

Camus/Sartre: Biography of a Relationship

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Introduction

“To the Editor of *Les Temps Modernes*”ⁱ

“My Dear Camus: Our friendship was not easy, but I will miss it. If you end it today, that doubtless means that it had to end. Many things drew us together, few divided us. But these few were still too many”ⁱⁱ

“To the Editor.” But everyone knew that this was one good friend talking to the other. “If you end it” - the celebrated philosopher of freedom, placing responsibility on his friend before subjecting him to the stream of violent abuse that did in fact end the friendship.

These unforgettable words, so personal and yet so public, so authentic and yet so saturated with bad faith, signaled two simultaneous turning points: of a personal relationship and an historical era. The friendship between Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre was at its peak immediately after the liberation of France. Both the individuals and the friendship reflected the initially boundless postwar optimism. For several years and despite differences, their friendship weathered the vicissitudes of the postwar purges, France’s colonial wars, the domestic return to politics as usual, and, above all, the growing influence of the the Cold War, with its pressure to take sides. But as Soviet-American conflict intensified, leading to the war in Korea, the middle ground, which both had occupied together, disappeared. In the end Camus and Sartre split not only because they took opposing sides, but because each became his own side’s moral

and intellectual leader.

In a philosophically intense and personally brutal argument, the two main voices of postwar French intellectual life publicly destroyed almost ten years of friendship. At first reluctantly and hesitantly, and then with a rush that seemed uncontrollable, Sartre and Camus also shattered their political milieu and any last traces of what was once their common project of creating an independent Left.

Unlikely terrain for a major historical drama: a few densely printed articles in a Paris journal with a circulation of a bit more than 10,000. The August, 1952, issue of *Les Temps Modernes* sold out immediately, was reprinted, and sold out again. Meanwhile, the exchange was presented in a two-page insert in the daily newspaper Camus had once edited, *Combat*. A weekly magazine edited by common friends, the forerunner of today's *Le Nouvel Observateur*, also ran extensive excerpts from their letters. The rupture became the talk of Paris, discussed in no less than a dozen newspaper or magazine articles. *Samedi-Soir*: "The Sartre-Camus Break Is Consummated."ⁱⁱⁱ *France Illustration*: "Sartre against Camus."^{iv} The protagonists as well as their supporters agreed that the falling-out encapsulated what Francis Jeanson's review of Camus's *The Rebel* called "the burning issues of our time."^v As Sartre's old friend Raymond Aron pointed out, the differences contained in these articles "immediately assumed the character of a national dispute."^{vi} After Camus answered Jeanson with an attack on him and Sartre, followed by Sartre's violent and Jeanson's interminable reply to Camus, Camus and Sartre never spoke to each other again.

The Sartre-Camus relationship began on the one side in 1938 and on the other in

1942 with their enthusiastic discovery of each other's early books, followed by immediate friendship in 1943 when the two first met. Philosophically and politically akin - Sartre soon considered Camus his best friend - they talked of various collaborations and shared similar literary, philosophical, and political ambitions. They were often paired at the Liberation, becoming France's most celebrated writers as existentialism became a postwar cultural craze. Struggling to avoid being seen as Sartre's acolyte, Camus disavowed the label again and again, while his friend took him as the exemplar of his new theory of commitment. The two were activist-intellectuals following parallel paths: Camus as editor of *Combat*, the Resistance newspaper now become a Paris daily; Sartre as creator and director of what immediately became France's foremost political and cultural journal, *Les Temps modernes*.

As they continued to socialize, their non-Communist leftism was strained by the beginnings of East-West polarization. The division marked by Churchill's "Iron Curtain" speech in early 1946 was brought into their circle by the arrival in Paris that fall of fiercely anti-Communist Arthur Koestler - following the French publication of his *Darkness at Noon* and *The Yogi and the Commissar*. Koestler's person and ideas placed a demand on all of them - to choose for or against Communism.

Such pressures were intensified by the events of the next few years, and marked Sartre's and Camus's writing and their evolving political positions. As earlier, a dialogue between Sartre and Camus could be discerned in their writings, with neither mentioning the other by name, but each formulating his thoughts in relation to the other. Still friends, often pulled in opposing directions, they continued to work for an independent "third force" for as long as possible - which is to say, until the Cold War became hot and,

along with their own development, finally forced a choice for or against Communism.

Their friendship persisted until the very moment of the explosion.

Then, no longer friends, they continued to argue with each other until Camus's death.

It is a riveting story. Why hasn't it been told in full before now? One or two brief accounts have been written, a handful of writers have explored the issues between Camus and Sartre,^{vii} but no one has recounted the detailed story of the relationship and its end. Why is such a book still necessary today, almost fifty years after the events it describes?

One reason is that it has only now become possible. The materials are now available - biographies, scholarly editions of texts, considered readings of various writings, detailed investigations of dozens of biographical questions and writings - that permit us to understand just what happened between them. In retrospect it is now possible to turn to *this* question, of their relationship, and to explore beneath the protective veil they, and most of their biographers, have placed over it. We will see how drawn to each other they were at first, how close and cross-fertilizing were their original paths, how they interacted with each other *on paper*, including commenting directly and indirectly on each other's works, how their writings treated common questions, how their political, literary, and intellectual projects overlapped and then began to explicitly oppose each other. Indeed, how *after their break* they continued to wrestle with, respond to, and challenge each other.

But the story's telling has waited not only on the accumulation of materials. We were kept from being able to see what happened between them by a more essential reason: the Cold War itself. Its demand that everyone take sides in a pitched struggle

of good against evil - which Sartre and Camus embraced in their distinctive ways - converted their conflict into a morality play. If one was right, then the other had to be wrong, the resulting story was not very interesting. No wonder no one has felt impelled to tell it in full.

As an integral part of the history of the Cold War, their relationship demanded being seen through partisan eyes. Thus Sartre's lifelong companion, Simone de Beauvoir, writing well after the break-up, could scarcely describe Camus without judging him. A petty tyrant at *Combat*, this was a man given to "abstract rages" and "moralism." "Unable to compromise," he became "a more and more resolute champion of bourgeois values." Obsessed by anti-Communism, Camus had become a devotee of questionable "great principles."^{viii} If Sartre's choices were right and Camus's wrong, then (as in Beauvoir's telling) the good side won and the wrong side was defeated. But according to a Camus partisan, "Sartre . . . proclaimed his alliance with the Stalinists no matter what, Camus refuse[d] to join the radical chic crowd that trucked with murderers; for this he was mocked and humiliated by the Sartrians and dearly everyone was a Sartrian then." The fall of Communism now allows us to reverse history's verdict or at least to set the record straight about Camus, who "had 20/20 political vision."^{ix}

The problem is that living and seeing history as a morality play rules out living and seeing its ambiguities and tragedies. The term "tragedy" conveys the sense of a profound loss, and we will see that the story of Camus and Sartre ends badly both personally and historically. This is not to deny that Sartre seemed unfazed by the broken friendship at the time, and that he himself later made light of the relationship and the rupture. Yet in one of his most revealing later interviews, Sartre says of Camus: "He

was my last good friend.”^x This is not surprising considering how close were some of their starting points, how parallel were their postwar missions, how easily they once seemed to negotiate their sharp differences of class background and temperament, not to mention the good times they had together. Nevertheless, lacking any other direct testimony by Sartre, we are left to speculate about what the conflict might have cost him. But there is no speculation that it powerfully affected Camus. He showed pain, a sense of betrayal, and even shame at what he experienced as a public humiliation. And he returned to it hauntingly in what Sartre described, in his eulogy after Camus was killed in an automobile accident, as “perhaps the most beautiful and the least understood”^{xi} of Camus’s books, *The Fall*. The cloud that hovered over Camus during his last years began to descend after the falling-out.

