

Review

Psychological Interpretation of the novel *The Stranger* by Camus

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Of all the critical approaches to literature, the psychological has been one of the most controversial and for many readers the least appreciated. Yet, for all the difficulties involved in its application to interpretive analysis, the psychological approach can be fascinating and rewarding. This psychological interpretation is an excellent tool for reading between the lines.

The proposed work titled "Psychological Interpretation of Camus's *The Stranger*" aims to explore the consciousness of the author and his work. It was published in July 1942 and a few months later Le Mythe de Sisyphe [The Myth of Sisyphus] an essay that raises the problem of how to live in a world without clear meaning. His early works are based on the assumption that there are no absolute moral values that life is a matter of living from day to day, trying to find happiness. Albert Camus through this novel *The Stranger* brings out various concepts like existentialism, nothingness, death of god etc. what the dissertation aims to do is to provide an in-depth understanding of Absurdism, Existentialism, Freudian concept of unconscious mind and some psychological problem based on the novel with the help of psychological interpretation and psychoanalytic criticism.

KEY WORDS: Absurd, Existentialism, Unconscious, Psychology.

INTRODUCTION:

Charles Darwin's *Origin of species* in the nineteenth century had a profound impact on mankind, which changed the entire understanding of human existence. Man questioned the existence of God. Science was paramount while Religion and Philosophy took a back seat. Moving into the twentieth century the two biggest events to shape the century were without doubt the two World Wars, which plunged Nations into misery and chaos. The Atom bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki shook an entire generation and faith in mankind was lost forever. Throughout these two centuries literary works in the form of Poetry, Novels and Drama have

reflected the ideas that have changed the mankind. A closer look at the literary works would reveal that man's existence and his survival has been a constant subject of debate and discussion in the second half of the twentieth century. Absurdism, in *The Stranger* Camus shows this 'absurd' sensibility by creating a character who makes none of the normal assumptions about life, a man without social ambition, without belief in any religious or rational meaning in the universe. Meursault, whose only desire is to live a simple, sensual life, is led, through a series of chance events, to commit murder, and is condemned to death. The novel is thus an image of the 'absurd'

opposition between man and the universe. Then we would be getting acquainted with Existentialism, The whole philosophical movement called existentialism talks about life as meaningless, accidental, there is no purpose behind it. It's full of anxiety and anguish which are incurable (King, 1980).

Psychoanalytic criticism analyses literature as an imaginative expression of the inner workings of the human mind. It is strongly influenced by the ideas of Sigmund Freud. The basic premise of Freudian psychoanalysis is the tremendous power the unconscious mind has on our conscious life. The conscious mind is only the tip of the iceberg. Our desires are repressed and pushed into the unconscious. Thus, in the work of Albert Camus, we would be tracing the ideas and philosophical movements of that century to fathom the conscious of the author for these must have influenced him in some way or the other (Chandra, 2007).

Since this analysis interprets the text psychologically, the prominent psychological terminologies have been used to comprehend the behavior of the main character Meursault who is psychologically sick with phobias, anxiety disorders and lacks emotional intelligence quotient.

It aims at delivering the psychological insights into our dominant emotions like reconciliation, depression and animosity with reference to *The Stranger*. Hence we could befriend with our feelings, emotions and thoughts.

It happened in New York that one somnambulist.... There are so many people, somnambulists, that you would not believe it – ten percent of the whole humanity. They get up in the night, they go to the fridge; they eat something which the doctor has forbidden them, because they are getting fatter and fatter and creating their own death, committing a slow suicide. In the day somehow they manage to repress, but in the night the conscious mind is fast asleep, and the unconscious does not miss the opportunity. It knows the way, and they walk with open eyes; even in the dark they don't stumble. They are worried; their doctor is worried, their family is worried." We have reduced your food, we are not giving you any sugar, and still you go on becoming fat!" And they are also worried that things go on disappearing from the fridge. And you cannot hold that person responsible, because he doesn't remember anything at all in the morning. But this New York case became world-famous.

This man used to live in a fifty-story building, on the last story. In the night he would get up, go to the terrace and jump across to the other house which was close by. The distance was such that nobody could have dared, with consciousness, to take such a jump – and it was an everyday routine! Soon people became aware and started gathering underneath to see, because it was almost a miracle. The crowd started becoming bigger and bigger, and one day, when the man was just about to jump, the crowd shouted loudly, hailing the man. That

made him wake up. But it was too late – he had taken the jump. He could not reach the other terrace – although each day he had been going to the other terrace, coming back, going to his room and falling asleep. But because he became conscious and he saw what he was doing.... But he had already taken the jump. He fell down from fifty stories and his body was shattered in fragments on the road.

THE STRANGER

The famous lines introducing Meursault's mother opening the novel. He is not sure whether she had died today or yesterday since the telegram was not specific. Furthermore he does not really think it matters. He asks for two days off and takes the bus to the home he had put his mother in when he could no longer afford to take care of her. He sleeps on the way there. At the home, Meursault meets the director and the caretaker and is taken to see his mother. He chooses not to look at her and sits by her side as friends come to mourn during the night. He chats with the caretaker, naps, smokes, and has some coffee. In the morning, the funeral procession walks the hour into town for the ceremony. The sun is scorching and Meursault feels more oppressed by the heat than sad over his mother's death. Her fiancé Thomas perez, however is in tears and must struggle to keep up by taking shortcuts. After the, Meursault catches the bus home and looks forward to sleeping twelve hours.

He wakes up the next day and realizes that it is a weekend and is not surprised his boss was annoyed. He gets up late and then decides to go to the beach where he loves to swim. Once there he sees a woman he used to be attracted to at work Marie Cardona. They are instantly attracted and agree to see a movie later that night. Marie is surprised to hear that Meursault's mother died only yesterday. That night they see a comedy and go back to Meursault's. She is gone the next morning before Meursault gets up. He remembers that he hates Sundays because they are boring so he takes a nap. Finally he gets up, makes lunch and settles on the balcony to watch people pass. Different crowds move by throughout the day including families, soccer fans, and moviegoers. He eats dinner standing up, watches some more, and then moves inside when it gets colder and darker.

A work day follows. His boss, trying to be kind, asks about his mother but is relieved when Meursault says his mother was about sixty when she died. Meursault has a great deal of work to do before lunch. On the break, he and Immanuel jump onto a moving fire truck. Meursault eats lunch, takes a nap, and returns to work. Arriving home after work, he runs into Salamano and his dog and thinks of the routine the ridiculous pair always follow. Meursault sees Raymond next who invites him over for

dinner. They talk about Raymond's fight with an Arab and then, his cheating girlfriend. He asks Meursault to write a letter to her for him to make her feel bad about what she did. Then he can punish her when she comes back to him. Meursault agrees to write the letter because he is there and Raymond seems to like it very much and says they are pals.

