

The Sameness of Existing in a Meaningless Reality : Boris Vian's *L'herbe rouge* and Murakami Haruki's *IQ84*

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Murakami Haruki (1949-) has not been really influenced by the literary works of Boris Vian (1920-1959). However, both writers have been deeply influenced by Franz Kafka's works : according to Gilbert Pestureau, it was clearly the case in Boris Vian's *L'herbe rouge* (182). In his novel *IQ84*, Murakami has referred to Kafka's works (*IQ84-1 12 ; IQ84-3 275*). Both Vian and Murakami are concerned with what-it-means-to-exist. The sameness of existing is reflected in various paradigmatic life experiences : loneliness, anxiety, and despair, fault and guilt, suffering and death, said Murakami (*IQ84-1373*). Any meaning of life is basically subjected to existential doubt. As it is interpreted in a meaningless reality, the sameness of existing requires existential doubt. That's why truth is never conceived as a given set of beliefs, values, virtues, rituals and practices. Both Vian and Murakami believed that Truth-itself does not exist. Rather, truth is a dialogical process that implies to face others' truth claims. Being is communication, and communication is being. Truth is nothing but the communicational exchange of truth claims, said Karl Jaspers (2003, 205-249). In a way or another, Vian and Murakami criticized Truth-itself, and more generally, the thing-in-itself. Everything remains unknown since there is no-thingness. There is no in-itself. Essence does not exist. Truth is nothing but an existential quest and implies communicational exchanges. As dialogical process, truth is much more connected with the unknown than with knowledge. Vian, and Murakami described the sameness of existing from three basic existential perspectives : (1) the unknown frontiers between good and evil, and the meaning of truth and justice ; (2) the unknowable self ; (3) the unknown basis of existence : what-it-means-to-exist refers to existential categories whose meaning remains unknown : freedom and suffering, temporality, having-to-die and existential anxiety, hope and despair. Vian and Murakami used those three perspectives in order to define existential doubt as the ground of any meaning of life. We will explore the meaning of those existential categories as they are interpreted by Boris Vian (in *L'herbe rouge*) and Murakami Haruki (in *IQ84*).

In Socratic way, Vian believed that we actually know nothing. Our thought is always subjected to prejudices. Insofar as our knowledge is colored by prejudices, how could we know things, persons and phenomena in themselves ? Prejudices are distorting what things, persons, and phenomena seem to be. Every knowledge process is basically linked to prejudices about things, persons, and phenomena. According to Hans-Georg Gadamer (1976, 103-140), prejudices are inherently linked to knowledge processes themselves. Laws and regulations do not get rid of prejudices, although they tend to reduce the propensity to widespread their influence. But is it enough to conform ourselves to laws and regulations ? Does it guarantee that our behavior will be ethically justified ? Laws and regulations constitute a moral minimum. Ethics requires stronger moral standards than those provided by laws and regulations. Ethics is the not parrot of laws and regulations. However, our moral standards must be grounded on objective criteria that could be accepted by the reasonable spectator (Immanuel Kant, John Rawls). Such standards are continuously evolving and are not always universally shared. Ethics is then a permanent questioning about what is good and evil, in given circumstances. Good and evil remain unknown realities. What is a good/wrong action ? Could we avoid wrong actions without undertaking right ones ? According to Vian, I am emptiness. That's why I cannot know the exact frontiers between good and evil. Since I know nothing, I cannot know how I could theoretically distinguish good and evil. I know that there are rules. Conforming myself to a given rule implies to conform myself to all rules. However, when undertaking right actions, I cannot avoid every kind of evil that follows from morally right conducts, since human will is mischievous. Are human beings basically egoistic ? We could be aware of our truth claims. But expressing our truth claims does not unveil anything about our future. Predicting our future is not necessarily true, said Vian (*L'herbe rouge* 48). Truth claims about the nature of good and evil are then only useful for personal decision-making. They cannot unveil anything about the essence of good/evil. According to Vian, we really do not know what is justice/injustice because of the unknowable character of good and evil. But when decision-making is quite difficult, then moral questioning is arising. Decision-makers implicitly embrace given ethical theories (for instance, theories of virtues, philosophical egoism, utilitarianism, Kantianism, theories of justice), so that their moral questioning is determined by the basic principles that characterize such theories. In all cases, decision-makers must take into account all consequences of their actions (in the short-, mid-, and long-term) for all people who are affected by such actions. Most of people find hard to take into account all consequences of their actions. Morally right actions could be undertaken for wrong motives ; they could also have very bad consequences. People often love to see others suffering or being unhappy. Others' suffering could console them about their own existential suffering. People are deeply concerned with their own suffering. That's why the basic (objective) criteria for ethical decision-making are so important. But are they really available to the subjective thinker ?