In using the term “tragedy” I mean to get beyond the Cold War partisanship that has colored, along with so much else, perception of the Sartre-Camus conflict. I intend to describe both adversaries with understanding and sympathy, as well as critically. This means appreciating the fundamental legitimacy of *both sides* of their conflict. Indeed, Sartre and Camus were not driven apart by individual idiosyncrasy but because, in Sartre’s later terminology, he and Camus came to “incarnate” the world-historical conflict between two of the century’s major ideological antagonists. Although Camus was never a partisan of capitalism and Sartre was never a Communist, these two antagonists wound up representing far larger forces than themselves.^{xii} Each one struggled against the looming split for several years and at the same time continued to develop and respond to events in ways that made that split more likely. A historical logic animated the controversy as Sartre and Camus were driven to articulate not the

clichés of Communism and capitalism in all their sterile and self-interested bad faith, but the fundamental reasons why thoughtful people, intellectuals committed to the broadest possible freedom and social justice, would support or oppose Communism.

After their split a dispiriting “either-or” would henceforth prevail on the Left: supporting revolutionary movements and governments meant agreeing to ride roughshod over freedom; defending freedom meant opposing the only significant project challenging capitalism. In a deep sense, we are talking about the Left’s defeat in the twentieth century, its splintering of hope. The hopes of a generation to advance towards socialism *and* freedom were to be frustrated. People were forced to make an impossible choice: between Sartre’s grim dialectical realism (Communism as the only path to qualitative change, and the ugly face of such change) and Camus’s principled Leftist rejection of Communism (which left him unable to identify with any significant force struggling for change). Sartre and Camus articulated the half-rights and half-wrongs, the half-truths and half-lies of what became the tragedy of the Left - not only in France, but across the world - for at least the next generation.

Camus and Sartre came to insist that there were only two alternatives, reflected in their plays, *The Just Assassins* and *The Devil and the Good Lord*: Camus’s rebel and Sartre’s revolutionary. But in choosing capitalist freedom *or* Communist socialism, they in effect chose not only against each other, but against themselves. In their choice, whatever their position and whatever the arguments, Sartre and Camus, and their generation, betrayed themselves and their highest values.

After their split, and to the end of their lives, each saw the other in the simplistic

terms of his own chosen morality play: the only betrayal each one recognized was by his former friend. For Camus, the explosion confirmed that Sartre had never been his friend, and that politically Sartre and the whole *Les Temps modernes* crowd had a taste for servitude. For Sartre, Camus had stopped growing and betrayed the vital connection with his historical world that had made him so attractive during and after the war. After their spectacular break, as sometimes happens with a painful divorce, each one seemed bent on erasing any trace of the other in his life. Camus until his death in 1960, and Sartre until his in 1980, cooperated as if in a conspiracy to erase the traces of their friendship.

Many Sartre and Camus biographers and scholars have been their accomplices, seeing their relationship as brief and insignificant, and looking at it primarily to anticipate its ending. After all, didn't their philosophies, temperaments, literary styles, and social origins all demonstrate that the rupture was the essential, the friendship accidental? This stance seems to correspond to the law of "analysis after the event" described by Doris Lessing. Inasmuch as it resulted in a break, we are tempted to focus from the start on "the laws of dissolution" of the relationship.^{xiii} As in a marriage that ends in divorce, afterwards we fixate on the logic of the breakup, as if the two were bound to fall out and that is all that matters. Moreover, both Sartre and Camus put their whole being into the choice that broke them apart. Each man's total stake in being right fed the inability to look at the relationship except to see "seeds" of the split. This was only intensified by the judgements of right and wrong immediately imposed by Cold War manicheanism, and then by the disposition to side with their man by writers devoted to each.

Were they fated to break apart? However they later came to see their friendship, both Sartre and Camus at their best would have rejected the notion that any relationship was destined to end from the moment it began. In fact Sartre developed an extended argument against such fatalism, calling it bad faith. Both men's writings and lives demand reading their story as each one must have lived it - with openness towards what might happen. Appreciating the Sartre-Camus relationship in their spirit means approaching it with their shared sense of unforeseeability, choice, freedom, and absurdity.

Doing otherwise has meant ignoring the full story of the Sartre-Camus relationship. It has left us instead with a highly skewed short story: Camus and Sartre had good times briefly but not much of a friendship, they didn't influence each other, their connection was superficial and didn't last very long. And their breakup was inevitable. But telling the real story in its fascinating and painful detail means putting the relationship in the center. Once given its due, it takes on a whole series of new and different meanings. In fact Sartre and Camus were strongly attracted to each other, affected each other deeply, were involved in and had conflicts over each one's intimate life, argued with each other in writing without mentioning names, shaped themselves against each other, and remained involved with each other long after their breakup. Sartre was not being rhetorical when he said, in his eulogy for his estranged friend: "being apart is just another way of being together."^{xiv}

Notes

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- i. Albert Camus, "Révolte et servitude," *Essais* (Paris: Gallimard, 1965), 754.
 - ii. Jean-Paul Sartre, "Reply to Albert Camus," *Situations* (New York, 1965), 71
 - iii.. *Samedi-Soir*, 6 septembre, 1952 ; see Herbert R. Lottman, *Albert Camus: a Biography* (Corte Madera, CA: Gingko Press, 1997), 532. : .
 - iv. Jean Caillot, *France Illustration*, 21 September 1952, 280.
 - v. Francis Jeanson, "Albert Camus ou l'Ame Révoltée," *Les Temps modernes*, avril 1952, 2070.
 - vi. Raymond Aron, *Opium of the Intellectuals* (Boston: Beacon, 1957), 51.
 - vii. One of the best of the brief accounts is Ian Birchall, "Camus contre Sartre: quarante ans plus tard" *Actes du colloque de Keele, 25-27 mars 1993*, David H. Walker, ed. Longer studies include Germaine Brée, *Camus and Sartre: Crisis and Commitment* (New York: Delacorte, 1972), Leo Pollmann, *Sartre and Camus* (New York: Ungar, 1970), Peter Royle, *The Sartre-Camus Controversy* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1982).
 - viii. Simone de Beauvoir, *Force of Circumstance* (New York, 1965), 106-12.
 - ix. Lottman, xiv-xv. See also Tony Judt, *The Burden of Responsibility: Blum, Camus, Aron and the French Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).
 - x. Jean-Paul Sartre, "Interview at Seventy," *Life/Situations* (New York: Random House, 1976), 107.
 - xi. Jean-Paul Sartre, "Albert Camus," *Situations, IV* (Paris, Gallimard: 1964), 127; *Situations*, 109,
 - xii. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique de la raison dialectique*, II (Paris, 1985); see Ronald Aronson, *Sartre's Second Critique* (Chicago, 1987), 51-75.
 - xiii. Doris Lessing, *The Golden Notebook* (New York: Ballantine, 1962), 227-9.
 - xiv. Sartre, "Albert Camus," 109.

Ten: No Exit

Was a reconciliation now thinkable between Sartre and Camus? Each man had worked his way past the effects of their rupture, and each had fully returned to himself. Both had criticized the Soviet invasion of Hungary, and in any case the worst tension of the Cold War had eased. Beauvoir had imagined a fictional reconciliation, right down to Henri becoming Anne and Robert's son-in-law. More realistically, in March, 1956, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, never as close as Sartre and Camus but estranged over Sartre's "ultra-Bolshevism," found themselves at the speakers' table at a conference in Venice chaired by Ignazio Silone. Sartre realized how much he still had in common with his old schoolmate and began a tentative and slow process of reconnecting that was still taking place when Merleau-Ponty died in 1961.^{xiv} Wasn't it just conceivable that Sartre and Camus, who retained their relationships with Gallimard and still inhabited the same corner of Paris, might run into each other, each offering the other an embarrassed greeting, after which one or the other might follow up with a note?

