The Stranger

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF ALBERT CAMUS

Born in French Algeria in 1913 to a poor family, Camus' father died in World War 1 the next year. Camus grew up in a two-bedroom apartment shared among five family members. He worked to support his education at University of Algiers but tuberculosis forced him to drop out. Afterwards, Camus became a journalist for a newspaper opposed to the French colonial government in Algiers and then for the Resistance in Paris during World War II. Camus developed his philosophy of the absurd while living in Paris. Though Absurdism asserts the meaningless of life in an indifferent universe, Camus maintained faith in human dignity and ability to escape despair. In addition to his first novel, *The Stranger*, Camus published *The Plague*, *The Fall*, and philosophical essays including *The Myth of Sisyphus* and *The Rebel*. His work's rich influence on intellectual and artistic culture earned him a Nobel Prize in 1957. Camus died in a car accident in 1961.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Fought between 1914 and 1918, World War I introduced the world to unprecedented violence and gave rise to a new sense of disaffection and doubt, producing art very different than the art of the past. In the wake of the war rose the Lost Generation, a group of artists who addressed the collapse of traditional structures of meaning—both secular and religious—and conveyed their sense of life's meaninglessness. Born during World War I, Camus lost his father to the fighting and grew up to be an integral member of the Lost Generation. By the time he wrote *The Stranger* in the early 1940s, World War II had begun and the Nazi regime occupied France, where Camus had recently moved from Algeria. Though he fought passionately for the French Resistance against the Germans, Camus lived amidst widespread fear that the senseless horrors of World War I would be repeated. The inadequacy of religion or logic to account for such horrors helped inspire his own philosophy of Absurdism, whose ideas are reflected throughout *The Stranger*.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Though technically a philosophical essay, *The Myth of Sisyphus* is integral to a deeper understanding of *The Stranger*. It was published the same year as *The Stranger* and, along with the novel, cemented Camus' reputation as a prominent thinker. In it, Camus explicates the tenets of his philosophy, Absurdism, the ideas of which underpin much of the action of *The Stranger*. *The Myth of Sisyphus* pinpoints the absurd precisely: neither the world nor human thinking in and of itself is absurd. Rather, the absurd arises when human thinking attempts to impose its order, reason, and logic on the meaningless world, a perennially futile goal. In *The Stranger*, the absurd is demonstrated by the trial, the lawyers, and the numerous priests and Christians who attempt to convert Meursault to religion.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Stranger
- **When Written:** 1941?-1942
- **Where Written:** France
- **When Published:** 1942
- **Literary Period:** Modernist
- **Genre:** Philosophical novel
- **Setting:** Algiers, Algeria
- **Climax:** Meursault shoots the Arab.
- **Antagonist:** Raymond
- **Point of View:** First person (Meursault is the narrator.)

EXTRA CREDIT

An Existential Novel? Though *The Stranger* is often categorized as an existential novel, Camus himself rejected this label. Camus' philosophy of Absurdism resembles Existentialism in many respects (both philosophies, for example, believe in the essential meaninglessness of life) but Camus was fiercely committed to human morality and dignity, ideas many Existentialists discarded.

Alternate Translations. The key sentence in Meursault's final acceptance of death has been translated in several different ways, each of which shifts the line's meaning. The edition on which this guide is based was translated by Matthew Ward and published in 1988. It translates the line: "I opened myself to the gentle indifference of the world." The first English edition, translated by Stuart Gilbert and published in 1946, translated this line, "I laid my heart open to the benign indifference of the universe." The second English edition, translated by Joseph Laredo and first published in 1982, translated the line, "I laid my heart open to the gentle indifference of the universe."

PLOT SUMMARY

Meursault is a shipping clerk living in a decrepit Algiers apartment he shared with his mother before he sent her to an old people's home he rarely visits. The novel opens when he receives a telegram saying his mother has died. Meurseult isn't

upset. Meursault meets with the director of the home who quells Meursault's inner defensiveness about sending his mother away by assuring him she was happier at the home than she would have been in Algiers. He tells Meursault he's arranged a religious funeral, in accordance with her wishes, though Meursault reflects privately that his mother wasn't religious. Meursault goes to the mortuary and surprises the caretaker by declining to see his mother's body. They drink coffee and smoke together, then sit vigil over the coffin with his mother's friends, whose crying irritates the unemotional Meursault. Next morning, the funeral procession is joined by Thomas Pérez, Mme. Meursault's closest friend (and rumored fiancé). They walk across the **hot, shimmering** landscape to church for the funeral, which Meursault barely remembers.

Saturday, Meursault goes to the beach and runs into Marie. They swim, flirt, go to a comedy, and go home together. Marie is startled to hear Meursault's mother just died. Monday, Meursault's neighbor Raymond invites him to dinner and recounts his thirst for revenge on his mistress. He gets Meursault to write a letter luring her back to shame her. Pleased, Raymond now considers Meursault his friend.

Next Saturday, Meursault and Marie hear Raymond beating his mistress. A policeman frees her, shaming Raymond. Later, Meursault agrees to Raymond's request that he testify to her infidelity. He meets Salamano who is heartbroken after losing the dog he's always pretended to hate.

At work, Meursault declines a transfer to Paris since "nothing mattered." When Marie asks if he wants to marry her, he says it makes no difference but he will if she wants.

Sunday, Marie, Meursault, and Raymond go to Masson's bungalow. Raymond worries he's being followed by the Arab, his mistress' brother. At the beach, Meursault and Marie are happy. Meursault, Masson, and Raymond walk on the beach, running into the Arab and his friend. Raymond starts a fight but surrenders when cut by the Arab. Furious, Raymond insists on returning to the beach. Meursault follows. They meet the Arabs but Meursault has Raymond give him his gun. The Arabs retreat. Dizzy with **heat**, Meursault wanders alone along the "**dazzling, red glare**." He is "surprised" to meet the Arab again, who draws his knife. At the "dazzling spear" of sun reflecting off it, Meursault shoots the man.

In prison, the examining magistrate attempts unsuccessfully to Christianize Meursault. Marie visits once, but is barred from visiting again. Meursault acclimates to prison and spends his days remembering his apartment. A year passes.

The trial is blown up by the press and the courtroom is packed. Much is made of Meursault's insensitivity at his mother's funeral and the director and caretaker testify to Meursault's coldness. After Meursault's lawyer makes progress, Marie inadvertently cripples the defense by recounting her first date with Meursault the day after his mother's funeral. Meursault's lawyer attempts to rescue the case – "is my client on trial for burying his mother or for killing a man?" – but the prosecutor connects the funeral and the murder, portraying Meursault as a soulless monster premeditating murder at his mother's grave. Throughout the trial, Meursault is mostly calm, only rankling when he feels excluded from the proceedings. In closing remarks, the prosecutor equates Meursault's crime with the parricide being tried in court next day, claiming Meursault is "morally guilty of killing his mother." Meursault is sentenced to death.

Meursault files for appeal. Obsessed by the arbitrariness of his verdict and the certainty of death by guillotine, he fantasizes a justice system that would give the condemned "a chance." He tries to be levelheaded, imagining both possible outcomes of his appeal, but feels "delirious joy" whenever he thinks of living. The chaplain visits and lectures Meursault on the afterlife. Meursault screams that there's no existence but this one, that all people are equally privileged and condemned. He feels "rid" of "hope" and is "happy." He "opens…to the gentle indifference of the world," and thinks he need only be accompanied by "cries of hate" "to feel less alone."

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Meursault – A young French Algerian living in colonial Algiers and working as a shipping clerk, Meursault is passionless, disaffected, and without ambition. His primary priority is his own physical comfort. Convinced of the world's indifference to him and to everyone else, Meursault himself is indifferent towards those around him and has only superficial relationships. His relentless honesty and refusal to subscribe to conventional belief systems or to social niceties alienate Meursault from society.

Raymond Sintès – Meursault's neighbor who adopts Meursault as a friend by enlisting him to help sort out a conflict with his mistress. Though exposed in court as a pimp, Raymond is cagey about his profession and tends to talk around the truth or to lie outright in order to present himself in the best light, showing a concern for public opinion that's at odds with Meursault's perennial honesty and disregard for social reputation.

Marie Cordona – Once a typist in Meursault's office, Marie is young, beautiful, easy going, and openhearted. Her romantic feelings for Meursault seem authentic and she is genuinely discouraged when Meursault confirms he doesn't love her as an individual, that he'd marry any woman like her. Still, she is remarkably resilient and is able to cultivate closeness and happiness with Meursault in spite of his chilly attitudes.

The Prosecutor – Determined to portray Meursault as a cold-blooded, premeditating murderer and soulless monster unfit

for society, the prosecutor builds his case around Meursault's insensitive attitude towards his mother, evidence that shouldn't properly be relevant. Still, the prosecutor is passionate, articulate, and convincing. Even Meursault notes that he is a talented lawyer.

The Defense Lawyer – Meursault's lawyer who tries to defend Meursault's character, to present his crime as an accident, and to disassociate Meursault's behavior at his mother's funeral from the murder. He is exhausted by Meursault's unyielding impassiveness and by his self-sabotaging lack of savvy about public opinion. A less talented lawyer, in Meursault's opinion, than the prosecutor.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Céleste – The good-hearted proprietor of the restaurant where Meursault is a regular. Céleste does his best to testify to Meursault's good character at the trial but is not taken seriously by the court.

Madame Meursault – Meursault's mother, who dies right before the novel begins. Meursault's decision to send her to an old people's home combined with his calmness at her funeral damn him in the eyes of the jury at his murder trial.

The Funeral Director – Works at the old people's home where Madame Meursault lived and died. Testifies to Meursault's insensitivity at his mother's funeral.

The Caretaker – Works at the old people's home where Madame Meursault lived and died. Testifies to Meursault's insensitivity at his mother's funeral.

Thomas Pérez – Madame Meursault's closest friend and rumored fiancée at the old people's home.

Salamano – Meursault's neighbor and the owner of a scabby, hairless dog which he publicly berates and abuses until its loss – then he is heartbroken.

Raymond's Mistress – The Arab woman Raymond claims is his unfaithful mistress.

Masson – Raymond's friend and owner of the beach house that Meursault is visiting when he shoots the Arab.

The Arab – The man Meursault murders. Raymond's nemesis and the brother of Raymond's mistress.

The Boss – Meursault's boss who offers Meursault the opportunity to transfer to Paris and accuses Meursault of lacking all ambition when Meursault declines the offer.

The Examining Magistrate – An examining magistrate who attempts, futilely, to help Meursault by Christianizing him. After his efforts fail, he calls Meursault "Monsieur Antichrist."

