

# George Orwell and Albert Camus: “Commitment”- the two European writers’ attitudes towards the politics of the 1930s and 40s reflected in their works and lives

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ジョージ・オーウェルとアルベール・カミュ：  
1930～40年代における両作家の政治参加について

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## 1. “engagement” / “commitment”

Un écrivain est engagé lorsqu’il tâche à prendre la conscience la plus lucide et la plus entière d’être embarqué, c’est-à-dire lorsqu’il fait passer pour lui et pour les autres l’engagement de la spontanéité immédiate au réfléchi. L’écrivain est médiateur par excellence et son engagement c’est la médiation.<sup>1</sup>

[A writer is “engaged” when he tries to come to the most lucid and entire awareness that he is involved—that is to say, when it is considered by the writer himself as well as others, as direct and spontaneous “engagement” after due consideration. The writer is an excellent mediator, and his “engagement” is mediation.] (my translation, M. T.)

It was shortly after the end of World War II that Sartre emphasized, in his manifesto *Qu’est-ce que la littérature?* (1948) the significance of the writer’s active involvement in politics, by reinstating literature as an immediate, effective force for social transformation. This had had a considerable impact on the notion of “commitment” in European as well as Anglo-American world of literary criticism. In the manifesto, Sartre redefined that the writer’s role was to disclose (“dévoiler”) to his bourgeois readers the truth concerning their social condition and their complicity in the oppressive class structure, and advocated a literature of “praxis” that attempts an active role in mediating between the world and man’s capacity to change it. In the political postwar chaos, he was urging French writers to take the lead in a collective and dynamic participation in the domain of practical politics.

In fact, Sartre’s position was not particularly new or unique. Many writers in the past—such as

Zola, Barrès, Maurras, Péguy, Romain Rolland or Tolstoy outside France—had effectively intervened at the turn of the century, in social issues or had debated the question of the writer's responsibility. The advent of the Russian Revolution, Fascism and the Spanish Civil War further politicized the literary establishment everywhere in the West. As the postwar euphoria came to an end, the 1930s brutally thrust the writer in the "nightmare of History".<sup>2</sup> It was a time of cleavage, a time of crisis in which the concept of "engagement"—"commitment" represented the prevalent climate of both the French and British intelligentsia.

However, it is necessary to note here the different social, historical and intellectual circumstances between France and Britain that had affected their respective literary milieus. Compared to French writers who had known a bourgeois revolution both abrupt and violent, British writers had little experience of revolutionary ideas and methods; and tended to show, generally, an "undeveloped attitude"<sup>3</sup> towards politics. This was also the result of the developed structures and traditions of British politics whose ingenious governmental system had enabled them to maintain a political equilibrium, thereby preventing any upsurge of radical mass movements. Besides, the traditionally insular, eccentric and empiricist characteristics of the British intellectuals had kept them from a collective intervention in political affairs. As Sartre pointed out in his essay "Situation de l'écrivain en 1947": "En Angleterre, les intellectuels sont moins intégrés que nous dans la collectivité; il forment une caste excentrique et un peu revêche, qui n'a pas beaucoup de contact avec le reste de la population."<sup>4</sup> [In England, the intellectuals are less integrated in society compared to us. They form a certain group whose members are eccentric and rather difficult, and which does not have many contacts with the rest of the population. /my translation, M.T.]

France, by contrast, was a country in which literature was a matter of "national import and pride",<sup>5</sup> firmly rooted in the conception of man and society inherited from the Enlightenment. Unlike many British politically committed writers who had a divided sensibility and double standards, literature for the French, was a whole way of looking at life that had been influenced, to a greater degree, by the vicissitudes of the nation. Thus, while British Popular Frontism remained more restricted as a political force, to a minority of left-wing politicians, artists and intellectuals associated mainly with the Left Book Club (which was also due to the stability of the British ruling class as well as the relative economic recovery that took place between 1934 and 1937),<sup>6</sup> the rise of parliamentary power of the "Front Populaire" during the thirties—encouraged further by the economic deterioration—had had a paramount impact on the whole literary establishment in France, orienting it towards left-wing positions in the conflict of ideology generated by the Fascist-Communist dichotomy.

Even when the British intelligentsia began to detach itself from politics in the disillusionment—often to the point of inertia—with the subsequent failure of the Popular Front, the betrayal of the

Spanish Revolution and with the vacillations and corruption of the Communist Party, French writers who had a more acute and developed social consciousness, did not, or rather could not cease to be "engagé", to work for a social change. For them, political commitment was then a moral imperative, an inescapable moral obligation: it was the only possible choice they could make within the confines of their "situation".

This, certainly, was how Camus had observed and understood his own situation at the time—though not as convincingly as his somewhat self-righteous friend, Sartre. Basically, Camus distrusted the word "engagement" and its connotations. He could not appreciate Sartre's contention that the artist must be "engaged" politically and socially at all times and for all men, in any place or situation—as if he were perpetually on trial. Camus believed that every artist was already "committed" with or without his noticing it, in the sense that he was first and foremost an ordinary human being who could not separate himself from reality. Hence, "un écrivain doit collaborer à la chose publique: il ne peut pas se séparer."<sup>7</sup> [A writer should take part in public matters: he cannot separate himself from them. /my translation, M.T.] In the "age of fear" like his, the artist had to speak out as a member of the human community, for those who were suffering under tyranny and injustice. At the same time, he firmly denied that there was any obligation for the artist to sacrifice his art to political action or to put it at the service of an ideology. What was necessary, was to maintain amid outcries and violence, "la pensée claire, la générosité, la volonté d'être qui est notre volonté à nous tous."<sup>8</sup> as well as a sense of equilibrium between the two domains. In an interview in 1957, Camus commented on the artist's role and his dilemma:

Il me semble que l'écrivain ne doit ignorer des drames de son temps et qu'il doit prendre parti chaque fois qu'il le peut ou qu'il le sait. Mais il doit aussi garder ou reprendre de temps en temps une certaine distance à l'égard de notre histoire...Cet *aller-retour perpétuel*, cette tension qui devient à vrai dire de plus en plus dangereuse, voilà la tâche de l'artiste d'aujourd'hui.<sup>9</sup> (my emphasis, M.T.)

