

## Albert Camus on Writing, Creativity and Stubbornness by Maria Popova

Three years after he became the second-youngest laureate of the Nobel Prize, awarded him for literature that “with clear-sighted earnestness illuminates the problems of the human conscience,” Albert Camus (November 7, 1913–January 4, 1960) died in a car crash with an unused train ticket to the same destination in his pocket. The writings he left behind — about the key to strength of character, about creativity as resistance, about the antidotes to the absurdity of life, about happiness as our moral obligation — endure as a living testament to Mary Shelley’s conviction that “it is by words that the world’s great fight, now in these civilized times, is carried on.”

Albert Camus

Camus addressed his views on writing most directly in a 1943 essay about the novel, included in his altogether indispensable *Lyrical and Critical Essays* (public library).

He reflects:

One must be two persons when one writes... The great problem is to translate what one feels into what one wants others to feel. We call a writer bad when he expresses himself in reference to an inner context the reader cannot know. The mediocre writer is thus led to say anything he pleases.

In a sentiment James Baldwin would echo in his advice on writing, insisting that “beyond talent lie all the usual words: discipline, love, luck, but most of all, endurance,” Camus observes that all creative endeavor demands of us “a certain constancy of soul, and a human and literary knowledge of sacrifice.” He writes:

To someone who asked Newton how he had managed to construct his theory, he could reply: “By thinking about it all the time.” There is no greatness without a little stubbornness.

Nearly a century after Tchaikovsky asserted that “a self-respecting artist must not fold his hands on the pretext that he is not in the mood,” Camus adds:

Great novels... prove the effectiveness of human creation. They convince one that the

work of art is a human thing, never human enough, and that its creator can do without dictates from above. Works of art are not born in flashes of inspiration but in a daily fidelity.

Complement with more excellent advice on writing from Mary Oliver, Rachel Carson, Maya Angelou, George Saunders, John Steinbeck, and Ernest Hemingway, then revisit the beautiful letter of gratitude Camus sent to his childhood teacher shortly after receiving the Nobel Prize.