The Chaplain – A priest who repeatedly tries to visit Meursault in prison and endeavors unsuccessfully to Christianize Meursault during their one visit.

The Strange Little Woman – A peculiar and meticulous woman whom Meursault once eats beside in silence at Céleste's, then follows out of curiosity. She appears at his trial.

Emmanuel – Meursault's co-worker, a dispatcher.

One Old Woman – A friend of Madame Meursault's. Her crying at the vigil irritates Meursault.

The Nurse – A nurse at the old people's home who accompanies the funeral procession and tells Meursault, "There's no way out..."

The Head Guard – The head guard at the prison who first makes Meursault realize that the point of prison is to take away a man's freedom.

A Reporter – One of the press at Meursault's trial who explains to Meursault that his trial has been blown up because of the slow press season and because of the subsequent parricide trial.

The First Policeman – A policeman who rescues Raymond's mistress from Raymond's beating and slaps Raymond.

The Presiding Judge – The presiding judge at Meursault's trial.

Monsieur Meursault – Meursault's father, known to Meursault only through a story about how he was nauseated by seeing an execution.

The Arab Nurse – A nurse at the old people's home who sits vigil over Madame Meursault.

The Funeral Director – A funeral director who directs Madame Meursault's funeral procession.

The Pallbearers – Pallbearers who carry Madame Meursault's coffin in the funeral procession. One informs the director that Meursault didn't know his mother's age.

The Priest – A priest who performs Madame Meursault's funeral.

The Parisienne – Masson's wife from Paris.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

MEANINGLESSNESS OF LIFE AND THE ABSURD

From Meursault's perspective the world is meaningless, and he repeatedly dismisses other characters' attempts to make sense of human. He rejects both religious and secular efforts to find meaning. From the director at the old people's home who arranges a religious funeral for Madame Meursault to the examining magistrate who tries to

guide Meursault towards Christian faith to the chaplain who lectures Meursault about repentance and the afterlife, Meursault is often advised to embrace religion and place his faith in a divine world beyond this one. Meursault, though, is adamantly atheist, and insists he believes only in *this* life and physical experience.

Efforts to engage Meursault in secular structures of meaning are equally futile. When Meursault's boss offers Meursault a position in Paris, he expects Meursault to embrace the opportunity for career advancement. Meursault, though, lacks all ambition and turns down the boss' offer without considering it. As a student, Meursault recalls, "I had lots of ambitions...But when I had to give up my studies I learned very quickly that none of it really mattered." When Marie asks Meursault whether he wants to marry her, she expects him to take the institution of marriage seriously. Yet Meursault is indifferent towards it, thinks "it didn't mean anything" to love a person, and agrees to marry Marie simply because she wants to marry him. Though he grows fond of her, he doesn't cultivate any attachment to her more meaningful than superficial attraction. Throughout his trial, Meursault is equally bemused by the meaninglessness of the justice system and finds its attempts to impose rational, meaningful structure on his actions ridiculous. He considers the guilty verdict he eventually receives entirely arbitrary, and describes its "certainty" as "arrogant."

Meursault's unwavering nihilism frustrates those who try to convert him to their ways of thinking and they often experience Meursault's perspective as a threat to their own ideas. "Do you want my life to be meaningless?" the examining magistrate bellows when Meursault refuses to accept his faith in God. The prosecutor passionately describes "the emptiness of a man's heart" as "an abyss threatening to swallow up society," casting Meursault as a threat to social order.

This tension between Meursault's sense of life's meaninglessness and other characters' persistent efforts to impose structures of meaning demonstrates the main tenet of Camus' own philosophy of Absurdism. Absurdism holds that the world is absurd and that looking for order or meaning of any kind is a futile endeavor. Humans must accept the absolute indifference of the world towards human life. Ironically, it is only the thought of imminent death that leads Meursault to acknowledge anything like meaning or importance in life. Though he still spurns the notion of essential meaning, Meursault's impending execution fills him with an overwhelming, heart-felt desire for life that contradicts his stated goal of being "level-headed" and considering life and death as equal possibilities.

CHANCE AND INTERCHANGEABILITY

Meursault considers all experience interchangeable, arbitrary, and essentially meaningless. "One life was as good as another," he tells his boss, explaining his indifference towards the opportunity to move to Paris. To him, it's only a matter of chance that events turn out as they do. His thoughts on the beach steps as he decides whether to return to Masson's bungalow or to go back down to the beach could summarize his attitude towards every life choice: "to stay or to go, it amounted to the same thing." (Expressing this attitude at that particular instance is, of course, highly ironic as his choice to go back down to the beach leads to the murder that changes his life dramatically.)

Meursault remains convinced of the arbitrariness of events throughout his imprisonment and trial. Hearing street noises he recognizes beyond the court, he reflects that's is as if "familiar paths traced in summer skies could lead as easily to prison as to the sleep of the innocent." Meursault's primary contention with judicial procedure is its certainty, its unwillingness to embrace chance. After being condemned, Meursault thinks how the verdict may as well have been the opposite, as all the factors leading up to it were entirely arbitrary. He fantasizes a new form of capital punishment which would work nine out of ten times, leaving the condemned a chance for hope and eliminating the unyielding certainty of death by guillotine.

Likewise, Meursault treats human relationships as chance arrangements, believing that any person could substitute for any other in a relationship without causing any difference. He tells Marie that he would marry any other women with whom he had the same relationship he has with her. He kills the Arab without any personal motive: the man may as well have been anybody. Thus, though "the stranger" of the title refers primarily to Meursault's own estrangement from society, it also refers to the man Meursault kills, a chance stranger whom the novel never names. Contemplating his own death, Meursault reminds himself that it doesn't matter when one dies, since "other men and women will naturally go on living" far into the future.

Yet none of the people around Meursault see events as the fluid, interchangeable occurrences Meursault sees. Throughout the trial, the prosecutor repeatedly portrays Meursault's murder as a premeditated crime, fundamentally connected to Meursault's prior behavior. The prosecutor's determination to prove the deliberate malice of Meursault's actions reaches its highest pitch when his closing argument equates Meursault's disengagement at his mother's funeral to the act of another criminal who murdered his own father.

INDIFFERENCE AND PASSIVITY

The novel opens with Meursault's indifference at his mother's funeral and the consternation it provokes among the people around him. This dynamic recurs much more starkly at the trial, where the account of Meursault's "insensitivity" towards his mother's

death proves to be what ultimately turns the jury against him. People's surprise and dismay at novel's start implied they were judging Meursault based on his indifferent attitude. The court scene in the second half of the novel makes those judgments explicit.

Meursault is equally indifferent towards Marie, who, of all the characters, shows him the most warmth. Although he is fond of her and enjoys her company, he is indifferent towards her essential being and is not in love with her as a unique individual. When Marie asks Meursault whether he wants to marry her: "I said it didn't make any difference to me and that we could if she wanted to. Then she wanted to know if I loved her. I answered the same way I had the last time, that it didn't mean anything but that I probably didn't love her...She just wanted to know if I would have accepted the same proposal from another woman, with whom I was involved in the same way. I said, 'Sure.'" In prison later on, he fantasizes about women without imagining Marie specifically. Conversely, when Marie stops writing, he is not at all disturbed to imagine she may have taken up with a new man or be dead.

Meursault's emotional indifference contributes to his general passivity. Lacking goals and desires of his own, Meursault rarely seems to care how events turn out and acts simply to satisfy his immediate physical needs, allowing his life to flow by as it will. His passive people-watching from the balcony in Chapter 2 provides a possible model for his life philosophy. He stands by and observes others without acting. Even the crucial act of his murder is described in passive terms: "the trigger gave." As the prosecutor elaborates, Meursault's passive indifference threatens society because it can't be assimilated into social life (a life premised on care for relationships, careers, friendships, family, etc.). Thus, Meursault himself is the primary "stranger" of the title – he is a stranger to the social fabric of his world.

Meursault begins and ends the novel in a state of indifference, yet his indifference at novel's end is achieved after enduring the grueling frustration he experiences in prison trying to outsmart "the machinery of justice." Where his indifference at novel's start seemed like numb apathy, his indifference at the end seems to be a kind of enlightenment. He embraces indifference as an active choice, opening himself to the indifference of the world itself. The English translations of the novel differ critically in their characterization of this larger indifference. The first translation by Stuart Gilbert translates, "I laid my heart open to the benign indifference of the universe," while the second by Joseph Laredo translates, "I laid my heart open to the gentle indifference of the universe." Matthew Ward's most recent translation reads, "I opened myself to the gentle indifference of the world." Still, despite their differences, each of these translations conveys the world's indifference as harmless, as something to embrace and be "happy" amidst, rather than something to despise and fear.

IMPORTANCE OF PHYSICAL EXPERIENCE

As Meursault explains to his lawyer, "...my nature was such that my physical needs often got in the way of my feelings." Indeed, throughout the novel, Meursault experiences physical sensations and pains/pleasures much more acutely than he experiences emotional/psychological ones. As a narrator, he constantly supplies physical details without analyzing their emotional or psychological import. The most extreme example of this can be found in his account of killing the Arab. Meursault initially shoots because of the uncomfortably bright **glare** reflected off the Arab's knife and later explains to the courtroom he shot "because of the sun." Likewise, Meursault observes the mourners at his mother's funeral coolly, unmoved to empathize with the grief their actions attest to. Later, Meursault ignores much of the argument at his own trial (including critical speeches by his lawyer and the prosecutor), preferring to focus instead on the sounds of the street outside.

At novel's end, this way of life is actually presented as a positive, vivid alternative to religious life. He who lives a religious life lives for the sake of a world to come but Meursault wants to live for the sake of *this* life. When the chaplain insists Meursault must have "wished for another life," Meursault insists that any other life should still be embodied and sensual, "...of course I had, but it didn't mean any more than wishing to be rich, to be able to swim faster, or to have a more nicely shaped mouth...he stopped me and wanted to know how I pictured this other life. Then I shouted at him, "'One where I could remember this life!" The chaplain (and anyone who believes in an afterlife) is, to Meursault's mind, "living like a dead man." The memory exercises Meursault develops to pass the time in prison by recalling every detail of his old apartment likewise convey a profound trust in the richness of physical experience: "...the more I thought about it, the more I dug out of my memory things I had overlooked or forgotten. I realized then that a man who had lived only one day could easily live for a hundred years in prison. He would have enough memories to keep him from being bored."

