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‘An Unfinished Death’: the Legacy of Albert Camus and the Work of Textual  
Memory in Contemporary European and Algerian Literatures

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Abstract:

After a consideration of the prevalence of notions of haunting in recent literary and cultural analysis, the work of Assia Djebar is taken as an example of contemporary Algerian literature, in which memories of the dead haunt the living, sometimes in the form of ghosts. Djebar’s meditations on Camus’s death and on his unfinished text, *Le Premier Homme*, provide a starting point for an analysis of Camus’s legacy in contemporary European and Algerian literatures. It is argued that much recent reading, informed by postcolonial theory, accusing Camus of mythologizing both himself and ‘French Algeria’, has not engaged fully with literary practice and the work of textual memory. *Le Premier Homme* is neither a ‘mythologizing’ text, nor a surrender to ‘nostalgia’, but a text of mourning and loss written in full knowledge of the consequences of the war of independence. The article ends with an analysis of how Camus, in the form of the ‘phantom’, the ‘phantasm’ and the ‘fantast’, appears in the work of two of other women writers in addition to that of Assia Djebar, the Algerian Maïssa Bey, and the French-Algerian Nina Bouraoui, showing how knowledge concerning the realities of the postcolonial world are to be found in its imaginative exploration.

Résumé:

Une revue de la prévalence des notions de la hantise dans les analyses littéraires et culturelles récentes précède une étude de l’œuvre d’Assia Djebar, comme exemplifiant la littérature algérienne contemporaine, et où les vivants sont hantés par des morts, parfois par des fantômes. Les méditations de Djebar sur la mort de Camus et sur son texte inachevé, *Le Premier Homme*, amorcent une analyse du legs de Camus aux littératures européennes et algériennes. L’argument soutient que beaucoup des lectures récentes, informées par la théorie postcoloniale, qui accusent Camus

d'avoir mythologisé et soi-même et 'l'Algérie française', ne se sont pas pleinement engagées avec la pratique littéraire et le travail de la mémoire textuelle. *Le Premier Homme* n'est ni un texte 'mythologisant' ni une capitulation à la 'nostalgie', mais un texte de deuil et de perte, écrit dans la conscience vive des conséquences de la guerre de l'indépendance. L'article conclut avec une analyse de l'apparition de Camus, sous la forme du 'fantôme', du 'fantasme' et du 'fantaste' dans l'œuvre de deux autres écrivains : l'algérienne Maïssa Bey et la franco-algérienne Nina Bouraoui, ce qui démontre comment la connaissance des réalités du monde postcoloniale s'intègre dans l'exploration imaginaire de ce monde.

#### Biographical Note on Author:

Debra Kelly is Professor of French and Francophone Literary and Cultural Studies at the University of Westminster, London, and the Director of the Group for War and Culture Studies. She is an Associate Fellow of the Institute of Germanic and Romance Studies, School of Advanced Study, University of London and contributes to the MA in Cultural Memory there. Her main areas of research are in the fields of Text and Image Studies, especially the early twentieth-century Parisian avant-garde, War and Culture Studies focusing on France in the twentieth century, and Postcolonial Studies, with a special interest in autobiography in North African Writing in French. Her major publications include *Pierre Albert-Birot. A Poetics of Movement, A Poetics in Movement* (1997) and *Autobiography and Independence. Selfhood and Creativity in Postcolonial North African Writing in French* (2005). She has published widely on French and Francophone writers and artists including Guillaume Apollinaire, Philippe Soupault, Jean Tardieu, Hans Hartung and Jean Bazaine, Robert Pinget, Lorand Gaspar, Albert Camus, Albert Memmi, Assia Djebar, Abdelkébir Khatibi, and most recently on the contemporary artist and poet Cozette de Charmoy.

Peut-être devrais-je remarquer que, dans l'inachèvement, travaille ou joue une répétition, une sorte d'écho, dans l'avant ou dans l'après [...] Dans l'inachèvement du *Premier Homme*, se joue autre chose du fait de la mort imprévue ; ce texte parle autant de Camus que de l'absence de celui-ci... Il porte en lui l'adieu irrémédiable autant que son propre éclat.' (Djebar 1999: 226, 228)

## The Haunting of Contemporary Literary Criticism

The ghost is not simply a dead or missing person, but a social figure, and investigating it can lead to that dense site where history and subjectivity make social life. (Gordon 1997: 8)

Assia Djebar's powerful and evocative meditations on Camus's final unfinished text, *Le Premier Homme* (found with him in the fatal car crash on 8 January 1960 and eventually published in 1994) and on what she has termed his own 'unfinished death' necessarily brings to mind notions of haunting, placed as it is within her recent body of work that is increasingly concerned with the dead, the absent, the missing of Algeria. Indeed it is not only within literature itself that notions of ghosts, spectres and phantoms are to be found. The prevalence of the theme and of the terminology of haunting in contemporary literary and cultural analysis has already been noted by a number of critics, notably within postcolonial studies. 'Hauntology' as it has sometimes come to be called following Jacques Derrida's term, often takes as its fundamental reference Derrida's own work in *Spectres de Marx*, in which he speaks of the necessity of learning to live with ghosts and spectres as a politics of memory, inheritance, and generations. The case of Derrida's thinking is particularly apt for a consideration of Algerian literature and history:

Derrida, indeed, suggests that it was his upbringing in the former colony which determined the formulation of his recent theses on 'spectrality'; that the image of the coloniser provided the inspiration for a trope which now, in his lexicon, supersedes *différance* and trace. The 'first' figure to waver between (ghostly) absence and (ghostly) presence, the 'first' apparition of uncertainty for him he has claimed, was France. (Tomlinson 2003: 34)<sup>1</sup>

The experience of Algerian at war with its attendant lack of certainties concerning both the dead and the living is:

[...] a story in which the certainties of the ontological (the presence of the living, the absence of the dead) would be insistently challenged by the uncertainties of what Derrida terms the 'hauntologic', of corpses without resting-place, and martyrs without scars; a story in which 'being' and 'non-being' came perilously close. The story of its aftermath has for many been the story of traumatic disorder, of flashbacks and re-enactments that make 'the object world' tremble, even – to draw on Frederic Jameson's definition of 'spectrality' – 'waver', of injurious events manifesting themselves, repeatedly, obliquely, much later. (Tomlinson 2003: 35)<sup>2</sup>

As well as his now well-known theoretical work, Derrida's 'work of mourning' also takes a more concrete, less abstract form. The editors of *The Work of Mourning. Jacques Derrida*, a collection of fifteen translations of tributes in various forms (eulogies, letters of condolence, memorial essays, funeral orations) written by Derrida to bear witness to dead friends over a period of some twenty years, call such texts:

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<sup>1</sup> The author's reference is to Jacques Derrida's *Monolingualism of the Other or the Prosthesis of Origin*, translated by Patrick Mensah (1998: 42).

