

"the stranger" by albert camus essay sample

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“ The Stranger” by Albert Camus Essay Sample

Imagine a man so absurd, yet so in tune with himself that he does not go through the motions of life for anyone. This man has been brought to life in *The Stranger* by Albert Camus. The story takes place in a coastal town of Algeria. The main character is named Meursault. He is an ordinary office clerk with no real aspirations of progress, love, or greatness. He does not have any false emotions and does not do anything to please people. He did not even cry or feel bad at his own mother's funeral because that is not the way that he felt. He would rather complain about not having a fresh towel to dry his hands with than realize the importance in the fact that he received a promotion to a job in Paris. This lack of fake feelings should lead to a more honest life, but it ultimately causes his downfall. Meursault is also an absurd character. Some of his actions and beliefs are so strange that the reader is almost forced in to not liking him. Camus uses the character of Meursault to illustrate the absurdness, yet affirm the value of life.

The trouble Meursault gets in shows how absurd he really is. The absurdity of life can then be seen juxtaposed to his predicament. “ According to standards by which he had conducted his life, there is no basis for his arrest. He had based his actions on complete indifference to everything except physical sensations; and projecting this philosophy to the extreme, he saw no difference between firing and not firing the shots into the body of the Arab” (Rhein 35). At the beginning of the second half of the novel Meursault is put on trial for shooting an Arab man to death for apparently no reason.

It is very strange that someone can be completely indifferent to the point that they could kill someone. The absurdity is in the fact that Meursault is condemned mostly for this indifference not actually for killing the Arab. Since he is not like everyone else he is prosecuted. Rhein agrees with this view when he writes, " He knows that the absolute religious and social values by which he was judged are conventional and outworn" (Rhein 35). Since Meursault is judged absolutely upon other peoples feelings about how he has no feelings Camus shows the absurdity of life. All of this is shown beside the point that life is worth living.

Throughout all of Meursault's rough spots he never wishes to cease living. He finds pleasure in the simple things in life. This goes along with the existential theme that life should not be wasted. " He opens his soul to the tender indifference of mankind in a world devoid of God, recognizes that he has known happiness through the sheer act of living[...]" (Amoia 43). After Meursault kills the man he is incarcerated. Since he has no faith or religion he is left only with his thoughts. He realizes that he felt happiness through living, therefore life is important to him. Rhein reinforces this argument when he states that, " Meursault is, above all else, a man who wants to go on living. No matter how unbearable prison life becomes for him, death is never a temptation" (Rheine 37). Death never tempts Meursault.

Most people would rather stop living than live through something unbearable. He would rather enjoy the life he has left, even if it is in prison. This is an affirmation of the value of life. " I've often thought that had I been compelled to live in the trunk of a dead tree, with nothing to do but gaze up at a patch of sky just overhead, I'd have to get used to it by degrees"

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(Camus 95). Through the use of the symbol of a dead tree Camus shows that Meursault can find life within death. Meursault states that he could get used to anything as long as he gets to go living. This further proves how important life is to him. Meursault finds pleasure in the small luxuries of life like eating, drinking, smoking, swimming, and the company of other people. For him it would be pointless to end a life full of so many small pleasures.

Life is absurd but it is also enjoyable. "The Stranger" is testament to this. If a man can enjoy the fact that he is living while he is a prisoner, then more people should realize that their everyday lives are more bearable than they think. Life is not a thing to waste. It may be full of trials but life is all one has to lose.