Robert's note to Henri in *The Mandarins* highlighted some of the personal issues that would have to be traversed. "I just read your farewell letter to *L'Espoir*. It's really absurd that our attitude accentuates only our differences when so many things draw us together. As for me, I'm still your friend."^{xiv} Beauvoir brazenly quoted from Sartre's letter of rupture in creating Robert's gesture of reconciliation, changing the past tense ("drew") to the present ("draw"). This must have outraged Camus. He had endured

Jeanson attacking his intellect and political wisdom, Sartre tearing his personality apart, and in late 1954 he read Beauvoir treating his political commitment and personal life as grist for her mill. In the grip of his writer's block, he concluded that Sartre and company would use anything against him, even Sartre's former affection for Camus.

By 1956 Camus had battled his way back, but what Sartre had done to him personally would continue to seem inexcusable. Already in 1955, as he was beginning to feel more self-confident, Camus had publicly spoken of Sartre's disloyalty. In *The Fall*, the Sartre-dimension of Clamence epitomized bad faith, and worse, he sought to trap and torment others. He was the contemporary incarnation of the devil. Despite the mingling of Sartre- and Camus-dimensions in Clamence, Sartre had become Camus's bete-noir, the negative pole for Camus's own sense of himself, his Other.

While their differences had once complemented each other, since their break each one had made the other into the example of what he had chosen *not* to be. Camus condemned a half-invented, half-real non-Camus: pro-Soviet, violent, hypocritical, abstractly intellectual, terrified of death, facile with words and concepts, enamored of Hegel and Marx and history with a capital H, unwilling to take personal risks, blaming others to hide his own guilt, disloyal, blathering on about freedom while tolerant of oppression, bourgeois, privileged, and Parisian. Camus had built a personal, moral, and political self around his opposition to the individuals who shared these traits: "leftist intellectuals," or "existentialists." Cold-War manicheanism had merged with personal manicheanism. And then with the Cold War beginning to thaw, a new

difference imposed itself - the Algerian war.

During 1956 the number of FLN guerillas grew from about 6,000 to 20,000^{xiv} as French troops in Algeria increased from 180,000 to 400,000. This created a demand that could no longer be met by sending reservists, but now required conscripts. At the end of September, the bombing by FLN women of the Milk-Bar and Caf  teria, immortalized in Pontecorvo's *The Battle of Algiers*, set off a new phase in the war. The rebels were beginning to turn the war against civilians,^{xiv} and the French answer was torture and terror - exactly what Camus had tried to avoid. Although the French authorities and military still tried to conjure up a middle ground between themselves and the FLN and to fill it with acceptable Algerians, brute force was their standard colonial means for dominating the situation, and so they inevitably turned the natives against them. In October the army intercepted a Moroccan aircraft carrying FLN leaders to Tunisia, including Ahmed Ben Bella, and imprisoned them in France for the duration of the conflict. This brilliant military coup was a political disaster because it froze any hope of a negotiated solution. Moreover, Algerians still trying to occupy the middle ground or operating independently were met by FLN terror, most brutally in the massacre of over 300 members of a competing guerilla army at Melouza in 1957. Reconciliation between equals under the French flag, Camus's vision, turned out to be a fantasy dispelled by the either/or perceived by Sartre: French colonial violence would only be ended by FLN violence.

By September 1957 French torture and terror, but also technical and numerical superiority, won the Battle of Algiers, and the Morice Line along the border with Tunisia effectively sealed off Algeria from the growing guerrilla army on the other side of the electrified fence. Winning militarily, the French were losing the war politically as the FLN, through its disciplined and ruthless revolutionary leadership, had become hegemonic among Algerians and was recognized internationally. In the meantime the war was losing support in metropolitan France, as it became clear that military prowess was not defeating the FLN. In February, 1957, PCF leader Maurice Thorez first pronounced the fateful word, "independence,"^{xiv} and that summer, France's leading establishment intellectual, Raymond Aron, published a small book of his articles from the conservative daily *Le Figaro* advocating moving towards Algerian independence as the only realistic course.^{xiv} The million *pieds-noirs* whose very identity was dependent on the national myth of *Algérie française* and a frustrated officer corps that had known virtually nothing but defeat during the twentieth century, both afraid of being sold out by the Left, the intellectuals, and pusillanimous politicians in Paris, began to conspire. They hatched the project of overthrowing the Fourth Republic and bringing Charles de Gaulle to power: he would save *Algérie française* by releasing the brakes holding back the military machine.

Here was a historical moment when Sartre and Camus both seemed destined to play major roles, and each remained in the other's sights. Sartre now made the most of

his fame, his leadership of a major journal, his radicalism, and his ringing voice. After special issues on Hungary and Poland to begin the year, *Les Temps modernes* published ten articles on colonialism and Algeria over the next ten months. In spring, 1957, *Le Monde* asked Sartre to comment on a pamphlet in which reservists home from Algeria had described torture, summary execution, and murder of civilians. His article was rejected by the newspaper as too violent, so he published it in *Les Temps modernes* and then presented it at a meeting in June. Sartre spoke of the “irresponsible responsibility” of everyone who failed to denounce the army’s crimes: “There is the proof, there is the horror, ours: we cannot see it without tearing it out of ourselves and crushing it.”^{xiv} .

The Fall’s success did not alter Camus’s decision to remain silent on Algeria. The only time he spoke out in the twenty-one months after the Algiers meeting was when he was criticized in *Encounter* for remaining silent on Algeria while denouncing the Soviet invasion of Hungary. In his reply he recalled his record and said that colonialism should be ended by creating a Swiss-style confederation that would grant all communities a high degree of autonomy.^{xiv}

His fellow North African, Albert Memmi, whose first novel, *The Pillar of Salt*, had been graced by a preface by Camus, developed a term to explain his kind of silence, the “colonizer of good will.” Memmi had agreed with Camus during his conflict with Sartre^{xiv} and now, in April of 1957 *Les Temps modernes* ran the first two chapters of his forthcoming book, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, which treated the dilemma of

people like Camus. According to Memmi, the left-wing settler sympathized with the plight of the colonized but could not genuinely support their struggle without attacking his own existence as well as his community. "There are, I believe, impossible historical situations and this is one of them."^{xiv} Unable to imagine the end of his own people, incapable of fully identifying with the colonized, the colonizer of goodwill would come to feel politically impotent, slowly realizing that "the only thing for him to do is to remain silent."^{xiv} Memmi's book, introduced by Sartre, appeared later that year. Then, in December, he published a brief article, "Camus or the Colonizer of Goodwill." Here, with considerable sympathy, he made the link explicit: "far from being able to speak of North Africa, because he comes from there, Camus has been led to be silent because everything which touches on North Africa paralyzes him."^{xiv} Camus was unable to transcend his tribe and remain on a universal plane. "Indeed, such is Camus's situation that he was assured of receiving both the suspicion of the colonized, the indignation of the mainland Left, and the anger of his own."^{xiv}

As this article was being read in France, the "colonizer of goodwill" was in Stockholm receiving the Nobel Prize. Would his new status as a Nobel laureate empower him to break his silence? Asked to comment now on all manner of topics, he did in fact begin to talk about Algeria.^{xiv} The day after receiving the prize, December 11, Camus met with students at Stockholm University. Camus brought up the subject of Algeria and the room immediately grew tense. A young Algerian student showered him with criticisms and interrupted him constantly. Camus's face became pale.

