



Article

Art in the Face of Evil: Analogies between the Conceptions of Two French Resistance Fighters

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Abstract: I present two conceptions of the human being and art: that of Renaud—the main fictional character of a short novel written by Vercors—and that of Albert Camus. Although these French resistance fighters experienced the same war, the same terrible events surprisingly lead them to opposite extremes: the first one to despair and the rejection of art perceived as an unbearable lie, the second one to hope and to artistic commitment. Analogical reasoning allows us to show both the similarities and the distinctions between these two men or, more precisely, between what they tell us about human beings and art. Thanks to this, it is easier to understand the essential role the artist plays and his duty towards humankind. Moreover, in the work of Albert Camus, we will see that revolt is—and must be—connected to love.

Keywords: Albert Camus; Vercors; art; human being; evil; analogical comparison

- [...] Quand tu regardes le journal télé, tu vois que c'est dans pas longtemps qu'un type va faire exploser la Terre ...
[...] Et je peux te dire que tu pourras connaître par cœur tous les poèmes du monde, ça te fera pas survivre ...

- Et qui est-ce qui survivra?

- Les mecs [...] qui sont capables de rester trente ans dans les sous-sols en attendant que la poussière s'en aille ...
[...] Je mangerai des rats. [...] Les rats sont vachement intelligents, tu sais ... Même plus que les hommes, c'est prouvé ... D'ailleurs, ils sont pas à apprendre ces conneries de poèmes, ils s'entraînent déjà à rester en sous-sol pour l'époque nucléaire ...

- [...] moi je préfère connaître tous les poèmes du monde et crever plutôt que de vivre sous terre et de bouffer des rats ... [Benchetrit S., *Le Cœur en dehors*, Grasset et Fasquelle, Paris, 2009, pp. 96–98]

Remember, it didn't start with gas chambers. It started with politicians who divided the people "us vs. them". It started with intolerance and hate speech. When people stopped caring, became desensitized, and turned a blind-eye, it became a slippery slope to genocide. [Unknown]

1. Introduction

Is it possible to continue to believe in human nature—and art—when one sees all the suffering that human beings inflict on other human beings? If so, how? Maybe we could study this essential

question by referring to a terrible time, during which suffering was at its height and extreme violence was institutionalized: the Second World War. Faced with this terrible experience, how may one react? What may be the answers to our question about faith in human nature and art? I propose to compare two possible answers: one from Albert Camus and the other from a fictional character (who I will introduce below); both experienced this conflict.

1.1. Comparing Albert Camus, a Committed Writer

The French writer and journalist Albert Camus [1913–1959] was born in Mondovi (Algeria), in a very poor family in which no one could read. People often portray him as a philosopher, sometimes even as an existentialist, but he clearly rejected that. He actually described himself as an artist. He wrote novels, short stories, plays and essays. Some of them are very famous (*The Rebel*, *The Plague*) and he won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1957, at 44. One specificity of his work is that it is organized in three cycles (the Absurd, Revolt, and Love—but Camus died before having accomplished this last one) and each one is revealed in different kinds of books (fiction and nonfiction). His conception of the Absurd is found, for example, in *The Myth of Sisyphus* (essay) as well as in *Caligula* (play) and *The Stranger* (novel). During the Second World War, his tuberculosis prevented him from joining the French Army. He therefore worked for the clandestine newspaper *Combat*. He has always advocated dialogue, justice and brotherhood among all men, especially when these values were under threat. We will compare the conceptions of art and human beings of Camus with that of Renaud.

1.2. ... With Renaud Houlade, a Character Created by Jean Bruller, Another Committed Writer

Renaud is the protagonist of a short story entitled *L'Impuissance* [Helplessness] (1944). Written by the French writer and illustrator Jean Bruller [1902–1991], it was published—like all his texts, even after the war—under his pseudonym as a resistance fighter: Vercors. Like Albert Camus, Jean Bruller defended the position they had both chosen, that of a committed artist. He cofounded the clandestine publishing house—which still exists—“Les Editions de Minuit” [The Midnight Press], with Pierre de Lescure, and his most famous text is *The Silence of the Sea* (1942).

L'Impuissance was written immediately after the massacre of more than six hundred civilians by the S.S. in the French village of Oradour-sur-Glane in June 1944. In this novel, which takes place in France during the Second World War, reality and fiction intertwine. A narrator (Vercors himself?) tells a story about Renaud, a childhood friend who was sensitive to the extreme to the misfortune of others. A resistance fighter too, he has just learned two terrible pieces of news. The first one is the Oradour-sur-Glane massacre (which gave rise to no official protest); the second one is the death of a resistance fighter named Bernard Meyer in a concentration camp. Meyer did not really exist, but behind him another human being may be hiding, Benjamin Crémieux, a resistance fighter who died in Buchenwald in April 1944 and to whom the short story is dedicated.