[It seems to me that the writer must not ignore the dramas of his time and that he should take part whenever he can or he knows it is necessary to do so. But he should also keep or resume, from time to time, a certain distance with regard to our history...This perpetually pendulous "go-return" movement, this tension which in fact, is gradually becoming dangerous: this is the task of the artist today.] (my translation, M.T.)

For Orwell, by comparison, political commitment was more of "un engagement volontaire". Although he refused to subordinate his aesthetic responsibility to politics, and though he had a more acute sense of balance than most of his "committed" British contemporaries who often tended to show inordinate devotion to certain ideologies, Orwell had always believed that every work of art took up a political position. On one occasion, he did not even hesitate to declare: "All art is

propaganda ... On the other hand, not all propaganda is art.”<sup>10</sup>

In contrast to Camus whose view of commitment was rooted in the Greek sense of harmony between man and nature, between the dual aspects of the universe, Orwell's attitude seemed closer to those of Sartre's and other middle-class left-wing French intellectuals' that were founded upon the Cartesian idea of separation, in which commitment was seen as a kind of martyrdom and deeply connected with class guilt.

In Camus's universe, there is a sense of inclusion and solidarity that every individual human being, whether he is artist or not, shares the same fate; that everybody is privileged—a position advocated by Meursault, an anti-hero in *L'Etranger* who cries out to the prison chaplain: “Tout le monde était privilégiés. Il n'y avait que des privilégiés.” [Everybody was privileged. There was nobody but the privileged. /my translation, M.T.] On the other hand, the writer becomes negatively privileged in Orwell's world—while in Sartre's, he is a positive “privilégié” standing out of and entertaining the right to judge the masses. He is rejected, excluded from the “Others”, the lower classes which he regards, though with much sympathy, as a brand of human beings set apart rather than as individual persons with emotions. Here, he is the victim of his own culture, of the ruling class who attempts to redeem his guilt by bridging the gulf, by overcoming the insuperable barrier. Towards the end of his life, Orwell remarked in “Writers and Leviathan” (1948):

When a writer engages in politics he should do so as a citizen, as a human being, but not as a writer ... There is no reason why he should not write in the most crudely political way, if he wishes to. Only he should do so as an individual, an outsider, at the most an unwelcome guerrilla on the flank of a regular army... One half of him, can act as resolutely, even as violently if need be, as anyone else. But his writings, in so far as they have any value, will always be the product of the saner self that stands aside ... but refuses to be deceived as their true nature.<sup>11</sup>

The solution that he had reached after his peregrinations, was that the writer must divide, separate and compartmentalize his inner self in order to preserve his sense of balance.

While Orwell's somewhat ascetic, chivalrous and self-imposed commitment was based upon his strong sense of the “Different” that ended in keeping each element apart, Camus's more discreet and introspective, but lucid commitment was rooted in a sense of the “Same”, of solidarity between different individuals, and was seeking their ultimate reconciliation. In 1938, at the very beginning of his career as a writer, Camus wrote in his review of Paul Nizan's *La Conspiration*:

*L'adhésion*...est un problème aussi futile que celui de l'immortalité, une affaire qu'un homme règle avec lui-même et sur quoi il ne faut pas juger. On adhère comme on se marie. Et quand il s'agit d'un écrivain, c'est sur son oeuvre que l'on peut juger des effets de l'adhésion.<sup>12</sup>

[Commitment...is a question which is as futile as that of immortality; it is something which



a man deals with by himself and which one should not pass judgement. One commits oneself as one gets married. And as to a writer, it is in his work that we can see the effect of his commitment.] (my translation, M.T.)

Art is a way of the writer's political expression; and his commitment ("adhésion") is primarily seen in his own work rather than in his art. Here, young Camus had already started to seek a point of balance between "art for art's sake" and the total subordination of art to politics. If his was a more tentative and personal position than Orwell's, it was the position of an ordinary but well-intentioned citizen who was aware of, and accepted human limitations; it was that of a guilt-free man who wrought "au niveau de tous" to alleviate the sufferings of the oppressed "others"—a position which Camus was to maintain through his life.

The differences and similarities between the two writers' fundamental views of "commitment"—and not "engagement" which has more specific and mandatory implications—as well as their sense of equilibrium, were reflected upon their respective attitudes towards crucial political events and ideologies of their time which at the same time, exerted a certain influence on the formation of their outlooks. I shall explore this by focusing mainly on their essays, newspaper and periodical articles in relation with their political activities.

## 2. Pre-war period: First turning point

By looking at their careers as "committed" writers, it appears that Orwell and Camus, despite the different social and cultural backgrounds, shared many features in their basic attitudes towards politics: anti-imperialism, anti-colonialism (especially against institutional oppression), anti-Fascism, anti-totalitarianism, egalitarianism, libertarianism, democracy, attraction to an anarchistic type of socialism, and empirical rather than theoretical thinking. They were both aware of and warned against the existence of totalitarian elements in modern democratic societies, and pointed to the similarities between Hitlerism and Stalinism as early as the 1930s when many writers on the Left were oriented in the direction of communism. Also, both of them were intensely concerned with ethics, more preoccupied with the fundamental moral values of conduct in relation to the preservation of the individual right to self-respect and dignity, rather than with party doctrines or political propaganda. This would always make them sceptical of, and keep them at a distance from left-wing intellectuals within their respective literary milieus.

