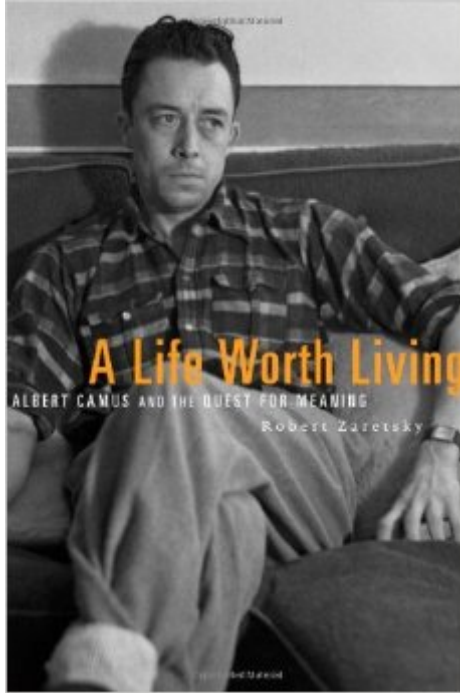


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A Life Worth Living: Albert Camus And The Quest For Meaning



Synopsis

In his Nobel Prize acceptance speech, Albert Camus declared that a writer's duty is twofold: "the refusal to lie about what one knows and the resistance against oppression." These twin obsessions help explain something of Camus' remarkable character, which is the overarching subject of this sympathetic and lively book. Through an exploration of themes that preoccupied Camus--absurdity, silence, revolt, fidelity, and moderation--Robert Zaretsky portrays a moralist who refused to be fooled by the nobler names we assign to our actions, and who pushed himself, and those about him, to challenge the status quo. Though we do not face the same dangers that threatened Europe when Camus wrote *The Myth of Sisyphus* and *The Stranger*, we confront other alarms. Herein lies Camus' abiding significance. Reading his work, we become more thoughtful observers of our own lives. For Camus, rebellion is an eternal human condition, a timeless struggle against injustice that makes life worth living. But rebellion is also bounded by self-imposed constraints--it is a noble if impossible ideal. Such a contradiction suggests that if there is no reason for hope, there is also no occasion for despair--a sentiment perhaps better suited for the ancient tragedians than modern political theorists but one whose wisdom abides. Yet we must not venerate suffering, Camus cautions: the world's beauty demands our attention no less than life's train of injustices. That recognition permits him to declare: "It was the middle of winter, I finally realized that, within me, summer was inextinguishable."

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Customer Reviews

The other reviews explain the way the book is structured and what is presented. What the ones I read don't really express is how well this book communicates the "feel" of reading and thinking about the author and his work. This writer was a courageous and determined person who refused to stop acting on what he saw and believed, and yet had the rationality and self-awareness to consider his own filters and motivations very carefully. I read this while still going through the translations of Camus' journals. As an Israeli-born American I see in Zaretsky's description of the author's struggles the same determination, grief, and orphaned hope that arises in me when I consider the misery caused by colonialism and the pointless, stupid, absurd and tragic suffering that people inflict on the world when they assume false permissions under the mantle of victim. Camus never stopped fighting the religion of worshipping tyranny, competition, material and communal exploitation. The same pathologies that plagued his world, that he tried to make people acknowledge, are the pathologies that are killing us and the world around us today. And his love of being, his profound love of the beautiful world, beautiful life, must have been a central energy that moved him in his rebellion. The murderers, rapists, tyrants, and torturers of every age are always the men who will not accept "no" from those they would exploit, who will not hear "no" on anything that threatens their self-gratifications. Camus offered the view of the rebel as the one who says no, who will not back down, will not go away, and will tell himself no as well.

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