Angered, Camus demanded to be allowed to complete his thoughts, and insisted that he had always worked for “a just Algeria, where the two peoples should live in peace and equality.”^{xiv} He alluded to the fact that the student hectoring him no doubt had comrades who were alive today due to his own intervention. And then he shocked his audience: “I have always condemned terror. I must also condemn a terrorism which is carried out blindly, in the streets of Algiers for example, and which one day might strike my mother or my family. I believe in justice, but I will defend my mother before justice.”^{xiv}

Camus’s honesty immediately created a stir in France, and he reaffirmed his words in a letter to *Le Monde*.^{xiv} His mother before justice: his courage in posing what he felt to be the real choice was not accompanied by any understanding of why he was being harassed from all directions. Rather than thinking of how it might appear to those who didn’t face his choice, he blamed them. Not the Algerians, who at least were fighting for their own cause, although in the most horrible of ways. In his letter to *Le Monde* Camus declared that he felt closer to the Algerian student who had badgered him “than to many French people who speak of Algeria without knowing about it.”^{xiv} Who was he talking about?

Sartre had not stopped being one of his targets. Four days after receiving the Nobel Prize Camus argued with Sartre in his address at Upsala University. Complaining at first that “writers of today” found themselves attacked for not speaking up on political issues and then attacked when they did speak up, Camus aimed directly at Sartre’s notion of commitment. He sharply restated his old criticism, this time by

stressing that the theory, by requiring the writer's political involvement, destroyed his freedom. "‘Impressed’ seems to me a more accurate term in this connection than ‘committed.’ Instead of signing up, indeed, for voluntary service, the artist does his compulsory service. Every artist today is embarked on the contemporary slave galley."^{xiv}

Even as Nobel laureate, Camus saw Sartre blocking his path and needed to dislodge this nemesis. His references to Sartre appeared not only in the theme of commitment but also in coded phrases like "the period . . . of the armchair genius is over."^{xiv} The very point of his lecture was to reject Sartre's insistence that artists *should* commit themselves politically *and* in specific ways. Camus asserted his artist's sense that the very nature of their freedom led them to involve themselves in their time and "create dangerously."

In the next few months Sartre wrote a sensational review of Henri Alleg's account of being tortured by paratroopers in Algiers, *The Question*. Beginning with the memory of the Germans torturing the French at Gestapo headquarters in 1943, Sartre recalled that the French had declared it to be impossible that "one day men should be made to scream by those acting in our name. There is no such word as impossible: in 1958, in Algiers, people are tortured regularly and systematically."^{xiv} Some readers would have recognized a reference to Camus's *Combat* articles of a dozen years earlier:

Appalled, the French are discovering this terrible truth: that if nothing can protect a nation against itself, neither its traditions nor its loyalties nor its laws, and if fifteen years are enough to transform victims into executioners, then its behaviour is no more than a matter of opportunity and occasion. Anybody, at any time, may equally find himself victim or executioner.^{xiv}

Sartre had not forgotten the articles that had followed Camus's violent scene with Merleau-Ponty at the Vians' party.^{xiv} His powerful denunciation of torture caused *L'Express* to be confiscated by the authorities on March 6, 1958, and during the next several weeks the article became famous by being published and confiscated as a booklet, then appearing as a scroll which could only be read by using a magnifying glass, and then being published in Switzerland as a preface to a reprinting of Alleg's text.^{xiv} That month he also published an article protesting the death penalty for complicity in sabotage given to an Algerian couple.^{xiv}

Angered by Sartre and his colleagues, analyzed by Memmi, attacked for his silence - during these months Camus prepared his final answer. He selected from his writings on Algeria for a book to be entitled *Algerian Reports*. It would be led off by an introduction and concluded by a final chapter which would respond to everyone, defend himself against his critics, explain why he became silent after so much involvement with Algeria, and clearly state his position on the current situation. He would square his accounts while demonstrating his lifetime of commitment to Algerian Arabs - he pointed

out ruefully that had his “voice been more widely heard twenty years ago there would perhaps be less bloodshed at present.”^{xiv} And then he would sign off.

While making a show of condemning both Right and Left, Camus’s comments directed to the one side had a general and formulaic quality, while his criticism of the Left was specific and showed a definite animus. He refused to “protest against torture in the company of those who readily accepted Melouza or the massacre of European children.”^{xiv} The Left believed that Algerian Arabs “have earned the right to slaughter and mutilate”^{xiv} while years ago Camus had complained “of Arab misery when there was still time to do something, at a time what France was strong and when there was silence among those who now find it easier to keep heaping abuse, even if abroad, upon their weakened country.”^{xiv} Then Camus directly addressed those who, like Sartre, spoke of the responsibility of *all* the French for what was unfolding in Algeria:

If some Frenchmen consider that, as a result of its colonizing, France (and France alone among so many holy and pure nations) is in a state of sin historically, they don’t have to point to the French in Algeria as scapegoats (“Go ahead and die; that’s what we deserve!”); they must offer up themselves in expiation. As far as I am concerned, it seems to me revolting to beat one’s *mea culpa*, as our judge-penitents do, on someone else’s breast, useless to condemn several centuries of European expansion^{xiv}

The pro-FLN French, like Clémence-Sartre, were making French Algerians into scapegoats for their own guilt.

By situating himself within his tribe and reaffirming his choice of family over abstractions, Camus answered Memmi. Camus clearly believed that he could be true to principles of universal justice and a member of his community.

When one's own family is in immediate danger of death, one may want to instill in one's family a feeling of greater generosity and fairness, as these articles clearly show; but (let there be no doubt about it!) One still feels a natural solidarity with the family in such mortal danger and hopes that it will survive at least and, by surviving, have a chance to show its fairness. If that is not honor and true justice, then I know nothing that is of any use in this world.^{xiv}

His two 1958 essays were efforts by a *pied-noir* to do justice to *both* communities in Algeria by holding tenaciously to the middle ground despite its disappearance from the political and intellectual worlds: judging both sides' violence by the same standard, seeking equality between both peoples, refusing a justice for the Arabs which would be unjust to the French. His intentions were honorable, yet Camus dismissed Algerian nationalism as "a conception springing wholly from emotion" and resulting from Nasser's "Arab imperialism" and Russia's "anti-Western strategy." He buttressed these outrageous claims with another: "There has never yet been an Algerian nation."^{xiv} But their national "unreality," Raymond Aron soon replied to Camus in his second book on

the Algerian conflict, “appears to me to be tragically real” among the FLN guerrillas. The great realist, not known for supporting leftist causes, continued to rebut Camus: “These Muslims have not been a nation in the past but the youngest among them want to create one. Emotional demand? Of course, like all revolutionary demands. This demand is born in revolt against the colonial situation and poverty.”^{xiv} Aron’s analysis led to an inescapable conclusion: Algerian nationalism was no more unreal than the *pied-noir* demands asserted by Camus. Camus, Aron repeated from Memmi, revealed himself as the “colonizer of good will” by claiming to favor a compromise while simultaneously rejecting the legitimacy of Algerian nationalism and insisting on giving up “none of the rights of the Algerian French.”^{xiv} All of which made a genuine compromise unthinkable.

