controlling the squad through a brain-controlling remote, making him the real superior officer; his best and only friend is called Stoney Stevenson (who unbeknownst to Unk was the man he killed); and finally, he has a mate and a son in Mars, who he should search for. The letter of the truth-seeking hero is signed by Unk.

On the day the Martian War invasion to Earth begins, Unk tries to escape to find the mother of his child, Bee, and his son, Chrono, who does not know him nor needs him. Bee is a teacher of the breathing school and Chrono a student and the best German baseball player, who attributes his skill to a piece of metal, calling it his good-luck piece. Unk fails to convince Bee and Chrono to come to him, and meets Rumfoord again, not remembering their previous encounter. Rumfoord sends both Boaz and Unk towards the war, although their flying saucer is programmed not to go there, but to Mercury. Boaz does not plan to fight in the war, but to go to party with Unk, who he knows used to be a party-goer and enjoyer of life, Boaz does not really “understand life” and only wants the pleasure he can find on Earth.

The Martians (i.e Rumfoord), had warned the governments of Earth that they would invade them before leaving Mars, noting the date in which the flying saucers would arrive. Earth was well prepared for the invasion, winning every time with the best cutting-edge war armament, missiles and nuclear weapons against the Martians’ weak infantry armaments. The invasion consisted of 4 waves: first of Martian Commandos, second the Army’s reserves, third the armed civilians and finally the women and small children. The suicide of Mars was all orchestrated by Winston Niles Rumfoord with the help of the Tralfamadorian alien Salo, who is stranded on Titan and gave Rumfoord all the means and technology to make Martian society work.

Meanwhile, Boaz and Unk are trapped in Mercury, surviving using the ship’s reserves Rumfoord put there to last a lifetime. The planet is populated by harmoniums, alien creatures that

resemble a bioluminescent kite that feed on sound, the sound Mercury's walls make. Stranded, Boaz and Unk part in different ways. Boaz is comfortable there, the harmoniums attracted to his heartbeat feed on his sound, and Boaz feeds them with music. Unk is driven somewhat crazy trying to find a way to escape; Rumfoord leaves clues to the puzzle of how to do so, creating messages arranging harmoniums in order to write words. After three years, he gives Unk the answer. Unk lets Boaz know, but he chooses to stay, as he has found happiness and peace with the harmoniums, not hurting anyone and only causing them "happiness".

Unk arrives to Earth, much changed after the Martian suicide. Rumfoord has made his materializations public and created the Church of the Utterly Indifferent. Explaining to a horrified world that massacred the Martians that they were saints, hoping that their sacrifice would bring humankind to create a kind brotherhood of men. Rumfoord declares that unlike any religion he will announce and deliver miracles, the miracle of foreseeing, and builds his new religion on the foundation that the God who created everything does not care about any individual and any individual is insignificant both in relation and in will towards God. Using Malachi's hedonistic life and sign of good luck, he instructs humanity that there is no such thing as luck, the only thing guiding humanity is itself, and no longer can anyone claim it is God's will that drives them.

One of the miracles prophesied by Rumfoord is the arrival of the Space Wanderer, actually Unk, on his way from Mercury to Earth. He is received by a crowd of believers in ecstasy who bring him to Rumfoord's materialization. In a ceremony, Rumfoord reveals Unk's identity of Malachi Constant to the crowd, and reunites him with Bee and Chrono, who survived the invasion in accordance to Rumfoord's plan, sending them finally to Titan, symbolically disposing of two of humanity's sins: Malachi's calling of his accidental fortune as luck, like a God-given gift, and use of that fortune to hedonistic purposes, and Beatrice's separation of her peers, believing herself too good to be with others, as a more important God-created-being.

In Titan, the mismatched family meets Salo, the alien robot stranded in Titan, whose purpose is to carry a message from his far away home Tralfamadore to another corner of the

Universe. Salo goes to the palace where both Rumfoord and Kazak are to tell him Malachi, Beatrice and Chrono have arrived. However, Rumfoord and Kazak are soon to be thrown away from the Solar System by a solar flare, both experiencing a sort of sickness. It is then revealed that Salo has been waiting for a replacement part of its ship for millions of years. Rumfoord also reveals that Salo's peers from Tralfamadore have sent messages to Salo through the manipulation of humankind, making them create monuments to be seen from Titan by Salo, such as Stonehenge or the Great Wall of China. Furious, Rumfoord lets Salo know he knew all along and scorns it in light of Tralfamadore's manipulation of humanity's actions throughout its history for the sole purpose of Chrono bringing him his good-luck piece, the missing part of Salo's broken ship. Salo, even though it is a robot, is heartbroken by Rumfoord's words berating it and calling it a machine. Rumfoord makes a final plea to at least know what the message is supposed to say but Salo refuses, programmed to not open the message until it reaches its destination.

Salo sends the particular family to Rumfoord, informing them of the situation. As Rumfoord says his good-byes, Salo comes back just as he disappears, willing to give him the message despite its strict programming to not do so. Heartbroken once more, Salo declares it is no longer a machine, it fought against its very being to give the message to its only friend and kills itself.

In the epilogue, Malachi and Beatrice grow old in Titan and eventually do love each other. Chrono joins Titan's native birds. Beatrice writes a manifest about the meaning of life in the universe and Malachi, as a hobby, reconstructs Salo. Both Malachi and Beatrice conclude that their life, however bleak, was their best life, and are grateful. The day Beatrice dies, Salo gets up, finally deciding to deliver the message he is supposed to. On his trip, he leaves Malachi on Earth again, where he dies waiting for a bus in the winter. Hypnotized by Salo, in his final moments Malachi hallucinates Stony Stevenson greeting him into the afterlife.

6. Analysis

The following analysis will be done considering the theoretical framework built with Albert Camus' philosophy and the intertextuality between him and Kurt Vonnegut's work. It will be divided into 4 sections considering the 4 main characters: Malachi Constant, Boaz, Beatrice Rumfoord and Winston Niles Rumfoord. For the first three, each section will examine their journey, how they become aware of the absurd and face it taking into account the ideas in *The Myth of Sisyphus*. For the analysis of the last character, it will be divided into 2 sections, the first one following suit as the previous 3, the second one examining the character's actions bearing in mind the ideas in *The Rebel*.

6.1.1. Malachi Constant, Unk, Space Wanderer

"Oh, my —" said Constant, "life is funny when you stop to think of it." (Vonnegut, 1959, p. 219)

As the story's protagonist, Malachi Constant's journey through the solar system carries him through the absurd on several occasions and in each of them reacting in different ways. We first see Malachi facing the absurd in the novel's first chapter as he is asked to come to one of Rumfoord's materializations. We learn through the narrator that Malachi has had everything material at hand thanks to his wealth; nevertheless, he spends his days indulging in hedonism and in his meaningless parties he considers the meaning of his name, Faithful Messenger, to be of great importance; as stated: "In the depressions that always followed his taking of alcohol, narcotics, and women, Constant pined for just one thing — a single message that was sufficiently dignified and important to merit his carrying it humbly between two points" (p.18)

Constant's hope for a greater mission is arguably an attempt to rationalize his existence, just as Camus puts it: " (...) the wild longing for clarity whose call echoes in the human heart." (p.39). His hope of something greater than himself, as the narrator of the novel describes: "What Constant had in mind, presumably, was a first-class message from God to someone equally

distinguished.” (p.18). However, in his conversation with Rumfoord this thought is confronted as he is told his future and fate to die on Titan; he asks “My name — it means faithful messenger,” “What’s the message?” (p.30), only to be told that there is no message, just a journey. He quickly asks the reason for that journey, again trying to rationalize his existence, but again finding no answer from Rumfoord; it is the complete opposite, as Rumfoord punctually states:

Things fly this way and that, my boy,” he said, “with or without messages. It’s chaos, and no mistake, for the Universe is just being born. It’s the great becoming that makes the light and the heat and the motion, and bangs you from hither to you. (p. 34)

Evidently, such an existentialist sentence calls for attention. Rumfoord —more importantly Vonnegut through him— remarks on the chaos of the universe, what Camus would call the irrationality of the universe. In an attempt to reassure Constant he states how there is no greater objective or meaning, nevertheless, he does draw a silver lining when he mentions the “great becoming” and what this could be is left for interpretation. If we consider “becoming” as change, Rumfoord may be talking of the changes Constant will endure on his journey and what he will eventually become. However, the use of the word “great” implies something more special than the simple human experience.

After Constant accepts he will die, he nevertheless considers his fate as one out of luck, as he thinks after his driver mentions how cool he was amidst a mob ready to attack him looking for answers: “Sumpin’ sure must be lookin’ out for you!” Then it hit Constant: This was exactly the case.” (p.39) Even though he has no message to deliver, Constant still considers his situation as one drawn to him by forces greater than himself, as he ponders: “He had been calm in the midst of the mob because he knew he wasn’t going to die on Earth. Something was looking out for him, all right. And whatever it was, it was saving his skin for.” (p. 39) There is apparently always something humans cannot leave behind: the hope that there is still something greater than us.

Regardless, the encounter with Rumfoord sets Constant into a spiral as after the conversation he goes on a 57-day party, trying to escape his fate somehow. In the finale of his

drug-induced-half-unconsciousness, we see him lament on his childhood as his new momentary wife tells him: "You said you had a very unhappy childhood, and made everybody listen to how unhappy it was. How your father never even threw a ball to you once — any kind of ball". (p. 50) We can argue this moment is another search for meaning, an attempt of human rationale to explain the irrationality of what appears to be an empty destiny for Constant, perhaps if he was loved, it would make more sense.