At the same time, there was an essential difference between the two writers' political commitment that was closely connected with their upbringings. Camus's initial affirmation of life as well as his dual identity and the proletarian environment had enabled him to develop a natural sense of solidarity with the oppressed "pied-noir" working class or with the Algerian Moslems; and this

eventually led to his early involvement with the Communist Party. Orwell, on the other hand, rejected the ruling-class culture at the first stage of his life, with a strong sense of failure and alienation. Therefore, he needed both time and experience beyond the pale of his own society—among the “Others”—in order to come to terms with himself, and also to reach a clear political position. In the summer of 1946, Orwell looked back on his early years and remarked:

His subject-matter will be determined by the age he lives in—at least this is true in tumultuous, revolutionary ages like our own...In a peaceful age I might have written ornate or merely descriptive books and might have remained almost unaware of my political loyalties...As it is *I have been forced into becoming a sort of pamphleteer... The Spanish Civil War and other events in 1936-37 turned the scale and thereafter I knew where I stood*. Every line of serious work that I have written since 1936 has been written directly or indirectly, “against” totalitarianism and “for” democratic Socialism, as I understood it. It seems to me nonsense in a period like our own, to think that one can avoid writing of such subjects.<sup>13</sup>

(my emphasis, M.T.)

Thus, unlike Camus, Orwell was politically a “late developer”.<sup>14</sup> But it was more of his own will, by his inner urge rather than having been “forced into” the subsequent situation as Orwell stated above, that he had embarked on those explorations—from the Burma Police, via the life of destitution in Paris and London, the working class of the Industrial North, and then into the battlefields of Catalonia. While Camus became inevitably involved with—indeed, almost “forced into”—the politics of his time, Orwell, as if he were playing his own version of the “Great Game” within the Imperial System, had voluntarily and constantly tried to push and test himself in “down-and-out”, rather extreme circumstances until he could become a lucid and profound political writer.

Orwell’s first-hand experience in Spain had certainly given him “a horror of politics”,<sup>15</sup> turning him against Communist propaganda and eventually against totalitarianism in general. It was not, however, his Spanish experience that had directed him to what he called “democratic Socialism”—although it is possible that this experience had convinced him to support the concept. In fact, it seems that many of Orwell’s political attitudes - concerning imperialism, capitalism, Marxism, Fascism, class system, revolution, war, democracy, propaganda, the corruption of language and the concept of “truth”—had already been clarified by his earlier commissioned visit to the Industrial North (Wigan, Leeds, Sheffield, etc.), which was also to intensify the moral seriousness of his belief in the possibility of social reform. Besides, Orwell’s deep interest in left-wing socialist ideas from an earlier time, is seen in an article on his Burmese experience written in 1929;<sup>16</sup> and this seems to have been encouraged further, by his later relationship with the Independent Labour Party (a left-wing, non-communist egalitarian group separated from the Labour Party in 1932) in the early 1930s as well as his attending Mosley’s speech during his journey to the North.

According to "*The Road to Wigan Pier Diary*", Orwell went to Barnsley in 1936 (on 16 March) to attend this speech given at the Public Hall by the leader of the British Union of Fascists, known as "Blackshirts":

Mosley spoke for an hour and a half and to my dismay seemed to have the meeting mainly with him. He was booed at the start but loudly clapped at the end...M is a very good speaker. His speech was the usual clap-trap-Empire free trade, down with the Jew and the foreigner, higher wages and shorter hours all round, etc., etc.. After the preliminary booing the (mainly) working-class audience was easily bamboozled by M speaking from as it were a Socialist angle, condemning the treachery of successive governments towards the workers...Afterwards there were questions as usual, and *it struck me how easy it is to bamboozle an uneducated audience* if you have prepared beforehand a set of repartees with which to evade awkward questions.<sup>17</sup> (my emphasis, M.T.)

It is important to bear in mind that before this incident, there is no indication of any particular concern in Orwell with the nature and spread of Fascism which was soon to become his great concern. Unlike many of his peers on the Left, Orwell did not see it as "advanced capitalism" but somehow from the very beginning, as a "grim perversion of Socialism",<sup>18</sup> as an international mass movement with an élitist but reasonably coherent ideology and a popular appeal. He also knew by this time, about the Moscow trials and shared the views of the I.L.P. that these were political murders. But he did not yet think that these extreme aberrations under the Soviet régime would involve and be condoned by the entire, global Communist movement; nor did he suspect that Hitlerism and Stalinism could have anything in common.

Indeed, it was not until he had faced the sordid reality of the "Soviet myth", the totalitarian manipulation of history in the Spanish Civil War, that Orwell became convinced that Communist Party was working irredeemably against the revolution, and that Fascism and Bolshevism did after all have something in common, both in style and methods. In his article for the *New English Weekly* (dated 29 July and 2 September 1937), Orwell told that for some time past "a reign of terror—forcible suppression of political parties, a stifling censorship of the press, ceaseless espionage and mass imprisonment without trial" had been in progress. He also accused the Communist purge of its revolutionary oppositions in the name of "Trotskyism".<sup>19</sup> This would soon bring him round to the anarchist, I.L.P. line that the future, European or world war, could only be won through workers' revolution, neither by bogus national coalition nor by popular front, which would eventually lead to his hope for the possibility of a socialist revolution carried out by the working-class people who are led by the lower-middle-class men like himself.