The solution endorsed by Camus, the Lauriol Plan, was a masterpiece of bad faith. Camus would have had the French government proclaim that “the era of colonialism is over”^{xiv} and that it was time “to grant complete justice to the Arabs of Algeria.”^{xiv} The neo-colonial scheme would then give each community autonomy in areas pertaining to it alone, but the mainland French Assembly, enlarged by Arab representatives, would decide all matters pertaining to *both* communities. Thus did Camus pretend to serve justice *and* his own people while serving neither. The simple fact was that it was impossible to end colonialism *and* leave French rights intact, and Camus never faced this.^{xiv} Instead, he warned of “dreadful consequences” if his solution did not win out. “This is the last warning that a writer who for twenty years has

been devoted to the service of Algeria can voice before resuming his silence.”^{xiv}

But why the necessity to be silent? Camus’s real reason led back to his family and to “terrorism as it is practiced in Algeria.” His main fear was that “by pointing out the long series of French mistakes, I may, without running any risk myself, provide an alibi for the insane criminal who may throw his bomb into an innocent crowd that includes my family.”^{xiv} After saying this Camus recalled his “my mother before justice” remark and then, either in a slip or deliberately, he separated himself from his critics by ending with a word that referred back to the controversy over *Man in Revolt* and to the first pages of *The Fall*. “But those who, knowing it, still think heroically that one’s brother must die rather than one’s principles, I shall go no farther than to admire them from afar. I am not of their race.”^{xiv}

The racial reference aside, Camus’s remarks demanded a closer look. They were followed by his statement about his “natural solidarity” with his family in danger and his primary commitment to its survival before worrying about fairness. But how might something Camus have written have provided an “alibi” for an FLN terrorist or endangered his own family? In his discussion with students in Stockholm Camus had spoken of the possibility of his interventions “risking aggravating the terror.”^{xiv} How? He was implying that his own remarks would have been critical of French government policy, which he often suggested, and perhaps more importantly his own community’s intransigence, which he never explicitly mentioned. Hearing of his criticisms, “insane” FLN members might feel justified in killing French civilians. Thus, to protect his

endangered community, Camus would have to avoid speaking his mind.

He would keep quiet but this did not mean remaining uninvolved. After he received the Nobel Prize the war was clearly his major concern. He spoke to friends about it, made notes about it, brooded over it. In March, 1958, he arranged a meeting with de Gaulle, trying to convince him in the event of his return to power that Camus's middle way was the best solution. And he did what he could, privately and behind the scenes, to intervene on behalf of dozens of Algerians accused or convicted by the French authorities. Camus placed Algeria at the center of his new novel, *The First Man*, which swept across the entire *pied-noir* experience from the first settlers to the war. It contained sweet childhood memories of a poor and gifted *pied-noir* as well as *Algérie française* myths about the working-class socialist settlers creating their country with their own hands.

As Camus was preparing his *Algerian Reports* , barricades went up in Algiers, farcically trumpeting great revolutionary and Resistance watchwords on behalf of colonialism. De Gaulle insisted not only on ascending to office constitutionally, but after visiting Algiers he slowly began to grasp that *Algérie française* had become untenable. Hesitantly and in stages in 1958 and 1959 he offered a "peace of the brave" to the FLN, then "self-determination," and then peace negotiations. He was faced on the Right by increasingly extreme supporters of *Algérie française* , especially among the officers and the *pieds-noirs* . They had brought him to power, and as soon as they

sniffed betrayal, plots against his life began to hatch. On the Left, de Gaulle's rise to power had been opposed by some in the small anti-war movement and by the Communists, with Sartre among those leading the attack.^{xiv}

By mid-1959 Camus's suffering over Algeria seemed to ease.^{xiv} The previous October, after twenty years of feeling in exile from Algiers and homeless in Paris, the money from his Nobel Prize had enabled him to buy a house at Lourmarin in southern France. His writer's block, which had recurred after he became the Nobel laureate, had receded again and he was deeply at work on *The First Man*. He seemed resigned to the loss of his homeland. Although retrospectively celebrating French Algeria in the novel, Camus kept his promise to say no more about the conflict.

While returning from Lourmarin to Paris on January 4, 1960, Albert Camus was killed in an automobile crash. He was 46. The manuscript he had been working on was in a black leather briefcase in the car. The loss stunned Paris, Algiers, and much of the world. Simone de Beauvoir later described how, when hearing the news, her overwhelming sense of loss slowly overcame her determination to not let Camus's death matter, until she no longer saw in her mind's eye "that just man without justice" but once again "the companion of our hopeful years, whose open face laughed and smiled so easily, the young, ambitious writer, wild to enjoy life, its pleasures, its triumphs, and comradeship, friendship, love and happiness."^{xiv}

Sartre's farewell to Camus was published in *Le Nouvel Observateur* on January

7. From the outset Sartre made much of Camus's silence over Algeria, respecting his conflicts but not wanting to take his last remarks as final: "it was important that he emerge from silence, that he decide, that he conclude."^{xiv} And he died before he had the chance. Notably, Sartre now included himself among "all those who loved" Camus.^{xiv} This fit his reflection that their quarrel was "just another way of living together and not losing sight of each other in the narrow little world which is given to us." And he was correct to say that the break "did not prevent me from thinking of him," for the two men had continued to "live together" during the seven years since the quarrel.^{xiv}

Sartre's strongest recollection of Camus was as a moral presence whom he had to avoid or fight. Camus was "this unshakeable affirmation. For, as little as people may read or reflect, they collide against the human values which he held in his closed fist. He put the political act in question." This was a rather ambivalent appreciation. Sartre sometimes found Camus's silences "too prudent and sometimes painful," and noted that Camus had fought "against History." He had "refused to leave the sure ground of morality, and to engage upon the uncertain paths of the *practical*." Yet the negative became positive. "His stubborn humanism, narrow and pure, austere and sensual, waged a dubious battle against events of these times. But inversely, through the obstinacy of his refusals, he reaffirmed the existence of moral fact within the heart of our era and against the Machiavellians, against the golden calf of realism."^{xiv}

Sartre did not acknowledge that he himself had worshiped at this altar for over four years, and then, after a chain of events that included reading "*La Chute*, above all,

perhaps the most beautiful and the least understood” of Camus’s books - and without the usual fanfare that accompanied his changes - he had recovered his own way of reconnecting morality with politics. He only hinted that in his own way and no longer diametrically opposed to Camus, he too had been doing battle with realism. But he did acknowledge Camus’s importance as of the “principal forces of our cultural domain” and as a thinker who framed the questions for others: One lived with or against his thought . . . but always through it.”^{xiv}

Later that month, *pied-noir* Algeria rose up again in a revolt that fizzled out after de Gaulle faced the plotters down. The government prosecuted Jeanson and his network. Defiant, Sartre and other celebrities signed the “Manifesto of the 121,” urging conscripts to desert. The government also initiated prosecution against the group that had signed the petition, and the whole business became such a cause celebre that demonstrators shouted “Shoot Sartre,” and de Gaulle had the charges dismissed with the words: “You do not imprison Voltaire.”^{xiv} In spring, 1961, the “Generals’ Putsch” also failed in Algiers and the OAS emerged among intransigent settlers and military, its strategy being to kill as many Arabs as possible in order to sabotage any agreement.

As the government pressed on with peace negotiations, the OAS carried out a campaign of slaughter among Algerians and their supporters that rivaled in a little over a year the entire toll lost to FLN terror. It hatched plots against de Gaulle and others in France, including Sartre. In Algeria this mad fury created exactly the conditions, once the FLN took power, that would require the *pieds-noirs* to abandon Algeria completely.

It was a bloodbath. As Algerian independence was finally declared, in July, 1962, one million French Algerians were in the midst of fleeing to France and Spain, destroying everything they could not carry with them. Camus was dead, and so was his Algeria.

The first OAS bomb aimed at Sartre, in July, 1961, had been mistakenly placed on the floor above; the second, in January, 1962, damaged his apartment. Sartre and Beauvoir had holed up at an acquaintance's, but Sartre's mother was home. Luckily, she was in the bathroom when the bomb went off, and was unhurt. Camus had worried publicly about FLN violence against his mother, but it was Sartre's mother who came within a hair's breadth of being murdered by OAS violence. This irony points to the deepest reason why reconciliation had been impossible between Sartre and Camus. The difference had been apparent since they met in 1943 - Orestes embracing violence in *The Flies* as a way of becoming real, Camus justifying the violence of the Resistance in "Letters to a German Friend." From the beginning of their relationship violence has been the basso ostinato sounding through this story, and it came to its climax over Algeria. Not that Camus was nonviolent and Sartre was violent, but the one was preoccupied with keeping his hands clean, and the other with the redeeming effect of getting his hands dirty.