RELATIONSHIPS

Throughout the novel, Meursault remains unable to experience deep, complex relationships to the people in his life. All of his relationships – from the filial relationship he had with his mother to his friendship with Raymond to his romantic relationship with Marie – are passionless, determined much more by incidental, superficial impressions than by deep-felt emotional bonds. His casual attitude towards these relationships enables him to treat the people in his life according to his own desires without feeling any sense of duty or loyalty towards them. Once he no longer has anything to talk with his mother about, he sends her off to

an old people's home and is puzzled to hear his neighbors disapprove of the decision. At his mother's vigil, he drinks coffee and smokes as usual, not feeling obliged to act differently out of respect.

Though fond of Marie, Meursault does not feel bound to her as a unique individual and freely admits he isn't in love with her. Though he helps Raymond by writing the letter to his mistress and by testifying to her infidelity at the police station, Meursault does not feel these actions to be any sort of burden on himself and performs them in a spirit of indifference. Ironically, Meursault's murder could be considered a tremendous sacrifice made for a friend's wellbeing (it is Raymond, after all, who has a problem with the Arab, not Meursault). Yet the Arab's connection to Raymond is, to Meursault's mind, entirely incidental and he shoots the Arab without even thinking of Raymond.

Meursault's cool detachment from relationships is juxtaposed by several passionate bonds between other characters, including the tender warmth between Thomas Pérez and Madame Meursault, the volatile resentment between Raymond and his mistress, and the excruciating love/hate relationship between Salamano and his dog. Though Meursault remains just as unattached to others at novel's end as he was at the start, he glimpses the possibility of a deeper connection to others several times in Book II. The first occurs after Céleste's testimony on the witness stand when Meursault feels for "the first time in my life I...wanted to kiss a man." The second occurs is in the final chapter when Meursault realizes "why at the end of her life [Maman] had taken a 'fiancé.'" In the novel's last sentence, Meursault sees even his estrangement from society as capable of giving companionship, thinking that "to feel less alone, I had only to wish that there be a large crowd of spectators the day of my execution and that they greet me with cries of hate.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

HEAT

Heat symbolizes the indifference of the universe towards human life. The sun's blazing intensity without regard for bodily comfort or peace of mind stands for the general disregard the natural world has for humanity. Thus, human life is essentially meaningless and no higher or deeper order should be looked for. The most uncomfortably hot moments in the narrative are also the moments at which the meaninglessness of human life is brought into greatest relief. They literally make Meursault dizzy, a dizziness that is both physical and psychological. Meursault encounters dizzying heat on the day of his mother's funeral as well as on the day he shoots the Arab (he himself links these two days by comparing their heat.) Likewise, the heat in the courtroom renders Meursault dizzy during the prosecutor's damning speech in which he creates false meanings for Meursault's actions and claims Meursault is guilty of parricide. Meursault is unable to say anything in response but that the murder was meaningless, without personal motive, a truth the court will not accept.

GLARE (SHIMMER, GLISTEN, DAZZLE)

Glare (along with its synonyms) symbolizes the importance of physical experience over mental analysis. Literally caused by light bouncing off a surface, glare represents a way of experiencing the world that doesn't seek to probe beneath the surface of things. Instead of analyzing or interpreting, this way of looking at the world takes physical experience as it comes and makes decisions based on sensory impressions. The most crucial instance of glare in *The Stranger* can be found reflecting off the Arab's knife on the beach, moments before Meursault shoots him. Indeed, to Meursault's mind, this bright glare (rather than any deeper, personal motive) was the reason he killed the Arab. Glares, shimmers, glistens, and dazzles are plentiful throughout the rest of the novel as well, and shine off the landscape the day of Madame Meursault's funeral, off of the pavement and bodies of strangers walking below Meursault's apartment as he people-watches, and off the beach beside Masson's.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Vintage edition of *The Stranger* published in 1989.

Book 1, Chapter 1 Quotes

❝ For the first few days [Maman] was at the home she cried a lot. But that was because she wasn't used to it. A few months later and she would have cried if she'd been taken out. She was used to it. That's partly why I didn't go there much this past year. And also because it took up my Sunday – not to mention the trouble of getting to the bus, buying tickets, and spending two hours traveling.

Related Characters: Meursault (speaker), Madame Meursault

Related Themes:

Page Number: 5

Explanation and Analysis

As he meets with the director of the home where Meursault's mother lived until the end of her life, Meursault initially feels defensive about putting her in the home. Thanks in part to the director's reassurances, however, Meursault takes a different perspective. Not only does he consider that his mother grew accustomed to the home, but because ultimately it doesn't matter - for her, for him, to the world in general - where she lives. Meursault's attitude is thus a prime example of how he projects his own philosophy of existence onto others around him.

It is in Meursault's own interest, of course, to consider his mother's experience in such a way, since it was always so unpleasant for him to go visit her. Meursault is acutely sensitive to the physical, sensory experience of being in the world, which makes traveling especially unpleasant for him. Still, the way he coldly considers his mother's final months living underlines the indifferent attitude he takes towards relationships in general.

> That's when Maman's friends came in. There were about ten in all, and they floated into the blinding light without a sound. They sat down without a single chair creaking. I saw them more clearly than I had ever seen anyone, and not one detail of their faces or their clothes escaped me. But I couldn't hear them, and it was hard for me to believe they really existed.

Related Characters: Meursault (speaker), Madame Meursault

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 9

Explanation and Analysis

Meursault's emotional distance from his mother does not mean that he feels somehow absent from the scene of her funeral itself. Instead, he is aware of each precise moment, paying close attention to all the actors in the scene and each detail on their faces. However, the way Meursault describes the attendees to his mother's funeral is, indeed, reminiscent of the way someone might describe the way a movie or play unfolds. His relationship to them is detached – he does not feel at all emotionally invested in the scene, for instance.

One could probably, then, call Meursault's attitude a more aesthetic one, in that he considers events to take place in terms of the interest they hold for him, in terms of how they make him feel on a plane entirely separate from his emotional investment in other people. Meursault's inability to really believe in the full humanity of others will also help to explain his actions on the beach: in each case, he fails to see how other people really exist.

> Seeing the rows of cypress trees leading up to the hills next to the sky, and the houses standing out here and there against that red and green earth, I was able to understand Maman better. Evenings in that part of the country must have been a kind of sad relief. But today, with the sun bearing down, making the whole landscape shimmer with heat, it was inhuman and oppressive.

Related Characters: Meursault (speaker), Madame Meursault

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 16

Explanation and Analysis

On the one hand, this passage seems to suggest that by attending Maman's funeral, Meursault will be able to better understand her, drawing closer to her even after her death. It does seem that returning to "that part of the country" helps to flesh out Maman's past for her son. Nevertheless, this insight only further underlines just how little attention Meursault paid to his mother during her life, such that her past is still a mystery to him, one that he doesn't seem very interested at all in resolving.

Instead, the scene turns back towards Meursault's own sensory impressions. His casual thought about his mother's past is quickly conquered by the "oppressive," all-powering heat of the sun, which reminds him and us that the natural world cares little for our comfort and well-being – nor does it care to pay respect on the occasion of a human tragedy like death.

Book 1, Chapter 2 Quotes

❝ Once we were dressed, she seemed very surprised to see I was wearing a black tie and asked me if I was in mourning. I told her Maman had died. She wanted to know how long ago, so I said, "Yesterday." She gave a little start but didn't say anything. I felt like telling her it wasn't my fault, but I stopped myself because I remembered that I'd already said that to my boss. It didn't mean anything. Besides, you always feel a little guilty.

Related Characters: Meursault (speaker), Madame Meursault, Marie Cordona

Related Themes:

Page Number: 20

Explanation and Analysis

Meursault has happened to run into a woman he used to have a relationship with, on a day that happens to be the day after his mother died. For Meursault, that sequence means little if anything – his stance towards or interaction with life prevents him from assigning any significance to a particular sequence of events. Nor does his mother's death imply, for him, that he should act a certain way or inhibit himself in a certain way. The only way Meursault can think to make his mother's death signify something would be for it to have been "his fault" – an attitude that, of course, has everything to do with himself and nothing to do with Maman, or with his relationship with her.

Meursault is moving through these days without seeming to make active choices at all – though it is, of course, a choice for him to spend time with Marie, the way he describes these events suggests that they take place of their own accord. Marie doesn't share Meursault's passive, absurdist relationship towards the world, so for her it is shocking for him to be acting romantically towards her when his mother has just died. Meursault's guilt, if it exists at all, seems to be related to this gap between Marie's expectations and his reality, more than it has to do with his own lack of grief at his mother's death.

❝ ...I glanced at the mirror and saw a corner of my table with my alcohol lamp next to some pieces of bread.

Related Characters: Meursault (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 24

Explanation and Analysis

Through Meursault's conversation with the priest, we have been introduced to his lack of religious conviction, even as we know that he is familiar with at least the rites of Christianity. As a result, we can see in this scene traces of a holy, sacred ritual, that of communion with wine and bread on an altar.

However, the fact that Meursault sees this scene through a mirror gives us the first hint that this passage is not meant to be interpreted as spiritually significant. If anything, the presence of an alcohol lamp and bread on a table are an ironic counterpoint to the meaning-infused nature of objects at a Christian mass. Here, instead, the objects are totally devoid of significance. Meursault notices them nonetheless, because sensory material experience is the major framework through which he moves through the world; and yet nothing he notices gains any greater meaning as a result.

Book 1, Chapter 4 Quotes

❝ ...[Marie] asked me if I loved her. I told her it didn't mean anything but that I didn't think so. She looked sad.

Related Characters: Meursault (speaker), Marie Cordona

Related Themes:

Page Number: 35

Explanation and Analysis

Meursault obviously is attracted to Marie, and he often finds her company pleasant. But for him, these elements don't come near to love – an emotion which itself, in his point of view, means nothing, since none of life's emotions can mean anything. On the one hand, then, Meursault's statement reflects his attitude towards life and towards the world. He can't imagine feeling anything that strongly, since he is too passive, and he doesn't even believe in such a strong feeling in the first place.

In addition, however, Meursault is indifferent towards the feelings of others, in this case Marie, who may not share this same philosophy. Marie obviously does believe in love, and does want Meursault to love her. But Meursault refuses to reassure her or to try to explain himself, based on his absurdist attitude. Relationships for him are casual, transient unions that involve no responsibilities or commitments, especially ones that might make him say something he didn't believe.

Book 1, Chapter 5 Quotes

Then [my boss] asked me if I wasn't interested in a change of life. I said that people never change their lives, that in any case one life was as good as another and that I wasn't dissatisfied with mine here at all. He looked upset and told me that I never gave him a straight answer, that I had no ambition, and that that was disastrous in business. So I went back to work. I would rather not have upset him, but I couldn't see any reason to change my life. Looking back on it, I wasn't unhappy. When I was a student, I had lots of ambitions like that. But when I had to give up my studies I learned very quickly that none of it really mattered.