<sup>2</sup> The reference is to Frederic Jameson, 'Marx's Purloined Letter', in *Ghostly Demarcations: A Symposium on Jacques Derrida's Spectres de Marx* (Sprinkler 1999: 38).

‘not [...] texts that speak of the work of mourning, of phantoms and spectres, in a more or less theoretical fashion but those that enact the work of mourning – and of friendship – in a more explicit way’ (Brault and Naas 2003: 3). In addition to Derrida, the work of Abraham and Torok in *L’Ecorce et le noyau* (1978), and, within cultural and memory studies, the work of Avery Gordon in *Ghostly Matters. Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (1997), quoted in the epigraph to this section, have also received critical attention. Colin Davis in a recent ‘Etat présent’ contribution to the journal *French Studies* gives a welcome clarification on the origins and differences between the thinking of Derrida and that of Abraham and Torok, calling them: ‘two distinct, related, and to some extent incompatible sources’, and also noting the ways in which Derrida’s: ‘rehabilitation of ghosts as a respectable subject of enquiry has proved extraordinarily fertile in literary criticism [...] Ghosts are a privileged theme because they allow an insight in texts and textuality as such’ (Davis 2005b: 373, 378). This analysis follows Davis’s own article ‘Charlotte Delbo’s Ghosts’ (Davis 2005a: 9-15) in a special issue of *French Studies* dedicated to the ways in which memory has become an increasingly ‘dominant cultural obsession’ in France, as in other European countries, amongst the Post-Holocaust generation, and in which the contributors seek to re-think the relation between memory and representation by highlighting not the failures of cultural memory, but: ‘a different model of memory as innovation and creative representation’ (Best and Robson 2005: 1). This issue includes articles in which notions of haunting are insistently present, notably in those studies dedicated to Algerian Writing in French: Elizabeth Fallaize’s ‘In Search of a Liturgy: Assia Djebar’s *Le Blanc d’Algérie* (1995)’ (Fallaize 2005: 55-62), to which we will return, and Edward Hughes’s ‘Haunted and Haemorrhaging: The World of Mohammed Dib’s *La Nuit Sauvage*’ (Hughes 2005: 63-69), in which he analyses what he terms: ‘[...] an imagined fantomatic community, formed by the absent French Algerians, who remain known to the children of the postcolonial order’ (67), and in which: ‘The ambivalence of colonial relations is captured in the story’s spectral presences’ (68). Central to this article here will be the final unfinished autobiographical narrative by Camus, *Le Premier Homme*, described by Jean Sarocchi as a ‘spectrographie’ of French Algeria, providing ‘une analyse spectrale’, not a political analysis, of its main protagonist’s destiny and that of his community, and in this reading of the text, the fundamental ‘spectre’ is ‘that of the father’ (Sarocchi 1995: 96, 149).

The theme of haunting and the vocabulary of ghosts, spectres and phantoms, the terms often used interchangeably despite their very different origins (a distinction to which we will return), continues to be topical in French and Francophone Studies, and has in fact been noticeable for sometime in the postcolonial literary analysis of modern and contemporary Algerian writing in French, as previously noted.<sup>3</sup> The Algerian War of Independence figures frequently, together with its attendant dead, as a ‘spectre’ and a ‘returning ghost’. Azzedine Haddour, for example, had already analysed the ‘spectre of the Algerian war’ and ‘the returning ghost of a repressed history’ (Haddour 2000:

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<sup>3</sup>A conference about to take place at the time of writing covers a wide range of creative production, taking in both nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with again a notable presence for writers of Algerian origin, including unsurprisingly the work of Assia Djebar, but also that of Derrida and Hélène Cixous. ‘Haunting Presences: Ghosts in French and Francophone Literature, Film and Art’, Institute of Germanic and Romance Studies, School of Advanced Study, University of London, 28 January 2006. Later this year at a conference on the theme ‘Space, Haunting and Discourse’, Department of English, University of Karlstadt, Sweden, 15-18 June 2006, a session in the broader field of war and culture studies entitled ‘Haunting, War and Conflict’ will explore the historical linkages between war, conflict and the ghostly across the centuries from the classical to the contemporary era, noting that little scholarly research has been done to date on the theme.

182) in two novels by Jean Pélégri, *Les Oliviers de la justice* and *Le Maboul*, in which: ‘the process of decolonization [...] manifests the return of the repressed, the ghost of a vanquished history [...] It is the spectrality of history’ (184). While the title of J. Clot’s *Fantômes au soleil*, also analysed by Haddour: ‘represents this violence as the ghost of colonial oppression which was to come to haunt the settlers’ (188). Algeria is seen as trapped in a circle of violence as the violence that the settlers used against those they colonized, is in turn used against them: ‘Clot and Pélégri represent this dialectic in terms of hauntology as a returning violence [...] the ghost is nothing but the re-visitation of the site of what has been suspended and cancelled: history’ (188-189).

### **Assia Djebar: the Writer as She Who Wakes the Dead**

J’avais donc écrit, durant deux ans, mon premier livre du Quatuor algérien, en m’étant instituée, tout le long, à la fois auteur et quasiment mon propre inquisiteur sourcilieux. Dans ce cas, le terme ‘auteur’ devrait signifier celui qui réveille les morts, celui qui remet debout les cadavres. (Djebar 1999: 112)

As far as Algerian literature is concerned, it is, as noted above, the work of Assia Djebar that provides the most obvious example of the return of various forms of the repressed. Memories of the dead, sometimes in the form of ghosts<sup>4</sup> haunt the living and particularly the author herself from the early novels to more recent work, especially since the 1990s as she deals more and more explicitly with the violence of that decade’s civil war in Algeria, the legacy of colonisation and the failures in social, political and economic reform following the War of Independence. These texts perform a type of ‘mediation’ between past and present, and the figure of the ‘ghost’ is to be understood here in the sense that Avery Gordon defines ‘haunting’ as a particular form of mediation between ‘a social structure and a subject, between history and biography’ (Gordon 1997: 19). In her work the figure of the ghost moves from representing loss on a personal level, taking the form of a dead child on more than one occasion, to loss on an enormous, collective scale from the dead ancestors, victims of colonial violence, through the War of Independence and its attendant atrocities, to the more recent dead of Algeria’s continuing internal conflict. Djebar recurrently draws attention to the violence to which women are subjected, doubly marginalised within both colonial and postcolonial Algeria, and in so doing makes an often powerful political statement on the real, lived experience of those women, excluded from the public space within their own culture. The focus in this analysis, however, is on literary practice, and the ways in which the ghost, whether of a close relative, friend, colleague, ancestor or unknown compatriot, singly or in their hundreds, functions as a mediating figure, giving form to the narrative as the narrator seeks to give voice to the experience of loss whether on an individual or collective level.