More importantly, it is clear evidence of what Camus (1942) puts as man putting himself in relation to time, Constant recognizes his inevitable fate to the future, to death and thus enters this alarming self-destruction. This is a great part of facing the absurd, although Constant is not quite facing it, instead trying to escape it. Camus also remarks how as we live death is never our experience, only seen through the death of others. This is not entirely the case with Constant, due to his announced predestination he knows he will live to at least see Titan giving him certainty of place of death and a clarity of when no one has. Although the absurd, Camus argues, is already found just on the ambivalence of death, Constant's certainty offers an inescapable existential question.

Certainly, after he loses all his money, the story clearly depicts the existential crisis Constant is going through, as he is so close to finding the absurd other characters directly ask the question he himself is thinking. A few examples are the narrator's words around the crowd desperate to see Rumfoord: "The riot, then, was an exercise in science and theology — a seeking after clues by the living as to what life was all about."; "He (Constant) was wondering if there could possibly be eyes up there, eyes that could see everything he did" (p.40). Later, Constant goes to Fern, the vice president of his company, we again see the main question of the book expressed to some characters: "If the letter seems to cast the vaguest light on what life might be about, I would appreciate your telephoning me at home." (p.67). The letter left by his father asks again, what's the meaning of life and, as Constant senior puts it: "is there anything special going on or is it all just as crazy as it looked to me?" (p.71) It is at this point when Constant faces the

irrationality of the universe, he finds the confrontation of his logical mind trying to find a cause or reason for his mishaps and lack of such by the silence of the world. However, he is immediately struck by a distraction, in his final search for a purpose, someone drops one on his lap as a trip to Mars, a job as a lieutenant and an escape of his newfound misery on Earth, denying his confrontation with the absurd. Nevertheless, the choice of going to Mars simply escaping his life as a whole is a sort of suicide. Camus (1942) states that suicide is the confession that “that life is too much for you or that you do not understand it”⁵⁴ (p.20) which is precisely what Constant does, deeming it all too complicated, he leaves. His fall in despair is an important part of what Camus considers as “agreeing to the absurd” (p.52) causing it to lose its meaning, rather than accepting a distraction of his misery, a conscious rejection ought to take place.

6.1.2. Unk

After Constant is brainwashed and loses all his memories, now called Unk by his squadmates on the militia of Mars, his journey of facing the absurd is reseted, his newly found struggle to discover the truth in his confusing situation brings him once again to important questions. On page 98, written as a joke of Unk’s cavilations as a truthseeker, we find an important aspect of humanity’s attempt to apply our rationale into the universe. Unk thinks: “Theology: (15.) Somebody made everything for some reason”. Directly related are Camus’ affirmations that this is precisely what drives us to the absurd, our desire to make sense to the nonsensical (1942). Even as a human that does not even know who he is or why he is standing where he is doing so, Unk rationalizes the universe, such an important question from someone who in previous writings stated: “(2.) I am a thing called alive” (p.96) is precisely what Camus ponders on, no matter the circumstances, there is a search for a reason.

⁵⁴ Original text: “C’est avouer qu’on est dépassé par la vie ou qu’on ne la comprend pas.”

As Unk considers his situation as nonsensical, realizing not even the commanders know why Mars is going to attack Earth, he once more searches for purpose in his life, this time finding it on a mission to find the mother of his son and his son. Inevitably, he fails, and on his second meeting with Rumfoord, defeated, the narrator gives some insight: "As to life and death, poor Unk was indifferent. "I — I tried to bring my family together," he said. "That's all." (p.122) What follows is a constant state of frustration: on his trip towards Mercury, Unk remarks how he does not care about the war, accepting his trip towards Earth as inevitable. We see no hint of him pondering on his situation, his answer is rage as he lashes out against Boaz, his journey companion, he lashes out towards the harmoniums in Mercury and spends his days daydreaming about encountering his unbeknownst to him dead best friend Stony, Bee and Chrono. As he arrives at Mercury, he promptly states: "I've never been alive that I can remember," said Unk; "I thought I was finally going to get some living done." (p.149). Unk is in despair, something that does not align with absurd thought; he has given up but is not, as Camus puts it, in a "constant state of rejection" (1942, p.52). One needs to reject the absurd, carry on with the struggle of existence and consider life is worth living, simply put, to rebel against the absurd, something that Unk in Mercury is clearly lacking. He is actually in the opposite state of mind, that of "renunciation" and "immature unrest" which Camus contrasts respectively with "continual rejection" and "a conscious dissatisfaction"⁵⁵, terms that refer to a person's agency, Unk is not conscious of his dissatisfaction, to emphasize, he is in despair. Unk spends the next three years in the same state of mind, angry at his situation he walks and mumbles throughout the caves of mercury. After he escapes and arrives at Earth, things change.

⁵⁵ Original full quote: Et poussant jusqu'à son terme cette logique absurde, je dois reconnaître que cette lutte suppose l'absence totale d'espoir (qui n'a rien à voir avec le désespoir), le refus continu (qu'on ne doit pas confondre avec le renoncement) et l'insatisfaction consciente (qu'on ne saurait assimiler à l'inquiétude juvénile).

6.1.3. Space Wanderer

Unk arrives at Earth and the story's narrator reminds us of Unk's state of mind: He was filled with the heedless, tender violence of a man who has had his lifetime cruelly wasted. Unk was forty-three years old. He had every reason to wither and die. All that kept him going was a wish that was more mechanical than emotional. He wished to be reunited with Bee, his mate, with Chrono, his son, and with Stony Stevenson, his best and only friend. (p.165)

This "mechanical" wish is intriguing when it comes to Unk's struggle to exist. There is no conscious choice anymore as Unk's will on his life is almost non-existent, he is in despair still. Prophetised to come to Earth by Rumfoord, naming Unk the Space Wanderer, he is greeted by one of the priests of Rumfoord's religion and a crowd of believers, warned to not claim his life has been graced by God, when asked what happened to him he answers: "I was a victim of a series of accidents, as we are all" (p.174). Such a phrase encapsulates the first part of the absurd, to understand that life is meaningless, what Unk is now missing is the agency to reject it.

In Rumfoord's speech it is revealed to Unk that he is the person the crowd that had enthusiastically brought him to the stage hated the most, the Malachi Constant that used his money for nothing and dismissed it as good luck. The Space Wanderer learns too he killed the best friend he has been longing for and every past event in his recent life was ordained by Rumfoord, who now sends him and his "family" to Titan, to be forgotten as spiritual symbols. On his trip to Titan and at his arrival we see the consequences of this information:

As far as I'm concerned," said Constant, "the Universe is a junk yard, with everything in it overpriced. I am through poking around in the junk heaps, looking for bargains. Every so-called bargain," said Constant, "has been connected by fine wires to a dynamite bouquet." He spat again. "I resign," said Constant. (p.218)

During his journey he searched for meaning, chasing union in an accidental family and love in a careless universe but found nothing. Constant's attitude towards life changes dramatically, now aware he was manipulated (even to create the family that accompanies him) he rejects the universe he lives in, he has found and confronted the absurd. Furthermore, now conscious of his fate as a mortal to die in a distant moon, he spits on the ground refusing to be

used one more time. Constant has confronted the absurd and rather than killing himself, he has chosen to live despite it. As an absurd man, he has found absurd freedom; contrasted to how he found himself in renunciation while in Mercury, now Constant consciously revolts. Camus (1942) emphasizes that this must be of one's own free will and a constant effort, it must be the absurd man's truth: "The absurd is his extreme tension, which he maintains constantly by solitary effort, for he knows that in that consciousness and in that day-to-day revolt he gives proof of his only truth, which is defiance"⁵⁶ (p.80)

Such a defiance is stronger after it is revealed to Constant that there was a purpose for everything after Tralfamadore's manipulation of humanity. After this revelation, Malachi Constant grows old in Titan with Bee, making do with what he has at hand. At the end, he summarizes the philosophy he has found: "It took us that long to realize that a purpose of human life, no matter who is controlling it, is to love whoever is around to be loved" (p.235). Perhaps the word "purpose" may undermine Constant's journey facing the absurd if we dismissed the fact that he refers to humanity's purpose to fix Salo's spaceship. As an absurd man, Constant is fully conscious of his condition in the universe, his mortality recognized. Nevertheless, the last pages of the novel throw us into the opposite direction, where Salo in an act of mercy hypnotizes Constant into hallucinating an after-life as he dies. Perhaps an act of mercy on Vonnegut's part after carefully torturing a character throughout a novel, even so, it does not hinder Malachi Constant's characterization.

The end of the story's protagonist brings us to the beginning of the novel. As the first chapter starts the narrator speaks of Malachi's story as a tale from the past, mentioning how humanity was previously unable to find meaning in life; the "Nightmare Times" where "Mankind flung its advance agents ever outward, ever outward. Eventually it flung them out into space, into the colorless, tasteless, weightless sea of outwardness without end" (p.11). The narrator's present

⁵⁶ Original text: L'absurde est sa tension la plus extrême, celle qu'il maintient constamment d'un effort solitaire, car il sait que dans cette conscience et dans cette révolte au jour le jour, il témoigne de sa seule vérité qui est le défi.

day is where “Everyone now knows how to find the meaning of life within himself” (p.11) is offered as a contrast for the reader to use in the story. As described by the narrator, humans would only find in space “(...) what had already been found in abundance on Earth — a nightmare of meaninglessness without end” (p.11). In contrast, Constant acquires the meaning within himself at the end of the novel, in comparison to what humans found before.