How Orwell saw his Spanish experience as well as international relations at the time in the perspective of the I.L.P., perhaps, is more clearly seen, than is explicit in the book *Homage to*

*Catalonia* (1938), in his letter to Geoffrey Gorer written in September 1937:

The Popular Front boloney boils down to this: that when the war comes the Communists, labourites etc., instead of working to stop the war and overthrow the Government, will be on the side of the Government provided that the Government is on the “right” side, i.e., against Germany...After what I have seen in Spain I have come to the conclusion that it is futile to be “anti-Fascist” while attempting to preserve capitalism, and the mildest democracy, so-called, is liable to turn into Fascism when the pinch comes. We like to think of England as a democratic country, but our rule in India...is just as bad as German Fascism, though outwardly it may be less irritating...If one collaborates with a capitalist-imperialist in a struggle “against Fascism”, i.e., against a rival imperialism, one is simply letting Fascism in by the back door. The whole struggle in Spain, on the Government side, has turned upon this. The revolutionary parties, the Anarchists, P.O.U.M., etc., wanted to complete the revolution, the others wanted to fight the Fascists in the name of “democracy” and...when they felt sure enough of their position and had tricked the workers into giving up their arms, re-introduce capitalism. *The grotesque feature which very few people outside Spain have yet grasped, is that the Communists stood furthest of all to the Right, and were more anxious even than the liberals to hunt down the revolutionaries and stamp out all revolutionary ideas.*<sup>20</sup>

(my emphasis, M.T.)

Orwell would continue to maintain this contradictory viewpoint which was then shared not only by the I.L.P. but by the majority of the Parliamentary Labour Party<sup>21</sup>—an opposition both to Hitler and to preparation for war against Germany; in other words, anti-Fascist, anti-militarist hence anti-Popular Front while believing in being prepared to fight a revolutionary war—until the Hitler-Stalin pact of August 1939.

If Orwell’s voluntary and last exploration to the Catalan front in the mid-1930s had become the first turning point in his career as a political writer, warned him against the negative aspect and excess of totalitarian régimes, Camus’s brief and discreet involvement with the Algerian Communist Party which took place during almost the same period, did not actually turn him against the Communist or the Soviet Union, but made his attitude rather ambivalent for some years, even after his disillusionment with the Party.

While Orwell needed more than a decade to reach a clear political standpoint, Camus’s early journalistic writings (for *Alger Républicain* and *Soir Républicain* from October 1938 to January 1940) show that already in his mid-twenties, he had arrived at the basic viewpoints which were to direct his political commitment throughout his career. Despite the certain changes in his outlook that would naturally occur according to the broadening of his experience as well as histori-

cal developments, the principles which had fostered that outlook were to remain deeply rooted in the early stages of Camus's life in French Algeria. This was a time of international upheaval and internal unrest, both in France and in Algeria that had entered into economic crisis with the rest of the world, when the conflict between the Right and the Left, between the supporters of the conservative and the Popular Front was at its height.

In February 1934, the right-wing demonstrations that had eventually brought down the Radical-Socialist government (of Edouard Daladier) had incited a general protest strike organized by both the Communists and Socialists, ultimately resulting in the rise to the power of the "Front Populaire", the first Socialist-led government France had ever known: the Radical, Socialist and Communist Parties joined forces, with the support of the *Confédération Générale du Travail* (C.G.T.), France's most influential labour union, to form an effective left-to-centre coalition against domestic and foreign Fascism. At the same time, French intellectuals were rallying to the anti-Fascist cause, a movement also paralleled by a similar trend among French workers, subsequently expanding the ranks of the C.G.T. from 1,300,000 to 5,000,000 between 1934 and 1936.<sup>22</sup>

It was at this very point that Camus, who was still at university, entered the political arena by joining the Algerian Communist Party, with great discretion but with calm determination. In fact, there is every reason to believe that despite his youth, Camus was already a "lucid Communist"<sup>23</sup> with a dispassionate, balanced outlook who was aware of all the good reasons to be cautious of the apparatus. Also, it is necessary to mention here that at the time when Camus was discovering that effective political action might mean to work with the best organized party, Jean Grenier, his lycée teacher, and life-long mentor and friend, was warning against political orthodoxy, against the intellectual prison that the Communist Party represented. In his essay "L'Intellectuel dans la société" (1935) as well as in public, Grenier analyzed "l'esprit d'orthodoxie", criticizing Marxist ideology, Stalinist infallibility, the bureaucratic hierarchy, dictatorship not of the proletariat but of a new class of inquisitors.<sup>24</sup> He was claiming these things before Orwell, Koestler or Isaac Deutscher did, and when the young men's cultural heroes such as Gide and Malraux were orienting intellectuals towards Communism. Nevertheless, in spite of his personal opinion, Grenier advised Camus to join the Party. For, he thought that it might prove his student a worthwhile career. At the same time, he knew that Camus had never espoused any particular belief to the exclusion of all others, and that he was prepared to undertake a career whose advantages and dangers would not betray his convictions.

Shortly before he became a party member, Camus told Grenier in a letter that he had been obliged to become a Communist so as to remain faithful to the working-class people of Algiers with whom he identified.<sup>25</sup> He also had genuine compassion for the Algerian Moslem with whom he grew up, and who were suffering from colonial injustice inflicted by the French government:

and the Communists at the time had supported the causes of both French workers and Moslem nationalists. It is also necessary to bear in mind that the French Communist Party of this period was not yet strictly canonical, that it was still at the stage of a more moderate, popular phase. However, as Orwell did, Camus had doubts about the Marxist analysis of history and thus, remained wary of the ultimate aims and practices of the Communists.