Murakami strongly criticized a philosophical-egoistic viewpoint. The world is basically unjust, and is thus a world in which we could go ahead with every potentiality-

of-being. Murakami is unveiling an Heideggerian influence (Heidegger 1962, 308, 320-322, 333, 342, 394-395). We have lost the meaning of justice/injustice, since we are too concerned with our self-interest (*IQ84-2* 464). However, it is easier to define injustice than to circumscribe the frontiers between justice and injustice. An imperfect being has useless thoughts, words, and actions. Imperfection requires uselessness. Imperfection needs imagination. If the world would be perfect, human beings would have no imagination, and thus no freedom, any project-to-be. Imagination is required to be being-free. Freedom could not constitute our being if we could stop and even erase our imagination. We could then lose our responsibility toward ourselves as well as toward others. We cannot (and should not) stop our imagination. A perfect world does not exist. And that's fine. According to Emmanuel Levinas (1982, 91-98), I am myself insofar as I am responsible for-others. We are imperfect beings living in an imperfect world. Nobody is perfect : that's why there are potentialities of cooperation and a deep will of collaboration. I must release myself from any necessity of perfection. It is the only way to become who-I-am. Although good and evil cannot be defined, I remain a moral agent : I cannot get rid of moral judgment. It is an integral part of human existence, since human being is being-free. Due to our existential finitude, we are subjected to fault and guilt. Fault and guilt are existentially rooted. That's why I cannot avoid to exert my moral judgment, although I cannot clearly distinguish the frontiers between good and evil.

Murakami is fully aware that good and evil are unknowable realities. Then, we are continuously searching for their meaning and extent. In doing so, we are defining the frontiers of our morality. Perfection does not give any place to imagination. Without a given morality, human being would not exist. Morality provides an equilibrium that makes social and psychological life possible. Sometimes, our egoistic attitudes make others suffering, although it was not our intent to do so. People could be deeply affected by others' suffering. Murakami referred to Fedor Dostoyevsky (2002, 341-342) : what is crucial is to maintain an equilibrium between good and evil. Right actions could have very bad outcomes, while wrong behaviors could have very good results. When we are undertaking right actions, we do not have any precise idea about evil itself. The notion of good is known when evil is actualized. But the notion of evil remains unknown although good actions are undertaken. If evil remains unknown, how could an actualized evil be the criterion for knowing the notion of good ? There is a vicious circle around good and evil, so that we cannot know neither the good, nor the evil. Through socialization processes, we have learned some parameters of good/evil. That's why we are usually undertaking right actions and avoiding wrong conducts. Such habits partly hinder our moral questioning about the nature of good and evil. However, from a theoretical viewpoint, we cannot distinguish good and evil. We could then lose given frontiers between good and evil, since we have built up such frontiers. In an Aristotelian way (Aristotle 1996, 8-10), Murakami asserted that every action/choice is guided by a given notion of good (*IQ84-1303-304*). But we cannot avoid the issue of good and evil. Human being always questions the nature of good and evil (373). Although