The ending of Malachi Constant's journey may also briefly remind us of the protagonist in Camus' novel *The Stranger* (1942). Right on the last two pages of the novel, as Meursault talks with a priest in his cell waiting for his death penalty to take place, he snaps and grabs him by the collar screaming his certainty of his life choices despite them driving him towards his death penalty; Meursault reflects:

But I was sure about me, about everything, surer than he could ever be, sure of my life and sure of the death I had waiting for me. Yes, that was all I had. But at least I had as much of a hold on it as it had on me.⁵⁷ (p.96)

Meursault accepts his fate, the end of a journey not at all different from all other journeys and finds solace in himself: “I opened myself to the gentle indifference of the world. Finding it so much like myself—so like a brother, really—! felt that I had been happy and that I was happy again”⁵⁸. (p.97) Just like Camus' Meursault, Vonnegut's Malachi Constant realizes this too in his own way. Although the former hopes his final hour is received by a crowd hating him and the latter is happy his insignificant life ended with love, they both faced the absurdity of their existence and spat on it in defiance; both embraced and thought happily about their lives however the circumstances. Consequently, we can see the intertextuality these two authors have and how enriching the reading of Vonnegut's work can be if the reader has interacted with Camus' work beforehand. Here we can consider the relationship between the two books, *The Stranger* and *The Myth of*

⁵⁷ Original text: Mais j'étais sûr de moi, sûr de tout, plus sûr que lui, sur de ma vie et de cette mort qui allait venir. Oui, je n'avais que cela. Mais du moins, je tenais cette vérité autant qu'elle me tenait.

⁵⁸ Original text: je m'ouvrais pour la première fois à la tendre indifférence du monde. De l'éprouver si pareil à moi, si fraternel enfin, j'ai senti que j'avais été heureux, et que je l'étais encore.

Sisyphus as the hypotext of *The Sirens of Titan*. As intertextuality argues when it comes to literary analysis, explained by Rodríguez (2008), if one aims for a complete understanding of a text one must consider the hypotext as an essential part of the hypertext, in this case *The Sirens of Titan*. The work between the two authors discussed is a prime example of this.

In conclusion, Malachi Constant starts the story as a hedonistic man who does not care about anything in particular, wasting his life away. Throughout the novel, he considers his mortality and his place in the universe as a man no more important than anything else. Once he finally accepts his unimportance and faces the absurd, rejecting it and literally spitting on his place in the universe, he lives a peaceful life in Titan, albeit with a little help. The conclusion to his story gives us an example of the defiance and living in hopelessness Camus speaks of.

6.2. Boaz

Constant's companion on his time in the militia of Mars and in Mercury is a strange figure when it comes to the absurd as his introspection and thoughts are not as present as in the case of Constant, making his journey and its conclusion more open. Boaz is one of the real commanders of Mars' military, he is not mind controlled through a brain antenna but controls his peers, and finds some joy in it too. The narrator describes Boaz as someone who had nothing while Constant had everything. Given this fact, Boaz hopes Unk shows him how to live once they arrive on Earth. He is uninterested in the war and expects to find happiness, defined by him as "(...) three magical words that seemed to describe the maximum happiness a person could achieve on Earth: Hollywood nightclubs." (p.93)

Boaz arranges a ship to only carry him and Unk but thanks to Rumfoord they are headed to Mercury, not Earth. On their trip, after Unk destroys Boaz's remote mind controller he decides that the company of a friend is important: "Not to be lonely, not to be scared — Boaz had decided that those were the important things in life. A real buddy could help more than anything." (p.139). On the other hand, Unk considered him as a threat. Boaz has a revelation on his way to Mercury

as he realizes he was pretending he understood what was happening on Mars and how he let himself be used. Evidently, this revelation applies not only to his experience on Mars but also to his life as a whole; as he yells in the middle of laughter:

“Holy smokes, buddy,” he said out loud, “what we doing way out here in space? What we doing in these here clothes? Who’s steering this fool thing? How come we climbed into this tin can? How come we got to shoot somebody when we get to where we’re going? How come he got to try and shoot us? How come?” (p.139)

The question Boaz asks to Unk and, more importantly, to himself is evidence of his attempt as a human to rationalize his situation. Camus (1942) speaks of the human process to rationalize the irrational as something one goes through in the process of finding the absurd. This is only but a moment, considering that once they arrive on Mercury Boaz still plans parties in the mountains he thinks are skyscrapers on Earth. However, once Boaz and Unk realize they are not on Earth and there’s no way out, Boaz panics and exclaims: “We’re dead, Unk — we’re dead!” (p.149)

While Unk walks through miles of caves for 3 years tearing apart his shoes and forgetting about his health, Boaz never waivers physically; he works out, maintains his clothes in good shape and builds a sort of home outside the spaceship. More importantly, Boaz grows fond of the harmoniums, the little creatures in Mercury that feed on sound and follow him due to his heartbeat. He develops a philosophy, stating:

“All I know is we’re being tested somehow, by somebody or something a whole lot smarter than us, and all I can do is be friendly and keep calm and try and have a nice time till it’s over. “That’s my philosophy, friends,” he said to the harmoniums stuck to him.” (p.154)

The test he talks about is the fact that harmoniums are being arranged, unbeknownst to him, by Rumfoord to give clues about the test they must pass to leave Mercury. Nevertheless, it speaks of each character’s thoughts on their situation; Boaz and Unk’s reaction to their dilemma is different: the former loves the harmoniums (their only company) and the latter hates them; Boaz thinks of Mercury as a home and Unk considers it a prison; Boaz takes care of himself and Unk disregards his health. What is more important is that to a degree Boaz, even though he considers the harmoniums his friends and loves them, shows some understanding of their unintelligence,

even of their insignificance. This is evident considering the threat of revealing to Unk that he killed his best friend, Stony Steveson, if Unk keeps telling “truths” about the harmoniums. “Unk was to stop telling Boaz truths about the harmoniums, because Boaz loved the harmoniums” (p.154). The use of the word “truth” is of great importance considering it is Boaz the one who uses the word, not the narrator nor Unk. Despite knowing, deep down, that the harmoniums are ignorant creatures incapable of thought, Boaz chooses to love them and think they love him too.

This attitude of Boaz gets to the highest point when Unk reveals to him how to escape Mercury and rather than go with him Boaz chooses to stay with the harmoniums, a decision he takes considering a message left by the harmoniums (actually Rumfoord) saying they love him. When Unk tells him it is not true, Boaz chooses to threaten with the truth again, if he keeps saying “truths” about the harmoniums.

“If you’d just let me think whatever I’m going to think about that message about how they love me. I mean —” he said, “you know —” he said, “it don’t necessarily have to make sense to you” (p. 160)

We can argue Boaz’s attitude is similar to what Camus calls philosophical suicide, at least at the beginning. Although Camus uses as an example the attitude of following a religion after one contemplates death, Boaz finding love in creatures incapable of love is similar in how both choices negate being conscious of the absurd and of reason. We come back to a previous quote by Camus (1942): “Is one going to die, escape by the leap, rebuild a mansion of ideas and forms to one’s own scale?” (p.77). Boaz builds a home for himself, one where there is love in a loveless planet and decides to be happy despite this.

Here, we may find a contradiction. Boaz’s choice of life is an absurd life —like all lives— in how the creatures he loves are incapable of love (at least what we humans consider love). Not only that, but he knows this and chooses to stay in Mercury and love them all the same; a Sisyphean end. However, what separates Boaz and the absurd man is the choice to be conscious. As stated above, Boaz is conscious of his absurd endeavor, but the great difference is that he

simply does not want to think about it. When Unk reminds him of the harmonium's truth, he chooses to ignore it; when he points out how the message left by "them" is also not real, he chooses to ignore him. As he summarizes:

I found me a place where I can do good without doing any harm, and I can see I'm doing good, and then I'm doing good for know I'm doing it, and they love me, Unk, as best they can. I found me a home. (...) Boaz — you made millions of lives worth living. Ain't nobody ever spread more joy. (p.162)

Consciousness is essential when it comes to the absurd, the great difference between doing "a service or a disservice to man"⁵⁹ (Camus, 1942, p.98). For Camus there is a distinction between facing the hardships of life with lucidity and doing so with voluntary ignorance. Whether Boaz is doing one or the other is up to the eyes of the reader. In the end, once Boaz states "they love me, Unk, as best they can" one can interpret that he is conscious of the futility of his feelings and accepts it, or rather is conscious but decides to ignore it as he may find it makes it all frivolous. Considering Camus, only the first option is the valid one. Whereas humans can find two different kinds of nights, of struggle, let us choose "that of despair, which remains lucid—polar night, vigil of the mind" instead of "that night that is born under closed eyelids and through the mere will of man"⁶⁰ (p.91). It is thus that the end of Boaz is uncertain when it comes to how he chose to live his life, consciously or willfully ignorant.

6.3. Beatrice Rumfoord, Bee

Bee's character contrasts with other characters who search for life: Malachi's hedonistic approach to life, Unk's quest for relationships or Boaz's desire for fun and finally love. Beatrice is the complete opposite. Ever since she was a child she refused to live, such as going up a roller coaster or simply getting her dress dirty. Beatrice does not show any interest in much at the

⁵⁹ Original text: Il en est qui servent ou desservent.

⁶⁰ Original text: Certes, mais non pas cette nuit qui naît sous les yeux fermés et par la seule volonté de l'homme - nuit sombre et close que l'esprit suscite pour s'y perdre. S'il doit rencontrer une nuit, que ce soit plutôt celle du désespoir qui reste lucide, nuit polaire, veille de [90] l'esprit, d'où se lèvera peut-être cette clarté blanche et intacte qui dessine chaque objet dans la lumière de l'intelligence. À ce degré, l'équivalence rencontre la compréhension passionnée

beginning of the story and is characterized as a proud woman that considers herself above others. Additionally, Bee does not have a journey as one like Malachi or Boaz due to most of her life happening off screen. However, the small glimpses of her character and thought the reader gets to see are important considering Camus' absurdism and the story as a whole. These are three in particular: her poem, her goodbye when leaving Earth, and her final words.