Paradoxically, it seems that Camus, regardless of his detached position and the little prominence within the Party, was perhaps the most active and the best-known Communist member—although a secret one—in the political and cultural life of French Algeria. As Orwell saw the significance of educating working men and involved himself almost during the same period with the I.L.P. summer-school courses, Camus soon became responsible for “Le Collège du Travail”, an adult education programme for workers carried out under the sponsorship of left-wing unions. This movement, together with “Le Théâtre du Travail” founded also by Camus, and its counterpart “Ciné-Travail”, a Communist-sponsored movie club, would form an influential triptych in its function along the Popular Front line. Moreover, in the autumn of 1936, Camus joined the most militant of his friends in setting up “La Maison de la Culture” which would represent an extension of his commitment, and which was to become the Algerian affiliate of “L’Association des Maisons de la Culture” in Paris, a national movement directed by the Communists and their sympathizers. From the viewpoint of the Party officials, it was one of the most effective organs for propaganda that allowed a multi-art, multi-media approach in order to attract intelligent people of various professions. Although it lasted for less than a year, “La Maison de la Culture” performed myriad, political as well as cultural functions.

However, by the beginning of 1937, Camus had already become disillusioned with the Communist Party and was finding it difficult to compromise his own principles with the Party’s new policy which had been taken since the signing of the Franco-Soviet pact (in May 1935). As a consequence, and mainly due to Stalin’s decision to emphasize the struggle against Fascism, the Algerian Communist Party’s official attitude of opposition to French colonialism had to be toned down. This would naturally cause a clash between Communists and Moslem nationalists; and Camus, who continued to support the nationalists, feeling that the Party was exploiting the Moslem’s oppressed situation for its own political purposes, was to be expelled by vote in the summer of 1937. The Communists accused both Camus and the Moslem nationalists of their “betrayal”, and called them “Fascists” or “Trotskyists”—in exactly the same way as they were then dealing with the revolutionary oppositions in the Spanish Civil War.

In this way, Camus’s association with the Communist Party had ended in disappointment. The break, somehow, did not stop him from looking upon Russian communism as a source of hope for the working class. But on the other hand, it was to make him reconsider the whole question

of commitment to a political party, and more sceptical of Communist ideology. At the same time, Camus was not so naïve to think that one could entirely avoid party politics. He also believed that the lives of human beings took every priority, and that the general public was capable of making a sound political judgement if they were given a fair amount of intelligent leadership and support. It was precisely on these beliefs that Camus based his view of the press as one of the most efficient and powerful means for social reforms, and that had eventually led him to take a job with *Alger Républicain*, a left-wing, anarchistic newspaper which endorsed the socialist, even the communist outlook on international and French colonial affairs. (The paper, in fact, is still published as the daily of the Algerian Communist Party.) The role of the press, Camus was convinced, should not be simply to serve political ends but to both reflect and form public opinion by an intelligent and well-balanced presentation of facts; and most important of all, by printing the truth in so far as it was ascertainable. This fundamental view of journalism which implies Camus's attempt at detachment as well as his sense of equilibrium, would enable him to remain faithful to his personal concept of commitment, while becoming increasingly involved in controversial issues in the following years.

As a young journalist of *Alger Républicain*, Camus, besides occasionally writing book reviews for its "Salon de lecture", pursued up-to-date social and economic topics in numbers of stories. "Ce n'est pas pour un parti que ceci est écrit, mais *pour des hommes*", he stated in June 1939 in a report on the Kabylia famine.<sup>26</sup> The same principle could be applied to nearly every article he wrote for the newspaper. Camus's compassion for afflicted human beings was directed not only towards the poor and the Algerian Moslems, but certainly to his own people—the working class. In 1938, to replace the Popular-Front-bound "Théâtre de Travail", he set up a "Théâtre de l'Equipe" whose main purpose was to interest the workers in the theatre as both audience and participants. Also, his article "Dialogue entre un Président du Conseil et un employé à 1,200 F par mois" (3 December 1938) was a severe criticism of the repressive measures against the workers taken by the right-wing government since Daladier (the Radical Party leader) came into power in the spring of that year.<sup>27</sup>

Having gained experience as a reporter as well as literary critic, Camus became increasingly involved in active public campaigns for individual and collective victims of administrative injustice. At the same time, he was beginning to have certain doubts concerning the effectiveness of violent revolution, and was more drawn to the concept of a non-violent, gradual form of revolution—which was to constitute an important basis of one of his main political thoughts in later years.

### 3. War-time period: Second turning point

It appears that apart from the contrast between their attitudes towards communism, Orwell and Camus shared several features in their political positions of the 1930s. They were both anti-Fascist, anti-militarist, and came to espouse a democratic, libertarian type of socialism, while believing in the importance of a morally as well as intellectually balanced outlook in politics which should be communicated to the public in clear, plain language. However, if Camus was more in advance compared to his contemporary writers, in realizing and warning against the government authorities about the nature and danger of growing resistance in the colonial Algeria, it was Orwell who became aware, more acutely and at an earlier stage than Camus, of the encroaching threat of global war, to the full extent.

Orwell was to maintain his oscillatory anti-Hitler yet anti-militarist position until the sudden announcement of the Nazi-Soviet pact on 23 August 1939. In this pact, Stalin agreed to remain neutral if Germany entered a war; and it included the subsequent carving-up of Poland between the two countries. The event had changed every relationship and assumption of the British left-wing intellectuals; and Orwell was certainly not an exception. Although his basic attitude to the war did not change overnight, his policy and behaviour did change—into the support for the coming war and for what he called a “revolutionary patriotism”. The war was still evil, and seemed to be fought on capitalist-imperialist lines. But now that the two totalitarian enemies had joined their forces together, Orwell, at this second turning point, suddenly realized the need to defend the lesser evil of Chamberlain’s England against Hitler’s Germany. At the same time, he tried to persuade himself and others that this war would be fought for and by democracy as well as against Fascism: the Empire, after defeating the Nazi-Germany, would destroy itself and from the ruins would arise a democratic, Socialist Britain. Here, Orwell was carrying into the England of 1940 the romantic ideals of Catalan revolutionaries of 1936.