we cannot fully know things, persons, and phenomena, we acquire more and more knowledge about them (310). Our moral behavior is basically determined by two facts : (i) prejudices are an integral part of truth as process and path (41) ; (ii) just effects do not necessarily follow from just motives (418). The absolute good as well as the absolute evil do not exist in the human world. The good is the equilibrium between right and wrong actions, their good and bad consequences, said Murakami (*IQ84-2260, 287*). Being aware of our personal truth claims is the way to conquer our authentic powers. Truth claims cannot be isolated from suffering (248, 522). Since Truth-itself does not exist, my truth claims are unsatisfying. Moreover, my truth claims will inevitably face others' truth claims. Any dialogue about truth claims will make people more deeply aware of their existential finitude, and then of their impossibility to grasp reality as-it-is. Nobody could claim to own Truth-itself. Everybody conveys truth claims, that is, historically-rooted truths that could be contradicted by others' truth claims. Our truth claims could give guidance to our present way to be, to think and to behave. They could help us to identify our project-to-be (who-I-want-to-become). Truth-itself cannot be grasped, because History is continuously rewritten, said Murakami (284). Truth claims are always relative. Truth claims can never be connected to any notion of Truth-itself (*IQ84-3 202-203, 223*). Then, we will put them in practice, either in words, or in action. We will be responsible for the practical outcomes of our thoughts, dreams, and ideas. As soon as we are born, we have an ethical responsibility, said Wittgenstein (2002, 132). Our moral norms of behavior will then unveil our truth claims. Whether they are socially-induced and/or self-defined, moral norms of behavior are always evolving. Good-itself and Evil-itself do not exist. Only truth claims (about the nature of good/evil) actually exist.

In Kierkegaardian way (1974a, 66), Vian and Murakami acknowledged the subjectivity of the self. According to Vian, dead persons are living the extreme conditions of loneliness : (1) they are free of every existential anxiety ; they will no longer suffer ; (2) they have no memory ; (3) they do not have anything they could be ashamed of. Vian then described their situation as mirroring the only perfection human beings could actually reach (*L'herbe rouge* 142-143). Although loneliness makes an integral part of human existence, the way it is felt is basically subjective. Our loneliness is increasing when we are too deeply concerned with others' judgment. According to Vian, we would be always alone if we would not love ourselves in an absolute way (36, 72). Vian talked about our weak/soft self. He believed that : (1) we wish to conquer such softness/limpness we should be ashamed of ; (2) we are aware that our weak/soft self has been inherited from our relatives. That's why we could hate them ; (3) our body is encline to let our softness/limpness be (70-72). My present self is determined by prior selves. Who-I-am is deeply influenced by my having-been. I cannot really put myself in others' shoes. My self is the only self I am living in (112). Could we really remember our prior selves ? According to Vian, what we remember is only mirroring the new self which has been substituted to the prior self. Any remembering (as well as any body) reflects our prior self as well as the era/milieu in which it has lived (63, 133). The way we are

interpreting our being-alone and our being-with-others could be influenced by the low/high level of self-esteem. However, what is crucial, said Vian, is to remain sincere and honest towards others as well as ourselves. Sincerity and honesty makes possible to be-with-others and to deal with our existential loneliness. I am a subjective thinker, so that I can never claim any kind of objectivity. Objectivity could only be reached by all-knowing beings. But human existence is finite. As said Kierkegaard, human being is nothing but subjective thinker (1974, 313-316).

The awareness of our existential loneliness is the ground of our existing. Nobody loves to be alone. Human existence is nothing but an absolute loneliness. Living beings are existentially alone. Why is it so necessary to be alone throughout our existence? Human being cannot get rid of his/her existential loneliness. Human being is being-alone. Such empirical fact is a phenomenon we must accept. My self is being-alone. To what extent could my self-perception mirror my true self? Physically/psychologically speaking, we are born alone, we live alone (inner life), and we die alone (*IQ84-3162*, 261). As being-alone, I take my responsibilities upon my self (*IQ84-3411*, 442). The feeling to be isolated from others makes me frail. This is a terrifying reality: we are not afraid of our self, but rather of the unknown grounds of our actions, words, and thoughts (*IQ84-1509*). That's why life is so terrifying. According to Murakami, human being is both existentially alone (being-alone) and living with others (being-with-others), whether others are relatives, friends, and even unknown people (*IQ84-2391-392*; *IQ84-3237*). However, I cannot be wholly understood by others. Others have various interpretations of my self: such interpretations do not always unveil who-I-believe-to-be and who-I-want-to-become (my project-to-be). I cannot wholly understand my self (*IQ84-2147*). On one hand, I cannot be sure that who-I-believe-to-be is equivalent to who-I-am. On the other hand, my project-to-be is certainly who-I-am: who—am-becoming is nothing but who-I-wanted-to-become. Part of my self-consciousness cannot be grasped. But I cannot be someone else than who-I-am-here-and-now, that is, who-I-have-decided-to-be. Any attempt to become anybody else than myself is useless. I always remain who-I-want-to-be and cannot get rid of my imperfect self. Imperfection is an integral part of who-I-am, as human (finite) being. What is my true self? Is my present self equivalent to my true self? But in very short delay, I could become unsatisfied with my new self and try to substitute another one. Life is a continuous existential quest of meaning, whether it is the meaning of the self, of the world, of the Nature, of any Infinite/Absolute/God. Is there any original (true) self, that is, a self that was already there, before any new self which had been substituted to it? If there is a true self, then there must be true world, since human being is a being-self-in-the-world (*IQ84-3344*). We cannot live without a true self we are continuously searching for. Through my various selves (one succeeding to the other), I am not who-I-am (a true self), but rather only who-I-want-to-become (*IQ84-3214*). There is a discrepancy between who-I-am and my self-awareness. Is then the self without any substance? My self always remains uncertain. I am always the self that I am in the here-and-now (*IQ84-2158*, 202). I am never satisfied by my own self. That's why I am a project-to-be. I can never know my whole self. I am only who-I-am in