The decisions Bee takes to avoid having contact with Malachi eventually leave her broke. As she tries to rent the Rumfoord state as a tourist attraction she is kidnapped and recruited to Mars, where she is tragically molested by Constant and her memory is wiped out. In Mars, she works as a breathing teacher and writes a poem of her teaching, causing alarm from the Mars officials and wiping her memory once more:

Break every link with air and mist, Seal every open vent;
Make throat as tight as miser's fist, Keep life within you pent.
Breathe out, breathe in, no more, no more, For breathing's for the meek;
And when in deathly space we soar, Be careful not to speak.
If you with grief or joy are rapt, Just signal with a tear;
To soul and heart within you trapped Add speech and atmosphere.
Every man's an island as in lifeless space we roam.
Yes, every man's an island: island fortress, island home. (p.117)

What is important in the poem are the two last verses which recall us to two things: Bee's rejection towards other people and the idea of humans as separated from their peers and secluded to their "inside". At the beginning what we see of Bee is a proud woman that considers what happens around her as silly and not worth her time. Even after she loses her memory we can still see a glimpse of that part of herself, what Vonnegut calls her aristocratic manner, leaving evidence of her proud character. More importantly, it sheds light on her process in facing the absurd. The two last verses talk about man as isolated and in solitary, which goes against what Camus expresses about revolt and solidarity in *The Rebel* (1951).

Camus rebellion is one that implies solidarity towards others since to consider there is a condition to which one human must rebel, all other humans share that condition. Camus considers

rebellion as “founded upon rebellion, and rebellion can only be justified by this solidarity⁶¹” (1951, p.29). Additionally, rebellion also appears out of empathy if someone is a witness of oppression. As such, rebellion suggests that “human reality, in its entirety, suffers from the distance which separates it from the rest of the universe”⁶² (1951, p.30) and therefore there is no isolation in humanity considering we share the same experience. This idea of separation and seclusion is essential to Bee’s character and is closely related to her second moment: her goodbye.

Bee and her son survive the Amazon Forest after their crash there, later on, Bee sells “Malachis” as religious figures in Rumfoord’s new religion. At Rumfoord’s final ceremony, he reveals she used to be his wife and speaks of her character as something despicable:

The excesses of Beatrice were excesses of reluctance,” said Rumfoord. “As a younger woman, she felt so exquisitely bred as to do nothing and to allow nothing to be done to her, for fear of contamination. Life, for Beatrice as a younger woman, was too full of germs and vulgarity to be anything but intolerable. (p.197)

Rumfoord’s description of Bee is also in opposition to Camus’ ideas, just like her poem. Camus’ call is to live “to the maximum” (1942, p.89) and Bee’s rejection of life is the complete opposite, a plain example of this is her simple disdain to get in a rollercoaster as a child or her constantly mentioned picture of a clean girl in a white dress. Although this is Bee before losing her memory, her words after the revelation that this was her before Mars, make it all the more important:

I do not recall the old days,” said Beatrice, “when I was mistress of this estate, when I could not stand to do anything or to have anything done to me. But I loved myself the instant you told me I’d been that way. The human race is a scummy thing, and so is Earth, and so are you. (p. 198)

While it is true we can empathize with Bee’s terrible life so far, her words are still against rebellion when it comes to solidarity, but not so to rebellion as a defense of the rebel’s values. This is evident in her previous line:

⁶¹ Original text: La solidarité des hommes se fonde sur le mouvement de révolte et celui-ci, à son tour, ne trouve de justification que dans cette complicité.

⁶² Original text: la réalité humaine, dans sa totalité, souffre de cette distance par rapport à soi et au monde.

We will be (leaving) for ourselves — and we will be proving to ourselves and to anybody who wants to watch that we aren't afraid of anything. Our hearts won't be breaking when we leave this planet. It disgusts us at least as much as we, under your guidance, disgust it. (p. 198)

Her conscious rebellion is one of preserving her dignity. Although her heart is filled with resentment towards Rumfoord she does not desire revenge or is envious of others' positions. All the more important is this thought of hers when related to that of Constant's as they arrive in Titan: "the Universe is a junk yard, with everything in it overpriced" (p.218) which she silently agrees. So it seems she's closer to rebelling against the absurd and embracing life rather than rejecting it, although there's still a lack of solidarity, which takes us to her third moment: her final words.

In the final chapter, Rumfoord reveals that the distant civilization of Tralfamadore has manipulated humanity to bring Salo's missing piece of its spaceship throughout history. In the epilogue, we discover that Bee has spent her life in Titan writing a manifest called "The True Purpose of Life in the Solar System" refuting the "notion that the purpose of human life in the Solar System was to get a grounded messenger from Tralfamadore on his way again" (p.231). This brings us to the Bee's character conclusion. To finish her writing she says: "The worst thing that could possibly happen to anybody, would be to not be used for anything by anybody." (p.233). The sense of the word "used" is caused by her experience of being indeed used by Rumfoord during her lifetime, however, the message of this line opens an interpretation despite the word "used".

In light of Camus' idea of living to the maximum, we can consider Bee's idea of "being used" as a part of life, a part of experiencing anything she could experience even though it may have caused her harm because being harmed was worse than nothing at all. Thus we contrast such a thought with the previous ones she presented in her two previous moments in the story. Rather than escaping and living in reluctance Bee now considers being forced to do, to experience, the better outcome. This is clear considering her final words to Constant: "Thank you for using me," even though I didn't want to be used by anybody." (p.233). Her change of heart is

one that coincides with the absurd and finally concludes her character's journey. Now she is no longer considering life below herself but rather the most important thing and one relating her to the human race as a whole, a conspicuous idea in her manifesto defending the human race:

Those persons who have served the interests of Talfamadore have served them in such highly personalized ways that Talfamadore can be said to have had practically nothing to do with the case. (Vonnegut, 1959, p.232)

At the end of the story, she rebelled against the absurd (both death, the universe and, in the case of the novel, the truth that humanity had a purpose, but an absurd one) and rather than rejecting life as she once did, she rejoiced in it, and rather than falling into a pit of remorse against Talfamadore, in solidarity she fought against the idea of humanity's lack of free will, an essential part of Camus' rebellion.

6.4. Winston Niles Rumfoord

*(Le révolte) n'est pas seulement esclave contre maître, mais aussi homme contre le monde du maître et de l'esclave.
(Camus, 1951, p.295)*

Even though Malachi Constant is the protagonist in *The Sirens of Titan* as the character we follow throughout the story, Winston Niles Rumfoord is the most important character. He is the one that starts the gears of the events and manipulates them into what the reader sees. This is also the case when it comes to the absurd and rebellion in the story. However, unlike the previous three characters, there is no journey to follow step by step. In consequence, the analysis of Winston Niles Rumfoord will be done through two different lenses: first, his place in Camus' absurdism and fit as an absurd man evidenced in his actions and thoughts according to *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942) and second, his rebellion in relation to his Church and his plans according to *L'homme révolté* (1951).

6.4.1. Rumfoord's absurdism

Although the fictional event of his entry to the "chrono-synclastic infundibulum" is hard to picture, the most important aspect to consider is the spreading of his being throughout the solar

system. We can imagine it as if he was once a person and then became a swift brush of paint on a canvas, that is, the universe. Rumfoord then exists simultaneously in all the space-time; this brush of paint encompasses and therefore lives past, present and future all at once, materializing his consciousness and “wave body” every specific interval of days in places around the solar system. As impossible as this is to imagine, the fundamental aspect of it is how he is aware of life’s lack of meaning or rather, the absurd meaning it does have in the story. Although Camus’ absurdism is principally encountered once humans face their mortality, Rumfoord encounters it once he is aware of his whole future and how his life and all of his actions are in the end manipulations from far away.

The reader knows Rumfoord is aware he is being manipulated from the beginning, as he tells Bee: “Some day on Titan, it will be revealed to you just how ruthlessly I’ve been used, and by whom, and to what disgustingly paltry ends.” (p.51). The reader also learns how unsatisfied Rumfoord is when, for example, Unk supposes he is Stony Stevenson: “Stony?” said the man. He laughed. “Oh, God — ” he said, “many’s the time I’ve wished I was Stony, and many’s the time I’ll wish it again.” (p.121). Stony is a happy carefree man enjoying his life with his friend, even for a short time. In comparison, Rumfoord does not enjoy his part in the story and it can be assumed that he envies such a carefree freedom. Close to the end of the story he expresses his frustration over how his fate and humanity’s fate was influenced by unknown forces: “The sickening thing is this: Everything that every Earthling has ever done has been warped by creatures on a planet one-hundred-and-fifty thousand light years away.” (p.223). Finally, as he is leaving the Solar System he is peaceful: “He sounded serene again, at peace with himself, and at least equal to any creature that he might encounter anywhere.” (p.224)

Taking the previous examples into account, Rumfoord is aware of the absurd and lives despite it, however hard it is to imagine the concept of his existence. Now that his awareness of the absurd is established, the question is: what is his stance around it. To consider Rumfoord as an absurd man as expressed by Camus in *The Myth of Sisyphus* we will contemplate three key

consequences of the absurd Camus mentions: “revolt, freedom and passion”⁶³ (1942, p.90). An absurd man is, first, a man who, aware of his fate of death, lives embracing said fate in rebellion of how pointless said fate is; second, he is a man who takes the limited freedom this consciousness gives him and acts experiencing what he can for as long as he is able to; and third, said experiences are lived with constant lucidity of the absurd and are thus passionately appreciated. As these consequences are intertwined, they can be examined through the same examples.

