

'The Searching Life and Enigmatic Death of Albert Camus'

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Theme: [History](#)

"Everyone wants the man who is still searching to have already reached his conclusions. A thousand voices are already telling him what he has found, and yet he knows he hasn't found anything. Should he search on and let them talk? Of course." – Albert Camus, "The Enigma" in Lyrical and Critical Essays

Albert Camus' search ended sixty years ago on January 4, 1960, the day he died. Although he had already written *The Stranger*, *The Rebel*, *The Plague*, and *The Fall*, and had won the Nobel Prize for Literature, he felt his true work had barely begun. Alongside the car in which he died, his briefcase lay in the mud. In it was the uncompleted, hand-written manuscript of his final quest, *The First Man*, an autobiographical novel written in a raw emotional and lyrical style that was liberating him from the prison of a classical form he felt compelled to escape. He was on his way to a new freedom, in writing and in life, when he was cut down. The book was published posthumously in 1994 by his daughter and son. It is a beautiful peek into a reserved man's youthful inner development, the loneliness of a poor boy made fatherless by an absurd war, and the ways in which the boy "had to learn by himself, to grow alone, in fortitude, in strength, find his own morality and truth." It explains a lot about Camus' later writing and why, at the end of his life, he was so isolated and criticized by the right, left, and center for his various political positions.

He could not be pigeonholed. This drove many crazy. His allegiance was to truth, not ideologies. He was not a partisan in the Cold War between the U.S./NATO and the U.S.S.R. An artist compelled by conscience and history to enter the political arena, he spoke in defense of the poor, oppressed, and powerless. Among his enemies were liberal imperialism and Soviet Marxism, abstract ideologies used to murder and enslave people around the world. He opposed state murder, terrorism, and warfare from all quarters. He was an artistic anarchist with a passionate spiritual hunger and an austere and moral Don Juan. He was a mystery to himself in many ways. He made mistakes. But he was honest and honorable.

He is the kind of thinker we need today. But he is still easily used and abused by those with their own agendas, and in that way, he is emblematic of the ways the search for truth today can be manipulated. It is a sly game, one that only can start to make sense when one puts concentrated effort into unraveling the endless propaganda that is the fabric of our lives today.

Anyone who has followed the evidence knows that Russia-gate, Ukraine-gate, the anti-Putin hysteria, and the new Cold War is a fabrication concocted by deep-state intelligence and political forces in the United States and the West. Of course, many will deny these facts. Anti-Russia hysteria has filled the airwaves for years. It is pure propaganda that is

man from heaven for liberals and conservatives wishing to maintain their religious belief in American holiness, even as the U.S./NATO has surrounded Russia with military forces. Anything that can intensify this mania is used by the corporate media. It is a very dangerous game of nuclear brinkmanship. For many people, studying such issues in depth is beside the point. As Camus wrote in 1954, "Today one takes a side based on the reading of an article." In 2020 it may be just a headline.

Here is a case in point. Perhaps minor, perhaps not. A relative, knowing I had previously written about a book claiming that Camus' death in a car was not an accident but an assassination carried out by the KGB, recently sent me a link to an article in *The Guardian*, the paper that published a tiny portion of the Edward Snowden documents after allowing the Intelligence authorities to censor them, then oversaw the destruction of all Snowden's computer documents, and finally became a full-time mouthpiece for the security state. The article was entitled: "[New Book Claims Albert Camus Was Murdered by the KGB.](#)" The article was published on Dec 2, 2019 and my relative naturally assumed it was a new book.

So did I, but I didn't know there was a new book. A year ago I had written about a book, *Camus deve morire* (Camus Must Die), published only in Italian in 2013 by the Italian writer Giovanni Catelli, that claims that Camus was assassinated by the KGB. So I read the article and was perplexed.

There is no new book; there are new translations into French and Spanish of the same book from 2013. The French edition has a forward by the American writer Paul Auster, who finds Catelli's argument convincing. More than a year ago Catelli had kindly sent me an English version of his book, which I had read before writing about it, and I assume I am the only person to have read the book in English. I think it is persuasive, but not dispositive.

The recent *Guardian* article was picked up by various publications that repeated much of it, adding incorrectly that *The Guardian* interviewed Catelli, etc., implying that it was all new. This was picked up by other publications that repeated this plus other erroneous claims, including one from a linked [New Yorker article](#) from 2014 that says, as do many others, that Catelli's claims of a KGB hit on Camus couldn't be true because Camus had a train ticket in his pocket and only made a last minute decision to ride in the car back to Paris with his friend Michel Gallimard and his family. This is false, but it fits into the attractive theme of "an absurd death." The truth is Camus had written a letter on December 30 to Maria Casarès that he would be taking a car, not the train, adding - believe it or not - that he would be arriving on Tuesday, January 4, "taking into account surprises on the road." Then on the night of January 2, he had a nightmare in which he was pursued by four faceless men on a country road where he got into a car to escape and another faceless man drove the car straight into the side of a house, as Camus awoke terrified.