the here-and-now, and thus who-I-have-decided-to-become in a more or less recent past. My self is the self which is observing my thinking self. It is my own prison and hell. In a Proustian way (Proust, *Contre Sainte-Beuve* 207; *Albertine disparue* 126), Murakami believed that every human being has various selves: each self has been replaced by another. I cannot escape my self. The enemy lives in my self. In my self, there is an anti-self. The anti-self is the self that contradicts my present self: it is the self which will replace my present self. The anti-self will become my new self, so that new anti-self will eventually arise, and so forth. I am my self, and nobody else. Even my anti-self is my self. It is the self I am becoming. There is a moment when my present self is replaced by a new self (or anti-self) (*IQ84-3* 208, 359). The anti-self could progressively get more power and influence over our mindfulness. It could also suddenly awaken, as if there would have never been any preliminary steps. In both cases, the anti-self is preparing the way it will be substituted to the present self. Others are often more aware of the powerful influence of my anti-self over my present self. I am unveiling my self in front of others as well as for my self-perception and self-understanding. Others are an integral part of my self. However, others cannot know my whole self (*IQ84-3126*). My new self that has replaced my previous self could question my own personality, or who-I-am-becoming, or who-I-am-here-and-now. I could believe that my new self is more appropriate to who-I-am, that is, to who-I-want-to-become. I could also be quite unsatisfied with my new self. A new anti-self is then born in my mind.

Interpretations that are covering facts are more necessary than facts themselves. Things (such as love) are simple. But when we become aware of their place in the Whole, then reality becomes much more complex (*L'herbe rouge* 67, 115). Human being perceives reality, whether it is the self, the world, Nature, or God. Such perceptions give birth to interpretations. And interpretations are basically influenced/distorted by our life experiences. We are always interpreting reality. Reality cannot be grasped as-it-is. It must always be reinterpreted. What does it mean to truly exist? Facts are uncertain. In a Nietzschean way (Nietzsche 1967 267, 301), Murakami asserted that everything that is perceived is an interpretation (*IQ84-1* 91, 262). There is no meaning of life without a basic feeling of really living/existing in front of myself/others, since I am being-alone and being-with-others. We should always look at reality as-it-is, but such an overview is impossible, at least for human beings. We could want to accept all components of reality. But we cannot define such components. We could only accept what we see (or what we decide to see). It is an illusion to believe that we could grasp reality as-it-is. It is also an illusion to believe that we could escape reality. Things, beings, and phenomena are not what we believe they are. However, reality is not the only truth. Insofar as Truth-itself would be mirrored by reality (as-it-is), we could understand that Truth-itself cannot be grasped. However, believing that Truth-itself is reality as-it-is implies an a priori belief: reality is conveying Truth. Such belief has to be proved. Otherwise, it is meaningless to assert that Truth-itself is reality as-it-is. Vian and Murakami have not identified any philosophical argument that could prove such assertion. They both focused on truth claims, and thus embracing a Nietzschean perspective (Truth-itself