These two pieces of news greatly upset Renaud. At first, he remains silent. But after a moment, he gathers the works of art he has collected, the “salt of his life” [1] (p. 81), in order to set them on fire. Furious, he explains that art is nothing but a lie: art is a kind of mirror in which human beings see the reflection of a sensible and intelligent being, whereas, to the contrary, not only are other living beings “angels compared to us”, but moreover “they do not play [. . .] the little saint, the grave thinker, the philosopher, the poet” [1] (p. 84). Before falling down, crushed with grief, Renaud declares that, so long as human beings will not change, he will not read a single line anymore.

At the end of the story, the narrator says that he disagrees with Renaud and that art alone keeps him from losing all hope. This opinion, opposite to that of Renaud, is close to that of Jean Bruller.

1.3. Relevance of the Comparison between a Real Person and a Fictional One?

Before going further, we may wonder if it is relevant to compare a fictional person to a real one. Why would not we compare Vercors’s and Camus’s points of view instead? In my opinion, the question is: “Why did I choose to compare Camus and Renaud?”.

First, we cannot ignore the fact that fiction has a lot to teach us and helps us to think about important issues and topics. Many thinkers, including Albert Camus and Jean Bruller, express their ideas through fiction. It is therefore not uncommon to use a novel to reflect. Secondly, studying the point of view of Vercors, which is very close to that of Camus, would have been a totally different question, because Renaud does not express the point of view of his author.

I made the choice to compare Renaud to Albert Camus because they have many interesting points in common: both were, as we said, French resistance fighters during the Second World War; both were men who loved justice; they both acted in accordance with values in which they believed; both have seen the horrors that men are capable of inflicting on other men; and both expressed their thoughts about human beings and art. Consequently, it may be interesting to see where they can go to from these very close starting points.

1.4. Methodology

My methodology is made clearer thanks to the Argentine and Mexican philosopher Enrique Dussel [born in 1934]. In his theory (theory well presented by Katarzyna Gan-Krywoszynska and Piotr Lesniewski [2]), he argues that human beings use words to communicate (and to think), and some of these words have several meanings (man, justice, right/wrong ...). According to E. Dussel, there are three ways to approach such polysemy:

- (1) *As univocal*: “there is only one legitimate meaning and every other meaning is considered erroneous, incorrect etc. [...] all dialogue is ruled out—for there are only two possibilities (“for” or “against”, “same/identical” or “different”) which are very clearly—or even radically—defined from the axiological point of view” [2] (p. 246);
- (2) *As equivocal*: “it allows for all the possible interpretations of a given cultural object that are at the same time completely disproportionate/incommensurable/untranslatable. But—just as in the case of univocal position—the equivocal approach also prevents dialogue/makes dialogue impossible, since there is not any common ground” [2] (p. 247);
- (3) *As analogical*: “it is based on a similarity connecting—at least two—given objects. This commonality can be accompanied by any number of distinctions—and not the differences. The afore-mentioned similarities should not be confused with identity. Thus, precisely the same approach dialogue is possible” [2] (p. 248).

Our goal is obviously to compare Renaud Houlade and Albert Camus in this third way, in order to create a kind of dialogue between them. Our idea is to show that despite many similarities, distinctions appear, and to find why they do. This analogical reflection will also perhaps make it possible to emphasize some specificities and originalities in the thought of Albert Camus.

1.5. Interest in This Question—About Human Beings and Art—In the Present Time

The testimonies of Camus and Renaud, according to an important metaphor of Zygmunt Bauman, should be treated as “windows” through which we can see dangerous elements of social reality—and of human nature—which usually remain hidden or less visible in peacetime. They are “of the utmost importance not just for the perpetrators, victims and witnesses of the crime, but”—as Bauman writes in *Modernity and the Holocaust* (1989)—“for all those who are alive today and hope to be alive tomorrow”. This question is crucial, not only during wars or social conflicts, but also in our everyday life, where the suffering that people inflict on one another may be less obvious, but is still present.

