

Albert Camus was a writer, a writer with an edge. His writing grew out of his life. It began with his father, Lucien.

Lucien was a Frenchman who claimed the heritage of those who had fled after the Franco-Prussian War, fled to the promised land—Algeria, a fertile lovely Mediterranean place with a splendid climate. These Frenchmen were accompanied by a rich mix of Spaniards, Alsatians, Italians, Maltese, Jews, and Greeks. As Albert later wrote: “Their brutal cross-breeding produced, as in America, happy results.” Of course, these continental immigrants made up only twenty per cent of the Algerian population. The rest were Arabs and Berbers.

Lucien, Albert’s father, was the son of a farmer who had five children. Lucien was the youngest. His father died shortly after he was born. His siblings, who were old enough to work, were taken in by relatives. Lucien was sent to a Protestant orphanage. He never would forgive his family for leaving him there and would have no more contact with them. However, he did learn some reading and writing before he ran away to become a laborer in a vineyard in Chirago where he met and married young Catherine Sintès who was of Spanish descent. Catherine’s father died in 1907, and the whole family moved to Belcourt, a working class neighborhood in Algiers.

After working as a clerk in the wine industry for a few years he was transferred to Mondavi where Albert was born in dramatic fashion on November 7, 1913. His parents and Lucien, Jr. were on a horse-drawn wagon holding their belongings nearing their new home when Catherine went into labor. Minutes after arriving with the help of strangers, a Muslim doctor, and Islamic neighbor ladies, Albert was born—healthy as could be.

Less than a year later Lucien was conscripted into the French Army to become a simple soldier in a Zoave Regiment, a troop which was noted for bravery and flamboyant garb. This made them an easy target when they engaged in the first battle of the First World War at Marne. Lucien was killed. Albert was not yet one year old.

Upon hearing of his death, Catherine, Albert’s mother, was in shock and was never the same. She was a small woman who was already hard of hearing, very quiet, shy, afraid of strangers, passive. She mispronounced words. Someone wrote that she had a vocabulary of less than two hundred words. All these

qualities were accentuated after her husband's death. She was never able to read or write. For a time she worked at a cartridge factory until rheumatism reduced her to washing, ironing and cleaning the homes of the wealthy. She was submissive, almost deaf, and could not show affection. Yet, somehow within her was the only warmth in the house. In fact, Albert later wrote: "The curious feeling the son feels for his mother constitutes all his sensibility." Many an hour he would sit with her in silence.

Albert lived in his grandmother's apartment until his late teens. It was a three room apartment. Grandmother, also named Catherine, had one room for herself. One room was for Albert, his mother and brother, Lucien. Albert slept in this room with his mother every night for seventeen years. He would sometimes dream of having his head cut off. His grandmother often told him that that is what he deserved.

The third room was for dining and Albert's uncle Ettiene, a deaf mute subject to rage attacks but generally an amiable sort, who slept there, also. The one toilet was down the hall and shared by six apartments. Water was from a well down the street. An oil lamp provided illumination. There were no books, since no one in the house could read or write.

The only ornamentation in the home was a plaque with a piece of the fragment which had killed Albert's father in honor of his passing. The only other information Albert had about his father was a memory shared by his grandmother. His father heard of a man who had murdered his family, and was so repulsed by this deed that he determined to go to the man's execution--his beheading. He did, and apparently it was botched. He rushed home in agony, retching for hours.

Grandmother Catherine had a hard life, having many children most of whom died, and much grinding poverty after her husband's death. She ruled the house with an iron hand, or, more specifically, with a whip. Albert and his brother would talk back to her and she would have none of it--lashing out with the whip. Albert was whipped for being late, for wearing out shoes, for complaining about a football injury because he disturbed the household, and much else. She would insist upon pain of the whip that he would tell visitors that he loved his

grandmother more than his mother. His mother would repeatedly beg her mother not to hit him on the head.

Grandmother, also, got him into kindergarten and got him a library card. Once a week they would go to the movies where Albert would read the sub-titles to her while trying to not offend the viewers who didn't want anyone speaking.

Outside, Albert played exuberantly with the other working-class kids in the neighborhood, playing ball with apricot pits, making kites, swimming in the poor people's beach in the wondrous Mediterranean sun. As he grew bigger, he excelled at soccer as a goalie and was respected for his courageous and sometimes brilliant play. He thrived on team play. He always did; he always would. He was smaller than the others and was often protected by his peers. The fundamental value of fair play was imprinted on his soul. In fact, he wrote: "What I know most surely about morality and the duty of man I owe to sport."