Related Characters: Meursault (speaker), The Boss

Related Themes:

Page Number: 41

Explanation and Analysis

Meursault's boss has given him the opportunity to transfer to Paris, but Meursault is entirely indifferent to this opportunity. The boss can't understand this: he believes that it is entirely natural to want to progress economically or socially, or even to make a change, to invite new experiences and to fulfill one's own, individual ambitions. Society is set up to value ambition and striving, and to reward those who succeed according to these values, but Meursault doesn't share any of them – making it difficult for Meursault's boss to understand him.

Meursault, in turn, not only doesn't want to make a life change: he doesn't believe that such shifts ever really change anything, since he might as well be in one place or another, doing one job or another. This attitude of indifference is not exactly the same thing as lacking ambition, which is the only way his boss can comprehend it. Rather, it is located outside society's entire framework of how one should live. Interestingly, this passage suggests that Meursault didn't always feel this way – he was ambitious once, as a student, like many others. It seems that it was a certain event in his life, having to give up his studies, that prompted him to consider life as meaningless and all choices as interchangeable.

That evening, Marie came by to see me and asked me if I wanted to marry her. I said it didn't make any difference to me and that we could if she wanted to. Then she wanted to know if I loved her. I answered the same way I had the last time, that it didn't mean anything but that I probably didn't love her. "So why marry me, then?" she said. I explained to her that it didn't really matter and that if she wanted to, we could get married. Besides, she was the one who was doing the asking and all I was saying was yes. Then she pointed out that marriage was a serious thing. I said, "No"...She just wanted to know if I would have accepted the same proposal from another woman, with whom I was involved in the same way. I said, "Sure."

Related Characters: Meursault, Marie Cordona (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 41-42

Explanation and Analysis

This passage is quite unlike a typical scene of a marriage proposal. Meursault comes across as cold, while Marie seems quietly distraught even as she is intent on figuring out exactly how Meursault feels about her. As a result of her questions, we learn that, once again, Meursault both doesn't love Marie and doesn't think love really exists, nor that it would be worth pursuing if it did. At the same time, he has no feelings *against* Marie – he does enjoy spending time with her – and with such a lack of animosity, he considers it perfectly acceptable for them to get married. While Marie considers marriage as an important step, as a declaration of love and commitment, Meursault thinks of it as an act of convenience, which doesn't mean anything one way or another, but which he'll take part in should Marie really want to.

Meursault also shows great coldness in suggesting to Marie that she means nothing to him as a unique individual: she could be replaced with any woman at all, and he would feel the same way (even if the way he feels is indifferent and passive). While this interchangeability is part of Meursault's general belief in the inconsequential, random nature of events, its logical conclusion when applied to human beings proves difficult for Marie to bear.

The sun was the same as it had been the day I'd buried Maman, and like then, my forehead especially was hurting me, all the veins in it throbbing under the skin. It was this burning, which I couldn't stand anymore, that made me move forward. I knew that it was stupid, that I wouldn't get the sun off me by stepping forward. But I took a step, one step, forward.

Related Characters: Meursault (speaker), Madame Meursault

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 58-59

Explanation and Analysis

Usually, Meursault moves through life passively, as if taking step after step without his own volition, driven by nothing other than the vicissitudes of existence. Here, at least, there is one major source of his actions: the physically excruciating experience of heat and glare – the "burning" that propels him forwards, even though he knows it won't do anything. Meursault explicitly links this feeling of overwhelming heat to the day of Maman's funeral. In both cases, a scene that one could consider as important because of other people, because of interpersonal relationships, instead becomes a reminder of the overwhelming power of physical reality to bend humans to its will.

> It seemed to me as if the sky split open from one end to the other to rain down fire. My whole being tensed and I squeezed my hand around the revolver. The trigger gave; I felt the smooth underside of the butt; and there, in that noise, sharp and deafening at the same time, is where it all started. I shook off the sweat and the sun. I knew that I had shattered the harmony of the day, the exceptional silence of a beach where I'd been happy. Then I fired four more times at the motionless body where the bullets lodged without leaving a trace. And it was like knocking four quick times on the door of unhappiness.

Related Characters: Meursault (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 59

Explanation and Analysis

Even after reading this passage again and again, the reader may not have any better sense of why exactly Meursault kills the "Arab" on the beach. He doesn't feel threatened, nor does he seem to want to defend Raymond or the other women. Meursault's reasoning once again takes place outside the societal standards and norms by which we seek to understand and to judge human activity. All the more striking, then, that what we do have is a huge amount of concrete details and sensory description. Meursault is tense, sweaty, and hot, a feeling that he violently shakes off with the noise of the revolver's shot.

Although we have no sense of why Meursault shoots, at least according to our own expectations of why people kill, Meursault does not at all claim that he was outside himself, unaware of what he was doing – indeed, it is precisely the opposite. He knows not only that he is committing murder, but also that he is shattering an idyllic moment – a change that he experiences, indeed, as a physical "knock." This tense, climactic moment seems to contradict Meursault's feeling that all life choices are indifferent and interchangeable, even if the man he shoots is indeed, in his eyes, random and interchangeable. Or else, perhaps, this is the extreme but logical conclusion of considering absolutely *everything,* even life and death, as ultimately interchangeable.

Book 2, Chapter 1 Quotes

> The investigators had learned that I had "shown insensitivity" the day of Maman's funeral. "You understand," my lawyer said, "it's a little embarrassing for me to have to ask you this. But it's very important. And it will be a strong argument for the prosecution if I can't come up with some answers." He wanted me to help him. He asked if I had felt any sadness that day. The question caught me by surprise and it seemed to me that I would have been very embarrassed if I'd had to ask it. Nevertheless I answered that I had pretty much lost the habit of analyzing myself and that it was hard for me to tell him what he wanted to know. I probably did love Maman, but that didn't mean anything...I explained to him...that my nature was such that my physical needs often got in the way of my feelings.

Related Characters: Meursault, The Defense Lawyer (speaker), Madame Meursault

Related Themes:

Page Number: 64-65

Explanation and Analysis

While Meursault's lawyer seems committed to helping him in his defense against the prosecution, Meursault seems indifferent about these efforts. He also is surprised by the way in which the investigator brings up past events in the hope of explaining Meursault's emotions and the relationship of his emotions to his behavior. But while the investigator is genuinely confused about Meursault's lack of

emotions in a situation that would be highly affecting to most people, Meursault can't bring himself to even recognize this confusion. He doesn't impede the lawyer's questions or refuse to help him, but he also doesn't care that he can't answer these questions.

He asked me if I could say that that day I had held back my natural feelings. I said, "No, because it's not true." He gave me a strange look, as if he found me slightly disgusting...I pointed out to him that none of this had anything to do with my case, but all he said was that it was obvious I had never had any dealings with the law.

Related Characters: Meursault (speaker), The Defense Lawyer

Related Themes:

Page Number: 77

Explanation and Analysis

Like Marie, the defense lawyer – even though he may be on Meursault's side – finds his behavior not only strange but repellent, wildly different as it is from any "normal" person's actions. Here, the lawyer is disturbed that Meursault won't admit to having had "natural feelings" – that is, feelings of grief and sorrow that for some reason he may have held back. The lawyer's disgust seems to indicate that he finds such lack of feelings to be inhuman.

At the same time, the lawyer finds it frustrating that Meursault won't even agree to speak or act *as if* he felt a certain way. The lawyer knows that in a legal case, the motivations of the suspect will be crucial for whether or not the jury gains sympathy for him.Meursault, however, seems to believe that the law will be indifferent to emotion or other issues. He thinks the law will care only about facts, about what happened. What's interesting here is that Meursault's idea of the law seems to be an idealistic vision of the law, that it is something based on action and evidence rather than tangentially connected appearances of how someone "felt." This interaction is just the first hint of how the law will really work, how it's findings are based on human emotions rather than some hard framework of pure evidence.

But he cut me off and urged me one last time, drawing himself up to his full height and asking 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 turn their backs on him. That was his belief, and if he were ever to doubt it, his life would become meaningless. "Do you want my life to be meaningless?" he shouted. As far as I could see, it didn't have anything to do with me, and I told him so. But from across the table he had already thrust the crucifix in my face and was screaming irrationally...

Related Characters: Meursault, The Examining Magistrate (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 69

Explanation and Analysis

As the magistrate tries to convince Meursault to believe in God – really, to agree to act according to existing beliefs and customs in society – it becomes increasingly clear that Meursault's own belief system (or lack thereof) is a threat to society itself. The magistrate grows shockingly frantic and upset here: Meursault's indifferent reaction makes the magistrate feel like he himself is being threatened, that the meaning he draws from his own life is dangerously close to collapsing. Ironically, the magistrate's attempt to convert Meursault ends up becoming a question of his own faith.

Meursault, as usual, is unable to see how different people's belief systems can have anything to do with those of others, or how one person's attitude and actions might affect another. His absolute passivity in the face of his own potential conviction and death is not only incomprehensible to others, but maddeningly so. Even though it is Meursault whose beliefs are strange and confusing, however, it is the magistrate who is made to look absurd here, as Meursault's own refusal to submit to social codes and beliefs suggests just how fragile and possibly unjustifiable those codes may be.

There were others worse off than me. Anyway, it was one of Maman's ideas...that after a while you could get used to anything.

Related Characters: Meursault (speaker), Madame Meursault

Related Themes:

Page Number: 77

Explanation and Analysis

One of Meursault's most distinctive qualities, of course, is his indifferent attitude towards whatever happens to him, and his belief that even when he acts dramatically – shooting a man, for instance – he is convinced that he is simply moving through life without any agency of his own. Here, in an instance of what in another book might count as tragic irony, Meursault twists his mother's "idea" into something she probably would never have agreed with. For Maman, the idea that one can get used to anything allowed her to surmount obstacles, to permit her to carry on even in difficult, unpleasant situations.

That Meursault thinks of his mother's idea here suggests that his philosophy of life can, in fact, be traced back towards his own individual experiences. However, he now takes the idea to mean that it doesn't matter what one does or how one acts, since one person's experience and situation is indistinguishable from another. Meursault thus reinterprets a message meant to encourage and reassure into one that stands for his own brand of passive indifference towards the world.