Meursault works hard the following week and attends the movies twice with Emmanuel. On Saturday he sees Marie and they go swimming. He admires her beauty. They frolic in the water and then hurry back to the apartment to have sex. She stays for the morning and asks if he loves her. He says no.

They are interrupted by the loud fight between Raymond and his girlfriend. They go watch as Raymond is beating the woman but Meursault does not want to call the police since he does not like them. The cops break it up, slapping Raymond when he will not remove a cigarette from his mouth.

Marie and Meursault make lunch but Marie no longer has much of an appetite. After Marie leaves, Raymond comes over and they agree the woman received her punishment. They go out to drink and play pool. They meet Salamano on the way back. He has lost his dog and is upset. Meursault suggests that he check the pound where he could pay a fee for the dog. Salamano is outraged at the idea of paying. He later gets the rest of the details on the pound from Meursault and then goes home. Meursault can hear him crying. He thinks of Maman and goes to bed without dinner.

Meursault receives a call from Raymond at the office which annoys. He is invited by Raymond to bring Marie to his friend's house and told that an Arab relative of Raymond's woman has been following Raymond. Soon after, Meursault's boss offers him a job where he would be transferred to Paris. Meursault admits he is happy enough where he is and the boss berates his lack of ambition. That evening he sees Marie who asks if he will marry her. Meursault says he will if she wants but still says he does not love her. Marie still wants to marry him. She is excited about the prospect of Paris but he thinks it is dirty. Meursault eats dinner alone at Celeste's until he is joined by a jerky robot-like woman. He follows her when she leaves but loses interest. Back at the building, he finds Salamano waiting. His dog was not at the pound and he tells Meursault stories about him and the dog. He does not want another. He also mentions that he is sorry about Maman and understands why he put her in a home though many neighbors do not.

Marie has difficulty waking Meursault on the day they are to join Raymond and his friend. Once outside they see a group of Arabs, like Raymond had mentioned, across the street. They get on the bus for the beach and are not followed. The cottage belongs to Masson and his Parisian wife whom Marie befriends. Meursault is struck by the idea of getting married. Marie and Meursault enjoy

swimming together. Meursault then naps on the beach before playing in the water more with Marie. He devours his lunch and then takes a walk with the other men. They run into two Arabs on the beach and Raymond and Masson fight them. Raymond gets cut and needs to be stitched. When they return, he takes off down the beach again. Meursault follows him though he wanted to be left alone. They find the Arab but Meursault convinces Raymond to give him his gun. Nothing happens and the men walk back. Meursault is affected by the sun and heat and goes back onto the beach. He finds himself near the Arab again and is drawn closer. With the heat and glare of the knife, Meursault shoots the gun once and then four more times, killing the Arab.

Part Two of the novel takes place after Meursault's arrest. He is taken to prison and held there. The magistrate gives him a lawyer although Meursault does not think it is necessary. He is taken into an interrogation room with a single lamp like in books he has read. It seems like a game but the magistrate is reasonable. His lawyer visits him the next day and is disturbed that he will not agree to say that he repressed his natural feelings on the day of Maman's funeral. Meursault considers stopping him to explain but is too lazy. The magistrate calls him again and is bothered by the part in his testimony where he hesitated before firing the last four shots. As Meursault cannot explain why, the magistrate takes out a crucifix and attempts to make Meursault repent so God will forgive him.

Meursault does not follow his reasoning nor does he believe in God. Frustrating the magistrate further, Meursault says he is more annoyed than sorry about the crime he has committed. Their discussions after this time are more cordial and Meursault remembers little else he enjoyed as much as these moments between him and the magistrate.

The same eleven months spent talking to the magistrate are also lived daily in the prison. Meursault does not like to talk about this much. Marie visits him once and the visiting room is very crowded, bright, loud, and hot. Meursault finds it hard to concentrate on their conversation, picking up pieces of the mostly Arab conversations around. Marie looks beautiful and Meursault looks at her body more than he listens to her voice. Meursault is hot and dizzy. He almost leaves but wants to take advantage of Marie being there. Soon after she visits, he receives a letter from Marie saying she is not allowed to visit any longer because she is not his wife. Still this time is not so hard for Meursault. He has free man thoughts and urges for awhile, such as the desire to go swimming, but these only last for a few months.

He realizes that he can get used to anything. The first months are especially hard because of his desire for women and cigarettes. Women's faces fill his room with desire but they also help to pass the time. He chews on

pieces of wood to get over smoking and realizes that the only way to really punish him is by taking away these freedoms. The main problem he faces is killing time. To combat time, he catalogs every item in his apartment gaining more and more detail each time he visualizes its entirety. He learns to sleep two thirds of the day. He finds a scrap of a newspaper crime story about a tragic Czech family and reads it over every day.

These items and his memory allow him to ease time. He loses a sense of all but yesterday and today. Meursault realizes that he has even begun talking aloud to himself and that his reflection refuses to smile, but he is not at all unhappy.

The year until the next summer passes quickly and it is time for Meursault's trial. At the courthouse, people cram into to see a spectacle and Meursault realizes that it is he. He feels as if he is being judged. The room is very hot and Meursault feels dizzy. The press has built up his story making the interest and crowds larger than expected. One young reporter in particular examines Meursault thoroughly and the robot woman is also seen in the audience watching intently. His examination is first and he agrees with the judge's reading of his statement. He is irritated by the questions on Maman. After a break, the prosecution's witnesses are called. The director and caretaker of the home testify on Meursault's lack of sympathy toward his mother at the funeral.

Pérez testifies that he could neither see Meursault cry or not cry through his own tears. The defense is then called and Céleste is the first witness. He states that the murder was bad luck. Marie testifies about the day they met following Maman's burial which is turned by the prosecution into a dubious liaison too close to his mother's death. Masson states that Meursault is an honest man and Salamano pleads with the jury to understand. Raymond is the last witness and testifies that Meursault was at the beach by chance and the Arab had hated Raymond. The prosecutor says Meursault is on trial for burying Maman with a crime in his heart. Meursault leaves the courthouse and smells the summer air. He remembers the days when he was happy, noting that his path could have gone either way.

The lawyer's summations follow the next day and Meursault is interested to see what they will say about him. As both speeches are very long, Meursault finds it difficult to pay attention. The prosecutor seems to dwell on his crime being premeditated. Meursault finds the recreation of events plausible and sees how he could be thought of as Raymond's accomplice. Meursault notes how odd it is that his intelligence is used against him.

The prosecutor then spends a long time on Meursault's treatment of Maman. Meursault admits to himself that the prosecutor is correct that he is not able to show remorse. The prosecutor ends by declaring that Meursault's soul is empty and that he is a monster who has paved the way for the parricide trial following. Meursault replies that he

had no intention of killing the Arab. When asked why he did it, he does not know and can only blurt out that it was because of the sun.