Yet as Camus had said in 1939, and then attempted to erase in 1955, the story of French Algeria was one of "colonial conquest." By the Algerian War Sartre understood, and Camus tried to repress, the fact that violence against the natives was

not only an original sin, but a daily feature of relations between French and Arab Algerians. The settlers had constantly to reassert domination over the natives, had constantly to assert their claim to the physical reality of the place which primordially belonged to the natives. And every moment even the poorest among them enjoyed, in Memmi's words, the "small crumbs" differentiating them from the natives.^{xiv} In the great novel of French Algeria, Camus's *Meursault* reveled in its sensuous reality, virtually bonding with its sun and sea, its heat and landscape. On the other hand, his violent and inexplicable murder of the anonymous Arab, following on his complicity with Raymond's beating of the young man's sister, conveyed without the slightest sentimentality Algeria's texture of colonial violence. And in both *The Stranger* and *The Plague* Camus recreated the settlers' personal and political worlds as strangely devoid of non-Europeans, showing the original occupants as occasional, silent, brooding, and threatening presences.^{xiv}

Camus the journalist had tried to give the natives their due, but he was ultimately arguing with the Meursaults and Raymonds, men of no reason. And then, after the native rebellion broke out, although hoping for the end of colonialism and its inequalities, he avoided telling them the harshest but most urgent truths. Sensing both their intransigence and their ultimately frail position, Camus did not dare talk to his fellow *pieds-noirs* either about their privilege or their violence. Thus the man who so decried violence and sought clean hands was complicit in the built-in violence that was a normal part of his homeland's daily life.

At his Nobel Prize ceremony, Camus presented his writer's credo: his function of "serving truth and freedom" was based on "two commitments difficult to observe: refusal to lie about what we know and resistance to oppression."^{xiv} Truth and Freedom. Yet in his actual fulfillment of these goals he remained silent about certain truths, echoing intellectuals he despised, including Sartre. Camus never realized that by doing so in order to help a people which experienced itself as beleaguered, he was no different than Sartre had been towards Communism. Of course Camus knew, as he heard Communist Parties or new revolutions overseas being justified, that their intellectual partisans spoke with a forked tongue - Sartre had done this in relation to the Soviet Union and French Communist Party between 1952 and 1956. By his own selective honesty and his own silences, Camus acted the same way in relation to French Algeria between 1955 and his death. And Camus had also imposed a double standard on Soviet Communism and French capitalist democracy since 1946 - just as Sartre did towards capitalist democracies and anti-colonial movements starting in 1956.

It turned out to be Memmi who understood where Camus went wrong. Before going silent, Camus had tried to square the circle, declaring that colonialism was over while insisting that its essential political relations be retained. He spoke of the equality of French and Arabs while privileging the one and ignoring the other's central demand, refusing to even mention their representatives. He spoke of recognizing the Algerians' dignity while imagining permanent French rule. This dishonesty, or delusion, was based on an underlying reality - the vulnerable position of French Algeria. Once the French government, under de Gaulle, had had enough, *pied-noir* Algeria faced a dead

end. The OAS, its crazed movement of fascist killers, perfectly expressed its disastrous dialectic. Unwilling to recast its identity as dominating force, nurtured on violence, the dominant forces of *Algérie française* chose a genocidal explosion, and then suicide, rather than risk transforming themselves into a non-ruling minority.

There was an inner link between the great generous spirit's final silence and the OAS's *Gotterdammerung* after he died. Probably no one and nothing could have induced a million settlers to abandon their privileges, above all of their white skin, to embark on a path of reform which would lead to their becoming a minority in an Arab-ruled society. *Pieds-noirs* participated in the massacres after Sétif in 1945, rigged the elections of 1948, and furiously resisted any concession to the majority after November, 1954, until Algerian nationalism became as hard and intransigent as themselves. And never faced down by fair-minded but equally deluded politicians like Mendès-France, they continued drugging themselves on the myth of French Algeria, ignoring until it was too late the nine million people who were making themselves into Algerians in response to their economic, political, and cultural domination. Capable of bravely seeing and saying the worst about Communism, willing and able to run great personal risks, Camus could simply not tell these simple truths to his people.

By 1958 his case for his people had been weakened considerably. A deep racist violence was stirring in his community, and Camus must have heard it in the crowd calling for his death, led by Jo Ortiz, in January, 1956, and he must have learned that it

had mounted the barricades in spring, 1958. The OAS, the hegemonic expression of *Algérie française*, declared its final program a year after his death by assassinating another generous spirit of reconciliation, Pierre Popie, a *pied noir* attorney. Its goals were to murder the remaining people of goodwill on both sides, to create a climate of retaliation and all-out violence that would throttle the peace talks, and, if victorious, to institute a system of apartheid.^{xiv} Camus's friend, Algerian novelist and teacher Moloud Feraoun, had disdainfully described their precursor organization as "masturbating in a corner."^{xiv} And in fact their final orgy of violence, capping their total refusal of every accommodation since 1945, paradoxically only made inevitable what they were desperately trying to ward off.^{xiv} Irony of ironies, had Camus himself been alive in 1961-2, it is quite conceivable that an OAS death squad would have stood him up against a wall, as it did Feraoun in the waning months of *Algérie française*, and shot him dead.

Certainly Camus's hatred of Communism was legitimate, and was understandably fueled by his opposition to violence. But he also used it to ignore French colonialism, wrecking his own moral and political coherence. What made his double standard appallingly easy to apply was the support of an entire community of Cold Warriors who gave his half-truth the ring of *the* truth, nurturing his bad faith on the kind of approval that kept him from ever facing its contradictions.

What Camus lacked, as did the liberal Cold Warriors who embraced him, was the saving insight which Sartre had been working on since *Dirty Hands*: in many of its key

structures our world is constituted by violence. In *The Communists and Peace*, its first part written just before he broke with Camus, Sartre insisted on directly facing the violence of the democratic capitalist system. And when he turned his attention to colonialism, in 1956, Sartre showed how, in the colonies, violence created the social order and its people. In a ringing voice Sartre named the reality of Algeria avoided by Camus. His most intense statement came a year after Camus died, in his Preface to Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*. Where Camus was constitutionally unable to hear the Algerian point of view, Sartre invited his readers into their world: "Europeans, you must open this book and enter into it. After a few steps in the darkness you will see strangers gathered around a fire; come close, and listen, for they are talking of the destiny they will mete out to your trading-centers and to the hired soldiers who defend them."^{xiv} While Camus denied any guilt, Sartre spread the net of responsibility. "It is true that you are not settlers, but you are no better. For the pioneers belong to you; you sent them overseas, and it was you they enriched. "

And then Sartre turned what he regarded as the central issue.

Violence in the colonies does not only have for its aim the keeping of these enslaved men at arm's length; it seeks to dehumanize them. Everything will be done to wipe out their traditions, to substitute our language for theirs and to destroy their culture without giving them ours. Sheer physical fatigue will stupefy them. Starved and ill, if they have any spirit left, fear will finish the job; guns are levelled at the peasant; civilians come to take over his land and force him by dint

of flogging to till the land for them. If he shows fight, the soldiers fire and he's a dead man; if he gives in, he degrades himself and he is no longer a man at all; shame and fear will split up his character and make his inmost self fall to pieces.^{xiv}

Inevitably the natives would make the settlers' violence their own, internalizing it, and then they would rise up against their masters: "and we are living at the moment when the match is put to the fuse."^{xiv} Even the Left would be upset by the explosion.