> Of course I had read that eventually you wind up losing track of time in prison. But it hadn't meant much to me when I'd read it. I hadn't understood how days could be both long and short at the same time: long to live through, maybe, but so drawn out that they ended up flowing into one another. They lost their names. Only the words "yesterday" and "tomorrow" still had any meaning for me.
> One day when the guard told me that I'd been in for five months, I believed it, but I didn't understand it. For me it was one and the same unending day that was unfolding in my cell and the same thing I was trying to do.

Related Characters: Meursault (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 80

Explanation and Analysis

In some ways, this passage suggests that prison, for Meursault, becomes an extreme opportunity to test out his theories on the lack of meaning in life in general. It is particularly evident how one day is indistinguishable from another, how nothing is more meaningful than anything else, when Meursault indeed is restricted to a cell with little to do and less to think about.

The "same unending day" that unfolds in his cell is another way to think about Meursault's life, or at least his life in the way he imagines it. The boundaries that divide up endless time – "yesterday" and "tomorrow" – are arbitrary, able to be understood only in an abstract way. As he lives out his months in prison, then, Meursault is only further convinced that there is no other way to interpret his own experience than the absurdist view he subscribes to.

> Come now, is my client on trial for burying his mother or for killing a man?

Related Characters: The Defense Lawyer (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 96

Explanation and Analysis

As Meursault's lawyer had expected, the prosecutor has continued to emphasize the coldness of Meursault's attitude as he buried his mother, the lack of feeling that he showed at her death, in order to convince the jury of how callous and unfeeling he is as a person. Here, the lawyer attempts to expose the irrelevance of Maman's burial, how silly it is to unite two disparate events. Indeed, this is the way that Meursault considers events as well, as distinct units irrelevant to each other, without any meaningful narrative able to emerge from them.

However, this is not the way that most people think: it's not the way that society is set up to function. The prosecutor is playing into most people's innate hunger for narrative and for meaning, for stringing *apparently* disparate events together into a coherent story. Even Meursault is not immune to this kind of thinking, as he himself did find certain similarities between the heat of Maman's burial and the heat of the day at the beach, for instance. Still, he refuses to draw any significance from these similarities.

Here, the prosecutor's opposite strategy is suggested to be disingenuous or even arbitrary, despite the equal confusion stemming from Meursault's own refusal to assign any meaning to a sequence of events.

Book 2, Chapter 4 Quotes

But were their two speeches so different after all? My lawyer raised his arms and pleaded guilty, but with an explanation. The prosecutor waved his hands and proclaimed my guilt, but without an explanation...In a way, they seemed to be arguing the case as if it had nothing to do with me...There were times when I felt like breaking in on all of them and saying, "Wait a minute! Who's the accused here? Being the accused counts for something. And I have something to say!" But on second thought, I didn't have anything to say.

Related Characters: Meursault (speaker), The Defense Lawyer, The Prosecutor

Related Themes:

Page Number: 98

Explanation and Analysis

Meursault is watching and listening with detached, even bemused interest, as the lawyers on both side of the case attempt to argue their case. While the prosecutor condemns the killing as a cold-blooded crime, Meursault's lawyer attempts to explain it and shed light on it. Both lawyers efforts involve emphasizing the meaning inherent to the crime. Meursault, of course, would object to both characterizations, since for him the murder meant and means absolutely nothing.

In this passage, Meursault also has the strange feeling that he has had before, that he is witnessing life and experience unfold before him without playing any role in it himself. Here, however, what is unfolding before him actually has very much to do with himself and his own life. And yet, after remarking on the strangeness of this closeness, Meursault realizes that he nonetheless has no more expertise on or interest in the matter than he would if the lawyers were arguing about a stranger.

[The prosecutor] said that he had peered into [my soul] and that he had found nothing, gentlemen of the jury. He said the truth was that I didn't have a soul and that nothing human, not one of the moral principles that govern men's hearts, was within my reach. "Of course," he added, "we cannot blame him for this. We cannot complain that he lacks what it was not in his power to acquire. But here in this court the wholly negative virtue of tolerance must give way to the sterner but loftier virtue of justice. Especially when the emptiness of a man's heart becomes, as we find it has in this man, an abyss threatening to swallow up society.

Related Characters: Meursault, The Prosecutor (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 101

Explanation and Analysis

Here, the prosecutor reaches new, dazzling rhetorical heights as he attempts to convince the jury of the necessity of the death penalty. In doing so, he draws on anything he can that might move the audience or prove rhetorically powerful. He alludes to divine justice, for instance, in addition to basic legal justice, and his references to man's empty heart and soul suggests that he is making a moral case as well.

Even as we witness Meursault's indifference throughout the trial, we are also meant to see the weaknesses, the lack of systematic or rational thought, on the side of the prosecutor. Meursault's own commitment to the meaninglessness and absurdity of life may be incomprehensible to society, but at least it is consistent. Of course, the prosecutor is mainly focused on doing whatever he can to gain a conviction – but even this pragmatic use of logic to make a case contrasts to Meursault's passivity in a way that suggests that the prosecutor's belief system is not necessarily superior to others.

...the guillotine is on the same level as the man approaching it. He walks up to it the way you walk up to another person. That bothered me too. Mounting the scaffold, going right up into the sky, was something imagination could hold on to. Whereas...the machine destroyed everything: you were killed discreetly, with a little shame and with great precision.

Related Characters: Meursault (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 112

Explanation and Analysis

Although Meursault's death sentence has strengthened his desire for physical (even if not emotional or spiritual) experience, he continues to consider the future that awaits him in a distanced, detached way, as a viewer observing a painting, for instance. As he constructs an artistic vision of his impending death, he is bothered mainly by the aesthetic problems that arise from things like the fact that a man and guillotine are located on the same level, rather than the

condemned being able to walk slowly up to a scaffold. Meursault might not assign any meaning to his life, but he is able to fixate on the differences in the way his life might end precisely because they have so much to do with the sensory way he will experience this end.

> But everybody knows life isn't worth living. Deep down I knew perfectly well that it doesn't much matter whether you die at thirty or at seventy, since in either case other men and women will naturally go on living – and for thousands of years ...At that point, what would disturb my train of thought was the terrifying leap I would feel my heart take at the idea of having twenty more years of life ahead of me. But I simply had to stifle it by imagining what I'd be thinking in twenty years when it would all come down to the same thing anyway... Therefore (and the difficult thing was not to lose sight of all the reasoning that went into this "therefore"), I had to accept the rejection of my appeal.
> Then and only then would I have the right...to consider the alternative hypothesis: I was pardoned...It would take all my strength to quiet my heart, to be rational. In order to make my resignation to the first hypothesis more plausible, I had to be level-headed about this one as well.

Related Characters: Meursault (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 114-115

Explanation and Analysis

Earlier in the novel, Meursault has had little trouble considering other people's life and death, as well as his own, coolly and apparently objectively: he has never mustered feelings of care, nor does he imagine that he should muster such feelings. Now, though, Meursault's indifference is not his natural state but a philosophical attitude that he has to strive to return to. His heart leaps when he thinks of being able to live twenty years longer, even though he knows it makes little difference, and he'll have to die anyway.

Interestingly, this change does not make Meursault realize the value of life or convince himself that he has been wrong all along about the meaninglessness of existence. Instead, it simply shows how even someone as "level-headed" and rational as Meursault can be carried away by his own, (importantly) physical feelings – his body's desire to keep on living – and temporarily forget what the truth of existence really is. To combat what he sees as a weakness, Meursault sternly orders himself to follow the train of logic that he has always embraced, and to once again coldly consider all the options available to him as indifferent and interchangeable.

> "Do you really love this earth as much as all that?" [the chaplain] murmured. I didn't answer.
> ..."No, I refuse to believe you! I know that at one time or another you've wished for another life." I said of course I had, but it didn't mean any more than wishing to be rich, to be able to swim faster, or to have a more nicely shaped mouth...[he] wanted to know how I pictured this other life. Then I shouted at him, "One where I could remember this life!"...He tried to change the subject by asking me why I was calling him 'monsieur' and not 'father.' That got me mad, and I told him he wasn't my father.

Related Characters: The Chaplain, Meursault (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 119-120

Explanation and Analysis

Once again, a chaplain speaks with Meursault and tries to convince him that the way he sees life is incorrect and morally wrong. This chaplain, rather than growing heated like the other one, tries to use Meursault's own tools of reason as he argues that Meursault, too, must desire another life beyond the earthly one – a life and a reality that would make this life meaningful. But Meursault brushes such thoughts aside, arguing that even if he did want another life, this desire is just like any other material, physical desire, rather than being a divine or transcendent one.

As the chaplain continues to try to convince Meursault of the "other life," Meursault grows frustrated, since he cannot get the chaplain to see that for him, this meaningless, indifferent life is all that there is. He does think this world is "better" because there's the possibility for physical pleasure in it, but this physical experience doesn't, for Meursault, make the earthly world *meaningful*. He underlines his point even further by calling the chaplain "monsieur" or "Mr." Calling him "Father" would mean agreeing to use Christian terms that presume the existence of a divine Father, God, and this is entirely against Meursault's own philosophy.

> [The chaplain] seemed so certain about everything, didn't he? And yet none of his certainties was worth one hair of a woman's head.

Related Characters: Meursault (speaker), The Chaplain

Related Themes:

Page Number: 120

Explanation and Analysis

As the chaplain continues to talk to Meursault, the latter grows increasingly frustrated and bitter about the chaplain's presumption to know what the meaning of life is, and to know exactly what Meursault should believe and how he should act. The question that Meursault poses here is rhetorical and ironic: Meursault contrasts the chaplain's confidence in his own knowledge to his, Meursault's, equal confidence that the chaplain knows nothing. By comparing the chaplain's certainties to a woman's hair, Meursault underlines several major assumptions of his own.In one sense, the hairs on a woman's head are interchangeable, each one an arbitrary example – just as the "certainties" of the chaplain are no more than empty, arbitrary words.

But by choosing this example, in particular, Meursaultagain emphasizes the supremacy of physical, sensorial experience in his understanding of how the world works: as he continues to yearn for Marie's physical presence, the reality of her body is far more real to him than anything the chaplain can tell him.

> Throughout the whole absurd life I'd lived, a dark wind had been rising toward me from somewhere deep in my future, across years that were still to come, and as it passed, this wind leveled whatever was offered to me at the time, in years no more real than the ones I was living. What did other people's deaths or a mother's love matter to me; what did his God or the lives people choose or the fate they think they elect matter to me when we're all elected by the same fate, me and billions of privileged people like him who also called themselves my brother?...Everybody was privileged...The others would all be condemned one day. And he would be condemned, too.

Related Characters: Meursault (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 121

Explanation and Analysis

At this climactic moment, Meursault does not exactly have an epiphany – that is, a realization that will fundamentally change his actions or change the way he sees the world.