2. The Human Being, “the Biggest Bastard of All Creatures”?

2.1. What People Are Capable of Doing to One Another

In the short story by Vercors, Renaud gives examples, unfortunately real, of what people did (and do) to others:

[...] we roast women and children, alive, in a church [...] we massacre and [...] we assassinate on the whole surface of the earth [...] we decapitate women with an ax [...]. We crowd people into chambers deliberately built to asphyxiate them [...] everywhere hanged people sway in the trees [...] we burn the hands and feet of people to make them betray their friends [...] we make Bernard Meyer die as a result of suffering, blows, hard work, hunger and cold. [1] (p. 84) [trans. Estelle Carciofi]

Everyone knows that everything that Renaud describes here—and we could add many more examples—is still happening right now, which makes his remarks still relevant. His anger would certainly still resound today concerning Daesh or the shooting attack in the Strasbourg Christmas market (France, December 2018). Renaud targets assassins, of course, but also the silent majority and the “officials”, all those who are complicit in horrific acts just by their silence:

[...] we are surrounded by people (very good people, cultured people and the rest), not a single one of whom would risk a finger to avoid these horrible acts, which they cowardly want to ignore, or which they don't care about, acts that some people even approve of and welcome [...]. [1] (p. 84) [trans. Estelle Carciofi]

Driven by his anger and pain, Renaud makes a leap: he does not limit his accusation to the murderers or the silent accomplices. He yells out:

What are human beings? The biggest bastards of all creatures! The vilest and the most sneaky and the most cruel! [1] (p. 84) [trans. Estelle Carciofi]

Renaud thus extends his severe and passionate judgment to the whole human race, and doing so, includes all of us, even me (writing this text) and you (reading it).

What does Camus tell us about this, about human nature, about the evil we are capable of? In *Combat*, he relates atrocities too:

For four years, we [...] made villages of orphans, we [...] shot men in the face so that we did not recognize them, we [...] have forced the bodies of children into coffins too small for them by kicking them with our heels, we tortured the brother in front of the sister, [...] we have shaped cowards and destroyed the proudest of souls. [3] (pp. 95–96) [trans. Estelle Carciofi]

In this excerpt, we find all the ingredients that were already present in the short story by Vercors: (1) a list of atrocities, (2) cowardice (that of silent people, in particular) and (3) the destruction of souls, such as that of Renaud. Thus, it seems that Renaud and Camus see the same reality. Camus goes on and writes:

For four years, every morning, every Frenchman received his ration of hatred and his slap. It was the moment when he opened his newspaper. Obviously, something remained of all that.

What remained is hatred. [3] (p. 96) [trans. Estelle Carciofi]

This is the hatred that Renaud feels towards all humankind and, by extension, towards art (as we will see further on).

2.2. *Hatred, a Poison against Which Every Person Must Fight*

From here, Camus and Renaud go their separate ways (but we surprise Renaud on the spot, in the heart of the turmoil, in the eye of the cyclone, when he is upset; who knows what his speech would have been the next morning?). Camus shows hatred as a poison against which everyone must struggle, inside himself and outside himself:

[...] this is what we must triumph over first. These poisoned hearts must be healed. And tomorrow, the most difficult victory we will have to win over the enemy, it is in ourselves that it must take place, thanks to that superior effort that will transform our appetite for hatred into a desire for justice. Not to yield to hatred, to concede nothing to violence, not to admit that our passions become blind, this is what we still can do for friendship and against Hitlerism. [3] (p. 96) [trans. Estelle Carciofi]

Camus, as we see, understands that we may hate people who have committed atrocities. However, he condemns this hate. He writes: “I detest only the tormentors” [4] (p. 17). He thus does not do the same as Renaud: he does not leap from the tormentors in particular to humanity in general. Moreover, “to detest” is not synonymous with “to hate”; “to detest” does not mean “to feel this violent and blind passion” that could push him to commit horrible revenge. The French ethnologist Germaine Tillion [1907–2008] would have defended the same position: hatred causes more hatred; violence causes more violence. We have to avoid the situation of the “complementary enemies”, as she named it. The Bulgarian-French historian and philosopher Tzvetan Todorov [1939–2017] summarized this notion as “a chain of resentments and reprisals, which is as destructive of oneself as of others. Giving a blow for a blow is without exit” [5] [trans. Estelle Carciofi]. According to him, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a contemporary example of this vicious circle. The only way to avoid such conflicts is to fight against both the evil outside us and the evil inside us.

Hatred is the most dangerous. Camus explains that, to respect the values he believes in and he fights for, he has to continue to see human beings in these tormentors. This point is crucial, as we will see later, because thanks to it, a common ground between the tormentors and Camus remains (their human nature), at least for this latter. It makes it possible for Camus to keep a necessary distance and to keep control of himself. He writes:

[...] when I am judging your atrocious conduct [...] I will still give you the name of ‘human being’. To remain faithful to our faith, we are forced to respect in you what you do not respect in others. [...]