The defense lawyer's summation is not as skilled Meursault finds, especially since he does not address Maman's funeral. Meursault does not like how his lawyer replaces his name with "I" and feels further excluded from the entire process. The pointlessness of the trial depresses him and he wishes he could go sleep. Meursault is made to wait in another room as the jury decides and pronounces the verdict. He is brought in for the sentencing and hears that he is going to be decapitated in the name of the French people. He has nothing to say.

In his prison cell, Meursault denies the chaplain three times. He wishes he had paid more attention to executions so that he could think of one possibility where the criminal had escaped the inevitability of the process. He finds the absoluteness of the situation to be arrogant. He remembers Maman's story of his father going to an execution and now understands why. He wishes that he could visit all of the executions from now on. This wish is too painful though since there is such little chance of his freedom. He imagines new penal codes which would allow the condemned to have one chance in ten of escaping his fate.

He realizes that his concept of the guillotine has always been skewed. The two things he thinks about most though are dawn and his appeal. Meursault knows that the executioners would come right before dawn so he waits up every night. Although he knows everyone will die, the thought of his appeal is maddening. He must convince himself of its impossibility in order to introduce to himself the chance of a pardon, which when faced rationally, gives him an hour of calm.

He thinks of Marie for the first time in a while at such a moment and the chaplain comes in. Asked why he has refused him, Meursault answers that he does not believe in God. Meursault tries to convince the chaplain that he has little time to devote to other thoughts and the chaplain's words do not interest him. The chaplain is surprised to learn that Meursault truly believes there is nothing after death. He points out that every sufferer has found the face of God in the prison stones. Meursault has looked only for Marie and not found her. The chaplain refuses to accept Meursault's behavior. Meursault snaps, yelling at him that he does wish for another life but one where he could remember the present one. He attacks the chaplain as the one who is dead inside, waiting for something after life.

Meursault realizes that he has been right all along. He had lived his life one way but it did not matter and no one's life, death, or love made a difference to him. Every life is worth the same and all are privileged.. The guards tear the chaplain away and Meursault falls asleep. When he wakes, it is night. The sirens blast just before dawn

and Meursault thinks of Maman. He understands her need to live life all over again, explaining why she took a fiancé so close to death. No one has a right to cry over her. He opens himself to the indifference of the world and finds it to be a brother. He is happy. To feel less alone, he only hopes that a crowd of haters will welcome him at his execution.

APPREHENDING ABSURDISM:

Meursault's story is an example of that opposition between man and the external universe that Camus terms the 'absurd'. Meursault is a man who wants to be happy, who wants to continue living, who would have liked, when he was a student, to plan a useful life for himself. He comes up against a universe, however, that will not allow these desires to be fulfilled.

He has been aware, from the time he gave up his studies, that ambition is futile.

His life is a monotonous repetition of tasks at work, Sunday spent watching people from his balcony. He realises at the end of his story that death is the common fate of all men, that death renders any attempt to plan for the future-- whether a job in Paris or marriage to Marie-- meaningless.

A series of chance events- writing a letter for Raymond because he wanted to be agreeable, returning to the beach because he didn't want to talk to Marie and Mme Masson, misinterpreting the flash of light on the Arab's knife blade- leads to a disruption of his life, a shattering of 'the balance of the day'. There is no logical explanation of what happens.

Meursault says he kills the Arab 'because of the sun'; the sun is often a hostile force throughout the events he describes. The novel shows the conflict between man and a universe governed by the sun, which is a symbol of death. Meursault cannot continue living 'because of the sun', because man is fated to die. He would, however, like to begin living again just when he is about to be executed. At the end of his life he sees that he has been happy. Life has offered moments of pleasure. Although the sun governs the universe, the natural world is beautiful and has given him the calm of the evening, the coolness of the sea, the laughter of Marie. Because of these simple pleasures, and because he is aware of what he is doing and honest with himself, Meursault realises that, like Sisyphus in Camus's version of the myth, he is happy.

A Zen Master was asked, "What did you use to do before you became enlightened?"

He said, "I used to chop wood and carry water from the well for my Master's house."

The inquirer asked, "And now that you have become enlightened, what do you do?"

He said, "I chop wood and carry water."

The inquirer was obviously puzzled.

"Then what is the difference? You used to chop wood and carry water, you still chop wood and still carry water then what is the difference?" The Master laughed. He said, "The difference is infinite! Before I simply used to chop wood not knowing the beauties that surrounded me. Now chopping wood is not the same because I am not the same. My eyes are not the same, my heart beats in a different rhythm — my heart beats with the heart of the whole. There is a synchronicity, there is harmony. "Carrying water from the well is the same from the outside, but my interior has become totally different. I am a new man, I am born again! Now I can see in depth, I can see into the very core of things, and each pebble has become a diamond, and each song of a bird is nothing but a call from God, and whenever a flower blooms, God blooms for me. Looking into people's eyes I am looking into God's eyes.

Yes, on the surface I am carrying on the same activity, but because I am not the same the world is not the same."

Start becoming a little more alert and watch things, and you will be surprised. Life is mysterious, unexplainable — life is absurd. You cannot prove anything for or against.

Tertullian says: I believe in God because God is absurd — CREDO QUIA ABSURDUM. WHY do I believe in God? — Because God is absurd! No logic can prove him, no logic can disprove him. It is a love affair. And life is very hilarious because it is very ridiculous too. If you become a little alert you will find love, light, laughter, everywhere!

It is said that when Hotei attained enlightenment he started laughing. He lived at least thirty years afterwards; he continued laughing for thirty years. Even in sleep his disciples would hear him giggling.

His whole message to the world was laughter; he would go from one town to another just laughing. He would stand in one marketplace, then in another, just laughing, and people would gather. His laughter had something of the beyond — a Buddha's laughter. He is known in Japan as 'the laughing Buddha'.

His laughter was so contagious that whosoever heard it would start laughing. Soon the whole marketplace would be laughing; crowds would gather and laugh and they would ask him, "Just give us a few instructions." He would say, "Nothing more, this is enough. If you can laugh, if you can laugh totally, it is meditation."

Laughter was his device. It is said many people became enlightened through Hotei's laughter. That was his only meditation: to laugh and help people laugh. Just watch life, and you will be surprised.

Just look at people! And each person is a fiction, and each person carries so many stories in his heart. Love people, search in their souls, and you will not need to go

to the movies and you will not need to read novels. EACH person contains many novels and many movies, but we don't listen to people. We don't see people face to face, we don't hold their hands, we don't allow them to open their hearts.