Indeed, the "absurd life" he's lived until now is only strengthened in this passage. What is different, of course, is the way in which Meursault expresses his views. Whereas beforehand, his commitment to the indifference and meaninglessness of life was expressed through an indifferent attitude, now he finds himself forced to take a stand, to openly and explicitly embrace these views and to champion them as correct.

Indeed, indifference becomes far more than a day-to-day attitude here. Meursault argues that *everyone* is subject to the universe's ultimate indifference to us all. What makes us privileged, he argues, is simply the fact that we are alive today. And this same fact is also what condemns us, not only to die, but also to live in the knowledge that our existence means nothing. Meursault's refusal to care about other people's death, another's love towards him, is only the logical continuation of the larger meaninglessness defining all our lives. In a way, ironically, meaninglessness itself becomes the way by which Meursault makes meaning out of the world. Throughout the novel, then, his philosophy towards life has struggled to maintain its rebellious, anti-meaning approach, without this attitude becoming yet another, inevitably meaningful philosophy of its own.

> As if that blind rage had washed me clean, rid me of hope; for the first time, in that night alive with signs and stars, I opened myself to the gentle indifference of the world. Finding it so much like myself – so like a brother, really – I felt that I had been happy and that I was happy again.

Related Characters: Meursault (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 123

Explanation and Analysis

Bolstered by the dramatic outburst that he made to the chaplain, Meursault now has the peace and quiet to be able to think through what his embrace of the absurd, of the world's indifference, implies for the way he will act from now on. Instead of resentfully mirroring the world's indifference with his own, he "opens" himself to this indifference.

In a way, this passage might remind one of the most optimistic lines of the world's religious texts, which encourage people to feel happy at the knowledge of a greater meaning. Meursault's feeling is different – indeed, his happiness comes from the very fact of hopelessness that

he knows to be the real nature of the world. Knowing that he is looking clear-eyed into the indifferent universe, and enjoying the mere physical, sensory experience of inhabiting it, Meursault doesn't transcend the meaninglessness of the world, but rather learns to live within it.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

BOOK 1, CHAPTER 1

Meursault receives a telegram from the old person's home in Marengo, outside Algiers, informing him that his mother has died and that the funeral is the next day. Meursault asks for two days off work (which his boss reluctantly grants) and arranges to borrow a funeral suit from his coworker, Emmanuel. During lunch at his regular restaurant, Céleste, the owner, and the other diners all feel "very sorry" for Meursault, but Meursault himself is distracted by practical arrangements. He notes that he is not yet "in mourning." Meursault still feels as if his mother is alive, but thinks, "after the funeral…the case will be closed, and everything will have a more official feel to it."

Meursault is surprisingly unaffected by his mother's death – he is calm and level-headed and spends most of the novel's opening paragraphs considering the logistics of getting off work for the funeral rather than doing any actual mourning. His language is wholly unemotional, imagining the feeling of his mother's death sinking in as "more official." Comparing the funeral to a "case" foreshadows the trial that will take place in Book 2 in which the funeral will play a crucial role.

Meursault takes the bus to the home and meets with the director, who wears a Legion of Honor ribbon. He initially feels defensive about his decision to place his mother in the home, but the director assures him "she was happier here." Meursault reflects that this was why he visited so infrequently – that, and the practical inconvenience of the trip out. The director leads Meursault to the mortuary where his mother is and explains that he has arranged for a religious funeral according to her expressed wishes. Meursault thanks him but recalls privately that, while not an atheist, his mother was not at all religious.

The Legion of Honor is a high French distinction and the ribbon shows that the director is a valued member of French society. If Meursault is really as practical and unemotional as he seems, then his second reason for visiting so infrequently (inconvenience) likely outweighed the first (his mother's happiness). The implication of the religious nature of the funeral is that the director may have forced his own religious faith on Mme Meursault's funeral. Also note the director saying that his mother was happier in the home. Later the director will testify about Meursault's strange behavior at the funeral but will not bring up (or even remember?) his own stated opinion that putting his mother in the home was actually better for her.

In the mortuary, Meursault surprises the caretaker by declining his offer to open the casket (to show Meursault his mother). Meursault is embarrassed, feeling he shouldn't have declined. The caretaker explains that dead bodies must be buried much more quickly than in Paris because of the **heat**. The caretaker's wife shushes him but Meursault does not understand why, thinking the comment "made sense."

Meursault's conduct does not match up with society's expectations. Conventional norms expect him to be emotionally attached to the corpse, to want to see it, to be disturbed by talk of its decay. Yet the caretaker's comment about the body rotting is also not a normal thing to say (as his wife's shushing him indicates). Meursault, however, is unbothered, even interested, by the scientific fact.

Still in the mortuary, Meursault accepts the caretaker's offer of coffee and they smoke cigarettes. Under bright electric light, Meursault, an Arab nurse, the caretaker, and Mme Meursault's friends sit vigil over her coffin. Meursault thinks there is something surreal about these other old people. The noise of one old woman crying irritates Meursault. The caretaker explains Meursault's mother was her only friend. After the stops crying, Meursault is irritated by the silence. Everyone dozes.

Again, Meursault's behavior seems out of sync with social expectations: drinking coffee and smoking at a funereal vigil seems disrespectful. Meursault is superficial, thinking of the woman's crying and the sitters' silence as irritants rather than as empathetic expressions grief.

Next morning, Meursault again declines the director's offer to show him his mother. The director explains that, for humane reasons, home residents aren't allowed to attend funerals but he's made an exception for Thomas Pérez, who was extremely close Mme Meursault. (The home joked that they were engaged.)

Though Meursault said he was "embarrassed" to decline to see his mother the night before, he does not act any differently now. Mme Meursault was capable of intimate, strong relationships, as her relationship to Thomas Pérez shows.

The funeral director assembles pallbearers and prompts the priest to lead Meursault, the director, Thomas Pérez, and another nurse in the two-kilometer procession to the church. The sun is blazing and everyone sweats miserably in their black formal clothes. Pérez cannot keep up. Meursault's head pounds. **Heat** makes the landscape "**shimmer**."

The first appearance of both of the novel's symbols. The intense heat conveys the universe's utter indifference to human tragedy: it beats mercilessly on the funeral party and even Pérez, the most sincere griever, is robbed of his ceremonious dignity and made to look ridiculous, dripping with sweat. The landscape shimmers, repelling any attempt to read emotion or symbolism into it: it is only itself, impervious to humanization.

One of the pallbearers asks Meursault about his mother's age but Meursault doesn't know how old she is. The funeral itself happens "so fast, so deliberately, so naturally" that Meursault can't remember it. He has only a few fragmented memories, including the nurse saying "there is no way out" (since walking too slowly risks sunstroke, while walking too quickly causes sweat that will lead to chills in church), Pérez fainting, red geraniums on graves, "blood-red earth spilling over Maman's casket." He is glad to return to Algiers.

The fact that Meursault doesn't even know his mother's age shows just how distant they were. Meursault, again, is more invested in physical than emotional experience: all of his memories of the funeral are concrete details. The nurse's comment is ironic given it's a funeral procession: in addition to sunstroke and chills, there is also no way out of death, no matter how one chooses to live.

BOOK 1, CHAPTER 2

The next morning is Saturday and Meursault takes the streetcar to the public beach where he runs into Marie Cordona, a former co-worker whom Meursault had "had a thing for." They swim together and flirt, Marie laughing and Meursault laying his head on her stomach as they share a float. They decide to go see a Fernandel movie together that night.

A Fernandel movie is a comedy. Meursault continues to be unburdened by his mother's death, frolicking and flirting light-heartedly on the beach with Marie.

When they get dressed after swimming, Marie is startled to see that Meursault is wearing a mourning tie and further shocked to hear his mother died the day before. Meursault stops himself from apologizing, thinking, "it didn't mean anything. Besides, you always feel a little guilty." They still go to the movies. They feel each other up in the theater and Marie goes back to Meursault's apartment.

Meursault again startles those around him by failing to match social expectation. Marie (embodying conventional social norms) is startled because she expects someone who just buried his mother to be mourning and serious, not horsing around at the beach and watching comedies.

Meursault wakes alone on Sunday morning, bothered because he "hates Sundays." He sleeps till noon, smokes, and then spends the afternoon people watching on his balcony. He sees waves of families walking. When the crowds thin out, he assumes the matinée shows have begun. In the evening, he watches soccer fans returning from the stadiums, moviegoers going home, and young couples on dates. The street lamps go on, dimming the stars and making "the pavement **glisten**." Hair, mouths, and jewelry glisten too.

Though Meursault doesn't explain why he "hates Sundays," his hatred is likely connected to his distaste for Christianity. Though Meursault lives in a Christian society, Church is strikingly absent from his image of everyone else's Sunday. People go to movies and to sports games rather than to church. The glistening streets and women reinforce physicality over spirituality.

As he goes to bed, Meursault notices the reflection in his mirror of "a corner of my table with my alcohol lamp next to some pieces of bread." He thinks nothing of it and feels he is back in his same routines, unchanged by Mme Meursault's death.

The image on the table evokes the holy communion (wine and bread on the alter) but empties it of all holiness and divine meaning. There is nothing transcendent about this wine, bread, and table.

BOOK 1, CHAPTER 3

Before Monday's lunch break at the office, Meursault enjoys washing his hands, as always. He recalls mentioning to his boss once how unpleasant the bathroom's roller towel got by the end of the day and his boss saying "it was really a minor detail." Outside for their lunch break, Meursault races joyously with Emmanuel through the streets to Céleste's, leaping on the back of a truck. Meursault tells Céleste everything is "all right now," drinks too much and naps before going back to work.

His boss may think the state of the bathroom's roller towel is only "a minor detail" but physical details are of highest importance to Meursault.

Home in the evening, Meursault runs into his scabby old neighbor, Salamano, and his scabby, hairless dog. The two look like one another, have shared the same routine for years, and hate one another. Salamano curses at the dog and often beats it. Tonight, when Meursault asks the livid Salamano what the dog has done wrong, Salamano answers, "He's always there."

Salamano's comment conveys intense intimacy. This intimacy, though, is double-edged – though Salamano and his dog must be profoundly attached to each other, they also resent one another deeply.

Another neighbor, Raymond Sintès, appears and invites Meursault to dinner. Though Raymond is unpopular with others and has a reputation for living "off women," Meursault finds him interesting and sees no reason to avoid him. Upstairs, Raymond bandages his hand, explaining he's been in a fight with a troublemaker. Then he explains the fight was with his mistress' brother. He says he suspected her of infidelity (she had not been able to explain a lottery ticket and had pawned items that he didn't recognize) and so he beat her up. She subsequently left him.