As I said, it's a sly game, this publication business where little things can mean a lot, or not. Subtle points. Many mistakes. Some out of ignorance, others intentional. Things repeated. The timing often important to send implied messages.

This speculation about Camus' death began in 2011 when the media were abuzz with a report out of Italy that, rather than an accident, Camus may have been assassinated by the Soviet KGB for his powerful criticism of the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956, their massacre of Hungarian freedom fighters, and for his defense and advocacy of Boris Pasternak and his novel, *Doctor Zhivago*, among other things. For those who study history,

all these issues are complicated by CIA involvement, which is not to say that Soviet forces did not massacre Hungarian freedom fighters or that Pasternak should not have been defended and the massacres condemned. Those things are clear, while others are murky, as was then and is now the CIA's intention in so many terrible events around the world. This murkiness is created by the mass media that does the bidding of the intelligence agencies.

These reports of a KGB hit on Camus were based on an article in the Italian newspaper *Corriere della Sera*, and came from the remarks of Catelli, an Italian academic, Slavic scholar, and poet. Catelli said that he had read in a diary, published as a book, *Celýživot*, written by Jan Zábrana, a well-known poet and translator of *Doctor Zhivago*, the following:

I heard something very strange from the mouth of a man who knew lots of things and had very informed sources. According to him, the accident that had cost Albert Camus his life in 1960 was organized by Soviet spies. They damaged the tyre on the car using a sophisticated piece of equipment that cut or made a hole at speed.

This claim was quickly and broadly rejected by Camus' scholars and it just as quickly disappeared from view.

But in 2013 Catelli published *Camus Must Die* that suggests there may be more to it than those early dismissals of the *Corriere della Sera* report indicate. One has only to harken back to the 2013 mysterious death of journalist Michael Hastings in the United States when his car accelerated to over 100 miles per hour and exploded against a tree on a straight road in Los Angeles to make one think twice, maybe more. To question that death is of course to be accused of being a conspiracy theorist, a bit of mind control straight from the CIA's playbook.

Camus and Hastings. Tree lined straight roads, no traffic, outspoken writers, anomalous crashes, different countries and eras – tales to make one wonder. And probe and research if one is so inclined. Read more than one article. Perhaps a book or two.

Whatever the cause of Albert Camus' death, however, it is clear that we could use his voice today. I believe we should honor and remember him on this day that he died, for as an artist of his time, an artist for our time and all time, he tried to serve both beauty and suffering, to defend the innocent in this murderous world. Quintessentially a man of his age, he was haunted by images that haunt us still, in particular those of being locked in an absurd prison threatened by madmen brandishing weapons small and large, ready to blow this beautiful world to smithereens with weapons conjured out of their hubristic, Promethean dreams of conquest and power.

For we live in plague time, and the plague lives in us. Like the inhabitants of the rat-infested French-Algerian city of Oran in Camus's *The Plague*, the United States is "peopled with sleep walkers," pseudo-innocents, who are "chiefly aware of what ruffled the normal tenor of their lives or affected their interests." That their own government, no matter what political party is in power (both working for deep-state, elite interests led by the organized criminals of the CIA), is the disseminator of a world-wide plague of virulent violence, must be denied and divorced from consensus reality. These plague-stricken deaths visited on millions around the world – by Clinton, the Bushes, Obama, Trump – must be denied by diverting attention to partisan politics that elicit outrage after outrage by the various factions and their minions.

The true plague, the bedrock of a nation continually waging wars against the world, is avoided. Presently, it is the liberals that are “shocked” that Trump is the President as he bombs Iraq and assassinates Iranian leaders. These are the same people who went silent for the last eight years as Obama ravaged the world and lied about his cruel policies. Their outrage over Trump’s victory reeked of bad faith, with most of them supporting Hillary Clinton, a neo-liberal war-monger par excellence. Further “shocks” will follow when Trump leaves office and the latest neo-liberal avatar succeeds him, whether that is this year or in 2024; conservatives will resume their harangues and protestations, just as they have done during Obama’s reign. The two war parties will exchange insults as their followers are outraged and the American Empire, built on the disease of violence, will roll along or perhaps disintegrate. No one knows. But the plague will rage on and the main stream corporate media will play along by sowing confusion and telling lies in big and little ways.