This is why, at the end of this struggle, from the bosom of this city which now has an infernal countenance, despite all the tortures inflicted on our people, in spite of our disfigured dead and our villages filled with orphans, I can tell you that at the very moment when we are going to destroy you without mercy, we are without hatred against you. [6] (pp. 75–76) [trans. Estelle Carciofi]

Perhaps this is a lesson he learned from his father, who died before he was born. In “The First Man”, an unfinished autobiographical novel, he relates that, when his father was in Morocco during the bloody conflicts, he discovered a man with his throat slit and with his genitals cut off and placed in his mouth. Cormery [Camus’s father] said that the people who did that were not human. Levesque answered that according to them, maybe it was exactly the opposite. Camus’s father disagreed and said: “Un homme, ça s’empêche”, which we could translate as “A man is the one who prevents himself from doing that kind of thing”. What Albert Camus shares with his father is the duty to prevent oneself from losing control—an important point. But unlike his father, who dehumanizes the killers of the man with his throat slit, Albert Camus always keeps in mind that tormentors remain human beings.

2.3. Camus: No Hatred, and a Faith in Humanity

Thus, Renaud and Camus, both engaged in the Resistance, go through the same war and see the same atrocities. But, unlike Renaud, Camus does not invoke this reality to despair about the species in general. He concentrates his condemnation on hatred. And even this hatred, even those who are animated by it and whom he calls “tormentors” (which he never confuses with humanity), he does not hate.

Throughout his life, Camus believed in humanity. Of course, he understands that one can be tempted to turn away from humankind, but he writes: “we cannot live and hate ourselves” [7] (p. 140) and invites us, through his many writings, as well as his actions, to keep, like Prometheus, a “peaceful faith in humanity,” [8] (p. 124) the faith and peace which Renaud seems to have lost.

3. Art, Lies and Revolt

3.1. *Art as a Lie, as a Beautiful Mask on the Horrible Human Face?*

At the same time that Renaud Houlade loses faith in humankind, he violently rejects art. He builds a pyre to burn his “books, objects, pictures” [1] (p. 81), some of which are rare and precious, because suddenly, for him, art appears as an unbearable lie: it gives humanity the reflected image of a being “filled with poetic sentiments and moral ideas and mystical aspirations and everything that goes with it” [1] (p. 83). This beautiful and misleading image of humans makes us think that we are sensible and intelligent. Therefore, according to Renaud, art is a mask behind which we hide our horrible faces, those of monsters or cowardly beings. This is a kind of “opium” that soothes our conscience.

What does Camus think? Is art a lie that lulls a person into “a blissful satisfaction” [1] (p. 83) by preventing him from seeing the odious creature he really is? Of course, we would have to write books to list in detail what Camus said and wrote about art and the role of the artist. In this paper, we will just cut to the chase: no, Camus does not share the view of Renaud about art. On the contrary, he even replies to the criticism that Renaud and others make about art and artists. For example, he said in 1948 at an international meeting of writers that they were going through

[. . .] a time when Racine would be ashamed of *Bérénice* and Rembrandt would feel the need to be forgiven for having painted the *Night Watch* [. . .]. Today’s writers and artists have a sick conscience and it is fashion among us to apologize for our profession. In truth, some people are zealous to help ourselves to do it. [9] (p. 205) [trans. Estelle Carciofi]

When Camus mentions these people, who are “zealous” in helping artists have a guilty conscience about making art in such troubled times, we think of Renaud. How does Camus answer them? How does he answer Renaud? It is important here to remember that Camus described himself not as a philosopher, but as an artist. Consequently, what he tells us about art and artists, he says from the inside. What does he say? Does he have a guilty conscience? Absolutely not. He even says that “in front of and even because of the misery of the world”, he feels “grateful” and “proud” [9] (p. 206) when he thinks of his artistic vocation. Why?

According to Camus, the misfortune of the world is widely caused by totalitarian ideologies that reign and make everything abstract, even man. Words shape the mind and the way we think about people. In Nazi language, non-Aryans were thus referred to as “Stücke” (“sticks” or pieces, items) in order to dehumanize them. From the moment a human being no longer sees in the other a being with whom he shares the human condition, but just a thing or an idea, it becomes possible and even easy (ink and a stamp suffice) to destroy him and, conversely, any dialogue—especially one intended to prevent this destruction—becomes impossible:

It was and it is still impossible for a concentration camp victim to explain to those who degrade him that they should not do so. [9] (p. 209) [trans. Estelle Carciofi]

3.2. *Art as a Revolt against Abstraction, Silence and Falsehood*

This is precisely where artists have a crucial role to play: they have to fight against abstraction to make dialogue possible again. In his Nobel Prize lecture [10], the Russian novelist Alexandr Solzhenitsyn [1918–2008] explained that it is in human nature to be moved more by a small incident that happened at the corner of our street than by atrocities committed far from our homes. Then he asks:

Who will make clear to mankind what is really heavy and intolerable and what only grazes the skin locally? Who will direct the anger to that which is most terrible and not to that which is nearer? Who might succeed in transferring such an understanding beyond the limits of his own human experience? Who might succeed in impressing upon a bigoted, stubborn human creature the distant joy and grief of others, an understanding of dimensions and deceptions which he himself has never experienced? Propaganda, constraint, scientific proof—all are useless. But fortunately there does exist such a means in our world! That means is art. [10]

The word “flesh”, linked to Art, is also used by Camus, who writes: “The artist who lives and creates at the level of the flesh and of the passion, knows that nothing is simple and that the other exists”. [9] (p. 212) We asked why Albert Camus felt “grateful” and “proud” when he thinks of his artistic vocation. We have here the first element of his answer. But this is not the only one. The diagnosis that Albert Camus makes here is as follows: “[...] the world needs true dialogue, [and] the opposite of dialogue is both falsehood and silence [...]” [11] (p. 172). And art, true art, fights against both. So yes, a certain sort of art can lie; Camus does not deny this, but he rejects the lie with at least as much vigor as Renaud, and he also rejects silence, which is the opposite of dialogue.

We have to be specific to understand how much Camus diverges from Renaud, even when they both denounce the lie of art. On one hand, Renaud burned works of art and denounced art as a lie that would put people to sleep because it would give them a good image of themselves. On the other hand, Camus defends art, true art, and sees in it a revolt against falsehood and silence. According to Albert Camus (and Alexandr Solzhenitsyn), artists have to do their duty away from any ivory tower. Far from lulling men, artists awaken them: they make them aware of what is hidden or deformed, and also aware of what is beautiful and worthy in man. They create works about what we all share—the human condition—and give a voice to the silent ones. Renaud says that his rejection of art will not stop until humans have changed. But it is now clear that, for Camus, art helps to change man in the right direction: “Every great work makes the human face more admirable and richer, it is all its secret [...]” [12] (p. 61). Thus, burning works of art is useless, even destructive. Producing works, on the contrary, can make people better.

4. Nothing Is True That Forces One to Exclude

4.1. Shadow and Light

At this point, one may wonder how it is possible that Renaud and Camus, who went through the same war and saw the atrocities people can inflict on one another, look in such different ways both at humanity and at art: the first one despairs about our species and rejects art as a lie, while the second one maintains his faith in human beings, who thinks that art is essential in the fight against falsehood, and that the artist has the duty to break the silence. What interests us is trying to understand what separates Renaud from Camus.

This may be due to the fact that Renaud is carried away by his emotions to the point that he is blind, incapable of seeing the whole reality. We can recall the words of Camus:

“Errors are always caused by an exclusion,” Pascal says. [...] The Greeks knew that there is a part of shadow and a part of light. Today we see only the shadow and the work of those who do not want to despair is to recall the light, the midday of life. [13] (p. 181) [trans. Estelle Carciofi]

Renaud is perhaps one of those who see only the shadow now. Camus, for his part, would be one of those who do not wish to despair, and who, even in the thickest darkness, endeavors to recall “the light, the midday of life.” What Camus talks about when he speaks of “the light, the midday of life” is what creates inside a persona what he calls not the love of life, but “the love of *living*”. To feel this love, to be filled with it, is necessary, in the eyes of Camus, to love both humanity and the beauty of the world; he thinks it is impossible to live by hating oneself—and if we hate humankind, we hate our

human nature, and thus, we hate ourselves. As for beauty, one might think it is “superficial”, but it is not. It is as essential to a person as bread or oxygen. Camus writes: “Man cannot live without beauty, and this is what our time pretends to want to ignore” [7] (p. 139). Beauty is so important because it awakens love and gives strength. As we know, Camus wrote amazing texts in which he exalted the beauty of nature. In one of them, he explains that:

In the worst years of our madness, the memory of that sky had never left me. It was it who finally prevented me from despairing [. . .] I rediscovered in Tipasa that we should keep intact in ourselves a freshness, a source of joy, and love the day that escapes injustice and come back to the battle with this conquered light. [14] (p. 164) [trans. Estelle Carciofi]

Thanks to the beauty of nature, Camus remains hopeful, strong, even when surrounded by the worst atrocities. Therefore, as difficult as this might be, and even more so when it is hard because ugliness is omnipresent, it is important to keep our eyes open to beauty. This is what Renaud forgets. Camus, even if he sees the shadow (as we have mentioned), endeavors to keep his eyes open to both the shadow and the light. Already in 1952, he wrote:

Yes, there is beauty and there are the humiliated. Whatever may be the difficulties of the undertaking, I would like never to be unfaithful to either one or the others. [14] (p. 166) [trans. Estelle Carciofi]