Meursault's perspective doesn't match society's: though others steer clear of Raymond, Meursault sees nothing wrong with him. Raymond's stories are shifty – the random troublemaker turns out to be his mistress' brother; he beats his mistress for cheating but has scant evidence that she's actually been unfaithful. Raymond might not be telling the whole story, especially if the rumor that he's a pimp is true.

Raymond wants further revenge on his mistress, even though he still has "sexual feelings for her." He asks Meursault's opinion of the situation, and Meursault, now thoroughly drunk, agrees she must be cheating on him. He agrees to write a letter for Raymond that will lure the mistress back so that Raymond can spit in her face, shaming her. Raymond is "very pleased" with the letter and starts to call Meursault his "pal." Meursault doesn't mind and lets him.

Raymond calls Meursault his "pal" but the only seed of friendship that's been planted between them is Meursault doing him a favor. Moreover, Raymond knows hardly anything about Meursault as an individual - he's been talking about himself the whole time. Is Raymond being disingenuous? There's something fishy about this "pal." And Meursault doesn't seem to care one way or the other. Relationships just don't mean that much to him.

BOOK 1, CHAPTER 4

The next Saturday Marie comes over as planned wearing a dress that makes Meursault want her more than ever. They go to another beach and then Marie spends the night, this time staying through lunch on Sunday. She asks Meursault if he loves her. Meursault "told her it didn't mean anything but I didn't think so. She looked sad," but soon she laughs again in the way that makes Meursault want to kiss her.

There's nothing equivocal about Meursault's physical attraction to Marie – he is filled with desire for her by her dress, by her laugh, etc. Yet he seems entirely to lack any sense of a deeper romantic bond. Though Meursault says love doesn't "mean anything," it obviously means something to Marie.

They hear a woman screaming and being beaten in Raymond's apartment. When Marie asks Meursault to get the police, Meursault tells her he doesn't like policeman. Another neighbor gets one, though, and Raymond opens the door to him, mumbling with a cigarette. The policeman slaps Raymond hard when he refuses to take the cigarette out of his mouth. The crying, beaten woman claims Raymond is a pimp, and the policeman helps her out of the apartment. Raymond says the woman is lying. Marie loses her appetite.

Does Meursault refuse to get a policeman to protect Raymond or for more selfish reasons (because he genuinely "doesn't like policeman")? Based on Meursault's behavior thus far in the novel, it's likely the latter. Yet whatever the reason, his impulse is disturbing – he would rather let a woman get beat up than interfere. Raymond had meant to shame his mistress but the policeman shames him.

Later, Raymond tells Meursault he knows all about cops and that the cop can't change the fact that his mistress got her punishment. He asks Meursault if he'd "expected him to hit the cop back" and is pleased when Meursault says no. Meursault agrees to act as a witness to the fact that the woman cheated on Raymond. Raymond, happy at his revenge, acts friendly, buys Meursault a drink, and the two walk, sharing what Meursault calls "a nice moment."

Raymond is anxious about his public image – he asks Meursault about what Meursault "expected," trying to gauge whether he lived up to people's expectations. He is relieved to find out he did. Meursault's feelings (if you can call them feelings) for Raymond are curiously unaffected by explicit evidence of Raymond's cruelty.

Upon returning to his building, Meursault runs into a flustered Salamano, distraught at the loss of his dog and alternately fretting anxiously for the dog's safety and damning the dog's worthlessness. While fretting, he trembles and asks Meursault, "what's going to happen to me?" He worries no one will take the dog in because of its scabs. Later, Meursault hears Salamano crying and "for some reason…thought of Maman."

Salamano loved his dog deeply, even if that love was concealed by abuse. He may feel he loved the dog in spite of himself. Even now, he denies his love by damning the dog, but love prevails. Though Meursault claims not to understand his comparison, his thought of his mother references the fact that Mme Meursault, too, lost a companion – him, Meursault, her son.

BOOK 1, CHAPTER 5

Raymond calls Meursault at the office and tells him his friend has invited Meursault to his beach house that weekend. When Meursault says he already has plans with Marie, Raymond invites Marie too. Raymond then adds that "he'd been followed all day by a group of Arabs" including his mistress' brother, and asks Meursault to keep an eye out for him.

Did Raymond call to invite Meursault away for the weekend or because he wants Meursault to come along to look out for him? Either way, Raymond's friendship demands favors.

Soon after, Meursault's boss offers Meursault an opportunity to transfer to a position in Paris. When Meursault is indifferent to the offer, the boss is surprised that Meursault doesn't want "a change of life." Meursault replies "that people never change their lives, that in any case one life was as good as another and that I wasn't dissatisfied with mine here at all." Upset, his boss accuses Meursault of lacking ambition. Returning to work, Meursault recalls that he had ambitions as a student but had lost them when he left his studies and realized that nothing mattered.

Meursault's perspective on life (that one life is just as good as another, that one needn't strive for anything since nothing matters) clashes with his boss's view. His boss thinks everyone should try to advance themselves by pursuing career promotions. Society is on his boss' side.

That evening, Marie asks Meursault if he wants to marry her. He says it makes no difference to him and they can marry if she wants. When she asks if he loves her, he again says "it didn't mean anything" but probably not. Meursault denies that marriage is "a serious thing." When she asks if he would marry a woman with whom he had a similar relationship as the one he had with her, Meursault says, "Sure." Marie debates aloud with herself while Meursault stays silent. Then she smiles and says she wants to marry. Meursault tells her about the Paris job and Marie says "she'd love to see Paris."

Meursault again proves himself incapable of emotional attachment. He insists love is meaningless. Along with contradicting society's general beliefs about love, Meursault's answers contradict Marie's beliefs specifically. Saying he'd marry another woman in the same circumstances insults Marie by implying there is nothing unique about her. Marie is surprisingly tolerant of Meursault's chilliness.

Marie has to go so Meursault eats alone at Céleste's. "A strange little woman" enters and asks to sit with Meursault, who agrees. She orders all her courses at once and counts out the payment in advance, then spends the meal checking off radio programs from a long list for that week. Meursault observes her meticulously, then follows her out of the restaurant for lack of anything better to do. She moves "with incredible speed and assurance" and doesn't turn around. He quickly forgets about her.

The strange little woman is Meursault's opposite, planning out her meal in advance, calculating her activities, and generally conveying the desire for control and the confidence to exert it. Her way of life is in marked contrast to Meursault's passivity, indifference, and unassertiveness. This contrast is emphasized when Meursault follows her for no good reason at all.

Back at home, Salamano tells Meursault that his dog is truly lost or dead because it isn't at the pound. Meursault is a little irritated but not yet tired so he asks Salamano about the dog "just for something to say." Salamano explains that he'd wanted to go into theater as a youth but had ended up working on railroads. He'd been married unhappily but tolerably. After being widowed, he got the dog and raised it tenderly. After the dog got sick, he'd rub the dog daily with skin ointment.

Meursault shows Salamano kindness by inviting him in to talk, but Meursault's internal reasoning calls that kindness into question. He claims to invite Salamano in simply to have some company and asks about the dog because he can't think of what else to say, not because he sympathizes. Salamano's account reveals just how deeply and tenderly he loved the dog.

Meursault apologizes about the dog and Salamano thanks him, saying Mme Meursault had been fond of it and expressing his sympathy for Meursault, who remains silent. Salamano sheepishly admits that, while neighbors think it was cruel to send his mother to the home, Salamano knows Meursault loved her. Meursault replies he didn't realize people thought that way and had sent her way only because it was "the natural thing," he was poor, and she had nothing to say to him. Salamano bids goodnight, saying his life has changed, and shakes Meursault's hand.

Whether or not Meursault's kindness towards Salamano is authentic, Salamano appreciates it. Meursault's surprise at his neighbors' reactions attests to Meursault's ignorance of conventional social expectations. Meursault seems to use "natural" to mean "practical," whereas his neighbors would likely use it to mean "heartfelt" or "familial."

BOOK 1, CHAPTER 6

Sunday morning, Meursault, Marie, and Raymond set out for the beach as planned. Meursault notes that he testified at the police station the day before that Raymond's mistress had cheated on him. On the way to the bus stop, they see a group of Arabs "staring at us…in that way of theirs, as if we were nothing but stones or dead trees." Raymond tells Meursault that one of the Arabs is his mistress' brother and grows worried. They continue to the bus stop and observe that the Arabs neither watch them nor follow them.

Raymond is afraid and convinced he's being followed, but it's entirely unclear whether or not the group of Arabs even notices Raymond. They may be living their lives without regard to Raymond, simply looking at whomever passes by.

They ride to the outskirts of Algiers where Raymond's friend, Masson, has a bungalow with the Parisienne, his wife. Marie and the Parisienne laugh together and Meursault "for the first time…really thought I was going to get married." Masson, Meursault, and Marie go out to swim. Swimming alone with Marie, Meursault reflects that "we felt a closeness as we moved in unison and were happy." After Masson goes in, they have sex in the water.

Meursault may not feel any spiritual or emotional attachment to Marie, but his physical bond with her is unwaveringly strong. Though the idea of love has no effect on Meursault, the sound of Marie's laugh convinces him they are "really" marrying. They bond physically (through swimming and sex) rather than through conversation.


After a wine-heavy lunch, Meursault, Raymond, and Masson take a walk on the beach. In the midday **heat**, "the **glare** on the water was unbearable." Meursault reflects, "I wasn't thinking about anything, because I was half asleep from the sun beating down on my bare head." They see two Arab men approaching from the far end of the beach. Raymond tells them one of the men is his mistress' brother and, still walking steadily, tells them he'll "take care of my man" if there's trouble. He tells Masson to handle the other man and Meursault to handle anyone else who shows up. Meursault observes "the blazing sand looked red to me now."

The crushing heat again evokes the world's utter indifference for human comfort, beating down on Meursault's head so forcefully it stops his thoughts. The glare on the water asserts the primacy of physical experience so powerfully that it's painful to witness it. The blood-colored sand foretells violence.

When the two groups meet, the Arab men stop walking and Raymond goes up to the one he recognizes and says something that Meursault can't make out. Raymond strikes the man. Masson strikes the other Arab man, who falls facedown in the water and lies still. Raymond's target is also on the ground and, just as Raymond prepares to "let him have it," the man slashes Raymond's arm and mouth with a knife. The two Arab men back off holding the knife before them. Then they run off. The men return to the beach house. The women are upset and frightened.