They would do well to read Fanon; for he shows clearly that this irrepressible violence is neither sound and fury, nor the resurrection of savage instincts, nor even the effect of resentment: it is man re-creating himself. I think we understood this truth at one time, but we have forgotten it - that no gentleness can efface the marks of violence; only violence itself can destroy them. The native cures himself of colonial neurosis by thrusting out the settler through force of arms. When his rage boils over, he rediscovers his lost innocence and he comes to know himself in that he himself creates his self. Far removed from his war, we consider it as a triumph of barbarism; but of its own volition it achieves slowly but surely, the emancipation of the rebel, for bit by bit it destroys in him and around him the colonial gloom. Once begun, it is a war that gives no quarter. You may fear or be feared; that is to say, abandon yourself to the

disassociations of a sham existence or conquer your birthright of unity. When the peasant takes a gun in his hands, the old myths grow dim and the prohibitions are one by one forgotten. The rebel's weapon is the proof of his humanity. For in the first days of the revolt you must kill: to shoot down a European is to kill two birds with one stone, to destroy an oppressor and the man he oppresses at the same time: there remain a dead man, and a free man; the survivor, for the first time, feels a *national* soil under his foot.^{xiv}

Now the peasants would see their real situation, create "new structures which will become the first institutions of peace."^{xiv} They were discovering their humanity "beyond torture and death," and were making themselves people at our expense: "a different man of higher quality,"^{xiv} creating a socialist society. But here Sartre stopped his gloss on Fanon's narrative, for he knew that the argument was continuing within his reader and he had to bring it to a conclusion. Through the Algerian war, he claimed, Europeans themselves were being decolonized: "the settler which is in every one of us is being savagely rooted out."^{xiv} And then Sartre recalled Camus's words of fifteen years earlier:

A fine sight they are too, the believers in nonviolence, saying that they are neither executioners nor victims. Very well then; if you're not victims when the government which you've voted for, when the army in which your younger

brothers are serving without hesitation or remorse have undertaken race murder, you are, without a shadow of doubt, executioners.^{xiv}

Terming his readers “exploiters” and guilty of a “racist humanism,” he spoke of how French violence, blocked in Algeria, was seeping back into France. “Rage and fear are already blatant; they show themselves openly in the nigger-hunts^{xiv} in Algiers. Now, which side are the savages on? Where is barbarism? Nothing is missing, not even the tom-toms; the motor-horns beat out “Al-gérie fran-çaise” while the Europeans burn Moslems alive.”^{xiv}

We have, in this incredible journey, accompanied Sartre from his insights into colonialism, to his projection of its psychic damage - to an assertion of how that damage was being repaired through the natives’ violence, to his bathing in that violence, to his exultant and self-flagellating attack on Europeans! In one of his most powerful pieces of writing Sartre’s argument and his world-view were as brutal as his language. If Camus had denied settler violence, Sartre had now composed the twentieth century’s ode to violence as liberation and therapy. If Camus had tried to lay down rules for conducting conflict, Sartre had now approved of the natives getting rid of “colonialism by every means within their power.”^{xiv} If Camus had been adjusting his statements according to his sense of his community’s intolerance, Sartre now guiltily attacked his community in making himself *the* European spokesperson for the Third World. If Camus’s anti-Communism had masked his inability to treat the natives in any other way than

patronizingly, Sartre the revolutionary away from the field of battle now gave a blank check of support for even the ugliest anti-colonial brutalities.^{xiv}

The theme of “dirty hands” had been Sartre’s way of accepting violence into struggles for social change, but he now erected it into an ethic of struggle, even beyond the claim that the ends justified the means. Sartre now gave violence itself a value, a liberating function. Sartre wrote his preface to please his friend, Frantz Fanon, but his ideas were no momentary aberration. Since *Dirty Hands* Sartre had never been much concerned to place limits on violence as a tool of social struggle. Goetz’s dramatic murder of the officer who balked at his command turned out to be annunciatory. Sartre sided with the Communist Party in part *because of* its alleged penchant for violence. Sartre’s philosophy, whether in its early years or now in *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, itself suggested an inner link with violence. At the core of his thought was a sense of isolation and alienation: serialized people came together not naturally but only under the collective threat of death. Sartre gave violence the unifying role in a worldview that stressed antagonism and denied the thousand daily ways of unforced cooperation.^{xiv}

We can now see why Camus and Sartre were unable to reconcile. It was not just that they continued to disagree sharply. More, each man was in bad faith about what turned out to be his key political theme, violence. Sartre saw *all* social life as a bitter struggle for domination. He made a fetish of violence, seeing it as necessary for human liberation and social change, and totally ignored the question of its costs. Camus denied and repressed violence insofar as it was central to the life of *his* Algeria

and to his second country, France, all the more vigorously campaigning against it elsewhere. No wonder each man's preface about violence, Camus in 1958, Sartre after Camus's death in 1961, attacked the other, with Camus singling out the "judge-penitents" and Sartre those who claimed to be "neither executioners nor victims." In the name of serving the oppressed, both men accepted oppression. So there was no possibility for each man to have kept the door open for the other during these years. There was no chance to preserve a relationship where each might have his bad faith illuminated by the other's integrity and honesty.

Conclusion

Sartre survived Camus by twenty years and had the last word on their relationship many times over. A few days after Camus's death Sartre told a young student that "Camus never did anything 'nasty' to me, as far as I know, and I never did anything like that to him."^{xiv} Perhaps his amnesia was due to the fact that, unlike Camus, Sartre did not hold tightly to friendships with men, having broken with many onetime colleagues during the 1940s and 1950s, always over politics: Aron, Altmann, Rousset, Camus, Étienne, Lefort, Merleau-Ponty.

After Camus's death Sartre the anti-colonialist remained critical of his former friend, not only mocking Algerian settlers who tried to be neither victims nor executioners but rejecting the "false intellectuals" who tried to avoid all violence in Vietnam and Algeria.^{xiv} Sartre's 100-page remembrance of Merleau-Ponty, a former

schoolmate whom he regarded as his political mentor but never a good friend, contrasted strikingly with his eulogy for Camus. The 1961 article on Merleau-Ponty was a detailed and warm appreciation which avoided looking deeply into his former colleague's motivations but spoke openly and at length about how he had been influenced by him. Above all, it showed an unforced respect for Merleau-Ponty as an intellectual - he was after all a fellow philosopher and graduate of the *École Normale* - which was always lacking in Sartre's writings on Camus.

In 1963 Simone de Beauvoir presented their "official" statement on the end of the relationship and on Camus's evolution. It demands quoting in full:

As a matter of fact, if this friendship exploded so violently, it was because for a long time not much of it had remained. The political and ideological differences which already existed between Sartre and Camus in 1945, had intensified from year to year. Camus was an idealist, a moralist and an anti-Communist; at one moment forced to yield to History, he attempted as soon as possible to secede from it; sensitive to men's suffering, he imputed it to Nature; Sartre had labored since 1940 to repudiate idealism, to wrench himself away from his original individualism, to live in History; his position was close to Marxism, and he desired an alliance with the Communists. Camus was fighting for great principles, and that was how he came to be taken in by the hot air of Gary Davis; usually, he refused to participate in the particular and detailed political actions to which

Sartre committed himself. While Sartre believed in the truth of socialism, Camus became a more and more resolute champion of bourgeois values; *The Rebel* was a statement of his solidarity with them. A neutralist position between the two blocs had become finally impossible; Sartre therefore drew nearer to the U. S. S. R.; Camus hated the Russians, and although he did not like the United States, he went over, practically speaking, to the American side. I told him about our experience [of recoiling at the sight of American soldiers in late 1951] at Chinon. "I really felt I was back in the Occupation," I told him. He looked at me with an astonishment that was both sincere and feigned. "Really?" He smiled. "Wait a little while. You'll see a real Occupation soon - a different sort altogether."