As early as her first novel *La Soif*, characters are haunted by memories of the past and especially by the deaths of others; in this novel Jedla is haunted by the dead child that she miscarried and even Nadia, characterised as living in the present, will be haunted by Jedla’s own suicide: ‘L’essentiel était de me persuader moi-même – de me répéter

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<sup>4</sup> The term ‘ghost’ that takes its origin from Germanic roots will be used in the initial part of this article in preference to the more problematic ‘spectres’ and ‘phantoms’ which will form part of the later analysis.

encore longtemps que cette soif étrange, léguée par un visage mort, n'était qu'une brume sans nom, dans mon cœur incertain.' (Djebar 1957: 165)

In her third novel *Les Enfants du nouveau monde*, Lila is haunted by the death of her mother, suffering: 'une maladie de plusieurs semaines, cauchemars où revenaient sa mère, ombre douce, son enfant, Ali', and also, once again, the loss of her child: 'Cet enfant (...) à peine ce fantôme fragile englouti, renié, disloqué' (Djebar 1962: 72-73). The fourth early novel, *Les Alouettes naïves* (1967), has also been analysed in terms of haunting: 'The phantomy animating *Les Alouettes*, [...] is not the *va-et-vient* of murdered patriarchs, but maternal 'revenge', it is a project to rescue women from the 'silence of their tombs'; women: 'come to stand for the ranks of Algeria's "unburied", for the visible-invisible victims of torture and war' (Tomlinson 2003: 36, 37, 46). The move from the individual to the collective gathers force, and the narratives will weave between the two from now on. The major volumes of Djebar's 'Algerian Quartet', published from the mid- 1980s onwards, continually use the ghosts of the past in various forms, ghosts that pass into being through the medium of the narrator, through the recounting of personal and collective memories and oral histories, and the narrating of stories, tales, legends, myths, particularly in *L'Amour, la fantasia* (1985) and *Vaste est la prison* (1995), that form a web of intertextual reference. All of these narratives in turn 'wake the dead', as Assia Djebar herself has written, and as evoked in the epigraph above. In *Vaste est la prison*, for example, deceased friends and relatives return throughout: the narrator's dead maternal grandmother enters the narrative with her story, while Bahia, the narrator's mother, has experienced the death of those closest to her: plunged into silence as a small girl following the death of her beloved sister, she then lost a six month old son while still a very young woman of nineteen, losses that, the narrator explains, were only fully mourned much later after the visit to the French prison to see the surviving son. The long dead of history also return, resuscitated in the French language, that 'langue adverse' which is Djebar's 'langue d'écriture':

Or celle-ci m'est aussi pour moi Algérienne, langue des envahisseurs et des soldats, langue du combat et des corps à corps virils, en somme langue du sang. Peut-être, après tout, est-ce pour cela que le premier sacrifice dans ma généalogie – le sang de l'arrière-grand-mère, ou plutôt sa mort soudaine, comme par étouffement – n'a pas pu me revenir à la mémoire que grâce à cette langue adverse [...] Ce n'est pas par hasard non plus que, dans *Vaste est la prison*, se lèvent d'autres morts en foule, au cours de la chute de Carthage... (Djebar 1999: 148-49)

Very explicitly, the final sequence of *Vaste est la prison* becomes a long procession of the dead, and contemporary Algeria in the 1990s is itself so full of the dead that it too has become a ghost:

Une Algérie fantôme où les vivants, croyant vivre pour eux-mêmes, continuent, malgré eux, à régler les comptes des morts pas tout à faits morts, persistant, eux, à s'entredévorer. (Djebar 1995: 230)

We will return to the dead who are 'not quite dead' in another way later in this analysis.

In Djebar's most recent works, the dead are ever more insistently present. In *Les Nuits de Strasbourg* (a text that has received less critical attention than the texts of the Algerian Quartet, set in a different geographical space, ostensibly a way of removing the narrator from Algeria, although this is also a space that is troubled by a violent past), Thelja describes herself as a ghost when François takes her to his late mother's house: 'Un fantôme, me voilà un fantôme parmi ses siens, ses siens morts' (Djebar

1997: 202). Thelja herself will suddenly disappear, as will characters in subsequent works. The title of *La Femme sans sépulture* is again explicit in its reference to the dead, or the undead, and there are multiple images of ghostly presences throughout the text, as the presence of Zoulikha hovers literally over the narrative: 'Comme si Zoulikha restée sans sépulture flottait, invisible, perceptible au-dessus de la cité rousse (Djebar 2002: 16-17). Of these recent texts, *Le Blanc de l'Algérie* is most explicitly concerned with the dead, and here the status of the author as she who 'wakes the dead' is most apparent, although Djebar also writes that this is not a book solely about death in Algeria:

Peu à peu, au cours de cette procession, entrecoupés de retours en arrière dans la guerre d'hier, s'établit, sur un peu plus de trente ans et à l'occasion d'une trentaine de morts d'hommes – et de femmes – de plume, une recherche irrésistible de liturgie. (Djebar 1999: 247)

Elizabeth Fallaize provides a detailed analysis of this text focusing on textual strategies with a close attention to historical documentation used in the text, noting that this is both a work of reference and testimony that is explicitly acknowledged, and at the same time a work of the imagination, using both imagined events and witness accounts (Fallaize 2005: 56-57). It is notably Camus who heads the first procession of four dead just before Algerian independence (followed Frantz Fanon, Mouloud Feraoun, and Jean Amrouche), although the account of his death is given obliquely, in contrast to many of the others evoked in *Le Blanc de l'Algérie*, and experienced through the mother awaiting the return of the son whom she eventually realises will never return (Djebar: 1995: 103-5). Camus's is 'une mort inachevée', a concept that gives a title to a whole section of *Le Blanc de l'Algérie*. As Fallaize notes, it is significant that Camus, the *pied-noir* writer, opens the processions and indeed provides one of the epigraphs to the text as a whole (the other is from Kateb Yacine): 'Si j'avais le pouvoir de donner une voix à la solitude et à l'angoisse de chacun d'entre nous, c'est avec cette voix que je m'adresserais à vous', taken from his famous address made in Algiers on 22 January 1956, calling for a 'civil truce'<sup>5</sup>. Fallaize sees this as a 'reversed form of inclusion, in which the margin of the former colonized includes the colonial centre' (Fallaize 2005: 60). Contemporary literary, historical and political critical thinking, informed by postcolonial theory, often views Camus's claim to Algerian status as suspect given his origins in the poor *pied-noir* community and the way in which his literary exploration of identity engages not only with a personal history but also with the collective histories of North Africa and of Europe, and specifically with the political, social and cultural configuration of 'French Algeria'. Such readings have literally put Camus 'in the dock' to answer for a list of offences ranging from overt racism, for example in *L'Etranger*, to 'special pleading' in the defence of French Algeria and his own poor settler community in *Le Premier Homme*, and leading to a variety of conclusions of variable nuance. For Assia Djebar, as we will see, Camus becomes a 'mediating' figure'.