Religion was not part of his life, but the culture was followed. He was baptized, and when it came time for confirmation which required two years of weekly classes, his grandmother ruled it out insisting that he had to work, instead; so the priest gave him a quick course in a couple of weeks. The family did not attend mass, and there were no religious symbols in the house. He didn't have anything against religion as long as it didn't hurt anybody.

Louis Germain was the most important man in his life. He was a strict teacher who was highly regarded by his peers. He set Albert on a course appropriate to his inclinations and ability. He was a veteran who had survived the war and took on a fathering role for the sons of veterans who had died. Albert was given demanding assignments, and when it was time for tests to determine if a student was fit for a higher level, Germain spent time after hours supervising his study. Above all, Camus wrote, he learned from this man that he was worthy to discover the world, and remained in personal contact with him throughout his life.

After passing the test there was one more hurdle. Grandmother let him know that it was time for him to go to work to support the household. Germain made a rare house call to clarify that Albert should not be held back. He was pretty sure that he could get scholarship money for the Lycee, but no additional money. Albert's mother for once asserted herself and sided with Germain, and after much sputtering grandmother relented.

At the Lycee Albert did well in the face of tougher competition. Under the tutelage of Jean Grenier, his inquiring mind was stimulated by Gide, Malraux, Nietzsche, Marx. , but, most importantly, he was inspired by Grenier's profound feeling for Mediterranean life. Grenier was sort of a lay Jesuit, a most outgoing fellow, who saw Albert's raw nature the moment he laid eyes on him, so placed him in the front row, directly in front of him to keep an eye on him.

Albert's passionate personality blossomed. He began to write more. He read voraciously. His body got stronger with more competitive soccer. His capacity for camaraderie, intellectual and social, was expanded to include upper class kids. His erotic life was enlivened in the company of girls becoming women. His skills of charming seduction came naturally to him as he began the dance of intimacy with zest.

Then the intimations of illness. It began with coughing, then more coughing. He occasionally fainted, then coughed blood and began to vomit. He was not going to let these symptoms interfere with his activities, but, finally, he had to give in and see a doctor who diagnosed tuberculosis. He was admitted to the hospital reserved for the poor and veterans' families where he was assured that he was going to die. It was a hospital holding all manner of illness, crowded, no friendly faces. He freaked out.

Acault, his grandmother's sister's husband, came to rescue him, took him into his home, fed him the steak that was prescribed. Overeating was also recommended. Acault was a butcher, a good-humored fellow, flamboyant, educated, politically an anarchist—a real character. He and his wife had no children, and enjoyed treating Albert like a son, giving him a cultured, comfortable atmosphere in which he could recover.

Albert was depressed, all his passionate outlets cut off. No visitors. No activity. Painful treatments, recurring setbacks, fear of death. For many months Albert was silent and bitter, often warding off the friendship that was offered. Gradually, he recovered. Gradually he began to read, write some, see some friends and reclaim his many passions—all with a sober sense that death is near, the illness will return. Urgent. Do what you can while you can. He took his studies more seriously, going back to university where he identified with Augustine, a fellow North African who wrestled with his passionate sensuality and sought valiantly

after truth. His thesis was on Augustine and Plotinus—the conflict of the truth through a mixture of mysticism and reason and Christian faith fighting sin. He was working out a morality without God, but with the lyrical sensibility of the sun and the sea.

After he recovered from his illness, his passions began to reawaken. His weak body was not noticeable beneath his projected strong character. With his gray-green eyes and his charm, the girls flocked to him again. After some dalliances, he became fascinated with a young lady with a freckled oval face, a straight nose, brown eyes with green highlights, and a walk which breathed sexuality. Young men could not take their eyes off her. She was hot. She was Simone Hie’.

Camus wooed her away from all the others. They became quite a couple around town. He was especially taken by her fey, mysterious air. Her aristocratic relatives disapproved of the relationship, with the exception of the mother. Acault refused to have his home as a love nest. When they married, Acault stopped the allowance since he was convinced the relationship threatened Camus’ future. After some jolly times and moving into his mother-in-law’s home, Camus discovered that the fey way was drug-induced, and when he found out that she was exchanging sex for drugs with her doctor, he separated from her and filed for divorce. He continued to help her get off the drugs to no avail.