For the first time humanity has become much closed. Each person is living a windowless life, completely encapsulated. Open up! Throw your doors and windows open. Let wind and rain and sun come in. Let people enter into you and you enter into people's lives. That is the only way to become aware of the tremendous mystery of life. And to be aware of the mystery of life is to be aware of God.

EXPLAINING EXISTENTIALISM

The type of speculation about the nature of the universe and man's place in it found in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* is related to Existentialism. Although Camus cannot be considered an existentialist philosopher, he was concerned primarily with analysing existence, trying to see what was clear without supposing any rational or religious foundation beyond our immediate experience.

He was undoubtedly influenced by the kind of philosophical thought associated with Existentialism. The existentialist philosophers rejected any attempt to find reason and order in the universe. They felt there was no meaning to life beyond what man might try to impose on his environment. Behind this anti-rationalism were the discoveries of modern physics, in which the mechanical principles of the movement of particles seemed no longer to hold. Another influence was the psychology of Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), who studied the irrational underlying impulses of human behaviour.

The existentialist position has been summarised as: 'existence precedes essence'. This means that existing objects and living beings come first; our idea of the essence of anything is only derived from what we learn of existing individuals. At first sight this may seem simple common sense. We know what the word 'cat' means, for example, because we have seen cats. But idealistic philosophers (philosophers who believe that ideas exist, perhaps in the mind of God) have often argued that the idea or essence comes first, the many existing examples of this essence come later.

Two questions arise from a consideration of essence and existence that have a bearing on *The Stranger* and Camus's own philosophical speculation. The first is 'what is a particular individual human being?' In our ordinary experience we tend to classify other people, and even ourselves: 'George is lazy'; 'I am brave, so I will go first'. In other words, we give ourselves and other people an 'essence'. To the existentialist, such an attitude is false. A person is the sum of all the things he has ever done; at any moment he is free to do something quite different

from what either he or someone else might have expected.

Our past experience, or our heredity, or our social situation might influence what we do, but we are free to choose. Camus agrees with this concept of man's freedom to choose. An essential part of being human is being constantly aware of ourselves in relation to the world around us. In *The Stranger* Meursault refuses to give himself an 'essence' as a 'loving son', or as a 'criminal'.

A second question is 'what is good'? Is 'good' or 'evil' something that can be defined, apart from particular examples? To take an instance related to *The Stranger* can we make such a statement as 'It is good to love your mother'? Or does moral judgement depend on each individual case? Camus began, in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, by considering a relativist moral position: moral judgements are always relative to the situation. But he was not satisfied with this position. Without accepting any absolute moral or religious system, he tried to see what values can be found in human experience. In this search for moral values, Camus moves away from Relativism and Existentialism. Everything is wrong with the world. It is only the retarded people who don't feel bored. You are intelligent. You can see that there is nothing meaningful. Life is a drag, a repetition. There seems to be no adventure in it, no challenge; there seems to be no hope. Tomorrow will be again the same as yesterday. It is the prerogative only of human beings to get bored; no other animal gets bored in existence. Have you seen any animal in existence being bored? Boredom is a high quality of intelligence. It means you are perceptive; you can see that there is nothing but -- finally -- death. Empty handed you have come, and one day empty handed you will leave, and all that happens in between birth and death is simply tedious. So I cannot say there is anything wrong with you. Every intelligent person thinks that perhaps what is not available in life may be available in death (Thody, 1989).

Psychologists have found that almost every intelligent person at least once in his life thinks of committing suicide -- he may not commit it, but the idea comes. Particularly in this century, the greatest philosophers -- Jean-Paul Sartre, Jaspers, Martin Heidegger, Soren Kierkegaard, Marcel.... Almost all the topmost thinkers of the contemporary world are agreed on one thing -- they don't agree on many things, but on one thing they are all in absolute agreement -- that life is meaningless. And if this is so, then the question naturally arises, why go on living? If there is no meaning, no significance, then what is the need to be dragged from the cradle to the grave unnecessarily? This is the only contemporary philosophy: existentialism (Robert and John, 1977).

There have been many philosophies born in different ages, but in this age there has been only one philosophy and that is existentialism. And its basic ground is so

strange that one feels that all these people are mad. If they are not mad, then we are mad -- there is no other alternative. The whole philosophical movement called existentialism talks about life as meaningless, accidental, there is no purpose behind it; it is full of anxiety and anguish -- which are incurable.

FREUD AND THE UNCONSCIOUS:

Freud's greatest achievement was in making it publicly known that the question WHO AM I is not nearly as easily answered as we once thought. Far from being who we think we are, a great deal of our psychic activity goes on, on an unconscious level.

FREUD AND CULTURAL CONDITIONING

First we must look at Freud within the culture in which he was born. Each and every person born into this world is conditioned by the society she or he is born into and Freud was no exception. Who we are is very definitely modified, not only by our needing to be acceptable to the people we come into contact with, but by the particular way in which our particular society lives. What was acceptable in Roman Times would be unlikely to be so now. Freud seemed to be a bit blind to this, possibly because most of his clients came from the same social class as him. The culture he was born into was bourgeoisie capitalist society and there is no doubt that his work is limited by his largely uncritical acceptance of it. He directly experienced this when he discovered that many of his "hysterical" patients had suffered from incest or other sexual abuse as children. When he tried to get this recognized by society, the pressure from his peers became so unbearable, that he turned this into his well known "Oedipus complex" - very much an idea related to his time. Freud then was concerned with individual psychology. Although he accepted that people would be affected by the people with whom they associated, he nonetheless did not concern himself with the collective psychic forces, which affect all of us; Carl Jung of course took this up.

FREUD AND BASIC IMPULSES:

Freud saw humans as having two basic impulses. The first being for pleasure, the second being self-preservation. He believed that all of our impulses are sexually motivated although we may redirect this energy into other activities. He was the first person to talk about the unconscious and I think this is his greatest legacy. He discovered that as well as our conscious activity, each person has a great deal of psychic activity going on, of

which he or she is largely unaware of it. He believed that the pleasure principal and largely sexual pleasure was the motivating force behind the activity going on in the unconscious. To Freud then, "Man" had two primary motivations, self-preservation and sex. He saw people as primarily motivated by biological motivations, which he called the Id; a baby would be 100% Id. However within a very short time the child would discover that it was not safe to follow its basic impulses as these frequently lead to psychic and physical pain. Here Freud has tapped into what is universally found within depth psychology and Eastern Religions, that is that at some point we recognize that it is not safe to be spontaneously who we are. Freud saw the young child then developing what he called a "Superego". This is a part of oneself that accepts as real what one has been taught from one's parents and society. A person will integrate this and act as if this is what they themselves really believe. This he called the Reality Principle. Again, another good idea sounds similar to Carl Rogers view of "false self concept". If Freud had not thought society were so good he could have come up with some good healing, not to say political ideas here! Freud however believed that this process was necessary for civilization. An advantage was that people could direct the unfulfilled pleasure principle into other activities such as intellectual pursuits, the arts, music and so on which create culture.