Considering revolt, as mentioned beforehand, Rumfoord is (literally) aware of his fate at all times. Although the reader does not know that he disappears from the Solar System until the end of the story, Rumfoord does know and acts accordingly. Even though arguing Rumfoord lives despite knowing his fate is difficult taking into account that, in the story, his future is already paved and he has experienced and is experiencing it all the time. Nevertheless, the most important part of his living is his revolt, this is evident in perhaps his most important line:

“Nobody likes to think he’s being used,” said Rumfoord. “He’ll put off admitting it to himself until the last possible instant.” He smiled crookedly. “It may surprise you to learn that I take a certain pride, no matter how foolishly mistaken that pride may be, in making my own decisions for my own reasons.” (p.214)

While Camus’ revolt is a consequence of facing the absurdity of the rational human mind, his mortality and the irrational universe, Rumfoord’s rebellion against absurdity is more literal. In the world of *The Sirens of Titan*, humanity’s existence did have meaning, but it was an extremely mundane one: delivering a spare part of a spaceship to an alien. Rumfoord is aware he is being manipulated to achieve this endeavor, taking a really important part in the process, but nevertheless rebels against this knowledge; furthermore, he uses his situation to help the human race: “All I can say is that I have tried my best to do good for my native Earth while serving the irresistible wishes of Tralfamadore” (p.224). This is important to the second consequence, freedom. On the events and plans Rumfoord goes through (the Martian War, Constant and Bee’s

⁶³ Original text: Je tire ainsi de l’absurde trois conséquences qui sont ma révolte, ma liberté et ma passion.

journeys), he carries them out in his prideful manner and, as mentioned above, prefers to think he has free will. In Titan, he constructs a palace to live in and names landmarks with his own name, he writes books on the historic events he creates and goes on aristocratically in his endeavors. To reiterate, he lives pridefully, despite his circumstances. Most importantly, however, is his choice “to do good for my native Earth”. Rumfoord’s elaborate plan of the Martian Suicide and the Church of the Utterly Indifferent albeit necessary for Tralfamadore’s machinations are a product of Rumfoord’s limited freedom, a “choice”. Camus absurd freedom is one of experiencing life conscious of the absurd and living as one sees fit, it is a limited freedom considering death as the final destination, or in Rumfoord’s case, the fact that he is being manipulated and his exit from the Solar System. Contemplating it all, Rumfoord does act as free as he can.

Nevertheless, however grand Rumfoord’s actions were, what is most important is his consciousness during them considering Camus’ idea that “a sub-clerk in the post office is the equal of a conqueror if consciousness is common to them. All experiences are indifferent in this regard”⁶⁴ (1942, p.98). With this in mind and considering as evidence the manner in which Rumfoord acted, his plans and his ideals, we can affirm that he did act with the limited freedom he had.

Coming back to revolt, at this point we can revise Camus’ most important metaphor: Sisyphus. Camus (1942) describes Sisyphus’ punishment by the gods to carry a boulder up a hill only for it to fall back down and repeating the process as an absurd endeavor, one analogous to human life. This endeavor is tragic because Sisyphus is aware of the inevitability of the boulder falling back down. Now, Sisyphus’ rebellion lies on the conscious choice of not considering his situation as pitiful as he goes back down to roll the boulder back up, rather, he accepts it in lucidity, his fate is his own as he built it so. As Camus puts it:

For the rest, he knows himself to be the master of his days. At that subtle moment when man glances backward over his life, Sisyphus returning toward his rock, in that slight

⁶⁴ Original text: Un surnuméraire aux Postes est l’égal d’un conquérant si la conscience leur est commune. Toutes les expériences sont à cet égard indifférentes.

pivoting he contemplates that series of unrelated actions which becomes his fate, created by him, combined under his memory's eye and soon sealed by his death. ⁶⁵ (1942, p.168)

Back to Rumfoord, this attitude of "master of his days" resonates with his character as per his pride in making his own decisions for his own reasons. The reader and he himself knows his decisions are not entirely his own, yet Rumfoord pridefully rebels against this idea. Perhaps putting the thought aside as he does is not what Camus would consider the lucidity the absurd hero should have, however, there is consciousness and rebellion against that consciousness. Up until then, Rumfoord's actions are also a Sisyphean history: conscious of how he is being manipulated, he schemes his plans regardless and with the objective of helping the human race. Granted, the separation between the two resides in the most important aspect of Sisyphus' rebellion: happiness. This brings us to the third consequence, passion.

"Happiness and the absurd are two sons of the same earth. They are inseparable"⁶⁶ (1942, p.167) affirms Camus; and in one of his most famous quotes: "One must imagine Sisyphus happy"⁶⁷ (p.168). This could be a separation between Sisyphus and Rumfoord as absurd men, or ideas of one. From the beginning, Rumfoord's character is not a gloomy one; he is charismatic, makes jokes and enjoys himself for the most part throughout the story. However, at the end of the story, the reader learns Rumfoord is frustrated with his fate being somewhat a product of manipulations beyond comprehension, considering it a "sickening thought" (Vonnegut, 1959, p.223). Also to consider, it is pertinent to bring back how Rumfoord envied Stony Stevenson and how the desire to live another life goes against Camus' ideas in so far as the most important aspect of facing the absurd is the consciousness and appreciation of one's own life and experiences. As he puts it: "A greater life cannot mean for him another life. That would be unfair"⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Original text: Pour le reste, il se sait maître de ses jours. A cet instant subtil où l'homme se retourne sur sa vie, Sisyphe, revenant vers son rocher, devient son destin, créé par lui, uni sous le regard de sa mémoire et bientôt scellé par sa mort.

⁶⁶ Original text: Le bonheur et l'absurde sont deux fils de la même terre. Ils sont inséparables.

⁶⁷ Original text: Il faut imaginer Sisyphe heureux.

⁶⁸ Original text: Une plus grande vie ne peut signifier pour lui une autre vie. Ce serait déshonnête.

(1942, p.64). Therefore, it can be argued that Rumfoord carried out his life with two sentiments at heart: solidarity towards the human race, and contempt towards Tralfamadore, his fate and its absurdity. Even though Rumfoord's rebellion is evident, the most important part appears to be missing, that is, happiness and passion.

Nevertheless, there is happiness, a small part in Rumfoord's character and manner as evidenced above, more importantly there is happiness in his objectives. The Martian Suicide that would bring shame to humanity and prepare it for a unification in a religion created by Rumfoord himself has only one goal: to help humankind be happier, free and more independent. This objective is one that resonates with Camus' previously mentioned emphasis on happiness in the absurd; it also acquires more importance considering Camus' following remark: "One does not discover the absurd without being tempted to write a manual of happiness."⁶⁹ (1942, p.167). It must be stated that Rumfoord does exactly that. Whatever means he chooses to complete it, his mission is to guide humanity into a new way of thinking. To do so he creates a new religion that rejects God as something that has any say in what people do, or, as something to consider in a person's actions. Instead, he gives people back their will, he emphasizes the importance of humankind as its own master. As he puts it:

They went to Mars, mounted their hopeless attacks, and died gladly, in order that Earthlings might at last become one people — joyful, fraternal, and proud. National borders will disappear. The lust for war will die. All envy, all fear, all hate will die. (Vonnegut, 1959, p.137)

Henceforth, Rumfoord may not live passionately in the most recognizable way and may sometimes express disappointment and grief over his own fate. Nevertheless, the passion in his mission and manner in which he accomplishes it is still one to take into account.

Conclusively, contemplating the three consequences of the absurd in light of the previous examples, one can return to question if Winston Niles Rumfoord can be called an absurd man.

⁶⁹ Original text: On ne découvre pas l'absurde sans être tenté d'écrire quelque manuel du bonheur.

When it comes to revolt, he undeniably revolts against his fate and in his Sisyphean endeavor he pushes forward; when it comes to freedom, he uses his limited freedom to accomplish his own mission of helping humankind; and as for passion and happiness, he enjoys himself and despite his frustration, he acts in the best interest of humankind and its happiness. It can thus be argued that he is an absurd man, albeit not a perfect one, considering *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942). This changes, however, when we see his journey through the lens of *The Rebel* (1951).

6.4.2. Rumfoord's rebellion

Le révolté ne demande pas la vie, mais les raisons de la vie. Il refuse la conséquence que la mort apporte. Si rien ne dure, rien n'est justifié, ce qui meurt est privé de sens.
(Camus, 1951, p. 109)

As stated previously in the theoretical framework, Camus' ideas changed between *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942) and *The Rebel* (1951) because of World War II and the nazi holocaust. The realization of the absurd, that nothing has any meaning, may make murder and its consequences meaningless. While the former book addressed suicide, the latter addresses murder. More precisely, it examines if the realization of the absurd may justify murder, a critical question in Rumfoord's story. Although in the previous section it was concluded that the character of Winston Niles Rumfoord is an absurd man and consequently rebels against the absurd, the definition of rebellion changes in *The Rebel*. Now the question is not whether Rumfoord is an absurd man but a *true* rebel. To answer this question, I will examine if he thinks, acts and follows what the french-algerian philosopher considers the core and essential principles of rebellion in *The Rebel*. The following points will be considered: the object of his rebellion and the purpose of that rebellion; whether there is solidarity in his rebellion; what he believes when it comes to freedom; and finally, the historic consequences of his actions.

To understand the object of Rumfoord's rebellion we come back to Camus' first example of rebellion: a slave that rebels against his master. The slave recognizes their condition as unfit,

undesired, and unjust and in doing so finds the most important value in their being: a free individual. The situation must change and they will rebel to reach what they consider just to be no longer a subject but a free person. Likewise, Rumfoord's character in the story is a rebel and also a metaphysical rebel. His schemes and plans are all founded in his rebellion against the Tralfamadorians as a manipulated individual and also, metaphysically, against the Universe and its irrationality seeing it through the eyes of a human. Although his rebellion against the manipulation from Tralfamadore is clearly stated, his metaphysical rebellion is evident with the purpose of his plan: "in order that Earthlings might at last become one people — joyful, fraternal, and proud" (p.137). Rumfoord takes notice of the cruelty and injustice in the world, noticeable through comments such as deeming the Mars Suicide as "(...) the first army that ever died in a good cause" (p.125) —asserting that any other war was meaningless— or leading his to-be-believers to read on the Spanish Inquisition before his next materialization. This is also unmistakable taking into account Vonnegut's background as a pacifist and anti-war veteran from WWII. His experience as a POW (prisoner of war) deeply influenced his writing and beliefs (Vonnegut, 2005). This acknowledgment of suffering is primordial to rebellion. The metaphysical rebel seeks for clarity and meaning when death is considered as part of life, opaquing the meaning of both suffering and happiness when there is a clearly defined end to both. As Camus puts it:

The protest against evil which is at the very core of metaphysical revolt is significant in this regard. It is not the suffering of a child, which is repugnant in itself, but the fact that the suffering is not justified. (...) In the eyes of the rebel, what is missing from the misery of the world, as well as from its moments of happiness, is some principle by which they can be explained⁷⁰ (1951, p.108)

This part of the rebel is seen in the case of Rumfoord indirectly, he does not proclaim it but is clear when his plan's motive of a kinder, more responsible humanity is considered.