As he neared the end of his studies, Germain recommended that he become political, as he thought every promising young man should. For a time, he joined the Communist party, did some programming and theatrical works for them until he got wind of Stalin’s atrocities, and resigned. He got some odd jobs, and lived with close friends in a small house high above the city on top of the world with magnificent views. He developed an independent theatrical group performing plays, dramatizing the injustices in Spain. He wrote plays, directed, produced, acted, and was the moving spirit of theatrical groups from then on throughout his life. He felt most alive in the theater where so many of the facets of his personality could come into play.

When he got his degree everyone, including himself, thought he would have an academic career, but this course was blocked. The tuberculosis excluded him, as it later excluded him from the military. What was he to do? He and his friends had been hanging around the bookstore where he met Pascal Pia, an editor of small

magazines. He had been writing fragment after fragment, getting some play in left wing magazines. Pia offered him a job as a writer for a new magazine, "Le Republican". He wrote a series of articles on the plight of the Arabs and Serbs who lived in the mountain areas, having been pushed there by the continental immigrants. He wrote and acted on behalf of those who had been treated unjustly by the courts. He became a supporter of the cause to give the Arabs equal rights, a view which made him highly unpopular with the French Colonial authorities. So much so that they shut his publication down and he was unable to get a job anywhere in Algeria.

Pascal Pia, also, was black-listed and had gone off to Paris where he offered Camus a job at another fledgling left wing magazine. Camus was reluctant to go. He found himself courting Francine Furey, a gorgeous, talented mathematician who lived in Oran, Algeria's second city. She would not go with him until he was divorced, so Camus went to Paris leaving her behind. He left all his relatives, all his friends, his mentors, his theatrical group, many close friends – his mother. He was an exile. He left them all behind, and was alone in Paris.

That is when his novel, *The Stranger*, was born. In his isolation, he, with his well-crafted writing skills, gave expression to the rich, complicated, contradictory feelings within himself. The flat tone of Meursault, the main character in the novel, is that of an Algerian working man who is in shock after hearing that his mother has died. In a wooden way, as one who is in shock, he goes to the old folk's home where his mother has been living and moves through the rituals of the funeral, sitting overnight with the body, walking with the priest to the burial, walking in the burning sun. There are few words spoken. The silence is a main character in the novel as is the landscape and the sun – the main components of Camus' life.

He returns to his humble apartment in Algiers and helps out a neighbor who needs his help writing a letter as Camus had done in his illiterate family. The neighbor wants a letter to his Arab girlfriend whom he has abused and whom he resents for leaving him. When they go out for a drink in the evening, the neighbor gets into a fight with the brothers of the girlfriend, and in the scuffle, gets a knife wound. Meursault helps out his buddy in this fight, as Camus had done with his buddies. Another friend enters the scene – a fellow who is cruel to his dog,

incredibly cruel, beating him daily, and at the same time loves him dearly and is loved by the dog in return, reflecting so precisely Camus' relationship with his grandmother.

Meursalt goes to the movies and walks the beach with a girlfriend, has an intimate time with her overnight, and finds it soothing and yet devoid of the love this girl would like him to have. That is precisely reflective of Camus' relationship with attractive women.

He goes for a walk along the beach by himself, carrying a gun to protect himself from the thugs who had threatened him the night before. He encounters them, sees a blade in the Arab's hand reflected by the sun, feels the sweltering heat of the sun, lets loose the rage which comes with loss, shoots the Arab four times and kills him.

Meursalt is charged with murder and receives the injustice which he recorded in courts in his reporting days. His friends testify on his behalf, the judge looks unfavorably on his treatment of his mother and his lack of religion. Meursalt does not feel the need to justify himself about these matters. He will leave the problem with the judge. In prison, as in his grandmother's impoverished home, he could accept and adjust to almost anything without resentment. That is Camus' stance. Meursalt is to be beheaded as Camus' grandmother had said. And the depth of the guilt he has leads him to beg to be viciously excoriated upon the occasion of his execution.

The novel is concrete. There is not an abstraction in it. It reflects the range of Camus' emotions – the absurdity of the age. It is just there.

The Stranger was the first of a triptych – the first phase of his life as a writer as he imagined it. The triptych included a novel – *The Stranger*, "The Myth of Sisyphus" – an essay, and *Caligula* – a play. The essay, "The Myth of Sisyphus", is to show that he is not an existentialist, which everyone still wishes to call him. He insists that he has a working man's sense of concreteness which guides him, not the abstractions of Sartre, Bergson, Nietzsche, and all philosophers. A man is simply an actor who acts where there is injustice to set things right.