The disadvantage he saw was that if it was impossible to come to a workable compromise in one's psyche all kinds of problems would happen. These could range from anxiety to psychosomatic illnesses to much more serious problems. There is a difference between who we are and who we think we are; Freud showed that there is often a great difference between what we feel and believe and what we think we feel and believe! There is a great difference between who a person really is and who they think they are. We have a need to rationalize unconscious processes to keep the self-image that we have built intact. For example, a person may go to watch porn movies claiming he wants to see what is going on so that he can stop it and protect our morals when really, sometimes even unbeknown to himself, he is really going because he enjoys the porn. Our motivations can often be quite different to our awareness. Freud showed that there is a great difference between who we are in our instinctual selves and who we need to become in order to function effectively in the society. We are far less aware of our own thoughts and inclinations than we once believed. He believed that by becoming more aware of our unconscious through dreams and being analyzed we could become more conscious, mature and independent.

There is no question that Freud's work was revolutionary for his time. However it suffers both from his inability to see how he himself was affected by his culture and from the fact that he believed the Id was mainly full of nasty things. He also, I believe makes a mistake in

seeing the pleasure principle as primarily sexual, although at the same time I think he was very near the truth.

Many people are coming to recognize that spirituality and sexual feelings are very closely linked. There is definitely a link which possibly in our over eagerness to express on a sexual level we sometimes miss. Apparently in past times it was not uncommon for people involved in spiritual quests to welcome feeling love including sexual love, particularly if that person was in a committed relationship and so completely off limits. The spiritual aspirant then would allow themselves to move past the sexual element of their love and so become more in touch with their own love and spirituality. I think it is far more our own spirit than our sexuality which we are forced to hide. We are hiding our genuineness and that is what causes the problems. However it is understandable given the sexual repression within the culture Freud was born into that he could have mistaken this for sexuality.

TAKE CARE WHEN DEALING WITH THE UNCONSCIOUS:

There is also obviously a danger when ideas about an unconscious come up and people need to be very careful if they wish to get help along these lines that the therapist who is helping them does not put ideas into their head. It is not a good idea to allow anyone else to claim they know more about what is going on in your unconscious than you do. They almost certainly do not and even if they did it would be of no use to you until you yourself recognized it. Cults and therapists who create false memories use Freud's ideas on the unconscious in a damaging way. One of my professors told me that everyone around us tries to give solutions to our problems and worries and so she termed them as Mini Fraud Freud. Thus we have to be really careful when we share things with other.

PSYCHONEUROTIC DISORDER:

The term 'neurosis' was coined by William Cullen, an Englishman, in 1769 to refer to disordered sensations of the nervous system. The prevailing conceptualisations of neurosis, as elaborated by WHO and accepted by the general majority of professional workers in this field, are developed out of Freud's work with hysterics mainly and also with other neurotics. Therefore, they are bound up with the psychoanalytic theory. "Anxiety is the chief characteristic of neuroses. It may be felt and expressed directly or it may be controlled unconsciously and automatically by conversion displacement and various other psychological mechanisms. Generally there mechanisms produce symptoms experienced as

subjective distress from which the patient desires relief" (American Psychiatric Association, 1968, p.39)

PHOBIC NEUROSIS:

Extreme and irrational fear and avoidance of an object or situation which the person is able to recognise as harmless. A phobia is an avoidance response, produced by fear that is out of proportion to the actual danger posed by a particular object or situation. For example, when a person is extremely afraid of heights, closed spaces, or crowds and actively avoids them, the label "phobia" is likely to be applied. Complicated names have been proposed for such behaviours; in each case, the suffix "phobia" is preceded by the Greek term for the feared object or situation.

Freud was the first to attempt to account for the development of phobia. According to him, phobias result from anxiety that is produced by repressed id impulses. This anxiety is displaced from the id impulses to an object or situation that has some symbolic connection with this fear. These objects or situations then become the phobic stimuli. The character Meursault is also to some extent suffers from this phobic neurosis. For an instance, after his mother's funeral he says the following day. "I slept until ten. After that I stayed in bed until noon, smoking cigarettes. I decided not to lunch at Céleste's restaurant as I usually did; they'd be sure to pester me with questions, and I dislike being questioned. So I fried some eggs and ate them off the pan." Thus he avoids the situation. Another instance from the novel. "Then we-- I and the magistrate settled back in our chairs and the examination began. He led off by remarking that I had the reputation of being a taciturn, rather self-centred person, and he'd like to know what I had to say to that. I answered: "Well, I rarely have anything much to say. So, naturally I keep my mouth shut" Then the magistrate asked him. "But why, why did you go on firing at prostrate man?" again I found nothing to reply. The magistrate drew his hand across his forehead and repeated in a slightly different tone: "I ask you 'why' I insist on your telling me." I still kept silent.

NEURASTHENIC NEUROSIS:

Feelings of chronic fatigue and weakness and lack of enthusiasm. The character Meursault also lacks enthusiasm and interest. He is primarily passive, because he has no particular ambitions. He lacks what the psychologist calls achievement motivations. For an instance, he is nervous about using the telephone for personal calls and is afraid his employer is annoyed. The employer, however, calls him into his office, to offer him a job in Paris. Meursault replies that he will go if requested,

but he doesn't care. 'One life was as good as another and my present one suited me quite well.' The employer thinks Meursault has no ambition. After the interview, in a rare instance of thinking about something besides the present, Meursault says that when he was a student he had ambitions, but when he had to drop his studies he realised ambition was futile.

COMMITMENT PHOBIA:

Meursault in this novel doesn't want to commit himself into any relationship. When Marie asks Meursault if he loves her, he replies 'that sort of question had no meaning, really; but I supposed I didn't.' 'When she laughs I always want to kiss her.' This is what he feels, but he will not call this feeling 'love', since he does not generalise from his immediate emotions. That evening Marie asks Meursault to marry her. His reply is similar to his reply to his employer; he will marry her if she wants. Marriage is not serious. (From his point of view, only the present moment is serious.)

Marie wonders whether she loves him. With his usual refusal to try to interpret others, he replies that he couldn't tell her what she feels. Marie thinks he is strange, but decides she does want to marry him. Thus we could find a fear of commitment in him. I met a psychologist and counsellor to get more information about this novel *The Stranger*. She told me that this character Meursault lacks emotional quotient and so he didn't mourn for the death of his mother and did not really love Marie. For an instance, in Part II Chapter 1, the lawyer visits Meursault in his cell. Inquiries made at Marengo have shown that Meursault was callous at the time of his mother's funeral, so the lawyer wants Meursault to say he felt 'grief'. This sort of generalised abstraction means nothing to Meursault, who replies that he has 'lost the habit of noting my feelings'. He will say he was fond of his mother, but adds that 'all normal people... had more or less desired the death of those they loved, at some time or another'. Later, the examining magistrate questions Meursault; because of inquiries into Meursault's past behaviour, the magistrate also asks if he loved his mother. The blunt reply-- 'like everybody else'-- shocks the secretary who is typing Meursault's statement. Even in the trial, the porter gives evidence that Meursault did not want to see the body, drank café au lait and smoked during the vigil. Thomas Pérez says he did not see Meursault crying, but admits that he cannot say Meursault did not cry. Thus this character lacks EQ.