Thus reborn as a revolutionary patriot, Orwell renounced his anti-militarism and scorned the pacific, while intensifying his belief that Hitlerism and Stalinism share common features. In effect, he would finally propose both internal and international Popular Frontism at the time when the Nazi-Soviet pact made this possible. What is worth noting, nevertheless, is that although he was definitely against totalitarianism, Orwell was dispassionate and sensitive enough to understand its emotional appeal to the public—for struggle and self-sacrifice—which could probably appeal to his own inner self, to his ascetic and heroic, sado-masochistic and self-abnegating aspect.<sup>28</sup>

In fact, the outbreak of war had proved to be rather congenial to Orwell’s character and to his circumstance. Unlike many fellow-travellers who left the Communist Party after the Russo-German pact, Orwell, having never belonged to the Party, could still argue for a war of revolution



and simultaneously defend a basic democracy; and he resigned the I.L.P. since its leaders continued to maintain their anti-militarist positions. Also, the hardships and excitement of war stimulated both his public and "public-school" spirit. But on the other hand, Orwell had to suffer its negative outcomes such as conscription, paper-rationing and above all, his own illness. (He was rejected by the army as medically unfit.) Nevertheless, Orwell would soon find the alternative measures that could make, so he believed, his dream come true—a dream of a workers' revolution which had nearly happened in Catalonia, and which before long seemed to be realized in his own country. Along this line of thoughts, Orwell decided to join the Home Guard (in June 1940) which he saw as a potentially-revolutionary Workers' Army; then he took a job as a temporary Talks Producer in the Empire Department at the B.B.C. (from 1941 to 1943); he also worked as London correspondent to New York-based *Partisan Review* (between 1941 and 1946); and above all, he became the Literary Editor of *Tribune*, a non-Communist (and non-Marxist) left-wing newspaper, from the winter of 1943.

Interestingly enough, it was almost at the same as Orwell began working for *Tribune* in war-time London, that Camus, in occupied Paris, took the editorship of *Combat*, a clandestine Resistance newspaper whose position was also non-Communist left, dedicated to democratic principles and aiming at revolution—though not as drastic as what Orwell had pictured in his mind—in post-war France. Although Camus was fully involved in the Resistance movement by this time, it took him a little longer than Orwell, in terms of both time and thinking, to accept the reality and power of war to its full extent. If Camus was basically against the use of violence whether it was military or institutional, he was not strictly a doctrinaire pacifist. So when the war broke out, he had tried to enlist in the army like Orwell—but with much less enthusiasm—which ended in great disappointment when he was rejected for being a tubercular.

It seems that Orwell's initial self-negation had enabled him to see and accept the war as a catalyst of reincarnation, as a sort of revolutionary path towards the rebirth of a democratic-Socialist Britain. But to Camus, who naturally felt at ease with his life and its harmonious relationship with the universe, the war appeared rather as a powerful machine that would destroy every possibility in the process of human progress. However, towards the end of 1939, Camus gradually came to accept the war in a more philosophical way: he came to see it as one aspect of the absurdity of the human universe. To Camus, the war and other social evils, like a recurring illness and death, had become a fact of human life. If it was impossible to prevent it, it was still possible and worthwhile to struggle against it—as Dr. Rieux (in *La Peste*) tried to fight back the plague while knowing that the battle was futile in the long run.

However, it was not until the end of 1941 when Camus heard the news of Gabriel Péri, a

journalist and an active agent in the communist opposition to the Nazis who was shot by the Gestapo, that his inner preoccupations came clearly to the fore. It was then, at this second turning point which came a little later than Orwell's, that he finally decided to join the Resistance; and by 1943, he was a member of the clandestine network "Combat". While Orwell voluntarily and willingly participated in the ventures of the war, Camus thought it impossible to remain detached from the war once he realized the need for the collective struggle against it; and for him, it became inevitable to join the Resistance movement when the opportunity came. Within less than a year since then, Camus had been transformed into a committed activist; and by August 1944 after the Liberation, he was editor-in-chief of the daily *Combat*, Literary Editor of Gallimard, and spokesman for a large group of the non-Communist resisters. *Combat* identified itself with the Left, but like its British contemporary *Tribune*, the paper expressed its wish to be free to criticize the Socialists as well as the Gaullists or anyone else. At the same time, Camus saw the "Combat" movement as a source of hope for a non-violent, postwar revolution which could bring about the establishment of a federation of independent nations. Like Orwell, Camus came to think that this social reform could only be initiated and carried out by leaders, the men of the Resistance (though not necessarily of middle-class) who were dedicated to democratic ideals than to political or personal ambitions.

At this stage, however, Camus had not yet realized that his commitment might take the violent form required by the Resistance. He had not realized that he would have to contradict his principles by condoning the capital punishment for traitors and collaborators in the name of revolutionary "justice".

#### 4. Post-war–Cold-War period: Third turning point

By the beginning of 1945, Camus would become alarmed at the degeneration and extremity of the purge trials. Although the trials were less extreme compared to those in Belgium, Holland or in Denmark at the time, he found himself unable to condone their flagrant abuse of justice any longer. He also realized that the hoped-for revolution had become a myth, and that the Provisional Government had abandoned the Resistance which had been, by this time, weakened and disintegrated due to the internal split.