We are all acquainted with "The Myth of Sisyphus", the man pushing a large rock up a mountain. When he gets near the top, it falls back down and he must set off

again pushing and hauling it back again—and then again. He is not successful in having justice triumph, but never gives up the struggle –with happiness without resentment. It was to be Camus' life.

After the period of profound loneliness, he began to make some contacts. His wife's sister had married into the Gallimard family, which owned the preeminent publishing company in Paris at the time. It was a fortuitous connection. He was hired as a reader and his ethical edge as a writer came to be a valued complement to the aesthetic writings which dominated the business.

He cultivated the company of left wing writers who, after the war began, developed the underground newspaper, "The Combat", which was surreptitiously printed, distributed, and sold like hotcakes. Camus became its editor, writing under the pseudonym Beauchard. His popularity, associated with the spearhead of the Resistance, changed his life from an obscure struggling artist to a national hero. It was extremely dangerous.

The paper was a morale-booster. It kept the populace informed about the status of war, filtering through the propaganda and misinformation. It vividly described Nazi atrocities, e.g. the murder of all the males who lived in a town in which a train had been derailed as an act of sabotage with no fatalities. The paper defined the meaning of the struggle – the aim of the Resistance to bring about a true democracy. His friends protected him, not wanting him to take unnecessary risks since his body would not take the torture which many of them had to endure when captured.

During the war the theater scene remained surprisingly active. Popular intellectuals, of which Camus was not yet one, were protected by the Nazis. The bars were full of a mixture of collaborators, spies, fun-loving citizens, Resistance workers – a lively social scene. Camus made many friends. Camus would work all day and drink, dance, and eat with good company all night, especially enjoying Sartre and other intellectuals with whom he would not necessarily agree, but with whom he enjoyed intellectual play. Of course, if an attractive lady caught his fancy, all talk would be interrupted in favor of chatting her up.

In addition to writing and socializing, Camus was active in the theater – producing a play, "The Misunderstanding", about a family whose son had been estranged from the family. After some time he sought to return. The family was expecting

him and looking forward to receiving him. As it happened, he arrived in the middle of the night. He was mistaken for a burglar, was shot and killed. It was a metaphor for the European family mistakenly murdering its own. The war was seen as a family affair. The play was controversial and at first created an uproar.

In the theater he met Maria Casares. She wrote of their meeting. "His face was haughty, but not foolish, reflecting an air of indifferent casualness, an extraordinary presence, sensual with a certain boredom...breathing an instability, a fragility which was hard to grasp, a vulnerability matched with the power that exile grants us." Both were in exile. He from Algiers and she from Spain. Both had fathers who died in war during their first year of life. She was from a wealthy, aristocratic family.

He saw in her a violent and electric beauty. She inherited a sense of anarchy as well as the pride and theatricality characteristic of her culture. She was vibrant, warm-hearted, optimistic, healthy, and full of bewitching charm. She was a gifted actress and dancer, and entirely indifferent to what people thought of her. They were the hottest couple in town. When entering a dance hall, the band would strike up a number known to show off their superior dancing skills. It was an intense time. Camus had earlier married Francine who spent the war safely in Oran.

When the war was over and it was safe for Francine to come to Paris, Camus tried to explain to Maria that his wife was but a sister to him. However, when Francine was shown to be pregnant with twins, Maria left him and he resumed his marriage with difficulty. He regarded himself as a good father to his children whom he loved, but not as a good husband. Francine suffered from depression.

When the war was over, he was intent on demanding justice through his writing. He vigorously wrote against revenge. Although he let pass the execution of a couple of the egregious offenders, his opposition to severe sentences and the death penalty was ferocious. His opposition to any infringement on the development of democracy whether it be from the Communists or the Gaullists sounded forth loud and clear. Any political idea which smelled of infringement on true democracy was excoriated.

He was convinced that journalism should be devoted to serious political issues, and shouldn't be overwhelmed with the "shopper mentality" which sold

newspapers. As the peace was restored, the “shopapist mentality” prevailed. As a result, the interest in the Combat waned and it was eventually disbanded. But his fight on these issues continued unabated as one or another event occurred which required an ethical assessment. His journalistic ability was like that of Ed
Murrow – rich with detail, sharp to the point, arresting attention, making people think. He was the Jon Stewart of his day. He would not only write about injustices, he would confront the abusers personally in interviews, organizing those who might bring power to bear against the offenders.