does not exist). Truth claims can be found out in reality as well as in the unreal/illusory. What is important is the reality I am choosing, and not the whole reality (as-it-is) that I cannot grasp and understand. However, what is the true reality (IQ84-2 86 ; IQ84-3212) ? We only perceive part of reality. The whole reality cannot be grasped by human mind. Thus, we cannot know what is real or unreal/illusory. There is a gap between the reality and what I believe to be real (IQ84-1264 ; IQ84-2520 ; IQ84-351, 134, 160, 209, 328). There are various (possible) realities. There is basic link between my self and the reality I have chosen to observe/see. There is an interconnectedness between all existing things and beings. Is there any reality behind the (empirical) fact (IQ84-3406) ? Human existence is full of uncertainties, enigmas, mistakes, and contradictions (IQ84-284, 94 ; IQ84-3137). Why are given facts interpreted as mirroring the whole reality ? Indeed, given facts are considered as dimensions of reality, because of past perceptions and interpretations (which are grounded on older perceptions and interpretations, and so forth). The feeling/consciousness of one's existence comes from such interconnectedness between our past and present perceptions and interpretations. According to Vian and Murakami, the basis of human existence remains unknown. However, there are three sets of existential categories that reflect the sameness of existing : freedom and existential suffering ; temporality, having-to-die, and existential anxiety ; existential hope and despair.

Human being always wants to be free, since he/she is being-free. Being-free is following its own will and thus its desires. Does it change anything to satisfy our desires, asked Vian (*L'herbe rouge* 44) ? Human being cannot be free of desires. If it would be the case, human beings would not be living beings since they should not have any inner past. Having desires implies that we are being-free. Vian clearly perceived that the will of erasing desires from human heart/spirit is itself a desire. The will is always connected to desires. Being-free implies to have desires which arise from our selves. Our consciousness is free insofar as it is impregnated with desires. According to Vian, human freedom would be meaningless if human beings would be reborn from one life to another, as if there would be an eternal return of sameness. Vian strongly criticized the main Sartrean existentialist principle (existence precedes essence) (Pierrot, 2009, 252). Life is then harmful and disgraceful. Suffering is useless. It does not provide any right to anything. We could then understand why Vian asserted that we should hate anything that is useless (*L'herbe rouge* 141).

According to Murakami, freedom is always limited by fate (IQ84-2383). This is the existential power of fate. Fate makes our will-to-be-free basic delusion (IQ84-1339). Providing given meaning to things, phenomena and events, or claiming that everything is meaningless is nothing but free (personal) decisions. However, human freedom is always limited. The absolute will-to-be-free is an illusion. People love to be limited by taboos and prohibitions (325), although taboos and prohibitions are limiting the way they try to satisfy their desires. People are aware that taboos and prohibitions are socially constructed and that their being-with-others cannot avoid such compromise. Motivation is the basis of all desires. Most of our choices are meaningless, that is,

without any inherent meaning (IQ84-3285, 396). Life has no inherent meaning. We do not know why we are living. We have to decide if given things, phenomena, and events actually have an effective meaning (or to face the meaningless realities). Sometimes, the meaning is spontaneously arising. Murakami rather believed that existential suffering could be useful : our suffering makes us open to understand others' suffering. Empathy implies that we perceive others' suffering as if it would be our own pain. Compassion rather implies to suffer, when being in front of suffering beings. Compassionate beings are being-with-suffering-beings. Empathy has a basic cognitive dimension, while compassion has an emotional one. Human relationships are based on mutual understanding, respect, empathy, and compassion. Sometimes, our own being and existence could make others suffering. When we make others suffering, we are creating part of our own pain. I am being-with-others, so that my suffering and others' pain are interconnected. But the most important challenge is to find out a given meaning for our existential suffering, since only meaningful suffering could be tolerated, said Murakami (IQ84-2 241). My existential suffering will be interpreted in the context of my being-alone and being-with-others.