### **Albert Camus: the Work of Textual Memory in Literary Practice**

It is to Camus that we will now turn more fully. As Assia Djebar rather wryly notes, while Camus remains a suspect Algerian for many contemporary critics, her own identity is currently perceived as the embodiment of an 'Algérie-femme' and as such

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<sup>5</sup> 'Appel pour une trêve civile (en Algérie)', the full text is available in several collections of Camus's writing, including, *Selected Political Writings. Albert Camus*, (Jonathan King (ed.), 1981: 187-195. First published 1965.



is celebrated and sought after, playing as it does into western preoccupations concerning the experience and treatment of women in Muslim societies. Yet, it is also clear that the ambiguities of Camus's writing and of the representation of memory in the Algerian context are more complex than trial by political, and often emotional, conviction allows.<sup>6</sup> Emily Apter begins by agreeing with the accusations that in *Le Premier Homme* Camus mythologises not only himself, but also the way in which Algeria was colonised and then the subsequent fate of its poor settler community in which he grew up: 'For critics steeped in postcolonial perspectives, Camus's name triggers not only a deplorable record on the Algerian war that rightly cost him his friendships on the left, but also his systematic nullification of Arab characters, particularly evident in *L'Etranger*, *La Peste* and the short stories in *L'Exil et le Royaume*' (Apter 1997: 502). Much of this type of adverse reaction originates with Conor Cruise O'Brien's *Albert Camus: Of Europe and Africa* (1970) and then later with Edward Said's 'Camus and the French Imperial Experience' in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993). Such criticism can, of course, be traced back to Albert Memmi's original assessment of the poor settlers within his 'portrait of the colonizer' (Memmi 1957) which caused a rift between himself and Camus after the latter had provided a preface to the second edition of Memmi's first novel *La Statue de sel* (1953), another narrative exploring loss on an individual and collective level. Yet Apter also goes on to note the recent recuperation and re-appropriation of Camus as 'universal freedom fighter' by Algerian exiles and dissidents as part of a wider reaction against the rise of fundamentalism in Algeria in the 1990s. What she terms the 'unfinished business' of Camus and Algeria cannot be dismissed so easily (Apter 1997: 500-502). And aside from political considerations, this 'unfinished' autobiographical text, this 'unfinished' death and the resultant 'unfinished business' will allow us to grasp some of the dynamics of literary practice and the processes of textual memory.

As previously noted, the 'incompleteness' of *Le Premier Homme* and of Camus's own life leads Assia Djebar onto notions of rupture and loss in her own meditation on him and on his work. His final text: 'où la sève autobiographique est ouvertement affichée, mais roman tout de même', is incomplete, not because of dissatisfaction with it, or because of the exhaustion of old age or illness as may be the case for unfinished literary texts, but because, on the contrary: '[...] comme dans les morts non annoncées, semblent se ficher, dans le creux des mots ou dans les éclats de structure inaboutie, la hache du destin, et l'ombre de son coup' (Djebar 1999: 228). Historical memory and personal memories ('le roman de l'histoire familiale, de la sage communautaire [...] retour sur soi, sur le royaume de l'enfance, dans un flux qui rejaillit') present in *Le Premier Homme* share the characteristics of incompleteness, rupture and ambiguity: 'Ce livre nous livre-t-il, de la mort, l'ombre de sa face ? Non pas ce deuil, plutôt l'insaisissable du passage. Livre que le destin a interrompu, qui garde en lui un élan vers l'inconnu, une impétuosité' (Djebar 1999: 232; 229). Such 'unfinished business' necessarily returns to haunt the living. As Abraham writes in 'Notules sur le fantôme' in *L'Ecorce et le Noyau* on the phenomenon of haunting:

Tous les morts peuvent revenir, certes, mais il en est qui sont prédestinés à la hantise (...). Un fait est certain : le 'fantôme' est bien l'invention des vivants. Une invention (...) dans le sens où elle doit objectiver, fût-ce sur le mode hallucinatoire, individuel ou collectif, la lacune qu'a créée en nous l'occultation d'une partie de la vie d'un objet aimé. Le fantôme est donc, aussi,

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<sup>6</sup> For a fuller exposition of this argument, see Debra Kelly 'Colonial and Postcolonial Identities: *Le Premier Homme* and the Haunting of Modern Memory' in Edward J. Hughes (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Camus*, 2006 (forthcoming)

un fait métapsychologique. C'est dire que ce ne sont pas les trépassés qui viennent hanter, mais les lacunes laissées en nous par les secrets des autres. (Abraham and Torok [1978] 198: 426-427)<sup>7</sup>

In *Le Premier Homme*, the main protagonist Jacques Cormery is haunted by the memory (or rather the gaps in the memory) of his father killed in the First World War and lying in a cemetery in northern France, and by the forgotten settler dead in the graves of Solferino whose names are destined to be effaced on the gravestones that mark the site of their bodies: 'l'anonymat définitif et la perte des seules traces sacrées de leur passage sur cette terre, les dalles illisibles que la nuit avait maintenant recouvertes dans le cimetière' (Camus 1994: 181), and who will sink into: 'le mystère de la pauvreté qui fait les êtres sans nom et sans passé, qui les fait rentrer dans l'immense cohue des morts sans nom qui ont fait le monde en se défaisant pour toujours' (180). Camus himself is haunted by events in Algeria, and all the more intensely in the writing of this text from 1958 onwards, a period that coincided with his public 'silence' on the country of his birth. *Le Premier Homme* is not a mythologizing text, it is written in the full understanding of the consequences of the Algerian War of Independence, and as such it is not a surrender to nostalgia, another frequent accusation levelled at Camus, but part of the work of mourning and loss.<sup>8</sup> If the aim of the elaboration of a collective memory is a 'useable past' or the creation of a group identity, if collective memory tends to be: 'impatient with ambiguity and to represent itself as representing an unchanging reality' (Wertsch 2002: 31, 66), in order to create a set of memories for a particular kind of community, then the aim of *Le Premier Homme*, a text founded on absence and loss, is other, because on the contrary, it does not construct any sort of 'useable' collective memory for the future. Since the French Algerians have no future, it is rather a book of mourning. Mourning is a kind of remembering and in Freudian terms, unlike nostalgia, will end in the subject letting go of the loved object so as to become free again. As Daniel Sherman has observed, mourning is both cultural and political:

In the aftermath of war, societies enact and attempt to displace individual mourning [...]. The political dimension of commemoration resides in the way it channels mourning in a direction that conforms to dominant perceptions of the national interest. But the work of commemoration is also cultural: it inscribes or re-inscribes a set of symbolic codes, ordering discourses, and master narratives that recent events, perhaps the very ones commemorated have disrupted, newly established or challenged. (Sherman 1999: 7)

Camus's work of mourning in *Le Premier Homme* has certainly been perceived as political, although those he mourns are precisely those who in fact have no place in the national interest of either France or Algeria. Mourning also occupies a notable place in Camus's much earlier *La Peste*, a novel conceived towards the end of the 1930s, explicitly marked by the losses sustained in the First World War, by the rise of Fascism, by the events of the Second World War, by France's experience of the Occupation, and published in 1947, a year which saw wars in Indochina, China, Palestine and Greece. Here the work of mourning may be read as cultural in the way that Daniel Sherman describes, and the legacy of the 'codes, discourses and narratives' inscribed in *Le Premier Homme* is apparent in a number of novels

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<sup>7</sup> See also the use of this section of the text in the doctoral thesis of Jennifer Murray, 'Remembering the (Post) Colonial Self: Memory and Identity in the Novels of Assia Djebar', University of Ulster, 2005.

<sup>8</sup> Again, for a fuller development of this argument, see Kelly 2006 (forthcoming and as yet without page references).

published at beginning of the final decade of the twentieth century and dealing with the aftermath of last century's wars. Camus offers a meditation on the suffering that may bring communities together, and conversely on the mourning that separates those that are bereaved from those that are not. The gulf that opens up between relief and grief is described by Camus in *La Peste* at the moment when the plague is finally conquered:

Serrés les uns contre les autres, tous rentrèrent alors chez eux, aveugles au reste du monde, triomphant en apparence de la peste, oublieux de toute misère et de ceux qui, venues aussi par le même train, n'avaient trouvé personne et se disposaient à recevoir chez eux la confirmation des craintes qu'un long silence avait déjà fait naître dans leur cœur. Pour ces derniers, qui n'avaient maintenant pour compagnie que leur douleur toute fraîche, pour d'autres qui se vouaient, à ce moment au souvenir d'un être disparu, il en allait tout autrement et le sentiment de la séparation avait atteint son sommet. Pour ceux-là, mères, époux, amants qui avaient perdu toute joie avec l'être maintenant égaré dans une fosse anonyme ou fondu dans un tas de cendre, c'était toujours la peste.  
Mais qui pensaient à ces solitudes ? (Camus [1947] 1988: 317-318)

The legacy of Camus is also apparent in the need of later novelists to bear witness to the suffering of others, and between *La Peste* and later narratives of loss, the work of textual memory is evident:

Pour être un témoin fidèle, il devait rapporter surtout les actes, les documents et les rumeurs [...] Quand il se trouvait tenté de mêler directement sa confiance aux mille voix des pestiférés, il était arrêté par la pensée qu'il n'y avait pas une de ses souffrances qui ne fût en même temps celle des autres et que dans un monde où la douleur est si souvent solitaire, cela était un avantage. Décidément, il devait parler pour tous. (Camus (1947] 1988: 325)

'To speak for all': contemporary European fiction reveals what we might call a compulsion to bear witness to the wars of the twentieth century and to examine the impact of their aftermath through the work of the imagination since, unlike Rieux, this post-war generation of writers do not bear witness in person, in memory and the imagination. There is frequently a notable insistence on loss and on forms of mourning, indeed on giving a thought to those lonely mourners that Camus describes. As William Watkin writes in *On Mourning. Theories of Loss in Modern Literature*:

Modern fiction has centred on loss as a strong means of accessing meaning in a world where meaningfulness has been weakened [...] Whatever the motivations of the writer, two things are certain, that loss and its mourning have become a predominant theme in modern prose, and that unlike other expressions of loss and mourning which centre around the lost beloved love object and the effects of loss on a mourning subject, the Freudian dialectic of loss, novelists and prose writers have turned their attention to the effects of loss on the world at large. Loss is no longer personal but environmental, becoming a disturbing meta-narrative of our age. (Watkin 2004: 172)

Special attention should be paid to the 'environments of loss', but literature is not pathology and needs no 'cure' as does the melancholic subject in the clinic (191). Watkins sees loss, therefore, as a contemporary meta-narrative, a fundamental dynamic of what Peter Middleton and Tim Woods call the 'textual memory of literary practice' in their discussion of contemporary historical literature, taking as one example Pat Barker's *Regeneration Trilogy* (Middleton and Woods 2000: 3), three novels concerned with loss, mourning and eventual renewal in the First World War. Paul Ricœur writes powerfully that: 'La fiction donne au narrateur horrifié des yeux' (Ricœur 1985: 341-342), that fiction gives eyes to the narrator to see and eyes to

weep.<sup>9</sup> It is those eyes to weep that are of particular importance here, for in addition to the exhortation not to forget, the reader is also offered a channel through which to mourn. Indeed, the reader carries an ethical responsibility, as Derrida has suggested, it is only 'in us' that the dead may speak, it is only by speaking of or as the dead that we can keep them alive: 'Ghosts [are] the concept of the other in the same' (Derrida quoted in Brault and Nass 2003: 9, 41-42). Or as Elizabeth Fallaize summarises it with reference to Assia Djebar:

The lives of the writers she reconstructs function as a focus for ethical reflection on the part of the reader, and if Djebar refuses to address the living directly, preferring to address the dead, she compels our engagement through the work we undertake in unravelling her dense poetic prose and metaphors. (Fallaize 2005: 62)<sup>10</sup>

Djebar's literature of loss focuses rather on those who have been lost than on the community of mourners as in Camus's *La Peste*, and in this she joins thinkers such as Derrida and Levinas, as Watkin again writes:

Thinkers such as Jacques Derrida, Emmanuel Levinas, Jean-Luc Nancy and Jean-François Lyotard have begun to insist on the responsibility of mourning to the lost other, turning attention away from those who grieve and towards those who have been lost. This ethical consideration of otherness rather than subjective coherence, has been matched by a change in attitude in the literatures of mourning and loss also. (Watkin 2004: 199)