Renaud is “unfaithful” to the light. He forgets that the man whom he insults and rejects violently, yes, he is the Nazi, but he is also Benjamin Crémieux. Yes, he is one of those who kill children, but also one of those who, like him, is deeply burdened by this crime. And even in every person, we find both shadow and light. Camus writes:

[. . .] there are again gutted comrades, members of bodies torn to pieces and eyes whose look has been crushed with heels. And those who did this could give their seat to someone else in the subway, just like Himmler, who had made torture a science and a job, yet came home by the back door at night, so as not to wake his favorite canary. [15] (p. 22) [trans. Estelle Carciofi]

4.2. One Common Human Nature and Germs of Evil

This last point is not trivial. Camus reminds us that the Nazis could be nice and considerate. We could add and educated, sensitive and refined, as well. Joseph Goebbels [1897–1945], a close associate of Adolf Hitler, had a PhD in philosophy. We must keep it in mind. This is certainly a part of what Vercors wants to tell us when he writes *Les Mots* [“The Words”]. In this short story, a Nazi officer orders the massacre of a village. While the soldiers obey him and kill some civilians near him, the officer, who turns his back on them, is painting a beautiful landscape, feeling joy and emotion. The famous street artist Banksy expresses the same idea in *The Banality of the Banality of the Evil* [2013] (referring, of course, to Hannah Arendt’s book, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* [1963]). Banksy bought an oil painting depicting an autumnal landscape and he just added a “detail” on it: a Nazi sitting on a bench and admiring the beauty of nature.

It would be a serious mistake to forget that the Nazis and the tormentors and “bad people” in general were and remained human beings—as we have just seen—or conversely, to believe that we have nothing of the “Nazi” in us. Nazis were ordinary people just like you and me. In his “Introduction to *The Plague* by Albert Camus” [1962], the French novelist and resistance fighter Romain Gary [1914–1980] explains that, in his novel, Camus shows very clearly that everyone has in him germs of evil (hatred is one of the most dangerous) and, as he mentioned it above in *Combat*, we must be very careful to prevent them from developing. R. Gary writes: “No one is immune”.

This is precisely why some artists consider that they are no different from the tormentors, and that they have to say “we” even when they talk about some people who have done the worst. Alexandr

Solzhenitsyn is one of them. In his Nobel Prize speech, he states: “A writer is not the detached judge of his compatriots and contemporaries, he is an accomplice to all the evil committed in his native land or by his countrymen.” R. Gary would go even further and say that every human being is an accomplice to the evil that every other human commits. This is a way of not forgetting that there is always common ground between all men, that even if we are all distinct (tormentors, victims, ordinary people), we are not different—as we will see later.

4.3. *Two Kinds of Fires*

Now that we have clarified this crucial idea, we can return to our previous point: the fact that if Renaud becomes desperate, it is because he is no longer able to see the “light”. It seems that he has become one of those “proud souls” broken by Hitlerism, a soul that finds nothing to love or admire anymore. And thus, he loses his strength. Renaud keeps only the darkness, the painful heart. For Camus, it would be vain to fight for a world where it would not be good to be alive. This is why he describes his duty as a human being and a writer as follows:

My role [. . .] may be to serve, in my position, the few values without which a world, even if transformed, is not worth living, without which a man, even a new one, will not be worth being respected [. . .]: the simple happiness, the passion for the beings, the natural beauty. [16] (pp. 166–167) [trans. Estelle Carciofi]

So, no, he does not want to be one of those “men, driven by mediocre and ferocious ideologies, who become accustomed to being ashamed of everything. Ashamed of themselves, ashamed of being happy, of loving or of creating”. On the contrary, as he writes: we must “live and create” [17] (p. 58).

We henceforth know why Camus is a proud and grateful artist. Ultimately, the question is: can we keep everything together? Or, as Camus asks: “Can we eternally refuse injustice without ceasing to salute the nature of man and the beauty of the world?” [18] (p. 345) Can we combine revolt and love? Say no and say yes at the same time? Camus says: “Our answer is yes.” [*id.*] We can keep everything together. I would even add that *we have to*.

Renaud lights a fire to destroy art works because he is disgusted by humankind. According to Camus, the only fire worthy of that name is the one we light with loved people, on a warm beach, under the stars, when our body keeps its taste of salt. We find here, again, the three essential elements: “the simple happiness, the passion for the beings, the natural beauty” thanks to which we can continue to live, while fighting:

[. . .] for those who know the tearings of the yes and the no, of the midday and of the midnights, of revolt and of love, for those who love the fire in front of the sea, there is, there, a flame which is waiting for them. [19] (p. 131) [trans. Estelle Carciofi]

5. Conclusions

5.1. *Human Being and Art: An Analogical Comparison between Renaud Houlade and Albert Camus*

The result of the methodology we chose could be summed up in a “list” of similarities and distinctions between Renaud Houlade and Albert Camus [see Table 1].

