

Camus essay sample

[Family](#), [Parents](#)



The Stranger or *L'étranger*, is a famous novel by the stalwart author, Albert Camus which depicts the story of a man who traverses the path of life being an outlaw from the norms of the society. Meursault, the protagonist, is faced with the demise of his mother, love of a lady and the assassination of a man. But, in stark contrast to a common man who would show pangs of emotions at every occurrence, Meursault remains unfazed by the turns on the road of life and shows no care about bringing forth his own emotions or bothering about other people's emotional states. He clearly deviates from the normative and what follows in his life is what the avid reader comes across as the story gradually unfolds.

Albert Camus opens this book with the lines, "Mama died today. Or yesterday maybe, I don't know. I got a telegram from home: 'Mother deceased. Funeral tomorrow. Faithfully yours.' That doesn't mean anything. Maybe it was yesterday." The author thus portrays right at the very inception of this novel Meursault's personality. Neither is he sure of the time of his mother's demise, nor does he express any remorse about her death. This comes as a shock to the reader who is left perplexed at this mutation of emotional state in the man. Any commoner is expected to be affected and even lament the passing away of a close relative, leave alone someone's mother. But, the protagonist even denies seeing his mother's deceased body. He is unperturbed at the funeral too and does not shed even a tear and on the way back all he thinks is about having a tight sleep that night. His relationship with Marie Cardona also reflects his lack of emotion. While the lady is in love with him and is extremely affectionate in her approach. Though he seems to like to have the warmth from her, Meursault himself

does not reciprocate with similar depth of emotions. He is indifferent to the proposal of marriage and seems to care more about the physical attraction rather than the emotional bond. It almost becomes clear to the reader that this man is incapable of comprehending the concept of love. This simply stands out of the league when compared to the societal norms. One cannot but ponder over the bizarre personality and notions which can be seen in the protagonist of the novel.

Meursault later gets into a brawl with a person whom he refers to as “ the Arab” and ends up murdering him. He is taken in custody for the crime, yet he seems to be indifferent about the scenario. Even when he actually assassinated the person, he hardly seemed to comprehend the fearfulness of the incident and impetus it could have on his own life. He murders, but all that makes him enraged is the fact that the “ harmony of the day” has got ruined. He is truly a huge threat to the society as all his reactions and actions seem to subvert the normative order of the society. He readily deviates from the course of action that would be accepted as normal by the standards set by the social contract. An outlaw and a stranger in the eyes of the social order, Meursault threatens to thwart the uniformity of human nature.

During the trial, the magistrate enquires of him the reason of his taking a pause between shooting the man for the first time and the next four times. It queerly seems that the protagonist was agitated by the blazing heat of the sun and fact that the rest of his day would be spent devoid of any rest. In stark contrast to the societal outlook, this man hardly cares about the demise of “ the Arab”.

The judge's decision in the trial is greatly influenced by the fact that Meursault is subversive to the norms of the society. He is proved to be a grave threat to the society based on his apathy toward his mother's death and the conspicuous indifference after killing the Arab. Realizing that Meursault's mother demise would be an important aspect in the judgment, he is questioned by the lawyer about the incident. However, his overtly blunt replies testify his lack of affection for his own mother, to the sheer disgust of his lawyer. He is then enquired by the prosecutor and the witnesses of his reaction during the funeral worsen the case. Meursault then is proved to be a heartless person who is too nonchalant and selfish to fit into the society. His actions following his mother's demise are taken to be immensely reprehensible and are seen as a huge threat to the moral basis of the society. The prosecutor shows that his intelligence and expression of no repentance is proof enough that the murder he committed was premeditated. As a result, he is found to be guilty and is sentenced to death by guillotine by the court.

Meursault is different from a normal murderer who would kill with a definite motive. While the people at the court argue and debate over reasons behind the murder, the truth is that the protagonist himself does not see life that way. But, everyone except him seems to have his own argument for the incident. While the society tends to rationalize and attribute the norm on every action and thought of an individual, Meursault is an exception to this rule. Therein lies his being a paramount threat which needs to get quarantined and then eliminated, so that the society can function like it has always, devoid of any anomaly. When asked by the magistrate by a show of

crucifix if he believes in god, Meursault bluntly replies that he does not. The magistrate is convinced that this man is a hardened soul who has no traits of redemption. He is seen as a greater danger to the society than any other criminal who nurtures a motive behind the act.

Meursault is taken to the prison for his heinous crime. His crime transcends the ‘normalcy’ of such acts as he is audacious enough to challenge the social institutions and the futile attempt of society to attribute rationality to everything in this mortal world. He awaits his execution being seen as an evil man by the society. His days in prison make him realize the absurdist philosophy of life—the very philosophy the author so persistently wants to convey to his readers. He comes to understand that there is no meaning to human life, death being the sole inevitability. Meursault sluggishly moves toward this realization in the course of the novel. After his argument with the chaplain, he understands that both he and the universe are indifferent to one another. He is no exception to the inevitability of life, no one can be. Like every man he took birth, he will meet his demise and his importance will be lost. It is quite a paradox that it is at this realization that the protagonist achieves happiness. Having come to term with the occurrence of death, Meursault comprehends that it hardly matters if he dies by execution or natural death. He scraps his wish of filing a successful legal appeal to escape execution. His escape would only be temporal as death cannot be escaped. His appeal would only garnish false hopes about escaping death. Giving up the illusion that shrouds human perception, Meursault now aims to live life to the fullest for the remaining few days of his life, he is now a liberated soul. In this transcendental realization about life and its truth lies the salvation of the

protagonist.

Thus, Albert Camus aptly weaves the character and life of Meursault to convey the greatest philosophy of life and thus leaves his innumerable readers shaken to the core who are also disillusioned just like the protagonist and stand now at the bizarre crossroad of life from where they might decide to traverse endeavoring to make the most of the remaining days of life they are endowed with.

Works Cited

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