

Edward J. Hughes, *Albert Camus* (London: Reaktion Books), 2015. Paperback, 215 pages, 28 b/w illustrations. RRP £11.99.

This is an important addition to the Critical Lives series which also included in 2015 Andrew Ballantyne's *John Ruskin* (shortlisted for the first Ruskin Society Book Prize), and in 2013 Adam Watt's *Marcel Proust*.

The richness of this critical study lies very much in the shifting perspective on two countries – Algeria, the land of Camus' birth on 7 November 1913, and France, where Camus died in a car crash on 4 January 1960, at the age of 46.

A rare photograph of a glamorous, youthful, photogenic Camus prefaces the book. This was taken by Cecil Beaton in 1948 during Camus' only visit to New York and reproduced in *Vogue* to celebrate the publication of the American translation of *L'Étranger* as *The Stranger*. In 2016, a month-long festival 'Camus: A Stranger in the City' celebrated the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his visit. But Camus' heart was in Algeria, and the country he knew, loved and respected is revisited in the text and in the many fascinating period postcards of Algiers, where the grand post office looks more akin to a luxury hotel, of Tipassa and Ghardaïa in the desert that are a special feature of this book.

Edward Hughes asks and answers the difficult question of 'Who is Camus?' as he untangles his complicated emotional life and his abandoned attempts to live by conventional morality. The multi-faceted, complex Camus with an Existentialist tag is an intellectual first and foremost, a polemicist, an outspoken campaigner with a strong sense of justice, a novelist, a playwright, a theatre director and a fun-loving gastronome. The inner self of this winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1957 is revealed in particular through the lens of *The First Man*, the translation by David Hapgood in 1995 of *Le Premier Homme*, Camus' unfinished manuscript found among the wreckage in the fatal car crash.

Camus' life is inextricably interwoven with the Nazi occupation of France, the changing status of colonial Algeria and the role of de Gaulle. Hughes demonstrates the extent to which the author of *The Outsider* (a more faithful translation of the famous book) was himself an outsider.

Hughes writes with a freshness of approach, with compassion for the subject, and makes us regret deeply the loss of a literary giant, an eternally young and youthful meritocrat, cut down in his prime.

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