This experience which became the third turning point in his career as a committed writer, was eventually to take Camus back to his initial concern with non-violent revolution that he had cherished between 1938 and 1939. Nearly everything he wrote after 1946—from "Ni Victimes, ni Bourreaux", *La Peste*, *L'Homme Révolté*, to *La Chute* or *L'Exil et le Royaume*—would reflect and expand on his preoccupation with the validity and the effectiveness of violent revolution. Also,

Camus's individual-oriented view as well as his concern for life of an ordinary man had placed him against institutional violence and at odds with the left-wing intellectuals who tended to think and act in terms of a collective-oriented society during the 1940s-when Camus was to find himself increasingly isolated in the French literary milieu. His final and definite refusal to accept the death penalty would consequently separate him from his peers in the Resistance, and strengthen his scepticism towards the involvement with particular political parties. Similarly, Camus's strong opposition to the abuse of social forces was to warn him against any form of extremism-whether that of Nazism, Stalinism or of French *progressistes*-although he shared their disappointment in the Fourth Republic. This would ultimately lead to his search for the "third", neutral position during the Cold-War period amidst the global conflict between the two superpowers.

It is worthwhile to note, perhaps, that in 1947, both Orwell and Camus appealed, by coincidence, for the need for the establishment of a united socialist Europe and to divest themselves of their colonies. But compared to Camus's obstinate refusal to choose between the two blocs, Orwell showed a clear preference for American liberalism from an earlier stage. In fact, he once wrote to a friend that "if one were compelled to choose between Russia and America...I would always choose America."<sup>29</sup>

It seems that towards the end of their lives, Orwell and Camus had come to share more common features in their political attitudes: they both embraced a libertarian type of socialism based on the concept of human brotherhood; they were strongly against colonial oppression but did not entirely reject the presence of the Empire as long as it was a benevolent one; they also appreciated non-violent form of social reform; and above all, both writers were warned against the extremist tendencies which they detected in Fascism, Nazism or Communism and in those who unquestioningly supported or attacked these ideologies. This was probably because they both had managed to attain, after their respective experiences, a certain sense of balance in their views. For example, like Orwell's *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, both *La Peste* and *L'Homme Révolté* were in fact aimed not only at the Nazi or the Stalinist ideologies but also at the all-or-nothing attitudes of French intellectuals and politicians.

Orwell's contention against totalitarianism had its root in his first-hand experience in the Spanish Civil War. Similarly, the basis of Camus's criticism of the "excess" (*la démesure*), of historical determinism seen in the Communist-Marxist ideology was empirical rather than dialectical. It was what he had learned directly from his involvement with the Communists of the 1930s and 1940s. However, while Orwell's view grew increasingly pessimistic-towards a sort of diabolism-in his last years in thinking that not all human beings were born good by nature, and that there were some people who (like O'Brien in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*), once they gained authoritative power over

others, would find a sadistic pleasure in watching the oppressed suffer simply for the sake of his love of power, Camus basically believed in the “conscience commune”, in the good of human nature. He saw various forms of social evils such as oppression, injustice and war as the consequence of the destruction of the inner—and universal—equilibrium in the heart of man, as the physical manifestations of the negative aspects of the world. In other words, if social evils represented the “excess” of negative emotions within each individual, it was at least possible to fight their spread by the incessant exercise of one’s vigilance and intelligence, and by trying to keep a certain balance within oneself as well as others. However, this optimism was not to be reflected in Camus’s personal life or in his literary work of the last years which tended to show the author’s acute sense of isolation and dilemmas; but it was to influence his political outlook more and more deeply. This is seen in his occasional and largely private and personal interventions in politics whether in the Western or the Eastern bloc during the Cold-War period.

## 5. Conclusion: Writers and politics

British India had certainly taken a considerable space in Orwell’s moral imagination through his life—as is seen in his last essay “Reflections on Gandhi” (1949). Similarly for Camus, the deteriorating situation of French Algeria had always remained central to his thoughts—but probably to a greater extent and for more personal reasons compared to Orwell. It is necessary, however, to bear in mind the fundamental contrast between British and French colonial policies, since it gave slightly different perspectives to the régimes in their colonies from an earlier stage. British India in the early 1920s, particularly after the Mutiny, was considered as a sort of mandate and was allowed a certain autonomy for its government—though of course, strong racial discrimination still existed. Compared to this, the power relationship between France and Algeria at the time, was in fact more like that between Britain and Ireland; and therefore it was less democratic and more hypocritical. Under the compulsory policies of “mission civilisatrice” and “assimilation”, France had attempted to mould the colony into part of the Empire, and exercised discriminatory measures against the indigenous people while keeping the “universal” rule of democracy exclusively to the Gallic race.

Camus had been concerned about this situation from an early stage; and even before he started working for *Alger Républicain*, he had been warning against the French government’s flagrantly discriminatory policies as to the Algerian Moslems—through the press, public campaigns and speeches. Unfortunately, and despite Camus’s recurrent appeals, it was more than twenty years later when the government came to realize the seriousness of the situation; and it was then too late to solve the crisis. (After numbers of violent explosions, and finally set fire by an armed

insurrection launched by the Moslem-nationalists in November 1954, the Algerian War started and lasted for eight years.)

Orwell did certainly continue to pay close attention to the situation in India. But his concern for the country never went beyond that of an outsider, even though a very sympathetic one. This had probably made it easier for him, than for Camus, to be more logical and critical about the colonial institutions. On the other hand, Orwell distinguished himself from many other sheer "outsiders" in his more understanding view of Anglo-Indians whom he also saw as the victims of imperial power relations. The crucial difference was that Orwell did not really belong to the Indian culture—though he did spend the first year of his life in the country—whereas Algeria constituted more than half of Camus's entire life. This had naturally and inevitably made Camus's view of the crisis more emotional and personal. It also made him seek persistently a reconciliation between the two peoples of his homeland as the only solution to their conflict.