His journalistic work was clear, but he was plagued with inner turmoil. He wrote, “No one realizes that some people make Herculean efforts just to be normal”. He would confide in female friends. Simone de Beauvoir wrote about him in her memoirs. When they were out together, drinking, talking, laughing into the night, he was droll and cynical, wicked and naughty, confessed his feelings, yielded to his impulses. He could sit on a curbstone in the snow at two in the morning and meditate on love: “You have to choose, it lasts or it ignites; the drama is that it can’t last and ignite at the same time!” But in serious discussions, he closed up, put on airs, spoke noble phrases; pen in hand, he was a moralist she no longer recognized. Camus himself knew that his public image didn’t coincide with his private truth. He had bouts of anxiety, self-doubt, writer’s block, anguish, and at the same time, had a lusty joy in life. His loyal women friends were his balm.

The turbulence in French society after the war was remarkable. The Vichy government holding things together in the Nazi way was demolished with many civil servants discredited; indeed, subject to severe penalties including death, leaving their functions unattended. Many regarded the American occupation as objectionable as the German, although Camus did not think so. There was a powerful contingent aggressively favoring Communist takeover and they were excited about a rumored invasion by Stalin, especially strong when the Americans got tied up in Korea. Others were favoring another strong man to create order – de Gaulle. For most, the domination of the Americans was more menacing than that of the Soviets. After all, America was built on the massacre of the native population, and then powered by slave labor or the labor of ill-paid and ill-treated immigrants. All was for the sake of creating wealth for the few. Coca-Cola moved toward building a facility to introduce its products to the French. This invasion of capitalism with its poisonous soda was regarded as reprehensible. The Soviets

might have their gulags, but their vision of the future was more attractive. After ridding themselves of the elites, indeed, after exterminating them, the future of the common man was assured.

Camus rejected both of these directions. He spent ten years of his life studying ideas of revolution from Thucydides to Nietzsche. He was especially fond of Dostoyevsky. He agreed with Nietzsche about life's absurdity, but disagreed with his nihilism. There may be no meaning, but it is to be created with serious thought about each event in context to inform action which must be taken, for it is man's nature to revolt – move ahead, act. But he must hesitate to make sure that that action is one which furthers the cause of democracy and diminishes the danger of another tyranny.

This book, *The Rebel*, much awaited, was a disappointment to a populace looking for answers. We have difficulty imagining a society in which intellectuals achieve the status of heroic football players, whose every move and every game is all over the news. In France, public intellectuals were that important. So when Sartre, the leading smart one of the day, came out to severely criticize Camus, it was a big deal. Camus was crushed. His was a tender soul. His friends came to his defense, but Sartre's critique stung. They were no longer friends.

The Plague

The Plague was written in Camus' mountain retreat, La Penier, to which he returned repeatedly to recover from his tubercular condition. He was forced to be there, imprisoned by his disease. With each episode his lungs were further compromised. When he first was attacked by this illness at the age of seventeen, the doctors assured him that he was about to die, and so, with each attack Camus was reminded that he lived at death's door. He writes *The Plague*. It is the story of his life with tuberculosis.

The novel is set in Oran, Algiers' second city, a desolate ugly town, a port on the sea where Camus had lived for some time with his wife's family, whom he had resided there for generations. When he could not find employment, there was nowhere else to be. He was confined under the disapproving watchful eye of his mother-in-law. In the first page of the novel, he describes how very bleak it is. The people work and love and die "with the same feverish, casual air...everyone is

bored...devoted only to cultivating habits...work hard...solely with the object of getting rich”.

The narrator of the story is Doctor Bernard Rieux who one day steps on something soft and looks to see a dead rat with his mouth slightly open and blood splurting from it. It is the beginning of the Plague—more dead rats, then cats and dogs, moving gradually to people—with attendant emotions. First puzzlement, then anxiety, then dread. The whole city is put on quarantine. No one is permitted to leave. Families rent apart. Some deny, others look for a way out. Some keep track of the data –number of deaths, symptoms, criminal acts. Some obsess – one fellow is preoccupied with the exact wording for the beginning of his novel for months. There is outrage, depression, and activity required to care for the ill, and the disposition of the bodies. There is an especially painful description of the death of a child whose suffering has been prolonged by a trial vaccine. The pastor first sees it all as divine judgement for their sins, then later as the mysterious will of God to be accepted, the gift of a search for the divine intent. Some go mad, others have conspiracy theories. Much raging moving toward resignation. Most do their job as it should be done. Rieux says, “We are dealing with a fever of a typhoidal nature accompanied with vomiting and buboes”. These symptoms were a death sentence.

