

Themes of loss and retrieval in "the stranger"

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The Stranger Chris Drusbosky 3/5/12 Professor Krauss In the story "The Stranger" by Albert Camus, the belief that the themes of loss and retrieval are at the core of Mersault's mythology, and that they illumine the notion of exile to which he returns so often is widely discussed. I however do not believe that either one of those themes has anything to do with the Mersault and the exile to which he returns to so often, rather I believe that Mersault's own attitude is the reason for the exile he experiences in the story. The first theme that is said to play a role in Mersault's exile is the theme of loss.

Though Mersault does lose his mother in the beginning of the story, it does not affect how he acts throughout the rest of the story and he continues on like nothing ever even happened. "Then there was the church and the villagers on the sidewalks, the red geraniums on the graves in the cemetery, Perez fainting, the blood red earth spilling over Maman's casket, the white flesh of the roots mixed in with it, more people, voices, the village, waiting in front of a cafe, the incessant drone of the motor, and my joy when the bus entered the nest of lights that was Algiers and I knew I was going to go to bed and sleep for twelve hours. The Stranger page 18. Normally when someone's mother dies, you are filled with grief and sadness and you cannot help but to think about how much you miss her and love her. In this quote, Mersault shows no type of sad emotion whatsoever. He seems to be completely unmoved and unchanged emotionally by the death of his mother. Not only does he not show any emotion at his mother's funeral, the very next day he meets with his mistress Marie Cardona and spends the day with her going swimming, seeing a movie, and spending the night at his house with her.

Both of these examples clearly show that Mersault is unmoved by the death of his mother and it plays no role whatsoever in the exile that he encounters throughout the story. The second theme that is said to play a significant role in Mersault's exile is the theme of retrieval. If there is one thing in my eyes that Mersault never did throughout the course of this story, it would be that he never retrieved anything and that he always stayed the same throughout the story. Mersault seems to maintain the same attitude towards everything that happens in the story, the "I don't care or believe in much" type attitude.

One example that proves that Mersault possesses this attitude was after he was arrested for shooting the Arab 5 times. The magistrate asks him if he believes in God. "But he cut me off and urged me on one last time, drawing himself up to his full height and asked me if I believed in God. I said no. He sat down indignantly. He said it was impossible; all men believed in God, even those who have turned their backs on him. That was his belief, and if he were to ever doubt it, his life would be meaningless." *The Stranger* page 69.

This quote is a perfect example that even after he has murdered a man, Mersault still maintains that same attitude towards everything and he remains unchanged. You would think that especially after the fact that he murdered someone, he would have changed his attitude a little bit or that maybe he would have had some kind of revelation and he would realize that he has done something terribly wrong. However none of this occurs with Mersault and he continues to be himself and does not change anything about

himself and that he retrieves nothing from his actions and that it plays no role in his exile.

Though both of the themes of loss and retrieval may seem like they play a role in Mersault's exile in the story, I do not believe they do. I believe that Mersault's attitude is the cause of the exile he experiences. When one has a "I don't care or believe in much", you can easily be separated and apart from the world. Had Mersault cared more about certain things or had he shown more interest in them, I believe he would not have encountered any type of exile in the story.

But when you constantly see phrases like: I don't know, I don't care, I don't believe etc. you get the idea that the person saying those phrases is in some kind of exile from everyone else. Mersault is clearly responsible for his own exile in this story due to his attitude towards things. Loss and retrieval do not play a role in the exile that Mersault experiences and everything that he encounters and endures is because of his attitude and nothing to do with the thought of whether or not he lost something and retrieved something.

If Mersault were to ask himself: Why are these things happening to me and why do I seem to be separated from everyone else? All he would have to do is look in the mirror and he would see the cause of everything that he has gone through. While Mersault is in prison, he talks about how he misses certain things of life on the outside of prison and how he feels separated. My response to Mersault would be: If you had a sense of caring or interest in things, maybe you wouldn't be here in prison in the first place and maybe you also wouldn't feel exiled and separated from everyone else.