

CAMUS, ALBERT

Albert Camus, importance and influence. Albert Camus (1913-1960) was a French novelist, essayist, prominent political activist, and journalist. Through his own clear sighted and flexible responses to war and inequality, he made himself an internationally respected voice of contemporary thought. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1957.

Albert Camus, the life. Albert Camus was born in French Algeria and died before the outbreak of the great conflict between France and Algeria, in which Algeria would break from her colonizer. His parents were *pieds noirs*, that is French colonial settlers who had remained to colonized country. His mother was of Spanish extraction, and was half deaf, His father was a very poor agricultural worker, who was killed at the Battle of the Marne, in WW I. Albert was educated at the University of Algiers, where he was an excellent goalkeeper for the University football team. He earned his baccalaureat degree in 1935, then went on to advanced studies. (He wrote his Master's dissertation on the ancient Greek philosopher Plotinus, and the relation of his thought to early Christianity.) Further educated both in Algeria and France, Camus' deep involvement with Parisian culture began with his activist engagement in the French Resistance, during WWII. Already he had been deeply involved in public journalism, forming a group to combat the malign effects of technology. In 1933 he joined the Communist Party, but was soon booted out by Moscow, when he switched part of his allegiance to the Algerian Communist Party. During this period, when Resistance struggles and Communist intervention were swirling over France, Camus founded the journal, *Combat*, which was devoted to the Free French cause, but in the subsequent years he eventually broke from forms of Communism, as he discovered the tyrannical side of a movement initially intended to liberate the people. (That break with Communism was also Camus' break with his close friend and 'study partner' Jean-Paul Sartre, who felt Camus 'had gone soft.')

Camus waged a lifelong battle on behalf of human individuality, and a lifelong quest for the meaning of life in what often seemed an absurd world. The Nobel Prize was awarded to him for his clear sightedness in analyzing the complex problems of his time. On only point, perhaps, did he sustain an unvarying determination.. He was an ardent and lifelong opponent of capital punishment.

The work of Albert Camus. As a journalist, Camus was from early in life active at the forefront of opinion making and political argument. The clear lines of his thought are evident in his most effective writing. *The Stranger (L'Étranger, 1942)* This powerful novel attests to Camus' abilities as a master of controlled art, and deliberately simple narration. *The Plague (La Peste, 1947)*, a novel, is Camus' most anti-Christian work. It dwells on the injustice of Christianity, evidenced by the sacrifice of the innocents, as exemplified by the death of child victims of the plague. The chronicle testified to the violence and injustice imposed on the city of Oran, and to the belief that in times of tribulation man reveals more admirable than despicable traits. It is marked by constant understatement in descriptive style, the precise use of administrative terms and official language, the deliberate banality of words, and the use of irony to bring out the whole horror of a situation.

Reading

Primary source reading

The Stranger, tr. M. Ward, 1989.

Secondary source reading

Todd, Olivier, *Albert Camus: A Life*, 1997.

Further reading

Mumma, Howard, *Albert Camus and the Mind*, 2000.

Original language reading

Salas, Denis, *Albert Camus, la juste révolte*, 2002.

Suggested paper topics

One of Camus' lasting concerns was with the issue of capital punishment, which he considered nothing better than state sponsored murder. How does that viewpoint play out in Camus' writing, fictional and critical. Remember that Sartre believed Camus had 'gone soft,' when he backed out on Communism.

Although Camus is a lasting friend to human solidarity, and people's mutual fidelity, his perhaps finest novel, *The Stranger*, concerns a person who is essentially alien to human concerns. Is that character, Meursault, created by Camus for our admiration? Or our amazement?

Excerpt

<http://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/3324245-la-chute>

You know what charm is: a way of getting the answer yes without having asked any clear question."

"I used to advertise my loyalty and I don't believe there is a single person I loved that I didn't eventually betray."

"People hasten to judge in order not to be judged themselves."

"Men are never convinced of your reasons, of your sincerity, of the seriousness of your sufferings, except by your death. So long as you are alive, your case is doubtful; you have a right only to their skepticism."

"Friendship is less simple. It is long and hard to obtain but when one has it there's no getting rid of it; one simply has to cope with it. Don't think for a minute that your friends will telephone you every evening, as they ought to, in order to find out if this doesn't happen to be the evening when you are deciding to commit suicide, or simply whether you don't need company, whether you are not in the mood to go out. No, don't worry, they'll ring up the evening you are not alone, when life is beautiful. As for suicide, they would be more likely to push you to it, by virtue of what you owe to yourself, according to them. May heaven protect us, cher Monsieur, from being set upon a pedestal by our friends!"

"Don't lies eventually lead to the truth? And don't all my stories, true or false, tend toward the same conclusion? Don't they all have the same meaning? So what does it matter whether they are true or false if, in both cases, they are significant of what I have been and what I am? Sometimes it is easier to see clearly into the liar than into the man who tells the truth. Truth, like light, blinds. Falsehood, on the contrary, is a beautiful twilight that enhances every object."

"I love life - that's my real weakness. I love it so much that I am incapable of imagining what is not life."