In fact, Camus never withdrew from internal or European political affairs; and he never withdrew from the Algerian crisis either—although he often became the target of severe criticism concerning the silence on his country particularly during the last four years of his life. Camus had done "what he could" whenever and wherever it was possible within the limits of the circumstances, which, in my view, was his way of commitment—discreet, introspective and personal but humane and morally determined. Asked about his position concerning French Algeria in an interview that took place in October 1957, Camus replied:

*Mon rôle en Algérie n'a jamais été et ne sera jamais de diviser, mais de réunir selon mes moyens. Je me sens solidaire de tous ceux, Français ou Arabes qui souffrent aujourd'hui dans le malheur de mon pays. Mais je ne puis à moi seul refaire ce que tant d'hommes s'acharnent à détruire. J'ai fait ce que j'ai pu. Je recommencerai quand il y aura de nouveau une chance d'aider à la reconstruction d'une Algérie délivrée de toutes les haines et de tous les racismes.*<sup>30</sup>

(my emphasis, M.T.)

[My role in Algeria never was, and never will be to divide; but to reunite with all my efforts. I have a sense of solidarity with all, whether French or Arabs, who suffer in the misfortune of my country today. But I cannot reconstruct what many of those men are trying to destroy. I have done what I could. I will start again when there is another chance to help the reconstruction of a new Algeria cleansed of all the hatred and racism.]

(my translation, M.T.)

Both Orwell and Camus, at the end of their lives, and after having gone through various forms of "commitment" in the turbulence of their time, had attained a certain sense of equilibrium in their attitudes towards the affairs in the political as well as intellectual milieus. This balance, also

an internal one, was founded upon and constantly checked by their respective, long-cherished moral values - that is, English "decency" and the Greek ideal of moderation (*la mesure*). These ethical principles had warned them against the extreme tendencies seen in totalitarian ideologies or among the *progressiste* politicians and intellectuals, while leading them to embrace the essential, libertarian and humanitarian ideals of socialism.

On the other hand, and precisely because of their dispassionate and moderate positions, these two committed writers had to face social and personal dilemmas—between art and politics, private and public, the ruling classes and the lower classes, the East and the West, the Soviet Union and the United States, or between the Empire and the colonized. In the case of Orwell, however, his initial self-negation as well as his power to survive, that is, his negative yet pragmatic acceptance of life, had enabled him, to a certain degree, to keep his sense of balance between these dilemmas by way of separation—by compartmentalizing his inner self into small cells of incompatible values. Contrastingly, Camus's natural and inevitable affirmation of his dual identity had always directed him to the search for ultimate reconciliation and harmony between different and conflicting values. Thus, it was perhaps Camus, rather than Orwell, who had to struggle harder to maintain his internal equilibrium, and who came to suffer the consequent dilemmas more acutely.

#### Note

- 1) Jean-Paul Sartre, *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* (Paris: Gallimard, 1948) 98.
- 2) Victor Bromvert, *The Intellectual Hero* (London: Faber & Faber, 1960) 137.
- 3) George Woodcock, *The Writer and Politics* (London: Porcupine Press, 1948) 14.
- 4) Sartre, *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?*, *op.cit.*, 204.
- 5) Germaine Brée, *Camus and Sartre* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1972) 39.
- 6) John Coombes, "British Intellectual and the Popular Front", Frank Gloversmith ed, *Class, Culture and Social Changes* (Sussex: New Harvester Press, 1976) 70-71.
- 7) Albert Camus, *Cahiers 6* (Paris: Gallimard, 1987) 60.
- 8) Camus, "Les vraies tâches" (Paris: *Cahiers des Saisons*, No. 20., 1960) 616.
- 9) Camus, "Le Pari de Notre Génération", *Essais* (Paris: Gallimard & Calmann-Lévy, 1965) 1898.
- 10) George Orwell, "Charles Dickens", *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters (CEJL)*, Vol.1. (London: Penguin Books, 1968) 492.
- 11) Orwell, *CEJL*, Vol.4., *op.cit.*, 468-470.
- 12) Camus, *Essais*, *op.cit.*, 1396.
- 13) Orwell, "Why I Write", *CEJL*, Vol.1., *op.cit.*, 25-28.
- 14) Bernard Crick, *George Orwell: A Life* (London: Penguin Books, 1992) 18.
- 15) Orwell, "Autobiographical Note", *CEJL*, Vol.2., *op.cit.*, 39.
- 16) Eric Arthur Blair, "L'Empire britannique en Birmanie" (*Le Progrès Civique*, 4 May 1929) 22-24:  
 "The Burmese...find themselves placed under the protection of despotism which offers them protection but which would abandon them instantly should the need arise. *Their relation to the British Empire is that of slave to master.*"  
 (my emphasis, M.T.)
- 17) Orwell, "The Road to Wigan Pier Diary", *CEJL*, Vol.1., *op.cit.*, 230-231.
- 18) Crick, *op.cit.*, 314.

- 19) Orwell, "Spilling the Spanish Beans", *CEJL*, Vol.1., *op.cit.*, 302-306.
- 20) Orwell, *CEJL*, Vol.1., *op.cit.*, 317-318.
- 21) Crick, *op.cit.*, 351.
- 22) Emmet Parker, *Albert Camus: The Artist in the Arena* (Madison & Milwaukee: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1965) 5.
- 23) Herbert R. Lottman, *Albert Camus: A Biography* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1979) 147.
- 24) *ibid.*, 82.
- 25) Albert Camus & Jean Grenier, *Correspondance: 1932-1960* (Paris: Gallimard, 1981) 22-23.
- 26) Camus, *Actuelles III* (Paris: Gallimard, 1958) 88.
- 27) Parker, *op.cit.*, 175.
- 28) Orwell, *CEJL*, Vol.2., *op.cit.*, 29.
- 29) Orwell *CEJL*, Vol.4., *op.cit.*, 355.
- 30) Camus, *Essais*, *op.cit.*, 1902.

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