FREUD'S CREATIVE WRITERS AND DAY-DREAMING:

Sigmund Freud's influence is not restricted to just psychoanalysis alone. His great impact is felt on literary

theory and literary criticism as well. Freud's theory of why do we dream, 'unconscious' and 'working of mind' are notable achievements in the field of literary theory domain. His *Dream Work* is an original work of him. Freud says that the most common activities are influenced by our unconscious mind and there is only one way to reach the unconscious is that is through the dream. He differentiates between the manifest and latent dreams where both feed on each other to some extent. He talks about the night dreams and day-dreams. Basically Freud gives the four stages for dreams such as consolidation, displacement, representation and revision. He explains these terms by saying that the thoughts, first of all, are abridged and displaced and represented orderly in a form and the activity would be completed by revision. But in his later writing he leaves the last phase out.

Freud's categorization of Id, Ego and Super-ego is peculiar. He says that most of the thoughts are the product of Id that would be repressed and suppressed in Ego or Super-ego, and finally they would find their place in dreams. In this way dreaming is one of the important activities. He also puts forward the idea of 'talking-cure'. Freud is much influenced by the idea of how creative writing takes place.

Freud observes that creative writing and day-dreaming are similar activities. To explain this, Freud talks about 'child's-play'. Child creates his/her own world in his/her play. He orders and arranges his work. The child is very much conscious of his play. He differentiates his play with reality. In other words, he would not mistake his play with reality. Something analogous to this happens in creative writing process. Freud further explains that in his later phase i.e. adulthood, the child ceases to play. Now he indulges in what is called 'fancy' or 'day-dreaming'. Like child's play the writer also arranges his material in an orderly form. He is also conscious of his work. He does not mistake his writing for reality.

Freud compares child's play with day-dreaming as creative (writing) process. The only difference between the child and the adult (writer) is that the child is not ashamed of his play whereas the adult hesitates to tell his day-dreaming or reveries. The adult does not play in physical sense like the child but he will fancy and would build a castle in the air. In this way, the play of childhood is a continuation and a substitution for day-dreaming.

Both create their own world without mistaking them for reality. Freud suggests that day-dreaming is inseparable part of the human-psyche and is very essential for creative writing. Like his character Meursault, Camus grew up after the First World War. Many men were then led to question the social, moral and religious values on which European civilisation had been built. Often the rational knowledge of the world in which men had trusted seemed undermined by new scientific theories. In *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, Camus describes the sensibility of his

era, which he terms the 'absurd'. The 'absurd' is the incompatibility between man's desires for life and for meaning and the indifferent universe which is based on death and incoherence. Of what use are moral values, when we know we are to die? Why should we make any plans, when life is irrational? In such a world, what is left but the desire to be true to one's own feelings? Camus decides that human dignity kids in continuing to look for happiness while always being conscious of the ultimate defeat of death. It is from his life in Algeria in the 1930s that Camus drew the background for *The Stranger*. He saw the poverty, petty violence and racial tension of daily life; he was part of the younger generation that rejected the conventions of middle-class society. His relationship with his mother, described in *L'Envers et l'Endroit*, has some similarities to that of Meursault. After he left home at the age of seventeen, Camus found he had little to say to her. His experience in a tuberculosis sanatorium, where he was isolated from others, unable to enjoy the sun and the beaches, may have helped him to describe his hero's imprisonment.

Like his hero, Camus had to abandon his studies. More profoundly, Camus's continuing battle against tuberculosis taught him what Meursault sees clearly at the end of his life, that happiness is precarious, that any day he might die. Camus says in his notebooks: 'There people were sources for *The Stranger*: two men (one of them me) and one woman.' As a reporter Camus covered a number of trials and often wrote articles attacking government hypocrisy.

(The reporter at Meursault's trial, a very slight figure, is probably Camus's self-portrait.) When he was a reporter for *Alger Républicain*, he sometimes signed articles under a variety of pseudonyms; the paper had few funds and was short-staffed, but wanted to give the impression it had many reporters. One of Camus's pseudonyms was Jean Meursault.

There are traces of his own experience and situation in *The Stranger*. Like Meursault, Camus had a spell working in a shipping office, and also seems to have been slightly less efficient than his hero- who is good enough to be offered promotion- when he worked as a clerk in the Préfecture d'Alger. On one occasion he gave the same registration number to two different cars. Meursault also has the same love of swimming as Camus himself, the same appreciation of the minor pleasures of life in a Mediterranean seaport, and the same memories of a dead father. But in *The Stranger*, Camus was not exploiting these personal details in order deliberately to create a character that the reader would recognise as autobiographical. He was compensating for his relative lack of inventive or imaginative powers by picking out aspects of his own personal experience which fitted in with the mood and ideas he was seeking to communicate.

THE SOCIAL BEHAVIOR OF MEURSAULT:

Social Behaviors, perhaps more than other living creatures, humans spend most of their waking lives in social interaction (talking, fighting, making love, and so forth); therefore, to have a more thorough understanding of psychology, it is important to know how people interact. Social psychology is that branch of psychology that deals with people as social beings; the social psychologist studies both the private psychological experiences that influence how we behave with others (why we are attracted toward certain people, why we cooperate with certain individual or aggress against them), as well as the ways in which people-- both individually and in groups-- change their behaviour as a result of the social context in which they act (Frank, 1980, 1984).

COMPLIANCE:

We have certainly seen that there are various ways in which people will conform and obey because of great pressures exerted on them by others. As one team of researchers observed: "If a person is subjected to enough social pressure, offered enough reward, threatened with enough pain, or given enough convincing reasons, he will, under most circumstances, eventually yield and perform the required act" (Freedman, Wallington, and Bless, 1967). There is ample evidence to support this conclusion. For an instance, in Camus's *The Stranger*, Meursault conforms because of great pressure from the magistrate. "While I was talking, he thrust the crucifix again just under my nose and shouted: "I, anyhow, am a Christian. And I pray Him to forgive you for your sins. My poor young man, how can you not believe that he suffered for your sake?"

I noticed that his manner seemed genuinely solicitous when he said, "My poor young man"-- but I was beginning to have enough of it. The room was growing steadily hotter. As I usually do when I want to get rid of someone whose conversation bores me I pretended to agree. At which, rather to my surprise, his face lit up".