Thanks to this table, it is clearly demonstrated that if you think of a human being as “the biggest bastard of all creatures”, art may appear to be a lie. But if you think that something in humanity can—and should—be saved, art can be a powerful means.

Drawing on this analogical reflection, we can now emphasize some specificities and originalities in the thought of Albert Camus.

Table 1. Similarities and distinctions between Renaud Houlade and Albert Camus.

Renaud Houlade	Albert Camus
Similarities	
Both were French resistance fighters during the Second World War.	
Both loved justice.	
Both acted in accordance with values in which they believed.	
Both had seen the horrors that people are capable of inflicting on others.	
Both expressed their thoughts about human beings and art.	
Distinctions	
Houlade was disgusted by the whole of humanity.	Camus kept his faith in humanity.
Houlade thought art makes us forget the beast in us.	Camus thought art makes us remember what is dignified and beautiful in us.
Following Houlade art is an unbearable lie.	Following Camus art fights against falsehood (and abstraction and silence as well).
Houlade burned artworks.	Camus created artworks.
Houlade fell into despair.	Camus had hope due to his love of beauty, of humanity, and of the world.
Houlade was (self-)destructive.	Camus kept fighting and encouraged everyone to continue as well.

5.2. Camus: An Analogical Way of Thinking?

We can draw inspiration from the theory by E. Dussel to better understand Camus. Renaud confuses all of humankind and the despairs of humanity because of some tormentors: he simplifies and generalizes by means of a univocal way of thinking. Unlike him, Albert Camus is very specific: he has an analogical vision. He never forgets that there are some fundamental similarities between the worst of humanity and himself. Therefore, he considers that human beings are *distinct* but not *different* from one another. This nuance is of great importance. Indeed, two dangers arise when we consider that the person in front of us has nothing in common with us:

- (a) The first danger is that any dialogue becomes impossible. In Nazi totalitarian ideology, there is only one way to define words and thus to understand the world around us. You are Aryan or you are not. If you are not, if you are Jewish, for example, you will be considered a thing and no longer a person. This is why totalitarian ideologies are “univocal”. If we do not keep in mind that “the other” may be distinct but not different from us, everything seems authorized, justified, even the worst violence.
- (b) The second danger is that we may think that we are immune, that we are “the good ones” although the seeds/germs of evil are in each of us. This is another way of remembering that something is common between other people (who we can see as monsters) and us. As a character in a short story by R. Gary wrote: the “human case [is] a pretty nasty story in which everyone is compromised” [20] (p. 166). The Nazis were not extraordinary people, they were like you and me. If we forget this and draw (in a univocal way) an insurmountable border between two types of people: “people like us” as opposed to “people who have nothing in common with us” (because of their sexuality, their culture, the color of their skin, their political convictions, what they did), the worst becomes possible again.

All people have the seeds of the best and the worst inside them. They are able to do beautiful and horrible things. We must remember this in order to avoid two pitfalls: hatred (a), and recklessness (b). The question is: knowing that ugliness and beauty mingle, inside and outside of everyone, what to do?

5.3. Choice, Faith and Strength

We are faced with a choice, an existential choice. And the words pronounced in the famous movie written and directed by Frank Darabont *The Shawshank Redemption* [1994] resound: “I guess it comes down to a simple choice, really. Get busy living or get busy dying”.

The attitude of Renaud Houlade can be tempting. Perhaps Vercors specifically created this character to encourage us to resist this temptation by showing us how sterile and (self)destructive it is. How could we live in desperation, hating ourselves and without revolting anymore? In *Les Mots*, Luc is a poet who has decided to live far away from other human beings. But one day, he witnesses a massacre. He suddenly understands that when you live in isolation, you adopt the same attitude as the three monkeys who “see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil”. In doing so, your hands are not clean: they are accomplices to the evil you did not want to face. Living cannot be synonymous with resigning oneself or despair. So, if we choose life, it means we have to fight the darkness and light as many fires as possible. But how can we keep enough strength day after day?