For “decent folks must be allowed to sleep at night,” says the character Tarrou sarcastically in *The Plague*; he is a man who has lost his ability to “sleep well” since he witnessed a man’s execution where the “bullets make a hole into which you could thrust your fist.” He awakens to the realization that he “had an indirect hand in the deaths of thousands of people.” He loses any peace he had and vows to resist the plague in every way he can. “For many years I’ve been ashamed,” he says, “mortally ashamed, of having been, even with the best intentions, even at many removes, a murderer in my turn.”

The rats are dying in the streets. They are our rats, diseased by us. They have emerged from the underworld of a nation plagued by its denial. Unconscious evil bubbles up. We are an infected people. Worry and irritation – “these are not feelings with which to confront plague.” But we don’t seem ashamed of our complicity in our government’s crimes around the world. Camus knew better. He warned us,

It’s a wearying business being plague-stricken. But it’s still more wearying to refuse to be it. That’s why everybody in the world looks so tired; everyone is more or less sick of plague. But that is why some of us, those who want to get the plague out of their systems, feel such desperate weariness.

Yet the fight against the plague must go on; that was Camus’ message. If not, you will be destroyed by your own complicity in evil. You will be plagued by your own hand.

Were Camus alive today, he would no doubt be struck by the constant stream of news reports exemplifying the hubris of our technological rationality, a mode of thinking that has made a fetish out of technology, worships efficiency, and considers any critical protest as irrational. For Camus was deeply influenced by ancient Greek philosophy. He wrote,

Greek thought was always based on the idea of limits. Nothing was carried to extremes, neither religion nor reason, because Greek thought denied nothing, neither reason nor religion And, even though we do it in diverse ways, we extol one thing and one alone: a future world in which reason will reign supreme.

He would be appalled by the arrogance of a nation led by technocratic experts and politicians who have embraced the power of pure reason devoid of values. Despite all rhetoric to the contrary, the embrace of technical reason, which is innately amoral, has caused many of the problems we seem unable to remedy. These include environmental

catastrophe, high-tech wars, GM foods, drone killings, drug addiction, and nuclear weapons, to name but a few. For such problems created by technology, our esteemed leaders have technological answers. The high-priests of this technological complex – organization types all – use the technology and control the information which they then present as “facts” to justify their actions. The absurdity of this vicious circle is lost on them. Their unstated assumption: We have a prohibition to prohibit. If it can be done, it will be done. We have no limits.

Camus thought differently:

In our madness, we push back the eternal limits, and at once Furies swoop down upon us to destroy. Nemesis, the goddess of moderation, not of vengeance, is watching. She chastises, ruthlessly, all those who go beyond the limit.

Camus reminds us that we must break free from the “mind-forged manacles” that render us prisoners of hopelessness. This world as a prison is a metaphor that has a long and popular tradition. In the past hundred or more years, however, with the secularization of Western culture and the perceived withdrawal of God, the doors of this prison have shut upon the popular imagination, with growing numbers of people feeling trapped in an alien universe, no longer able to bridge the gulf between themselves and an absent God. Death, once the open avenue to the free life of eternity, has for many become the symbol of the absurdity of existence and the futility of escape. “There is little doubt that the modern cult of power worship is bound up with the modern man’s feeling that life here and now is the only life there is,” wrote George Orwell in 1944.

Camus was haunted by these images, intensified as they were by a life of personal isolation beginning with the death of his father in World War I when he was a year old and continuing throughout his upbringing by a half-deaf, emotionally sterile mother. His entire life, including his tragic art, was an attempt to find a way out of this closed world. This was his search.

That is why he continues to speak today to those who grapple with the same enigmas, those who strive to find hope and faith to defend the defenseless and revel in the glory of living simultaneously. Not absurdly, he left clues to that quest in his briefcase on the road where he died – the unfinished manuscript to his beautiful *Le Premier Homme* (The First Man). It was as if, whether he died in an accident or was murdered, the first man was going to have the last word.

In his last novel, *The Fall*, he left us Jean Baptiste Clamence, a nihilist worthy of our times, a lawyer dedicated to abstract justice, a phony actor who, in the name of absolute sincerity, lies in order to mask his destructive nihilism that knows no bounds. He reminds me of our power elites. His maxim cuts to the heart of our modern madness:

When one has no character, one has to apply a method.

Albert Camus had character. Let us honor him.

I can imagine Camus saying with Hamlet:

Oh, I could tell you –

But let it be, Horatio, I am dead;

Thou livest; report to me and my cause aright

To the unsatisfied.

Let us do just that.

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