EFFECTS OF CROWDING ON SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR:

"I would rather have a pumpkin all to myself, than be crowded on a velvet cushion." Henry David Thoreau once remarked," This view-- that crowding is detrimental to productive work and to one's physical and psychological well-being-- has been borne out by studies with animals suggesting that increased aggression and other difficulties among individuals are much more likely to arise under crowded rather than non-crowded conditions (Loo, 1973). Even in this novel, the main character

Meursault does not like to be around crowd. Most of the day he watches people in the streets, and describes them in some detail, thus he spends time alone in his balcony.

The main character Meursault tells his story in his own words is not like the usual character in a novel. Meursault is a man who lost any ambition he had when he had to give up his studies, and who also lost the habit of analysing his own feelings. He lives simply from day to day, without looking for any pattern in what happens, reacting to events and people without attempting to give his thoughts and emotions any consistency. When he tells his story, it is as a series of immediate sensations and impressions. He is an 'outsider' to himself, detached from his own life, never thinking of a permanent identity. He remains calm, as if what was occurring might be happening to someone else; only occasionally does he mention a physical sensation that gives him pleasure or that annoys him.

Meursault is also aware that, because he does not make the usual plans men form to give their lives a purpose, he is an 'outsider' to society; he does not fit in. He does not want, however, to call attention to himself. As a result, he is usually deferential to others, willing to do what he is asked to do. Since he does not often think about himself, he also does not think about other people, but simply accepts their actions without judging them. As Meursault relates the events of his life, therefore, he seems rather detached from usual human emotions, and unconcerned with explaining himself or other people. Meursault, who tells the story, is not interested in the private life of the magistrate or the warden, and he attacks no one. Rather, the satiric target is middle-class beliefs: the belief that all men fear God and eternal judgment, and that religion can be used as a means of social control; the belief that certain attitudes are necessarily moral (one must love one's mother); the belief that life is rational. The public prosecutor makes a reasonable case for seeing Meursault as part of the petty underworld to which Raymond belongs, but the reader knows this is not true. *The Stranger* presents a character that goes against these conventional beliefs, who refuses to play a usual social role, and yet who is basically likeable and honest. The plot suggests that those who accept unthinkingly the conventions of society do not understand what human nature is.

Meursault is quite at home in his own fairly small social sub-group. The people who know him find him quite acceptable, and there is no doubt about the feelings which he inspires in Marie. But as soon as his crime brings him into contact with society at large, the possibility of anyone understanding him totally disappears.

SOCIAL BEHAVIOR:

Our perception of ourselves in relation to the rest of the

world plays an important role in our choices, behaviors, and beliefs. Conversely, the opinions of others also impact our behavior and the way we view ourselves. Social psychology is a branch of psychology concerned with how social phenomena influence us and how people interact with others. There are some basic aspects of social behavior that play a large role in our actions and how we see ourselves.

- Social behavior is goal-oriented. Our interactions function to serve a goal or fulfill a need. Some common goals or needs include the need for social ties, the desire to understand ourselves and others, the wish to gain or maintain status or protection, and to attract companions.

- The interaction between the individual and the situation determines the outcome. In many instances, people behave very differently in various situations. The situation plays an important role and has a strong influence on our behavior.

- People spend a great deal of time considering social situations. Our social interaction helps form our self-concept and perception. One method of forming self-concept is through a reflected appraisal process in which we imagine how other people see us.

- We also analyze and explain the behavior of those around us. One common phenomenon is expectation confirmation, where we tend to ignore unexpected attributes and look for evidence that confirms our preexisting beliefs about others. This helps simplify our worldview, but it also skews our perception and can contribute to stereotyping.

- Another influence on our perceptions of other people can be explained by the theory of correspondent inferences. This occurs when we infer that the actions and behaviors of others correspond to their intentions and personalities.

While behavior can be informative in some instances, especially when the person's actions are intentional, it can also be misleading. If we have limited interaction with someone, the behavior we see may be atypical or caused by the specific situation rather than by the person's overriding dispositional characteristics. Studying social psychology can enrich our understanding of ourselves and of the world around us.

THE TRAIT OF MEURSAULT:

Meursault- the name combines Mer (sea) and Sol (soleil, sun) - is presented through the way he tells his story. He does not, until the final chapter, analyse his emotional reactions or give his opinions of other people, or many facts about himself. Only when he tries to pretend that 'it

makes little difference whether one dies at the age of thirty or three-score and ten', do we know his probable age. We do not know his first name. Nor are the judgements of other characters helpful towards understanding him. Those who represent established society see him as an incomprehensible monster. Those who like him-- Marie, Salamano, Masson, Céleste-- are not sufficiently articulate at the trial to give reasons for their sympathy. From his narration, however it is apparent that Meursault is perceptive of what occurs around him; he observes details of how people look and move, objects, and the natural world. He seldom, however, makes any logical connections between events. He never suggests what other people might be thinking or feeling, only what they do; he never judges others. Because he realises that human behaviour is not always rational, he has deliberately chosen not to try to give a logical coherence to his perceptions or emotions, and not to impose a unity on other people. If Meursault is an 'outsider' to society, he is also a stranger to himself. He refuses to analyse his emotions and refuses to see himself as having any essential personality. His life is a series of random occurrences and his immediate reactions to them.

Meursault is basically passive; things happen to him, people ask him to do something. Very rarely does he initiate any action or conversation. He does invite Marie to go to the cinema, but she chooses the film. Many of the actions for which he is judged morally guilty during the trial-- accepting a café au lait from the porter, seeing a comic film, writing the letter for Raymond -are in fact only responses to others' suggestions. Meursault usually wants to be agreeable to other people, not to disturb them. Although he knows he is an outsider to ordinary society, he does not want to assert his difference. He seems timid when speaking to his employer, to the journalist at the trial, to the examining magistrate; he is always ready to apologise. Ironically, one of his few positive actions, persuading Raymond to give him the gun, leads directly to his becoming a murderer.

Meursault is often lazy and bored, before he is imprisoned. Remembering his room while in prison is similar to sitting watching people from his balcony. He has an intellectual curiosity. He never reads a book, only an old newspaper. Often he accepts life, never wishing for anything, taking what comes. Occasionally Meursault does indicate his attitudes. He does not like the police. He does not believe in God. He does not love Marie. These are mainly negative attitudes. Sometimes he admits to finding something 'interesting': what the porter says about burials in hot countries, the behaviour of the 'little robot', Raymond's conversation. In such cases, he is interested in something rather removed from the usual concerns of men. He is not interested, however, in social advancement, in love, in going to Paris. He knows that any plans or projects are only superficial: 'one never

changed one's real life'. Meursault reacts strongly to the natural world as opposed to the social world. He is always aware of heat, light, sun, sea. Often he complains of being bothered by sunlight, which produces in him a desire to sleep.