“In any case, if the reader would have a correct idea of the mood of these exiles,” Camus writes, “we must conjure up those dreary evenings, sifting down through a haze of dust and golden light upon the treeless streets filled with teeming crowds of men and women”. All the normal sounds of a healthy city are absent...”only a vast rumor of low voices and incessant footfalls, the drumming of innumerable soles time to the eerie whistling of the plague in the sultry air above, the sound of a huge concourse of people marking time, a never ending stifling drone that, gradually swelling, filled the town from end to end, and evening after evening gave its truest, mournfullest expression to the blind endurance which has ousted love from all of our hearts.”

There is an intimation slipping into his poetic prose that the populace is in some way responsible for the plague, perhaps by ignoring the importance of rat control. Of course, Camus himself knew perfectly well that his fast living contributed to the hurrying of his inevitable demise.

The book has given rise to much speculation about its meaning. Most have thought that it refers to the insidious rise of Nazism, or Stalinism. Contemporaries may think of it as a metaphor for the emergence of Trumpism, or the self-inflicted process of the destruction of the planet; with the implication that all are in some measure responsible for these developments, as with addictions or capitalism run amok.

Throughout, Rieux is engaged with every effort to deal with problems which need attention, and debates about its meaning. He does what he can with his companions to fight the plague. Then he will go out with his friend for a swim. This book, when read with deliberate care, I found to be hypnotic – a marvelous read.

Conclusion

Camus received an invitation to go on a cultural mission to the United States for a few weeks. He wrote to Germain: “I am not displeased to abandon for a while this Parisian life which wears down your nerves and dries up your heart”. So off he went in an old freighter *The Oregon* with a few men who became his buddies.

He was not impressed with the skyscrapers –the view approaching New York. He was stopped at customs because his brief Communist affiliation was noted. When questioned, he, like Meursault, was silent. After several hours, someone from the French embassy came to collect him.

He toured New York with French friends and with A.J. Liebling of the “New Yorker”, frequented the monkeys in the zoo, the jazz clubs in Harlem, and especially Sammy’s Bowery Follies where fat old actresses would bump and grind. He exclaimed, “At last, something concrete!” He was frightened by the bright city at night, missing the safety of darkness during the war. He was astonished to see city untouched by war. The beauty of American women fascinated him and he remarked about their “terrifying inaccessibility”. He wore a gaudy, old Algerian suit, looking like a peasant, sought out bridal shops and funeral parlors, always asking others to go into stores for what he wanted since he had a fear of entering them. He followed the Algerian custom of preceding women through doors.

Eastern universities invited him to speak. He liked the vigor and sturdiness of young people, but felt that they lacked the passion for justice which students in

Europe felt more profoundly. His most important lecture was at Colombia, a lecture entitled, "The Human Crisis". It was reenacted at Colombia a couple of months ago to a great audience on precisely the 70th anniversary of its presentation. "We must revolt", he said. "Refuse to lie. Speak the truth. Call out those who lie. Refuse to accept injustice and cruelty. Fight them thoughtfully with all peaceful means available. The greatest sin is passive acceptance of cruelty, injustice, and lies. This rebellion must be fostered by communities and nations. This is the rebellion required if the human crisis is to be met responsibly.

In the years following his trip to America, Camus was more frequently ill, but he did have more income due to the popularity of his novels. He lived modestly, eschewing the social scene among the wealthy. He did not spend money on clothes, staying with his tattered trench coat. He would always pick up the check when eating and drinking with friends. He was generous with those who needed money when he had it to give. He didn't lock his car or home, saying that if things were stolen, they were probably needed. He enjoyed pets –cats, dogs, and birds.

He bought an old black Citroen, and loved driving through the streets, being hailed by friends and fans and gaily waving back. His best friends were writers, Algerians, most with working class backgrounds. He befriended all those who joined with him opposing injustice –including priests and even criminals who fought oppression and helped the poor. Every death penalty was challenged, every bit of vengeance under the cloak of justice.

Finally he was able to buy a country home, after much searching, in the town of Lourmarin, across from an old castle. There he became fast friends with the gardener and the blacksmith.