Maybe we need some sort of “faith”, a word that Camus uses repeatedly. To continue living (and therefore fighting), we have to choose to stay focused on the light, not only on the shadow. Speaking of his faith in humanity, R. Gary wrote: “Nobody will ever make me give up that which allows me to believe in life” [21] (p. 32). At the end of *The Roots of Heaven*, some prisoners are forced to walk carrying heavy bags of cement. Despising the fury of the Nazis, they stop to place may-beetles lying upside and flailing their legs, back on their feet. To think that people are capable of such an attitude certainly helped R. Gary preserve and protect his confidence in humankind. We already know that Camus found strength in the beauty of nature and in the love of humankind. As for Vercors, he tells us (in the preface of [1]) that one day, when he felt deeply bad for months, without hope, something happened thanks to four baby ducks. The youngest one was doing his best to go as fast as the others, but he often fell, his little beak hitting the ground. Yet each time he got up and made as much noise as anyone else, just like the other ones, doing his best to keep up the pace. Vercors, who had not been able to smile for weeks, burst out laughing and thought that ultimately we must be like this little duck, or like Sisyphus, despite our falls. Perhaps we do not have a choice when we like the light, because that is the only way we can go on, day after day, even if we do not reach our goal.

In the movie *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* [directed by Miloš Forman, 1975], the protagonist tries his best to escape. In a famous scene, all the other “patients” are around him, mocking him, as he tries to pull a heavy marble sink to escape. His face is marked by the enormous effort with which he engages all his might. When he stops, exhausted, he just says: “At least, I tried”. Maybe everything is here: it is not in the success, but in the attempt, made with all our strength. As Camus said at the very end of *The Myth of Sisyphus*: “The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man’s heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy”.

5.4. An Essential Tool for Today

It is essential to think about all this today. Indeed, we cannot pretend that “the atrocities are over, now we can sing!”. I started writing this paper months ago. But the more time I spend on it, the more I think these issues are urgent. It is Friday, 22 February 2019. Four days ago, a Jewish cemetery was desecrated in Quatzenheim, Alsace (France). The tribute organized with French President Emmanuel Macron was to be broadcast via Facebook Live. But a few minutes after the start, there were so many insults and hateful comments that the platform interrupted the broadcast.

We must be careful because the seeds of evil, of hatred, are in each of us. To prevent them from growing, we must always look for similarities with “the other”. It is easy to find them in the one who looks like us, but sometimes it is more difficult with someone who has another sexuality/race/culture or who has done something that makes us feel bad. In these cases, we may be tempted to consider him totally different from us and consequently to feel free to express our hatred without limits. After the attack in Nice (July 2016, France), rubbish was collected where the terrorist was shot by the police [22].

Passers-by lit a kind of pyre in which they threw garbage and spittle. Everyone could understand their anger. But what did it bring? Other reactions are possible.

We can think of “You will not have my hate”, the open letter written by the French journalist Antoine Leiris [born in 1981] to the murderers of his wife (November 2015) or to the musical tribute to the 17 victims of terrorist attacks in France (January 2015). A total of 150 musicians gathered in Trafalgar Square and played Samuel Barber’s *Adagio for Strings*. They reacted in accordance with the words of the American conductor and pianist Leonard Bernstein [1918–1990], declared some days after the assassination of President John F. Kennedy: “This will be our reply to violence: to make music more intensely, more beautifully, more devotedly than ever before” (November 1963).

In addition to anti-Semitic or terrorist acts, for 15 weeks in France, there has been the manifestations of the “Gilets jaunes” [Yellow Vests]. When we read the comments on social media, it seems that we have only two options: to be on the side of the demonstrators or to be on the side of the forces of law and order. This is a univocal way of seeing things, while the only approach that offers a chance for dialogue is the analogical one. To avoid hatred, violence and the vicious circle of “complementary enemies”, common ground must be found, as E. Dussel explains.

It is precisely when we feel the hatred growing in us, when we are tempted to build a wall between us and “those who are different from us”, that we must remember the lesson of Albert Camus. In an episode of *Black mirror* (*Men Against Fire*, season 3, episode 5), soldiers have an implant thanks to which they perceive the people they must kill—those who are not genetically modified—as monsters. It is essential to reject this (hatred) implanted in our mind and to always look for similarities and nuances, while keeping in mind our common humanity. At a time when a wall may be built between one of the most powerful states in the world and its neighbor, at a time when global warming is about to cause massive waves of migration—because some countries will be submerged and others deprived of what is necessary for life—these questions are more urgent than ever and Albert Camus’ thought has never been more crucial. If we do not want history to repeat itself, we must use this valuable tool: the analogical way of thinking is the only one that highlights nuances and makes dialogue possible.

I will conclude with the last words of *The Plague*:

He knew what those jubilant crowds did not know but could have learned from books: that the plague bacillus never dies or disappears for good; that it can lie dormant for years and years in furniture and linen-chests; that it bides its time in bedrooms, cellars, trunks, and bookshelves; and that perhaps the day would come when, for the bane and the enlightening of men, it would rouse up its rats again and send them forth to die in a happy city.

[trans. Stuart Gilbert]

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