

Literary analysis of the stranger by albert camus



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In the book *The Stranger* by Albert Camus, he illustrates that isolation from society leads to being emotionally detached which results in what others may perceive as inhumane acts. Albert Camus illustrates this idea through the main character, Meursault, who happens to be a detached and indifferent person that does not care about anything except his own physical needs. Camus uses many rhetorical devices such as indifferent tone and motif to communicate this idea to his readers.

This novel begins with the terrible news that Meursault's mother had passed away. Meursault's reaction to the death of his mother illustrates how emotionally detached he really is. Maman 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). Most people would immediately start crying after receiving news that their loved one had passed away, they would start reflecting on how different things will be with their loved one gone, and they would feel empty. Strangely, this was not the case for Meursault. It seems as if he did not care that his mother had passed away. His reaction illustrated that death is something that is bound to happen. Therefore, there is no point in being upset about it. At the funeral, Meursault was more concerned about how exhausted he was, how bad his back was hurting, and how hot it was instead of grieving for the death of the person who gave him life. People who barely knew his mother were more upset than he was. Soon one of the women started crying I thought she'd never stop The woman kept on crying I wished I didn't have to listen to her anymore. But I didn't dare say anything

(Camus 16). This specific example helps support Albert Camus idea that Meursault cared about nothing other than his own personal-physical needs.

Meursault's indifferent tone is portrayed more times throughout the novel. Another example would be when he was speaking to his lawyer about his mother's funeral and why he was not upset that day. I probably did love Maman, but that didn't mean anything. At one time or another all normal people have wished their loved ones were dead. Here the lawyer interrupted me, and he seemed very upset. He made me promise I wouldn't say that at my hearing or in front of the examining magistrate (Camus 65). Meursault's honest response to his lawyer emphasized how detached he really is, and his lawyer's response emphasized how unethical it would be to say something like that in court. A normal person who has emotions would never say something so horrific, and they would certainly never wish death on any of their loved ones. A normal person actually dreads the day that death will separate them from those who they love. Meursault's lack of emotion towards his mother's death made people perceive him as a monster, and a stranger of society who did not have a heart like everyone else.

Another rhetorical device that Albert Camus used to illustrate Meursault's lack of emotions is motif. The sun is presented several times throughout the novel as the force that influenced Meursault's cruel actions which led to his beheading at the end. He blames the sun for most of his actions such as not being able to grief at the funeral for his mother. But today, with the sun bearing down, making the whole landscape shimmer with heat, it was inhuman and oppressive (Camus 15). His own mother was being buried, and all he could think about was the heat. The ironic part of this quote is how he

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described the sun as being inhuman and oppressive. If anything, he is the one who is being inhuman by worrying more about the heat than his own mother being dead.

Meursault also sees the sun as the force that made him murder a man in cold blood. Fumbling a little with my words and realizing how ridiculous I sounded, I blurted out that it was because of the sun. People laughed. My lawyer threw up his hands, and immediately after that he was given the floor (Camus 103). Most criminals in the position of Meursault would feel guilt, and they would take full responsibility for their actions. Meursault on the other hand blamed the sun which is a ridiculous assertion. How does the sun make you murder a man? Did the sun also make you shoot at the body 4 more times after the Arab man was already on the ground? See how absurd Meursault's statement sounds? That's because it is an absurd statement. Meursault knew what he was doing when he went back to the beach, and he knew what would happen specially because he still had the gun on him. He cannot blame anyone else but himself for his cruel crime. His lack of emotion and responsibility towards the murder he committed further helped the court in seeing him as a monster who needed to be put down.

Another example from the novel that illustrates how indifferent Meursault is about others is when he helps Raymond lure back his mistress to him. This is such a horrible thing to do because Raymond had physically abused this woman before, and Meursault was going to help him humiliate her again. He wanted to write her a letter, one with a punch and also some things in it to make her sorry for what she's done. Then, when she would come back, he'd go to bed with her and right at the last minute he'd spit in her face and

throw her out. Yes, that would punish her, I thought (Camus 32). A person who has feelings and sympathy for others would never agree to something so awful. A man who has respect for women would actually defend women from men like Raymond. But Meursault had no feelings which made him agree to anything even if that meant hurting and humiliating an innocent woman.

To conclude, being socially isolated from society leads to being emotionally numb, which can result in acts that others may perceive as inhumane. Society as a whole tends to have rules of how a person should behave or react to certain things. If a person fails to follow these rules, society views them as a threat and as a stranger that does not belong. Meursault is a prime example of this. He failed to follow the rules of society because he believed there was no higher purpose to life. This belief made him emotionally detached which led to his death at the end of the novel. This illustrates that if you are different you will be rejected by society, which is why most people pretend to be something they are not.