Offers were forthcoming for television and radio interviews, and an occasional speech. He accepted few. Anxiety gripped him. Preparation was thorough. He memorized everything he was going to say. It came off as spontaneous. When he was on a panel with experts, many older and better known, he would quietly dominate with his energy and presence.

About politics he became silent. He so strenuously opposed both sides in the Algerian conflict. He tried valiantly to form a committee representing both sides to peacefully discuss resolution, but the effort failed. This issue sapped his energy

for years. Each side wanted its own tyranny and he would have none of it. It was a lonely position. He was reduced to silence.

His popularity led to many honors which people and organizations wanted to bestow upon him. Almost all of them were rejected, including the Legion of Honor. He did not want to be associated with those with whom he disagreed, which included almost everybody. He was the lone voice of the exile.

But then in 1957, he was offered the Nobel Prize in Literature and reluctantly and humbly accepted. In his speech at the banquet in Stockholm, he spoke of what it means to him to be a writer. "The two tasks that constitute the greatness of his craft...the service of truth and the service of liberty. The nobility of our craft will always be rooted in two commitments – difficult to maintain – the refusal to lie about what one knows and the resistance to oppression". He was honored as a moral beacon among the ravages of history.

At a press conference in Stockholm, he was loudly and unremittingly challenged by a young Muslim journalist. "How can you remain silent on the Algerian issue?" Camus quietly responded that silence at this point was the strongest action he could take after all that he had done. Camus' friends were upset about this disruption which to them was a smear on an otherwise lovely occasion. Camus, however, was delighted with the exchange. He felt the reporter was more of a brother than all of his admirers. His questioner had not been filled with hatred, but with despair – a feeling he shared.

In the fall of 1959, Camus, again tired of Paris, was intent on going to his home in Lourmarin to work on an autobiographical piece named *The First Man*. In this most tender of his writing, he begins to describe his emotionally rich childhood in the midst of the great strictures of poverty. "Poverty," he wrote, "is a fortress with no drawbridges." He made some progress on it, but did take some time out to visit his theatrical group playing in Marseilles, and there was an invitation from the Grand Duchess Charlotte in Luxembourg. He had to accept an invitation to speak to students in Aix where students from thirty-eight universities attend the university. He loved to discuss matters of life and death with college students.

He was further interrupted by the holidays. Michel Gallimard and his family had been invited to the cottage. Celebrate they did. When the holidays were over, Camus chose to travel back with Michel, sending his own family back on the train.

Michel was partner in the publications firms which employed Camus, was something of a playboy, and Camus' best friend. His wife and daughter were with them.

The four of them set off on the 470 miles trip north to Paris. It was the 3rd of January. They were a little late. They travelled in a truly luxurious vehicle – a Facel Vega 500. It had a huge Chrysler engine with a stylish French designed body. It was really a race car.

In the early afternoon of the second day of their trip, observers reported seeing the car fishtail into a tree, lurch forward, and come to rest upon hitting another tree. The two women were thrown out of the back seat, found more than fifty feet away – in shock, otherwise in fine shape. Michel's chest was caved in and he died several days later. Camus was killed instantly. He was in the front passenger seat with no seatbelt, was launched through the back window, his head mashed against the trunk. One motorist said he was passed by the Facel Vega 500 going ninety miles an hour. It doesn't take much of a distraction, just a second, to lose control of a machine like that.

Camus' body was laid in the Town Hall in the nearby town of Villeblevin. He was buried in the Catholic section of the cemetery in Lourmarin beneath a simple stone which looks centuries old, bearing his name and dates. His family rejected the offer to build a monument in his honor in Paris. But his fellow author, Malraux, finally got approval for a public theater (which Camus had fought for for years) to be built and named in his honor.

Perhaps it is fitting to close with some quotes from Camus: "The misery and greatness of this world: it offers no truths, but only objects for love. Absurdity is king, but love saves us from it".

Seven years after his death in front of the town hall of Villeblevin a stone block was decorated with a bas-relief of Camus' head, and an inscription from *The Myth of Sisyphus* (also carved in stone): "The struggle towards the summit itself suffices to fill a man's heart".

And his final words to his students in Aix: "What can we do to help bring a world less miserable and more free? Give when one can. And not hate if one can."

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Writer with an Edge

Presented by Arthur J. Diers
to the Chicago Literary Club

May 15, 2017