Like Camus's *La Peste*, a number of European novels published in the last decade of the twentieth century seek to deal with the loss and pain of the Second World War, bearing witness through the work of memory and the imagination, as previously suggested. A random selection might include the following four very different texts. Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient* (1992) in which all the protagonists are in mourning to some extent, all of them in various stages of grief, affected by loss and equipped only with partial understanding of themselves and of others. A sense of betrayal by individuals and by the nations they belong to hovers over the whole narrative, serving as a microcosm of a physically and emotionally damaged Europe whose inhabitants have yet to perform their work of mourning. Rachel Seifert's *The Dark Room* (2001) deals specifically with the consequences of loss and the forms that mourning may take, turning the focus to Germany and the question of whom to mourn and how to mourn amongst a people who are both perpetrators and victims. Even in a novel not ostensibly concerned with either of the two world wars, the grief caused by war and its consequences can suddenly erupt into the narrative. A striking example is Jonathan Coe's *The Rotter's Club* (2001), a novel primarily concerned with a group of adolescents and their families set in 1970s Birmingham against the background of industrial and political unrest and social change in a Britain also in the grip of IRA terrorism. Yet the Second World War makes an unexpected appearance in the main protagonist's life story during a family holiday in Denmark in 1976 spent with his father's German colleague when a near-tragic incident caused by memories of the German occupation of the country leads Benjamin to make his first attempt to create a

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<sup>9</sup> This quotation from Paul Ricœur is used both by Middleton and Woods 2000: 69 and by Fallaize 2005: 57.

<sup>10</sup> For an analysis of Djebar's autobiographical project that develops Mireille Calle-Gruber's concept of the aesthetics and ethics of Assia Djebar's writing, see Kelly 2005: 333, with reference to Calle-Gruber 1998: 142; 2001: 81.

narrative, effectively to 'bear witness'. Here, as in the other novels, loss works on the imagination and memory becomes text.

Finally in this random corpus, the 'textual memory of literary practice' is perhaps nowhere more apparent than in the re-writing of a personal history interwoven into the public history of the Second World War in Ian McEwan's *Atonement* (2001) in which the needs of both the narrator and the reader for some sort of closure is made explicit, but never achieved. At the end of this novel the positive outcome for the work of mourning that may be acted out through a narrative as has been suggested is the case for the *Regeneration Trilogy* (Middleton and Woods 2000: 109) is thrown into doubt as 'truth' is revealed as multiple and unknowable. We can only mourn a version of what may have happened in the past. Nonetheless, that version remains essential for us to move on, providing a resolution in its own way. From Freud's dynamic conception of mourning in *Mourning and Melancholia* published in 1917 in the middle of the Great War to McEwan's ambiguous fiction set against the backdrop of the Second World War, there is a strong narrative drive for some sort of closure or resolution. Camus's mourners in *La Peste* are described at the moment of dedicating themselves to lifelong mourning. The need to remember and to bear witness has become an imperative of contemporary European culture, yet, arguably, we must also be able to forget since forgetting is necessary both to society and to the individual, indeed forgetting can be seen as an integral part of memory.<sup>11</sup>

Camus, however, is not forgotten, his 'unfinished death', this very 'incompleteness' of which Assia Djebar writes provides fertile ground for literary creation within the Algerian context – several contemporary Algerian novelists, not only Djebar, remember Camus. The implicit and explicit references to his work are striking in the work of a number of writers, particularly that of women, in ways that go beyond the intertextuality that necessarily provides one of the dynamic elements through which the whole system of literary creation is generated. It is to the creative aspects of this type of 'haunting' that we will finally turn. It was previously noted that the term 'ghost' (with its Germanic origin) has been used up to this point in order to avoid the complexities of other terms such as 'spectre' and 'phantom' often used interchangeably by critics, despite their different original meanings.<sup>12</sup> 'Spectre' from the Latin 'specere' to look, would indicate a passive state, that of looking but not acting; 'phantom' shares an origin ultimately from the Greek meaning 'to make visible', 'to show', and indicates an active state. While the phantom may be defined as an illusion, a form without substance or reality, it is in fact, as we will see later, closely linked to perceptions of reality.

Camus's 'phantasm' (the supposed vision of an absent person, either living or dead) visits particularly the writing of Algerian women, and we might speculate that women writers are more ready to collapse the coloniser-colonised opposition and identify with a man who would have been excluded from full participation in the Algeria constructed by nationalist discourse after independence, just as women have been, and who has been perceived in an ambiguous position ever since with regard to the

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<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Marc Augé, *Les Formes de l'oubli*, 1998.

<sup>12</sup> Although it should be noted that Colin Davis, focusing on the status of the secret, distinguishes between Derrida's 'spectre' (a deconstructive figure that challenges intellectual traditions and does not belong to the order of knowledge, where the secret does not have a determinate content to be uncovered, and is not a puzzle to be solved, but rather opens up meanings), and Abraham and Torok's 'phantom' (whose secret should be revealed, returning the ghost to the order of knowledge) (Davis 2005b: 378), given that the secrets and crimes of past generations can be deposited in the unconscious without the subject ever having been conscious of them (Davis 2005a: 9).

country of his birth.<sup>13</sup> Camus shares with Assia Djébar and other writers such as Maïssa Bey and the Jewish *pied noir* Héléne Cixous the elaboration of a poetics of loss in his writing. Indeed both Camus himself and references to his fiction sometimes form part of that poetics of loss. In a short story by Maïssa Bey, ‘Un jour de juin’, collected in her *Nouvelles d’Algérie*, a young Algerian male narrator remembers reading *L’Etranger* at school: ‘Tiens, ça me rappelle l’autre, Meursault, mer et soleil comme disait la prof de français, l’histoire du type qui tue un Arabe, un jour, sur un plage. Je ne sais pas pourquoi, je n’ai jamais oublié cette histoire... pourtant le lycée, c’est déjà loin !’ (Bey 1998: 46). The narrative is at once critical of the implicit colonialist discourse that removes the Arab’s subjectivity when Meursault fires at the Arab: ‘avec un A majuscule, comme si c’était son nom’, and of the violence of contemporary Algerian society: ‘Seulement les gars ici, ils ne mettent pas ça sur le compte du soleil’ (Bey 1998: 46-47). In Nina Bouraoui’s *Garçon manqué*, an autobiographical text, the writer describes herself as made of the land of Algeria: ‘Qui saura de quoi je suis faite? La terre algérienne’ (Bouraoui 2000: 36), despite being of mixed French-Algerian parentage. Yet, the vocabulary of an earlier passage clearly echoes *L’Etranger*, the ‘violent sun’ of Algeria oppresses her and makes her feel that she is not really Algerian, although she feels she wants never to return to France:

La plage est impossible. Elle étouffe [...] Le soleil est son obsession . Il vise son corps. Il prend tout. Il dit le danger imminent de ce pays. Le soleil est violent. Il brûle le sel. Il embrase. Il chauffe la roche des falaises. Sa lumière est blanche. Sa frappe est puissante. Le soleil est une folie. Le soleil est un homme qui dévore l’Algérie [...] Le soleil incendie. Le feu contre mon souffle. Le feu contre ma volonté. Il m’attend. Je ne remonte pas. Le soleil révèle. Je ne suis pas algérienne... Il me cherche. Il vient. Par bandes obliques. Il consume. Le soleil est une vengeance. Je ne suis pas d’ici. Je ne remonte pas. Je reste assise [...] Je suis sous la terre... Se noyer en Algérie. Vaincre le soleil. Rester là. Ne jamais rentrer en France. (Bouraoui 2000: 30-31)

But it is Assia Djébar who provides the most sustained meditation on Camus: ‘fils-amant de ce même soleil qui darde’, her: ‘presque compatriote ou moitié compatriote par la terre et l’espace d’enfance, plutôt que par l’histoire...’ (Djébar 1999: 221, 226). He has returned to her and the haunting has mediated some kind of reconciliation: ‘J’ai mis du temps pour reconnaître les personnages des ces deux grands écrivains, leurs ombres sœurs. Point de paresse. Toute prise de connaissance nécessite son délai obligé de mise en place’ (Djébar 1999 : 221).<sup>14</sup> In Djébar’s *La Disparition de la langue française* (2003), the main protagonist Berkhane, almost fifty years old and an exile from Algeria for twenty years returns to his native land. During his attempts to retrieve his personal memories and the city of his youth he passes the Lycée<sup>15</sup>, where he always has a ‘thought’ for Camus who each day, as a schoolboy, got off the tram that had brought him from Belcourt to the other side of the city, to the entrance to the Kasbah:

<sup>13</sup> I am grateful here to the original ideas of Christine O’Dowd-Smyth in her doctoral thesis ‘Silence, Exile and the Problematic of Postcolonial Identity in North African Literatures Francophone Literatures’, University of Westminster, 2005, and for first alerting me to the references to Camus in the texts referred to in this section of the article.

<sup>14</sup> The other writer referred to here is Eugène Fromentin whose *Un été au Sahara* (1857) and *Une Année dans le Sahel* (1874) are used as suggestive intertextual references in *L’Amour, la fantasia* (Djébar: 1985).

<sup>15</sup> The same lycée that Djébar herself attended twenty five years after Camus she tells us (Djébar 1999: 222).

ma Casbah où il est rarement entré, me semble-t-il... (...) tout cela, ce songe d'ombres à la fois inconnues de moi et trop connues, ainsi que cet écrivain pied-noir me donnant comme une chiquenaude, d'un air de dire : 'Pas le Grand Lycée, petit, pas l'université, seulement les lettres, écrivain ou écrivain, qu'importe, mais le rêve sous les doigts, dans la langue murmurée, ou silencieuse, et pour toujours ensoleillée ...', tout cela... (Djebar 2003: 92).

The difference in experience between the returning Algerian and the *pied noir* is noted, but the identification with Camus is sustained as Berkane experiences the 'definitive' loss of his childhood, not its retrieval. He is haunted by his father's shadow, a father who fought in the Second World War for France and dies soon after independence. Berkane disappears in a car crash in Kabylia on his way to visit a camp in which he was imprisoned by the French in 1962. He leaves behind an unfinished autobiographical project entitled 'L'Adolescent', written in French, his 'langue de mémoire'. Like *Le Premier Homme* this is a text that entails risk, as his brother explains to Berkane's former French lover Marise whom he urges to read it, even 'unfinished', since it was in order to finish it that he put himself in danger. Berkane's death is also 'unfinished' as Marise suddenly realises: 'Berkane, mon Berkane, tu as eu une mort inachevée' (Djebar 2003: 275), his return has become a disappearance, his presence, an absence. His phantom returns to haunt Marise who carries him within her as she continues to go on stage in the Koltès play, *Retour au désert* in which she has accepted the role of Mathilde: 'Tout contre Mathilde, le personnage, mais au-dedans de Marise sur scène, Berkane revenait en fantôme pour habiter son amie : lui, vivant et absent, écrivant et muet, lui qu'elle cachait mais d'où elle retirait une force neuve.' (Djebar 2003: 277). Berkane's unfinished text, another expression of loss and absence is written against the violent background of the 'disappearance of the French language', indicated by the title, as the professional classes exile themselves from 1990s Algeria and the rise of fundamentalism. Another community is now threatened with effacement and the consequences of violence in Algeria continue to haunt.

### **Reality and the Fantastic: the Work of the Literary Practice**

Within the processes of literary practice, of textual memory and of memory work, *Le Premier Homme* and Camus's other fictions of Algeria are interpretations of an experience that continues to haunt, and continue to tell us much about the anxieties of contemporary postcolonial cultures. Just as Camus was haunted in the late 1950s by the increasing violence on both sides of the Algerian war of independence and by the consequences for his own community, so this literary expression of impossible return and potentially irretrievable loss continues to haunt the imagination of readers, critics and writers as we have seen.<sup>16</sup> The adverse reaction to Camus's work in recent years has already been discussed. But fiction is the work of the imagination and cannot be judged solely on political sensibilities.<sup>17</sup> *Le Premier Homme* explores the relationship between the writer's self and the creative process as a space for a meditation on the act of literary creation and the ways in which it intervenes in the world – and in the imagination. Although the project is firstly a 'writerly' one, this is not to say that it is merely intellectual project that takes little account of the realities of the colonial

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<sup>16</sup> Nancy Wood analyses this 'return to Camus', noting for example critical interest in the 1970s, 1980s and especially the 1990s following the immense publishing success of *Le Premier Homme* in 1994, and of Olivier Todd's biography, *Albert Camus: une vie*, in 1996 (Wood 1999: 143-44).

