

"the stranger" by albert camus



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Camus made a name for himself when he wrote *The Stranger*. This novel by Albert Camus was initially published in the year 1942. It is imperative to note that this book was written and published during the World War II. Describing the background and environment, Camus responded to the tensions by coming to the conclusion that the world was absurd and meaningless. He, however, believed that it was still important to hold traditional human values dearly. The novel has effectively developed the important concept of absurdism. The belief that every person can be happy in the face of absurd is vividly reflected in the novel. According to Virggiani, " Camus transforms his personal confession into a relatively impersonal fiction by means of a set of ironic devices, principal among them, the reconstruction of myth in a modern idiom, multivalent names, characters, images, and language, and occasionally, literary allusiveness" (866).

The text was undoubtedly a success and it represented an existentialist movement.

This essay focuses on the main characters of the novel, exploring the influence of the ideas of naturalism and absurdism on them, and demonstrating how the environment and society have influenced these people.

The most conspicuous character in the story is Meursault. The whole story is narrated by this clerk. Meursault is a young man around thirty years old, just like the most of the Camus' characters (Virggiani, 866) He was a citizen of France and was a man of the Mediterranean origin; however, he did not practice any of the Mediterranean culture. The distinctive feature of this

young man is his cruelty and indifference. He without a second's hesitation killed an Arab man. He didn't hate him; Meursault was just influenced by extreme heat and the glare of the sun. It is an absurd situation, when the nature pushes a man to kill a human being. The investigations that took place afterwards were also full of absurd and ironical, since Meursault was prosecuted for failing to show regrettable feelings to his dead mother rather than for committing the murder itself. Disappointed by the Meursault's lack of love, the society executed him.

Meursault was very observant unlike many people; however, he was indifferent. Due to this, the society was skeptical about him, and he was a subject to intense scrutiny. He was very keen in observing his surroundings. His beloved mother died just before the novel begun. Her death and funeral passes, and life proceeds as normal to him. "Mama died today. Or yesterday maybe, I don't know. I got a telegram from the home: 'Mother deceased. Funeral tomorrow. Faithfully yours.' That doesn't mean anything. Maybe it was yesterday" (Camus, 3) - this is what causes apathy and future strife for him. Immediately after the burial of his mother, he went to the beach where he met his friend Marie, a woman from the office. He became involved with her from that moment and henceforth. When he went back home he met and chatted with his neighbors, and soon became friends with a man, Raymond Sintes by name, who used to beat his Arab ex-mistress. After a while they went to the beach where they encounter a crowd of Arabs, a brother to the ex-girlfriend, who was beaten, was among them. They engage in a heated battle, and later left; however, Meursault returned later to shoot the Arab in cold blood. When the Arab man fell down dead, Meursault shot him three

more times. He was put in trial for murder, and was later sentenced to death through public execution. He openly welcomed death since he did not even believe in God. He was angry at the world and everyone in his life.

It is important to note that the cause of his trial was a result of his friendship with Raymond Sintes. He was a cold man and kept his distance from people, just like Meursault. He was of the opinion that women should be put in their place through beatings, whenever they go wrong. The conflict that leads to Meursault's conviction was a result of his friend's character. His effort to speak in Meursault's favor in court hadn't helped, and Meursault was finally prosecuted and convicted of murder. " The presiding judge told me in a bizarre language that I was to have my head cut off in a public square in the name of the French people. Then it seemed to me that I suddenly knew what was on everybody's fact. It was a look of consideration, I'm sure. The policemen were very gentle with me. The lawyer put his hand on my wrist. I wasn't thinking about anything anymore. But the presiding judge asked me if I had anything to say. I thought about it. I said, 'No.'" (Camus, 107).

Another character who testifies in his favor was Marie, a girl he was in love with. She really loved him, and had even visited him in prison for several times. According to his conviction, this relationship started on the day of his mother's funeral. Meursault sees her just like any other woman - a body that cares for him-nothing particularly special." For the first time maybe, I really thought I was going to get married" (Camus, 50). He cared about her but in a completely different way than she did.

Meursault uncaring relationship with his mother created the society's negative image of his personality. He had locked her in a home where she was thriving during her last days. The care taker at the funeral discussed with Meursault the issues of life and death, while they were having coffee, but the testimony the caretaker gave at the court put even more negative light on Meursault. Meursault was openly grateful and emotional to some of his pals that testified in his favor, like Celeste who owned the restaurant that he used to visit frequently.

There are other minor characters in the text, like Emmanuel, who was a friend to Meursault from his work. They spent a lot of time together talking and watching movies. He was present only at the beginning and at the end of the Meursault's story. Another character, who also testified in favor of Meursault during the trial, was Salamano, who was his neighbor. However, he was more concerned about his own issues; he had a skin disease, and kept a dog, which was eventually taken away from him by the authorities. He cried uncontrollably due to this. Masson also testified for Meursault. He was a great friend to Raymond, and they spent free time together.

Meursault had got a hard heart, and even the prison chaplain could not elicit or bring some sort of emotion or religious sentiments to his mind or soul. He failed to understand what sort of person Meursault was, that he was a man who could not feel remorse. Meursault was getting irritated by the persistence of the chaplain up to the point that he almost roughed him up, but fortunately the guards restrained him."... for the first time in years, I had this stupid urge to cry, because I could feel how much all these people hated me." (Camus, 90) Even the magistrate himself found time to go to the prison

so as to talk with him so as least he could get salvation, Meursault was reluctant to comply. The relationship between Thomas and Meursault's mother showed a real emotional connection unlike that with her son. Also we find out that while Raymond was insincere, Meursault was honest with his feelings, and had no need to lie so as to conform to the society's prescribed moral rules.

There is also contrast on the feelings when Salamano's dog is lost, he becomes restless and mourns; but when Maman dies, Meursault, her son, feels nothing." It occurred to me that anyway one more Sunday was over that Maman was buried now, that I was going back to work, and that, really, nothing had changed" (Camus, 24).

The author describes different characters in the novel. Even though they differ in nature, all the characters are to some extent a reflection of absurdism and naturalism. They all are influenced by the society, and it is the environment that determines the behavior of these characters.