⁷⁰ Original text: La protestation contre le mal qui est au cœur même de la révolte métaphysique est significative à cet égard. Ce n'est pas la souffrance de l'enfant qui est révoltante en elle-même, mais le fait que cette souffrance ne soit pas justifiée. Après tout, la douleur, l'exil, la claustration, sont quelquefois acceptés quand la médecine ou le bon sens nous en persuadent. Aux yeux du révolté, ce qui manque à la douleur du monde, comme aux instants de son bonheur, c'est un principe d'explication.

Hence, Rumfoord rebels against those two conditions, the absence of freedom, and injustice, in consequence he considers the opposite of the two to be the better and just outcome. In the first condition, to be manipulated is unacceptable and to be free is the desired state; in the second condition, the absurd in human life is unacceptable and to find reason and justice in a Universe without any is the desired state. Nevertheless, when it comes to the rebellion against Tralfamadore, paradoxically, letting the events unfold as they would marks the end of their manipulation. Instead, Rumfoord uses this inevitability to help mankind be better and kinder, doing “good for (his) native Earth” (p.224). It is then evident that Rumfoord’s desire for humanity’s freedom is for it to be kind; for humans to be good to one another.

Consequently, these two objectives (a free humanity, and a “joyful, fraternal and proud” one) are one and the same. To achieve this, Rumfoord plans to create the Church of God the Utterly Indifferent, the tenet of this church is summarized by him as “Puny man can do nothing at all to help or please God Almighty, and Luck is not the hand of God.” (p.138). In the eyes of Rumfoord it is not only Tralfamadore’s influence that shackles humanity but also the belief in God; more specifically, the belief that God has an influence on what happens to humans, their choices and vice versa. As Kehoe (2022) explores, Vonnegut uses Rumfoord to criticize christianism as an institution that “hinders human development and encourages complacency and the blind acceptance of God’s will” (p.23). To Vonnegut, the sacredness of religion removes the need for scrutiny and leads to blind acceptance of the facts that be. This is paramount to Rumfoord’s rebellion in search for real freedom, in his eyes, once humanity is no longer influenced by Tralfamadore there needs to be a new guidance that leads people to be kinder. This is where his new Church comes to play.

The Church of God the Utterly Indifferent does not reject the idea of God, it welcomes it but remarks the clear difference between the creator and the creation; God creates the universe and lets it be. Believers in this new religion are supposed to be liable for their choices and disregard differences between them; their God is indifferent to their endeavors and no action can

please an apathetic god. Rumfoord's purpose is to guide humanity to take responsibility for their actions and to not blame or attribute random or chaotic occurrences to the divine. Evidence of this is in his scorn towards Malachi's "luck":

We hate Malachi Constant," said Rumford up in his treetop, "because he accepted the fantastic fruits of his fantastic good luck without a qualm, as though luck were the hand of God. To us of the Church of God the Utterly Indifferent, there is nothing more cruel, more dangerous, more blasphemous than a man can do than to believe that — that luck, good or bad, is the hand of God. "Luck," said Rumfoord up in his treetop, "is the way the wind swirls and the dust settles eons after God has passed by. (p.190)

In Rumfoord's Church, the accidents that may be involved in a person's birth such as beauty, strength or wealth are not to revel in but to recognize and consider them in humbleness. This is apparent in the Church's followers' choice to wear handicaps and make themselves more equal to one another. For example, father Redwine wears iron slabs and weights on his body to make it more fair in "the race of life" in comparison to weaker people; once Malachi notices it, Redwine suggest the weight he should carry, saying "you should be glad, not sorry, to carry such a handicap, no one could then reproach you for taking advantage of the random ways of luck." (p.172). This disregard for the idea of divine intervention is the cornerstone of the Church and Rumfoord's desire for people to act of their own free will. It unifies its followers and the followers see themselves as equals, no one considering themselves above one another in grace of God's favor, i.e luck.

Rumfoord's Church, as Kehoe (2022) explains, is not one that celebrates God but ideas. The acceptance of God as the creator grants a sort of validity in a made-up religion in which the focus is humanity and people as a whole; there is meaning for the origin of humans but any other meaning or purpose is for humanity to find. Furthermore, if there cannot be a claim over God's desires then problems such as people demanding anything for them because of sacred ordinance disappear (God ordained king, self-righteous feelings over one's fortune). As she puts it: "Finally, envy could not prosper in an equal world, there would be no need for fear without war or violence, and one who regards himself as a germ on a flea on a dog cannot reasonably hate." (p.37). This

extends to the Church's flag motto: "Take Care of the People, and God Almighty Will Take Care of Himself" (Vonnegut, 1959, p.138). Rumfoord's new morality is not one of pleasing God but for everyone to please one another. Under the circumstances, the Church of God the Utterly Indifferent addresses both of Rumfoord's objects of rebellion: humanity's freedom, and the injustice in the world.

This is a fact of the utmost importance to Camus' final idea of the rebel's true goal. The struggle against injustice is not one backed up by the imaginary of an eternal justice that ought to rule the universe. It is one guided by the solidarity towards humanity found through the understanding and communication between our peers in which our similar destinies are established, the dialogue that is born from rebellion and can only be maintained in rebellion. As he explains:

If injustice is bad for the rebel, it is not because it contradicts an eternal idea of justice, but because it perpetuates the silent hostility that separates the oppressor from the oppressed. It kills the small part of existence that can be realized on this earth through the mutual understanding of men⁷¹. (Camus, 1951, p.294)

Maintaining this dialogue is crucial to Camus and also to Rumfoord. His desire, after all, is to unify humanity amidst his fictional religion's tenets, creating a "brotherhood of man". This is noticeable further with Father Redwine's speeches: "Oh, Mankind, rejoice in the apathy of our Creator, for it makes us free and truthful and dignified at last". He goes further, claiming that this apathy has liberated them from "the claptrap that has so often enslaved us or driven us into the madhouse" (Vonnegut, 1959, p.164). A truthful and dignified mankind avoids what Camus claims are the afflictions, servitude, falsehood, and terror, that cause the "silence between men", a silence that drives humans apart from each other preventing the collaboration that is necessary to avoid the nihilism that may come from the absurd. To defeat this nihilism, Camus argues, it is

⁷¹ Original text: Si l'injustice est mauvaise pour le révolté, ce n'est pas en ce qu'elle contredit une idée éternelle de la justice, que nous ne savons où situer, mais en ce qu'elle perpétue la muette hostilité qui sépare l'opresseur de l'opprimé. Elle tue le peu d'être qui peut venir au monde par la complicité des hommes entr'eux

necessary to maintain “the long complicity of men at grips with their destiny⁷²” (1959, p.294) something that is achieved through the solidarity that rebellion entails and causes. Rumfoord’s Church attempts to sustain and protect the joy of existence that comes with the understanding of each individual to one another and in a community, precisely what Camus deems important in the rebel’s search for integrity.

Nevertheless, as Kehoe (2020) explores, even though Rumfoord is convinced “his plan for the new religion and for the direction of humanity is right and true” (p.42), it is a plan he makes through his own power. He forces his hand and will over the whole of humanity at the same time as he proclaims he wants to give humanity free will, plus, it is done through the most cruel means imaginable with barely any discernible sympathy for his victims; the contradiction between Rumfoord’s ends and his means is palpable. The same solidarity Camus sustains is essential for rebellion, the same Rumfoord’s Church attempts to encourage, is the same he himself breaks.

The importance of solidarity in Camus *The Rebel* cannot be put lightly, it comes to play in the beginning: once the rebel acts for their integrity and what they deem just, the struggle against what they deny is more important than themselves, this struggle is not theirs alone, hence, rebellion transcends the individual and identifies them with humanity as a whole. A rebel cannot act against this acknowledgment. Per Camus’ words:

The first step for a mind overwhelmed by the strangeness of things is to realize that this feeling of strangeness is shared with all men and that the entire human race suffers from the division between itself and the rest of the world.⁷³ (1951, p.30)

As stated above, this is an evident aspect in Rumfoord’s goals. However, while the final result of Rumfoord’s plans are sustained by this solidarity to the human race, his means to achieve his ends are not. The Church of God the Utterly Indifferent is created using the Mars Suicide as a unifier of the people of Earth through guilt, used as a shovel to carve the path in the creation of

⁷² Original text: la longue complicité des hommes aux prises avec leur destin.

⁷³ Original text: Le premier progrès d’un esprit saisi d’étrangeté est donc de reconnaître qu’il partage cette étrangeté avec tous les hommes et que la réalité humaine, dans sa totalité, souffre de cette distance par rapport à soi et au monde.

the Church. The Martian Suicide, orchestrated entirely by Rumfoord, is precisely the means of rebellion antithetical to Camus'.