Existence is transitoriness. Then, past, present and future are nothing but inner stasis of temporality. Time is not a compartmentalized reality, said Vian (*L'herbe rouge* 105-107). What is self-evident in the way we spend our time is that we are obscuring our temporality, because we do not like to highlight our having-to-die. According to Vian, the world is nothing but prison for our body and spirit. Our existential situation (in-the-worldliness) implies a clear awareness of existential conditioning factors, including the awareness of our desires. Moreover, my world could coexist with others' world. However, both worlds cannot meet : they are parallel lines. Existential anxiety cannot be isolated from the awareness of such parallel worlds. Losing people we love is not only sad, it creates deep hole, an emptiness within our heart. Being in time means that we have-to-die. Human life is impregnated with the awareness of our having-to-die. Such awareness cannot get rid of sadness. Although we know that people have-to-die, we wish that people we love be immortal. If they would be immortal, then our own being would be released from its having-to-die. We want to forget our having-to-die in order to erase our existential anxiety. But it is useless (and meaningless) to do so. In making people we love immortal, we attempt to make our having-to-die disappearing from our life. We consciously know that we have-to-die. But such thought cannot be tolerated. That's why we unconsciously try to make our relatives and friends immortal. Such attempt is always contradicted by facts : people we love are still dying. Human life as the awareness of our having-to-die is thus tragical.

According to Murakami, everything is transitory. Everything is perishable, since it has a form. What is formless is then eternal. Human beings spent their time in perishable things. Time is the framework of perishable things, beings, and phenomena. Only human beings have the notion of time flow and could lose it (IQ84-1149, 207, 350, 382 ; IQ84-358, 254). Time is purely subjective, said Vian, in a Kierkegaardian way (Kierkegaard 1974a,66). Time is purely subjective. Is time flow unchanging and ordered ? Murakami

said that the unvarying and ordered character of time flow is nothing but social construction. Time flow could lose its consistency (IQ84-1 475-476 ; IQ84-2 318 ; IQ84-358, 252). The notion of temporality is described as being closely linked to a sense of loss (Gabriel 2002, 152). According to Murakami, my present self is rooted in the instant, in the eternal now. What is decisive for my self is my now. Murakami referred to Bergson (1999, 81-96) : our perception is nothing but memory ; we only perceive past phenomena. We cannot find out our original past (IQ84-3317). Existential anxiety is the awareness of our existential finitude, whose main expression is our having-to-die. Existential anxiety is a fear which is not conveyed by any precise object. The unavoidable death is within my self, as a having-to-die. Existential anxiety implies that I do not know where is my existential "locus". According to Murakami, existential anxiety is particularly arising when we feel that everything is meaningless (IQ84-3341). The lack of inherent meaning to any thing, phenomenon, and event is the origin of existential anxiety. In order to face meaningless reality, we must take existential anxiety upon ourselves (Tillich 1981, 129-132). I am responsible for what the world is becoming. Throughout my choices, I am building up the world I would like to live in (Sartre 1980, 612-615). Our responsibility is widened by the scope of our knowledge (IQ84-326, 423). The world is an infinite set of possibilities. The world varies from an interpretation to another. Out of our rememberings (and thus out of past interpretations), we are building up our own world. My thoughts, words, and actions tend to build up the world I wish to live in. Thus, I have deep responsibility for what the world is now becoming. My responsibility-for-others is basically to my being-with-others, and thus to my ability for love. Without love, the world would not exist. Love could distort our perception of the world, since love is irrational. But as said Henry James (1996, 20), love is the only thing we could deeply know. Love makes our existential anxiety more tolerable. Love makes us interpreting the past, the present, and the future in a different perspective. The present is moulded by past events and interpretations. The world cannot exist without me. Love makes us aware that we are an integral part of the world (IQ84-133, 532). The world is an integral part of my self. Murakami thus adopted an Heideggerian view on being-self-in-the-world (Heidegger 1962, 169). Love is in the midst of the self. Love could be helpful, when people have to face death. However, death is a phenomenon we cannot know. My being-free is always free to give/not-give a meaning to things, persons, events, relationships, and phenomena (IQ84-2 116, 121, 304). Love could rebuild the world, so that everything would be possible. But death is the unavoidable event that basically determine the way I will give/not give precise meaning to reality. Death is an integral part of human existence. It is already there when we are born : it is a potentiality-to-die. Death is one of the various components of human existence. Death makes us seriously thinking about the meaning of our life. If death would not exist, then we would not have to use our reason. Human being is a rationale animal, because he/she has to die and is aware of such having-to-die.

