

Meursault as an  
outsider to society, to  
himself and to his  
environment



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Albert Camus was an Algerian-French absurdist author, who wrote novels like *The Outsider* and *The Plague*. In *The Outsider* he tells the story of an emotionless and immoral character, Meursault, and how he deals with the norms of the society and the judgmental people around him. The story takes place in Algiers, where Meursault receives a telegram informing him that his mother had passed out and that he needed to attend the funeral, in which he did not show any emotion. Later on, as the character evolves, he kills a man with no specific motive and he is prosecuted in court for his actions. With supporting evidence from the novel, it can be argued that Meursault is an outsider to society, to himself and to his environment, only to some extent.

In the eyes of society Meursault is an outsider, a peculiar and detached man, who does not seem to understand how everything is supposed to function around him. Meursault does not understand why events, such as marriage or death of a loved one, usually have a sentimental value for people and this is what makes him appear as numb and disconnected with them. When Meursault is first introduced in the novel, he has to attend his mother's funeral in Marengo. As he talks about the funeral, he almost seems indifferent towards the fact that his mother had died, he even said, "it's still a little as if Mama hadn't died". One can understand the apathy he felt towards his mother's death, since she had been living in an old people's home for years, Meursault was disconnected with her, he was used to her absence, so his reaction could be justified. However, in the eyes of society, this kind of behaviour is regarded as bizarre and the fact that he did not show any kind of emotion in his mother's funeral contributes to this strange image of Meursault. Later on, Meursault is found in a perplexing situation

where he kills an Arab at the beach, without any clear motive. As he is being interviewed, Meursault tries to convince his lawyer that he did not know the man he killed and that he shot him for no reason. The lawyer is a representative of society, a 'normal' man and he does not seem to understand Meursault's way of thinking. Also, when the judge interrogated him, he kept asking him why he shot the Arab 5 times, since he was dead with the first shot but Meursault did not know what to tell him, because he did not know why he did it. When the judge got irritated, he brought up religion and God, yet Meursault gave no importance to religion, this was illogical and impossible in the eyes of the judge, who was a representation of society too. Generally, Meursault is viewed as an outsider to society, since he cannot comprehend the consequences of his actions and he does not follow any of the norms.

To contrast the above paragraph, it can be argued that Meursault is not an outsider to his natural environment, as he is so familiar with it, that it affects his decision-making. As Meursault goes to the beach and he went outside in the sun, he said: "it felt like a slap across the face". One can see how much it affected him, since Meursault recognizes the physical world better than the emotional. When he gets to the beach Meursault is relieved to finally see the "clear water". The huge contrast between the water and the blistering sun seems to calm him down and as he gets in the water he appears more pleased and comforted. Later on, the protagonist is affected so much by the warmth of the sun, that he kills the Arab without a second thought. Camus uses words like "burned alive" or "pierce my aching eyes" to build up tension in the murder scene and show how much Meursault is affected by

the environment around him. Moreover, in the beginning of chapter 2, as Meursault is being interrogated he mentions:

“ I had great difficulty following his reasoning, first of all I was hot...”

One can understand that once the weather is hot, Meursault's world gets upset. In this example, he starts losing concentration and he does not fully understand what the judge is telling him.

In the Outsider, the protagonist Meursault seems to be a stranger to himself as well as to the society. He can associate very well with the physical world but not at all with the emotional world around him and this is what makes him the outsider. Moments before the funeral, he was asked if he wanted to see his mother's body in the casket, but he said he did not want to. Then, Meursault mentions that he was embarrassed of his answer, so one can understand that he is aware of the answer society would expect him to have, yet he either cannot change or he does not want to change in order to fit in.

In contradiction with the above paragraph, it can also be argued that Meursault is not an outsider to himself, he rather knows what he wants. He does not cry at his mother's funeral and he does not mourn her death, simply because it did not mean anything to him. He recognizes the reaction that is expected by him, yet he refuses to change in order to please the people around him. When Meursault is asked if he would be interested in moving to Paris, he simply said that:

“ You can never really change your life...my life here wasn't bad at all”

This shows how change does not matter to Meursault and that since his life was not bad, then he does not understand why he needs to change and that is why he refuses to accept the offer. Meursault does not want to change himself and by not accepting the job opportunity to Paris, he stays true to his absurdist beliefs. Another moment where the protagonist rejects society's views is when he has a discussion with the chaplain and refuses by any means to turn to God, even if that is his last option left. As he talks with the chaplain, he says:

“ I didn't have time to waste thinking about things that didn't interest me”

Meursault firmly believes that religion is meaningless and unimportant, thus he does not have time for it and does not understand why people value it so much. The chaplain had tried several times to persuade Meursault to turn to God, however the protagonist kept denying, by doing that, he remains true to himself even though he is looked as an outsider by the society.

To conclude, Meursault is obviously an outsider to the society around him, since his behaviour is regarded as bizarre and amoral. Even though he is aware of the norms of the society, he keeps refusing to change in order to become accepted by the society, it is insignificant to him. One could say that Meursault lives his life with his own rules that please him. Lastly, he is not an outsider to his natural environment, because since he is so familiar with it, it has started to affect his emotions and mood. One can say that Meursault is an outsider to society, but not to himself and the environment.