To expand on the former, Camus' critique of rebellion in human history (i.e revolutions) is placed specifically in the death and suffering toll it encompasses. As stated above, rebellion transcends the individual insofar as the rebel's struggle is part of the collective of the human experience, this entails a solidarity between every rebel and could-be-rebel. For Camus, solidarity is the cornerstone of the rebel's integrity and going against it would make that rebellion invalid:

Man's solidarity is founded upon rebellion, and rebellion, in its turn, can only find its justification in this solidarity. We have, then, the right to say that any rebellion which claims the right to deny or destroy this solidarity loses simultaneously its right to be called rebellion and becomes in reality an acquiescence in murder. (1951, p.29)⁷⁴

The violation of this solidarity is present in all revolutions, including Rumfoord's fictional one. This is where the french-algerian philosopher differentiates between rebellion (*révolte*) and revolution (*révolution*): the former being a notion: "an obscure protest which involves neither methods nor reasons", and the latter as an "attempt to shape actions to ideas, to fit the world into a theoretic frame"⁷⁵ (p.115). To enlighten his point Camus critiques the period called *La Terreur* or the reign of terror that followed the French revolution as a consequence that followed the rebels' call for reason amidst injustice. The revolutionaries successfully defeat the regime and kill the king, nevertheless, the killing does not stop there and spreads to everyone opposed to them. In a search for reason in an unreasonable world they end up justifying the same heinous acts they rebelled against in the beginning. This goes directly against rebellion, as Camus considers rebellion a force driven by life that claims for life's dignity; what fuels it is the rebels' integrity and

⁷⁴ Original text: La solidarité des hommes se fonde sur le mouvement de révolte et celui-ci, à son tour, ne trouve de justification que dans cette complicité. Nous serons donc en droit de dire que toute révolte qui s'autorise à nier ou à détruire cette solidarité perd du même coup le nom de révolte et coïncide en réalité avec un consentement meurtrier.

⁷⁵ Original text: Alors que l'histoire, même collective, d'un mouvement de révolte, est toujours celle d'un engagement sans issue dans les faits, d'une protestation obscure qui n'engage ni systèmes ni raisons, une révolution est une tentative pour modeler l'acte sur une idée, pour façonner le monde dans un cadre théorique.

in consequence everyone's integrity. For the philosopher, revolutions throughout history in a demand for justice come to apply injustice. Accordingly, death is opposed to rebellion:

It is then possible to say that rebellion, when it develops into destruction, is illogical. Claiming the unity of the human condition, it is a force of life, not of death. Its most profound logic is not the logic of destruction; it is the logic of creation.⁷⁶ (Camus, 1951, p.296)

This illogical destruction Camus mentions is precisely Rumfoord's plan, in a claim for unity he develops destruction. While his intent for a kinder humanity and a demand for justice is evident, the means to achieve this are anything but kind or just. In orchestrating the Martian Suicide, Rumfoord literally brain washes millions of people into slavery for a purpose they are refused to know and finally sends them to certainly die by the hands of their peers. The death toll that Camus makes note of in all revolutions is conspicuous in *The Sirens of Titan*. It can be claimed that Rumfoord's actions must only be described as cruel and the solidarity of his goal is nonexistent in his method to achieve it.

This undisputable violence in *The Sirens of Titan* and in revolutions around history is an inevitable result in the eyes of the french-algerian philosopher as rebellion may bring a certain freedom. According to him, the consequence of metaphysical rebellion is the desire for the rebel to change the world as they see fit. Just as Rumfoord rebels and tries to redirect the world to what he believes would be a better way, the metaphysical rebel seeks to eliminate injustice, to fight death. The freedom to think of this as something someone is entitled to do is the absolute freedom gained after the realization of the absurd, the acknowledgement that all actions are equal if they are considered with death in mind. This nihilistic point of view, however, is Camus' entire critique. For him, the freedom that comes from the absurd is not one that liberates the individual but binds them to others. The freedom to kill that may come from nihilism is antithetical to the rebellion, as

⁷⁶ Original text: Il est donc possible de dire que la révolte, quand elle débouche sur la destruction, est illogique. Réclamant l'unité de la condition humaine, elle est force de vie, non de mort. Sa logique profonde n'est pas celle de la destruction; elle est celle de la création.

per the rebel's eyes, it is everyone's right to rebel and in this affirmation, everyone is equal, creating the most important limit: killing.

Far from demanding general independence, the rebel wants it to be recognized that freedom has its limits everywhere that a human being is to be found—the limit being precisely that human being's power to rebel⁷⁷. (Camus, 1951, p.295)

Nevertheless, Rumfoord takes his freedom and power to violate this very principle. Even though he wants mankind to be more free than ever before, better than before and more united than before, he does this in the most despicable way imaginable. Although his speech is brimming with claims for responsibility, as Kehoe points out: “Rumfoord takes extreme measures to institute his plan for humanity, including significant loss of life. Even founding the Church of God the Utterly Indifferent is a violation of his responsibility as a human being” (2022, p.40). This goes directly against Camus' rebellion.

This violation is not exclusive to Rumfoord. Camus examines it throughout his book as a consequence of metaphysical rebellion. As the rebel recognizes injustice and evil and the lack of justification for them acknowledged, the rebel confronts creation, i.e God, and in the process “kills” it, as Nietzsche once put it. Once killed, the rebel has to fulfill the place of God, just as the slave has to fulfill the place of the vanquished Master, this is the paradox Camus considers: “To kill God and to build a Church are the constant and contradictory purpose of rebellion”⁷⁸ (p.111). Camus sees throughout history this consequence of rebellion: the rebel considers themselves as a victim in the injustice of the universe —the injustice of God— and in that innocence their actions are justified, conquest. As he puts it:

In principle, the rebel only wanted to conquer his own existence and to maintain it in the face of God. But he forgets his origins and, by the law of spiritual imperialism, he sets out in search of world conquest by way of an infinitely multiplied series of murders. He drove God from His heaven, but now that the spirit of metaphysical rebellion openly joins forces

⁷⁷ Original text: Loin de revendiquer une indépendance générale, le révolté veut qu'il soit reconnu que la liberté a ses limites partout où se trouve un être humain, la limite étant précisément le pouvoir de révolte de cet être.

⁷⁸ Original text: Tuer Dieu et bâtir une Église, c'est le mouvement constant et contradictoire de la révolte.

with revolutionary movements, the irrational claim for freedom paradoxically adopts reason as a weapon, and as the only means of conquest which appears entirely human⁷⁹. (Camus, 1951, p.111)

For Camus, revolutionary thought excuses conquest and its ensuing violence in the final result that can be gained from victory. God's kingdom of heaven must be reclaimed for humankind and to be brought on Earth. In the nihilism affirmation of death as the ultimate equalizer, the "when" of any death is unimportant when the better future is the goal. As Camus puts it:

If it is certain that the kingdom will come, what does time matter? Suffering is never provisional for the man who does not believe in the future. But one hundred years of suffering are fleeting in the eyes of the man who prophesies, for the hundred and first year, the definitive city.⁸⁰ (1951, p.218)

This, of course, contradicts rebellion's principle of ultimate respect for the integrity of life. Furthermore, for Camus it is an absolute that must be avoided as killing only leads to more killing: "But to kill men leads to nothing but killing more men. For one principle to triumph, another principle must be overthrown⁸¹" (1951, p.118).

Evidently, this is exactly what Rumfoord does. He considers himself a victim in Tralfamadore's machinations, and humanity as a victim in the injustice and meaningless of the universe. He starts a plan of conquest, of conquering human morality and defeating God, removing him from his throne. Nevertheless, when it comes to him in comparison to the real revolutions Camus studies, one thing is different. The critique to violence that revolutionaries justify with the prophecy of the just kingdom of men, yet never achieved, does not apply to

⁷⁹ Original text: Le révolté ne voulait, en principe, que conquérir son être propre et le maintenir à la face de Dieu. Mais il perd la mémoire de ses origines et, par la loi d'un impérialisme spirituel, le voici en marche pour l'empire du monde à travers des meurtres multipliés à l'infini. Il a chassé Dieu de son ciel, mais l'esprit de révolte métaphysique rejoignant alors franchement le mouvement révolutionnaire, la revendication irrationnelle de la liberté va prendre paradoxalement pour arme la raison, seul pouvoir de conquête qui lui semble purement humain

⁸⁰ Original text: S'il est sûr que le royaume arrivera, qu'importent les années ? La souffrance n'est jamais provisoire pour celui qui ne croit pas à l'avenir. Mais cent années de douleur sont fugitives au regard de celui qui affirme, pour la cent unième année, la cité définitive.

⁸¹ Original text: Mais tuer des hommes ne mène à rien qu'à en tuer plus encore. Pour faire triompher un principe, c'est un principe qu'il faut abattre.

Rumfoord's case, since as we know, his prophecy is not an eternal idea of successfully creating a perfect world but a plan already victorious. Rumfoord does not hope or think he may be triumphant, he knows it; in the end, the Martian Suicide will facilitate the creation of the Church of God the Utterly Indifferent leading to a following of three billion people who become kinder and free, the "brotherhood of men". Since Rumfoord experiences the past, present and future at the same time, this is not a prophecy but a fact, the historic consequences of his actions —his success— justify everything. Per Camus words: "The golden age, postponed until the end of history and coincident, to add to its attractions, with an apocalypse, therefore justifies everything⁸²" (1951, p.218).

In the end, Rumfoord's actions are a plethora of contradictions. His plan (Malachi and Bee's fate, the Martian Suicide, the Church) is founded on the idea of freedom yet it is thought of, planned, executed and achieved while serving Tralfamadore's purpose, moreover, using Tralfamadore's technology. In an endeavor aiming to maximize the freedom human beings will possess, Rumfoord brainwashes millions to manipulate others through guilt, binding them to a made-up religion and its tenets, essentially creating —and one could argue forcing— a path for their freedom to follow. In his intent for ending religious thoughts that people use to justify their actions he creates new ones. In a claim for justice, he starts a chain of destructive events claiming millions of lives, staging everyone involved to either be killed or feel guilty about killing. In a mission to make everyone kinder, kindness is the last thing that goes through his mind. Ultimately, Rumfoord's Church and rebellion go against Camus' rebel's solidarity and claim for the integrity of life and his revolution is one that uses absolute freedom to kill and to kill cruelly. Notwithstanding what his goal is, he is not a true rebel.