He likes water and enjoys swimming, the only physical exercise this rather inactive man normally undertakes.

The most notable characteristic of Meursault is his fundamental honesty about himself, his refusal to give explanation of his own behaviour, to say more about his feelings than what is immediately apparent. He is honest, however, only about himself. He agrees readily to be a witness for Raymond, although he will have to lie to say he knows that the mistress was disloyal; he tells Salamano that his dog 'looked well-bred'. But, when talking about himself, he goes to considerable lengths to avoid having to tell a social lie. He does not go to Céleste's restaurant on the Sunday after the funeral, for example, to avoid being pestered with questions and expected to show conventional reactions. It is this honesty that makes him feel estranged from society and the ways of looking at oneself that it teaches. He refuses to be hypocritical. He shows traits normally considered those of an affectionate son. When he goes to Marengo, he at first wants to see the body. It is only after all the formalities, the conventions surrounding death that he decides not to have the coffin opened. After her death, he occasionally thinks with approval of something his mother said. He will not, however, say he 'loved' his mother, even to save his life.

After he is sentenced to death, however, there is a change in Meursault's personality. Suddenly, because his ordinary life is over, he looks back on it and makes general statements of a kind that he earlier refused to make. To the magistrate he was content to state simply that he did not believe in God. As his death approaches, he defends his attitude towards religion. Earlier, he lived each day as it came; now he is aware of what matters to him; no abstract speculation is worth 'one strand of a woman's hair'. Earlier he enjoyed simple activities. At the end he realises that he was happy.

As a result of being able to look back on his life, Meursault is also aware, as he was not previously, of why he had the feeling that plans were 'futile': because we are all going to die, because every man is guilty and has been given the death penalty. He knows that such an absolute judgment makes nonsense of any moral values. When the chaplain attempts to make him repent, for the first time Meursault loses his timidity and passivity. He sees his own view of life as worth defending, and he is now willing to incur the wrath of others.

ALBERT CAMUS ON MONSIEUR MEURSAULT

January 8, 1955

I summarized *The Stranger* a long time ago, with a remark I admit was highly paradoxical: "In our society any man who does not weep at his mother's funeral runs the risk of being sentenced to death." I only meant that the hero of my book is condemned because he does not play the game. In this respect, he is foreign to the society in which he lives; he wanders, on the fringe, in the suburbs of private, solitary, sensual life. And this is why some readers have been tempted to look upon him as a piece of social wreckage. A much more accurate idea of the character or, at least one much closer to the author's intentions, will emerge if one asks just how Meursault doesn't play the game. The reply is a simple one; he refuses to lie. To lie is not only to say what isn't true. It is also and above all, to say more than is true, and, as far as the human heart is concerned, to express more than one feels. This is what we all do, every day, to simplify life. He says what he is, he refuses to hide his feelings, and immediately society feels threatened. He is asked, for example, to say that he regrets his crime, in the approved manner. He replies that what he feels is annoyance rather than real regret. And this shade of meaning condemns him.

For me, therefore, Meursault is not a piece of social wreckage, but a poor and naked man enamored of a sun that leaves no shadows.

Far from being bereft of all feeling, he is animated by a passion that is deep because it is stubborn, a passion for the absolute and for truth. This truth is still a negative one, the truth of what we are and what we feel, but without it no conquest of us or of the world will ever be possible. One would therefore not be much mistaken to read *The Stranger* as the story of a man who, without any heroics, agrees to die for the truth. I also happen to say, again paradoxically, that I had tried to draw in my character the only Christ we deserve. It will be understood, after my explanations, that I said this with no blasphemous intent, and only with the slightly ironic affection an artist has the right to feel for the characters he has created. Meursault tells his story in the first person; the author does not mock the words of the character he has created. While letting Meursault use his own voice, Camus has, however, indicated an attitude towards the character, an attitude that we might define as limited, sometimes ironic, admiration.

IN 1955 CAMUS WROTE ABOUT MEURSAULT:

Far from being deprived of any sensitivity, a profound and tenacious passion motivates him, the passion for the absolute and for the truth. It is a truth that is still negative, the truth of being and of feeling, but without which no conquest of oneself or of the world will ever be possible. One would not be very mistaken to read in *The Stranger* the story of a man who, without any heroic attitude,

accepts dying for the truth... I tried to present in this character the only Christ we deserve.* Preface to an edition of *The Stranger*, ed G. Brée and C. Lynes, Methuen, London, 1958. Camus does not claim that Meursault is an exemplary hero, a model of behaviour for others. He is a man who refuses to play social games and refuses to lie about himself, still negative virtues.

There is no suggestion that what Meursault does is worthy of admiration; rather he is admirable for what he refuses to do. Camus said that Meursault is 'the only Christ we deserve'. Meursault's life ironically recalls the life of Christ. His companions have names with religious resonances: Emmanuel, Céleste, Marie. Like Christ, Meursault is silent at his trial. He refuses three times to let the prison chaplain talk to him about God, an ironic echo of Christ's three refusals to be tempted by Satan. He wants to be greeted with cries of hatred at his execution, choosing a role like that of Christ, jeered by the soldiers and the people at his crucifixion.

CONCLUSION

Meursault is a man who has his idea of honesty: being true to his immediate impressions, refusing to exaggerate or give consistency to his emotions, refusing to say more than what he knows. He lives by this one principle, which has nothing to do with the behaviour that society expects. Since he is tired, for example, he sleeps at the vigil for his mother; he does not try to create a good impression. He is 'vexed' that the murder occurred, but will not admit to feeling remorse, because he can only be true to his present emotions, and cannot pretend to change the past. Meursault's principle does not permit him to judge others, for how can he claim to know anyone feels when he refuses to analyse his own emotions? Because he is true to his belief, Meursault is judged a monster by society and is condemned to die. He accepts this role; like Christ he dies for his belief.

By saying that Meursault is the only Christ we deserve, Camus suggests that Meursault's principle of simple honesty to himself is the only guideline mankind can have. There are no abstract moral rules to be taught. Nor, according to Camus, can anyone die for our sins and promise immortality. That is a false hope. Meursault knows that the only happiness lies in accepting the present. His life recalls that of Christ, not as a God or saviour, but as a man whose example of living by his beliefs could inspire others. Meursault is not, however, a figure of dignity, but a simple man.

The Stranger has often been considered one of the best novels written in French during the twentieth century. This dissertation has shown not only the psychological interpretations of the novel but also how skillfully Camus has constructed the plot to show his ideas, how well the way in which Meursault tells his story expresses his

personal vision of life. As an unheroic exemplar of the sensibility of an era, Meursault has an enduring place among the characters of world fiction.

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