These differences of opinion were too radical for the friendship between the two men not to be shaken. Also, compromise was not easy for a man of Camus's character. I suppose he felt how vulnerable his position was in some way; he would not brook challenge, and as soon as he saw one coming he would fly into one of his abstract rages, which seemed to be his way of taking refuge. There had been a sort of reconciliation between him and Sartre at the time of [*The Devil and the Good Lord*], and we had published his article on Nietzsche in *Les Temps modernes*, although we weren't at all satisfied with it. But this tentative attempt had not lasted. Camus was ready, at the slightest opportunity, to criticize Sartre for his permissiveness with regard to "authoritarian socialism." Sartre had long believed that Camus was wrong all along the line and that furthermore he had become, as he told him in his letter, "utterly insufferable."

Personally, this break in their relations did not affect me. The Camus who had been dear to me had ceased to exist a long while before.^{xiv}

As time passed she and Sartre came to regard the break as the essence of the relationship, and, like her sketch, Sartre's recollections invariably had the aroma of self-justification. He recalled Camus as the Other against whom he had defined himself, as in the 1971 discussion with his biographer, John Gerassi. Reflecting back on himself in 1943, Sartre said,

I was then like Camus was in the fifties. . . . I did not understand that war is the consequence of certain inner conflicts in bourgeois societies. Workers don't go to war, peasants don't go to war, unless they are pushed into it by their leaders, those who control the means of production, the press, communications in general, the educational system, in one word, the bourgeois. When I think of Camus claiming *years later*, that the German invasion was like the plague - coming for no reason, leaving for no reason - *quel con*, what a schmuck!^{xiv}

This was an amazing turnabout, since Sartre had taken Camus as a model in 1945, and had strongly praised his novel about the Resistance.

In a 1975 interview, Michel Contat pressed Sartre on his inconstancy in friendship, citing his treatment of Camus. Sartre still felt fully justified in his attack

because he “called me ‘Monsieur le directeur’ and was full of crazy ideas about Francis Jeanson’s article.”^{xiv} Yet this was also the place where Sartre uncharacteristically let a very different note slip out: “He was probably the last good friend I had.”^{xiv} After acknowledging that he had replied “quite harshly”^{xiv} to Camus, Sartre sounded as if his personal affection survived alongside their differences. “I retained a liking for him although his politics were completely foreign to mine, particularly his attitude during the Algerian war.”^{xiv} This “particularly” was an odd recollection, because it had been their attitudes about Communism five years earlier, and not about Algeria, which had driven them apart. He now seemed to be suggesting that he had softened towards Camus after Hungary and as the thaw began, but that their separation had been reconfirmed by their new political differences.

And Camus’s view? We have seen Camus’s various indirect reflections on Sartre, as well as his last direct public comment in 1955, where he said that Sartre “was not a loyal adversary.” This is how the story ended from Camus’s point of view. Concluding with his perspective is appealing because he was the more sympathetic of the two men. Although success seemed to turn his head and the rough and tumble of debate embittered him, Camus was a visibly feeling, suffering, self-doubting, and vulnerable person, and even his literary genius seemed hard-won and more human than Sartre’s incredible intellectual power. Sartre’s polyvalent genius made him a rare being, even though, paradoxically, he was the more approachable and unassuming of the two. But concluding the story from one side and then the other sounds like the

either/or that made their relationship a well-kept secret for fifty years. If Sartre was right, then the relationship did not amount to much, and contained little worth talking about. And if Camus was right, so were his accusations against Sartre, and the relationship itself did not much matter.

But the relationship did matter. Beginning with a sense of discovery and kinship, this relationship was hopeful and exuberant, then angry and painful. Brought together by history, Camus and Sartre were torn apart by it. Communism versus democratic capitalism, a mystified and brutal colonialism versus a non-democratic and no less brutal liberation movement - it was necessary to take sides in order to remain loyal to one's people, one's commitments, and one's principles.

Camus stated the choice starkly: my mother or justice. But after declaring forthrightly that his concern for the other side's freedom must be framed by his own people's survival, Camus then denied the Algerians' very sense of themselves. No justice without violence, said Sartre. But after painstakingly working his way through the impossibility of bringing peace and light to the world without overthrowing its oppressive and unequal social structures, Sartre then proclaimed the necessary evil, violence, to be a positive good.

At each man's mature creative peak, Camus in *The Fall* and Sartre three years later in *The Condemned of Altona*, both produced brilliantly original reflections on the themes of hypocrisy, guilt, judgement, and responsibility. Two of the century's greatest writers explored the very same questions, at the same time - as if they were coming to

terms with something that was within each of them, between them, and about their corner of the twentieth-century world. Voiced or not, hypocrisy, guilt, judgement, and responsibility certainly applied to the pro-revolutionary Left, to Cold-War liberals, and to *pieds-noirs*. As Camus conveyed in *The Fall*, it applied to one's personal life and between friends, and as he all but said in interviews, it applied to his relationship with Sartre.

From the point of view of their relationship, then, the story ends sadly. Some historical situations are impossible. Part of the impossibility lay in the terms offered, whether by *Algérie française*, the French Cold-War establishment, the Communist Party, or the FLN: with us or against us. Camus was more lucid about the cost, but both were weak enough to descend into manicheanism - to the point of seeing each other through its lenses.

In 1979 a group of leading intellectuals gathered, first for a press conference, and then for a visit to the Elysée Palace, to urge President Giscard-d'Estaing to intervene on behalf of the Vietnamese Boat People. Sartre, in steep decline, encountered his old schoolmate, Raymond Aron, for the first time in over twenty years. If anyone was Sartre's political bete-noir in the 1940s it was his onetime friend Aron, who sat on *Les Temps moderne's* editorial board briefly, and then joined *Combat* as editorialist as Camus's role and influence were waning. Then, moving to the Right, he went on to write editorials for *Le Figaro* and countless pro-Western and anti-Communist articles

and dozens of books. At the same time he retained a lifelong interest in his old friend's philosophy, devoting two books to Sartre, both of which went unanswered. Now the old enemies greeted each other: "Bonjour, mon petit camarade," said Aron as they shook hands.

Sartre died a few months later, and Aron spoke about his former schoolmate with considerable knowledge and, despite his strong criticisms, great appreciation. Reflecting on this later, Aron made clear that there had been no reconciliation, that he still found Sartre's politics abhorrent, that their greeting had meant nothing special because it was the expression their generation of *École Normale Supérieure* students had always used, and that he continued to disagree with Sartre's thought. But he unashamedly admired Sartre's intellectual power. It was also clear as Aron spoke and wrote that Sartre, although aiming constant hostile epithets at him, had been very much in his life and on his mind. Their opposition was clearly a way of being together.^{xiv}

So with Sartre and Camus after 1952, but with special intensity. After they had discovered each other, influenced each other, and become fast friends, there would be no getting away from each other. Even breaking off did not remove them from each other's lives. Camus and Sartre kept reading and reacting to each other. They continued to argue with, and shape themselves against, each other. They defined their positions on issues in relation to each other.

However the specific questions changed over time, Sartre and Camus represented two fundamentally opposed attitudes on most questions they touched.

Sartre versus Camus: its ways became coded and subtle, but the polar opposites defined the choices for their generation. Their power was such, their immersion in their times so deep, their political commitment so strong, and their will to clarify their own point of view so forceful, that in the end it would have come down to Camus *or* Sartre no matter what. In the end their relationship mattered *because of* their antagonism.

Both men are long dead now, along with most of the causes that first brought them together and then drove them apart. But their different and shared sense of life is still with us, and so is their opposition - as testimony, as important writings, as contrasting models, as two deeply connected force fields defining their time and its choices. The century is over which, for a moment, seemed to belong to the two of them together, and then became bitterly contested by them as enemy brothers. No wonder the shadows of the Camus-Sartre relationship lie across some of its best and worst memories. And now, after the end of the century - and above all, its Cold War - perhaps we can appreciate both of them *and* reject the either/ors that broke them apart.

Notes