Hope is an issue of belief (*L'herbe rouge* 59). However, it is better to be sad than to hope in something vague/uncertain (32). Despair makes us seeing the foundations of

our self. According to Vian, despair could have two basic sources : (1) we already own all we could wish (the emptiness of the superfluous) ; (2) we do not have anything we wish (the emptiness of the lack). In both cases, we are unaware of our inner emptiness. Despair is an existential potentiality-to-be. It is based on the anxiety to be imprisoned in our past. Memory destroys our rememberings in order to make our self avoiding despair (108-113). The notion of God is useful for people who fear despair and death. But it is useless for those who fear to live with others, said Vian (*L'herbe rouge* 158). Indeed, there are no sound argument about God's existence/non-existence, since faith/unfaith is only an issue of belief (98). Mysteries are nothing but truth claims. Replacing mystery by words (or trying to explain it) is adding a second mystery to the first one. The third mystery would be created by magical beliefs that follow from words themselves (88). Hope and despair are two possible modes of being in a meaningless reality. In both cases, we have decided what it means to exist as well as our existential position in-face-of-the-Infinite. Theologically speaking, God is useless, even for believers : if God would be useful, then God would be a thing/object besides other things/objects. God is nonexistent, since God is not subjected to existential categories (suffering and death, fault and guilt, hope and despair). God is not a Supreme Being since then God would be a being besides other beings. In order to be God, God must be useless/nonexistent and must not have any being since God is nothing but the ground of being/existence (Pseudo-Denys the Aeropagite ; Master Eckhart). But believers usually want to have personal God, Impersonal God (God as the ground of being/existence) criticizes any notion of God that could be the delight of the superfluous. Vian strongly criticized the "bourgeois" God, that is, the God who seems to be exclusively own by the wealthiest. According to Vian, we should not be concerned with the happiness of humankind since we cannot make it arising in the daily life. Rather, we should focus on others' happiness. Then, believing or not in God is irrelevant. What is crucial is the decision to focus on others' happiness, without neglecting our own search for happiness. As being-alone and being-with-others, I must pursue both my own happiness and others' happiness.

Hope can only arouse frustration and deception. Despair is an existential potentiality of human heart. That's why we could identify an energy of despair, and thus the courage to take our despair upon ourselves. Hope implies that there are obstacles to the calmness of mind. We cannot live without hope, said Murakami. Murakami embraced a quite different perspective about gods. God is formless : that's why God could take various existential forms. Murakami was deeply aware that faith could give birth to intolerance (IQ84-3 83, 182, 243). Everything that could give us some hope (and make us escaping potentialities of despair) should be emphasized. Human existence mirrors shadows of hope and despair. Gods exist in human consciousness. The belief (in God) makes God existing. The unbelief makes God nonexistent. Any understanding is made of our misunderstandings, since there is an unknown dimension behind every thing, person, or phenomenon. We only believe what we want to believe. Religions and spiritualities are grounded on the human need to find out a meaning of life. Religious/spiritual doctrines have elaborated beautiful and attractive answers to existential

questioning. However, they have never provided any reliable truth (*IQ84-2248-250*). Truth-itself does not exist. Only truth claims are arising in human mind.

On one hand, Vian and Murakami have divergent opinions about the way some components of human existence should be interpreted. Murakami was influenced by Heidegger's existential philosophy (being-self-in-the-world, potentiality-for-Being). While Vian perceived that suffering is useless, Murakami said that suffering could help us to better understand others' life. On the other hand, Vian and Murakami shared a similar approach of the sameness of existing. Good/evil as well as the self are considered as unknowable realities. Even the basis of existence remains unknown : we cannot identify any inherent meaning to existential suffering, freedom, temporality, anxiety and having-to-die, hope and despair. Each of these phenomena is an integral part of human existence. In all cases, we can never find out any unchanging meaning. There is no Truth-itself, but only truth claims. In various ways, Vian and Murakami acknowledged the subjectivity of both the self and time (Kierkegaard). There is no thing-ness ; everything is an interpretation (Nietzsche). Uncertainties are integral parts of human existence. That's why doubt (and thus the possibility of despair) is existentially rooted. The works of Vian and Murakami converge, as they are expressing the unknowable character and the sameness of existing. Vian and Murakami interpreted reality as meaningless, that is, without any inherent meaning. A meaningless reality does not exclude hope. Rather, it makes hope arousing. Vian and Murakami claimed that hope and despair are potentialities-of-being in an meaningless reality. Hope and despair are different ways to look at existential loneliness and anxiety, freedom and temporality, suffering and having-to-die.

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