⁸² Original text: L'âge d'or renvoyé au bout de l'histoire et coïncidant, par un double attrait, avec une apocalypse, justifie donc tout.

Conclusion

In *The Sirens of Titan* the characters of Malachi Constant, Boaz, Beatrice Rumfoord and Winston Niles Rumfoord all become aware of the absurd, they face the inevitability of death and the meaninglessness of their universe, its irrationality, in opposition to their human rationality. In Constant's case, throughout his journey he is aware of it three times: as he faces his death on Earth, again on Mercury after losing his memory, and as he travels to Titan realizing the truth of his life. Boaz becomes aware trying to find reason in his interstellar travel to wage war. Bee becomes aware of the absurd after being manipulated and rejecting life. Rumfoord becomes aware as he sees his future and Tralfamadore's manipulations, and all of them reach similar conclusions.

The choices a person may make once aware of the absurd according to Camus are suicide, faith or rebellion, in which case all of the four characters analysed take the latter. In accepting their place in the irrational universe they live in and the insignificance of their existence, each of them rebel and continue to live regardless. In the case of Constant and Bee, both reach happiness and love in the company of each other and a simple life on Titan, appreciating the experiences they had, however small, terrible or strange. As Camus wanted to think of Sisyphus as happy in his useless endeavor, Constant and Bee end up happy as well. When it comes to Boaz, his ending is a little more ambivalent since whether he is willfully ignorant or conscious of the futility in his actions changes how his fate can be judged considering Camus. Deciding to be alone caring for unintelligent creatures in Mercury, he finds happiness in a useless endeavor since

they do not need him at all. Although he is happy, the difference between the consciousness that his actions make no difference and the lack of it marks if his finale is that of an absurd man or just a delusion, an important distinction considering absurdism.

Moving to Rumfoord's case, his absurd realization brings him to attempt to make a better world while conscious of his lack of freedom, mortal destiny and clear fate in a cruel world. Despite knowing he is being manipulated and lacks free will, he acts as if he did and does so in his own unique way creating a grandiose plan and executing it. However, the most important part is not whether his actions are great, but that he is conscious of the absurd as he goes on, which he does. Nevertheless, the most important aspect of Camus' example with Sisyphus, happiness while conscious of the absurd, while present in Constant, Bee and Boaz' end of journey, is not present in Rumfoord's actions, there is evidence of sadness in his speech, which disqualifies him as an absurd man, unlike the other three.

Moreover, Rumfoord's rebellion considering Camus is also lacking the most important aspect, solidarity to others and respect for their life. Rumfoord as a rebel acts against the manipulations of Tralfamadore and as a metaphysical rebel, considering the irrationality and cruelty of the universe, orchestrates a war, creating a church and manipulating millions to change the world—in his opinion—for the better. While at a first glance it seems his rebellion follows Camus, it is filled with the contradictions the philosopher points out, Rumfoord does the very things he critiques: takes away the free will of millions while conscious of Tralfamadore's manipulations of humanity; creates cruelty and suffering of those he uses; builds a Church and dogma made to end all churches and dogma, and manipulates Constant's entire life, despite of how he knows and resents the fact that he is being manipulated. The character of Rumfoord, in his rebellion, lacks the force of life, the solidarity towards other's ability to rebel and be free, and the consideration of absolute freedom not as a all-enabler but as a principle that binds one to everyone else's freedom and to respect said freedom. It can be concluded that Rumfoord's actions, while well-intended, are immoral and against Camus' ideas.

As previously mentioned, Vonnegut wanted to convey a message of hope and empathy between others (Rodney, 1988) through his novels, a clear message evident through the misfortunes of his characters just as we go on in life. In a similar manner, Camus' philosophy in *The Myth of Sisyphus* intended its readers to embrace life and find joy in the struggle, while in *The Rebel* he rejected violence and hoped for humankind to live in the present and in solidarity with our peers. Although the means of achieving such a goal in the story Vonnegut writes through the character of Winston Niles Rumfoord is antithetical to what Camus writes, the main points in common are there, specially with the characters of Malachi Constant, Boaz and Beatrice Rumfoord.

In the age we live in, a message as simple and timeless as "be kind to each other" is clearly pertinent. The political climate in recent years is one flooded with messages of hatred between one side to the other, messages that are propagated through social media and inevitably engulf our lives. Moreover, this is not a local issue, it is evident throughout the whole world (Carothers & O'donohue, 2019). The rise of populist leaders, divisive rhetoric, and polarization have further exacerbated this trend, creating deep rifts within societies. Accordingly, texts and analysis of them to reconsider our actions and thoughts towards others is a necessary step in the personal growth we all should go through. After six decades, the powerful anti-war, be kind to your neighbor message that *The Sirens of Titan* conveys, along its powerful absurdist view of embracing life despite whatever it may or may not bring is still relevant, and a text forever worth reading.

To conclude, an analysis such as the former grants a student in a foreign language major great practice in their writing and reading skills as well as proficiency in expressing ideas and in a second language. An intertextual analysis between the second and third language further expands that practice and enhances general proficiency. As an aspiring teacher such practice leads to a better understanding of the language one will teach to others, making teaching said languages a more successful and complete endeavor. Furthermore, the eventual use of literary

texts with students in foreign language teaching is enhanced by the teacher's own practice and understanding of literature in the target language. In my process as an aspiring teacher such texts writing, reading and researching further aids in my training and the mission to improve as an educator.

References

- Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia (2023, April 7). Kurt Vonnegut. *Encyclopedia Britannica*.
<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Kurt-Vonnegut>
- Camus, A. (1942). *L'Étranger*. Paris: Éditions Gallimard.
- Camus, A. (1942). *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*. Paris: Éditions Gallimard.
- Camus, A. (1951). *L'Homme révolté*. Paris: Éditions Gallimard.
- Camus, A. (1942). *The Myth of Sisyphus*. Vintage.
- Camus, A. (1942). *The Stranger*. Vintage.
- Camus, A. (1951). *The Rebel*. Vintage.
- Campo Moncada, W. M. (2020). *Análisis del concepto de culpa en la novela el lector de Bernhard Schlink*. [Bachelor dissertation, Universidad del Valle]. Universidad del Valle.
<https://bibliotecadigital.univalle.edu.co/handle/10893/18161>
- Carothers, T. & O'donohue, A. (2019, October 1). How to Understand the Global Spread of Political Polarization. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/10/01/how-to-understand-global-spread-of-political-polarization-pub-79893>
- The Hugo Awards. (n.d). 1960. *Hugo Awards*. Retrieved July 2, 20203, from <https://www.thehugoawards.org/hugo-history/1960-hugo-awards/>
- Kehoe, M. J. (2022). *Discovering "God Almighty": An Exploration of Kurt Vonnegut's Mythmaking in Sirens of Titan, Cat's Cradle, and Slaughterhouse-Five*. (Publication No. 887) [Masters dissertation, Liberty University]. 887. <https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/masters/887>
- Keren, M. (2012). Absurdity and Revolt in Cormac McCarthy's The Road. *PhanEx*, 7 (1), 221-243. <https://doi.org/10.22329/p.v7i1.3339>
- Lerate de Castro, J. (1994). The Sirens of Titan: el universo post-modernista de Kurt Vonnegut. *REDEN: Revista Española de Estudios Norteamericanos*, 8, 61-79.
- Lynn Sieber, S. (2011). Postmodern Infundibula and Other Non-linear Time Structures in Breakfast of Champions, Slaughterhouse-Five, and Sirens of Titan. *Hungarian Journal of*

- English and American Studies*, 17 (1), 127-141. Retrieved from: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43921805>
- Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Semiotics. In Merriam-Webster.com dictionary. Retrieved October 8, 2023, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/semiotics>
- Morais, B. (August, 2011). The Neverending Campaign to Ban 'Slaughterhouse Five'. *The Atlantic*. <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2011/08/the-neverending-campaign-to-ban-slaughterhouse-five/243525/>
- Radford, R. (2017). "Somebody up there likes you": Free will and determinism on a journey through space in Kurt Vonnegut's *The Sirens of Titan* (1959). *Implicit Religion*, 20(2), 149–166. <https://doi.org/10.1558/imre.34366>
- Rodney Allen, W. (Ed.) (1988). *Conversations with Kurt Vonnegut*. University Press of Mississippi.
- Rodríguez, A. M. (2008). La intertextualidad: cruce de disciplinas humanísticas. *Revista Xihmai*. 3 (5), 103-112.
- Simpson, J. (2022). *Kurt Vonnegut, modernity, and the self: a guide to the good life*. [Doctorate dissertation, University of Louisville] Electronic Theses and Dissertations. Paper 3806. <https://doi.org/10.18297/etd/3806>
- Vonnegut, K. (1959). *The Sirens of Titan*. The Dial Press.
- Vonnegut, K. (1965). *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater*. The Dial Press.
- Vonnegut, K. (1969). *Slaughterhouse-five, or, The children's crusade: a duty-dance with death*. The Dial Press.
- Vonnegut, K. (2005). *A Man Without a Country*. Seven Stories Press.
- Vonnegut, K. (2014). *Kurt Vonnegut: letters*. (D. Wakefield, Ed.) The Dial Press Trade.
- Vonnegut Library. (2023, Nov 16). Biography. <https://www.vonnegutlibrary.org/biography>
- Zengin, M. (2016). An Introduction to Intertextuality as a Literary Theory: Definitions, Axioms and the Originators. *Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi*. 25(1), [299-326.doi.org/10.5505/PAUSBED.2016.96729](https://doi.org/10.5505/PAUSBED.2016.96729)