<sup>17</sup> For more nuanced analyses by postcolonial critics, see Emily Apter, 'Out of character: Camus's French Algerian Subjects', 1997: 499-516 and David Carroll, 'Camus's Algeria: Birthrights, Colonial Injustice and the Fiction of a French Algerian People', 1997: 517-549, as well as Nancy Wood, 'Colonial Nostalgia and *Le Premier Homme*', 1997: 143-166.

system and has nothing to say about or to the postcolonial world. Camus is aware that the self of the writer is in the *present* of writing, not only in the accumulation of autobiographical ‘facts’ or in the writing or re-writing of a history either erased or appropriated by others. As is evident in the writing of several postcolonial writers, the postcolonial state is one of *becoming* (as explored by Abdelkébir Khatibi, for example; Kelly 2005: 339), where a new relationship may be opened up with time and space. The difficulty lies in tolerating the tension between the text’s historical context while: ‘remaining alert to that indeterminacy that marks literature’ (Harrison 2003: 150). Ambiguity and complexity reside in the form and literary processes of *Le Premier Homme*, as in its politics. The creative process becomes a testimony to a way of living, and writing is a necessary intervention despite personal and political cost. Camus’s commemoration of his community is certainly subjective, yet his literary legacy to both European and Algerian writers continues to resonate. For all these writers, memories are to be held side by side as are histories, despite the caveat that the appeal to memory over history may: ‘displace analysis by empathy, politics by sentiment’ (Hodgkin and Radstone 2003: 8). Or will it? On any site of conflict there is equally a struggle for memory, and it is certain that memory makes claims that will not be acceptable to everyone. Like the suggestive analysis of Avery Gordon, Albert Camus and then Assia Djebar: ‘contemplate haunting and ghosts at the level of the making and unmaking of world historical events’ (Gordon 1997: 27). This is an implicit reference to the work of Elaine Scarry who demonstrates in *The Body in Pain. The Making and Unmaking of the World* that the ‘structure of war’ and indeed all acts of violence and of torture, and what she terms the ‘structure of unmaking’ are one subject. It is obvious that torture and war are acts of destruction and: ‘entail the suspension of civilisation (and are somehow the opposite of that civilisation’; less obvious is that:

[...] they are, in the most literal and concrete way possible, an appropriation, aping, and reversing of the act of creation itself. Once the structures of torture and war have been exposed and compared, it becomes clear that the human action of making entails two distinct phases – making-up (mental imagination) and making real (endowing the mental object with a material or verbal form) – and that the appropriation and deconstruction of making occur sometimes at the first and sometimes at the second of these two sites. (Scarry 1985: 282, 323)

War and all acts of violence unmake, the writer makes. In acts of war and violence, the human is destroyed, but what remains is nonetheless intensely human. As Scarry suggests: ‘we make ourselves visible to each other through verbal and material artefacts’, but the: ‘derealisation of artefacts may assist in taking away another person’s visibility’ (Scarry 1985: 22). The writer ensures that the human remains visible through making available a shared experience: ‘objectified in language and material objects’ (Scarry 1985: 255) which are the marks of human experience. The artistic process of ‘making’ entails the: ‘passage of what is only imagined into a material form’ (Scarry 1985: vi). In the concluding pages of Djebar’s *Vaste est la prison*, the narrator appears to descend into the realm of the fantastic, far removed from everyday reality, tormented by nightmares and by the endless procession of the murdered as the pages of the text seem to drip with blood. The word ‘fantastic’ shares the same origin as that of ‘phantom’ and ‘phantasm’, ‘making visible’, yet the fantastic is always ambiguous, standing: ‘between the false, the foolish, the delusory, the shallows of the mind, and the mind’s deep connection with the real’ (Le Guin 1990: 9). The ‘fantastic’ is paradoxically the type of literature perhaps closest to ‘reality’. In the realm of the fantastic contradictions surface and are held in opposition



to reason which is forced to confront what it usually refuses to encounter. The fantastic challenges authoritative truths and replaces them with something less certain, in order perhaps to apprehend Truth, but certainly to test what is offered as a 'truth'. Once spatial and temporal assumptions are dissolved, as they are when the dead return, the perception of 'truth' is sent into disarray. One of the most powerful scenes in *Le Premier Homme* is a moment of just such a revelation. Standing in front of his father's grave in the cemetery at Saint-Brieuc, Jacques realises that: 'l'homme enterré sous cette dalle, et qui avait été son père, était plus jeune que lui', and consequently that:

[...] quelque chose ici n'était pas dans l'ordre naturel et, à vrai dire, il n'y avait pas d'ordre mais seulement folie et chaos là où le fils était plus âgé que le père. La suite du temps lui-même se fracassait autour de lui immobile, entre ces tombes qu'il ne voyait plus, et les années cessaient de s'ordonner suivant ce grand fleuve qui coule vers sa fin. Elles n'étaient plus que fracas, ressac et remous où Jacques Cormery se débattait maintenant aux prises avec l'angoisse et la pitié. (Camus 1994: 29-30)

The fantastic, the extra-ordinary, juxtaposes incompatible elements, resists fixity, opens up possibilities. The Algerian dead remain disturbing narrative presences, the remains of lives caught up in the fatal embrace of history. However, they are finally not 'spectres', able to look (*specere*) but not to show. In Djébar's 'making' they are 'phantoms', making visible the impulse inherent in all literary creation, generated between the mimetic impulse to which literature tends, and the fantastic impulse of a revelation beyond the rational, the two combining in the 'reality' of human experience: 'The ghost makes itself known to us through haunting and pulls us affectively into the structure of feeling of a reality we come to experience as a recognition' (Gordon 1997: 63). Avery Gordon's book that makes connections between horror, history and haunting offers a compelling lens with which to view Djébar's compulsion to write of the returning dead. For Gordon, and as Djébar's work testifies, fiction is a social force: 'a repository of memories that are too brutal, too debilitating, and too horrifying to register through direct historical and social sciences narratives' (back cover). Ghosts are a 'crucible for political meditation and historical memory', a way for us to reckon with what 'modern history has rendered ghostly' (18). In earlier periods of human history, as Victoria Best and Kathryn Robson note: 'Far from being unreal, the imagination provided the world in which knowledge could be acquired' (Best and Robson 2005: 6), quoting Giorgio Agamben:

For Antiquity, the imagination, which is now expunged from knowledge as 'unreal', was the supreme medium of knowledge. As the intermediary between the senses and the intellect, enabling, in phantasy, the union between the sensible form and the potential intellect, it occupies in ancient and medieval culture exactly the same role that our culture assigns to experience. (Agamben 1993: 24)

In his 'unfinished death', the death that intruded unexpectedly and unanticipated in a life's work, Camus is given the form of a phantasm. He is also a 'fantast', the visionary and dreamer, and as the notes to *Le Premier Homme* make clear, the narrative *must* be unfinished: 'Le livre *doit être* inachevé' (Camus 1994: 288), for as Assia Djébar writes in the extract taken as the epigraph to open this article, this 'last book' speaks as much of Camus's presence as his absence, and is a making visible of the very process of 'making' and of textual memory.

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