Raymond initiates the fight all on his own, saying the first words and striking the first hit. Though the words are inaudible, they are presumably insulting or combative. The Arab man slashes Raymond in defense.

After being bandaged, Raymond insists on going back down to the beach, carrying a concealed gun. Meursault follows. They walk in silence to the far end of the beach where they find the two Arab men lying by a spring, one playing a reed flute. The two lie calmly watching. Raymond reaches for a gun but Meursault insists Raymond can't shoot unless he is attacked with a weapon, convincing Raymond to give him his gun and "take [the Arab] man on man." All stand still in "the double silence of the flute and the water." Meursault notes, "it was then I realized that you could either shoot or not shoot." The Arabs back away, and Raymond feels better. He and Meursault head back towards the bungalow.

Meursault, level-headed in contrast to Raymond's reckless passion, keeps Raymond from acting rashly. Meursault's realization ("that you could either shoot or not shoot") evokes the famous line (and philosophical crisis) of Shakespeare's Hamlet: "to be or not to be." Meursault is saying: you could kill or not kill. Hamlet is saying: you could kill yourself or not kill yourself. Raymond is, as usual, protective of his image and only feels better once the Arab men have physically conveyed surrender by backing away.

Raymond climbs the steps up off the beach and goes back to the bungalow. Meursault, though, stands at the base of the steps, head ringing in the intense **heat**, and feels "unable to face the effort" of climbing up and seeing the women again. He thinks, "to stay or to go, it amounted to the same thing." He walks back down the beach hoping to see the spring again and rest in its shade. "There was the same **dazzling red glare**" on the beach and each flash of the sun's reflection is described as "a blade of light."

Heat and the world's brutal indifference continue to overpower Meursault's sense of the world. This relatively harmless glare and "blade of light" foreshadows a fatal blade of light soon to come.

At the spring, Meursault is "a little surprised" to see that the Arab man who is Raymond's enemy has returned and thinks, "as far as I was concerned, the whole thing was over, and I'd gone there without even thinking about it." To Meursault's eyes in the blazing sun, the Arab "was just a form **shimmering**...in the fiery air." Meursault notes the light is the same as it had been on the first walk and thinks, "for two hours the day had stood still." He likens the **heat** to the heat on the day of his mother's funeral and reflects that "it was this burning, which I couldn't stand anymore, that made me move forward."

Though Meursault may feel "the whole thing was over," the fight actually happened only a little while earlier and must surely be fresh in the Arab man's mind. Shimmer obscures the Arab man, making him look like "just a form," not a full human being. Likening the day to the day of the funeral summons death into the scene right before Meursault shoots. It is heat – or the world's indifference – that makes the usually passive Meursault take action and shoot.

The Arab man draws his knife and the sun reflects off it in a "**dazzling** spear...[that] stabbed at my stinging eyes." Reeling in the **heat**, Meursault "squeezed" the revolver and "the trigger gave." He reflects, that that "is where it all started...I knew that I had shattered...the exceptional silence of a beach where I'd been happy." He fires four more shots at "the motionless body...and it was like knocking four quick times on the door of unhappiness."

Meursault shoots in response to the dazzling spear that stabs him, but that spear isn't the Arab's blade itself – it's only the sun's reflection flashing off that blade. Meursault feels he's shooting that dazzle, but ends up killing the Arab. The "it" that "started" is crucially unspecified. Is it unhappiness? The end of silence?

BOOK 2, CHAPTER 1

Book Two opens on Meursault in prison, calmly and agreeably observing the judicial procedures unfolding around him. Thinking his case "pretty simple," Meursault does not hire an attorney. The court appoints one. His lawyer refers to accounts of Meursault's "insensitivity" at his mother's funeral and asks Meursault if he had "held back...natural feelings." Meursault replies that he has "lost the habit of analyzing myself," that he "probably did love Maman, but that didn't mean anything," and that his "physical needs often got in the way of my feelings." He claims he wasn't holding back feelings.

Like Book I, Book 2 opens with Meursault showing indifference in a situation that would make most people highly emotional. Now Meursault is calm after being arrested. His lawyer evokes Book I's opening by recalling Meursault's behavior at his mother's funeral. Again, "natural" proves a crucial word - the lawyer uses it to mean "emotional" or "familial." Again, Meursault insists love is meaningless. Meursault's concern for "physical needs" over "feelings" has been in evidence throughout the novel.

He points out that the funeral is irrelevant to the case but the lawyer suggests otherwise. Disgusted with Meursault, the lawyer leaves angry. Meursault wishes he'd had a chance to explain that he wanted them to be on good terms, not for the sake of his defense, but "good in a natural way."

The lawyer knows that what may be technically irrelevant to a case may nevertheless be relevant in other ways. Meursault's use of "natural" is curious – he may mean "a friendly way," as opposed to "a professional way."

Soon after, Meursault is taken to the examining magistrate who, after questioning, explains that Meursault "interested him," that "he would do something for me." The magistrate gets passionate and takes out a crucifix, attesting to God's willingness to forgive all crimes and asking Meursault whether he believes in God. When Meursault says he doesn't, the magistrate grows indignant, "screaming irrationally" that all men believe in God, and that to admit doubt would be to render his, the magistrate's, life meaningless. He shouts, "Do you want my life to be meaningless?"

The examining magistrate starts out wanting to "do something" for Meursault by converting him to Christianity, but he soon begins asking Meursault to do something for him: he needs Meursault to believe in God in order to protect the meaning of his own life. This meeting raises an issue that will come into play throughout the trial—Meursault's disinterest in the structures that give meaning to other people's lives are taken by others as a threat to them and to society. One might argue that Meursault has some form of Asperger's or autism, but that the society around him can't accept his difference because it requires everyone to believe in the traditional structures or meanings. This suggests a kind of nervousness within society—a secret mistrust of its own beliefs that it can't reveal even to itself.

Meursault is unwavering and the magistrate tires, claiming never to have seen a criminal with "a soul hardened as yours." When asked whether he feels sorry about the murder, Meursault responds: "more than sorry I felt kind of annoyed." All subsequent meetings with the magistrate are civil, disinterested, and calm and Meursault, enjoying them, feels he is "'one of the family.'" The magistrate "cordially" calls him "Monsieur Antichrist."

The examining magistrate is disturbed by Meursault's unwavering indifference and rationalism but Meursault feels much more comfortable in the absence of passion –it's "civil" disinterest (rather than emotional intensity) that Meursault feels he can enjoy and relate to like "'one of the family.'"

BOOK 2, CHAPTER 2

Meursault describes his early days in prison. He at first does not feel himself to be in prison, instead feeling like he's "sort of waiting for something to happen." From his cell he can see the sea. Marie visits and the two of them sit in the row along with other prisoners and visitors, shouting across a wide barrier between them. Marie tells him "to have hope," tells him he'll be freed and they'll be married. Meursault thinks Marie looks beautiful and wants "to make the most of [her] being there" but is also distracted by the other prisoner-visitor interactions and sickened by the noise.

Meursault's first impression of prison – like "waiting for something to happen" – is grimly accurate. He is waiting for a trial, for a sentence, and, eventually, for death. Marie tries to bolster their relationship with encouragements. Meursault can't help but be bothered by the physical distractions.

Marie waits at the bars even when Meursault has to walk back to his cell. Soon after, she writes to say she isn't allowed to visit anymore because she isn't Meursault's wife. Meursault marks this letter as the point at which prison truly started for him.

Prison rules show that the law organizes human relationships within a hierarchy: unmarried romantic relationships are less important than marriages. The moment Meursault is forced to comply with this hierarchy—which is meaningless to him because marriage is meaningless to him--marks the moment prison truly starts for him because now he is being restricted by society's belief structures.

Meursault describes acclimating to prison. At first "the hardest thing was that my thoughts were still those of a free man." He wants to go to the beach, to have sex. Meursault befriends the head guard who explains the whole point of prison is to take away men's freedom, that that is the punishment. Meursault realizes, "I'd never thought about that," and agrees. He eventually realizes that not getting to have cigarettes is "part of the punishment" as well, though it "wasn't a punishment anymore" after he gets used to not smoking.

Though Meursault is acutely aware of the physical experience of deprivation in prison, he is, as usual, focused on concrete particulars without considering the potential meaning behind them. The head guard articulates the meaning and purpose of prison from the perspective of society at large.

After the first few months, Meursault's "only thoughts were those of a prisoner." He thinks he would "have gotten used to it" if he'd been confined inside the trunk of a dead tree. He cites it as "one of Maman's ideas…after a while you could get used to anything." Meursault looks forward to his lawyer's neckties just as, before prison, he looked forward to holding Marie. "Killing time," he spends hours remembering every object, color, crack, detail in his apartment in Algiers. He "realized then that a man who had lived only one day could easily live for a hundred years in prison" because he would have enough memories to recount to keep from getting bored. He learns to sleep for three-quarters of the day.

From Meursault's perspective, everything is interchangeable and nothing has intrinsic value – his lawyer's neckties can become as pleasurable as holding Marie. His memory practice leads him to appreciate the full richness of physical experience, realizing that even one day's worth of memory would be intricate and vivid enough to fill a century's worth of memories. The grandeur of this vision and the strength of Meursault's faith in physical experience present an alternative to religion: one can focus on and be guided by remembering worldly life, not imagining an afterlife.

Meursault repeatedly reads an article he found describing a man who got rich and returns to his village to surprise his mother and sister after 25 years. He takes a room in their hotel anonymously, as a joke. Not recognizing him, his mother and sister bludgeon him to death to rob him in the night. When they find out what they've done, they kill themselves. Meursault reflects about the story: "on the one hand it wasn't very likely. On the other, it was perfectly natural." He thinks the man deserved his death as "you should never play games."

The article's story functions as a grotesque parable of life's meaninglessness. Another striking use of the word "natural" – by "natural" here, Meursault may mean "understandable" or he may mean "just," if he really believes "the man deserved his death."

Time loses meaning for Meursault and the days "lost their names. Only the words 'yesterday' and 'tomorrow' still had any meaning." When told he's been in prison for five months, he "believed it, but…didn't understand it." That day, he looks at his reflection, which stays "serious" even when he tries to smile, when he feels he's smiling. At that moment, he realizes that he's talking out loud to himself and realizes, in fact, that he's been narrating his thoughts out loud to himself ever since he got to prison. He remembers "what the nurse at Maman's funeral said. No, there was no way out."

Time never had much meaning for Meursault but it has even less now. The mirror scene inverts Meursault's internal thoughts and external appearance: his facial expression, which should be plainly visible, is invisible. But his thoughts, which should be inaudible inside his mind, are audible. The nurse's words return as a sinister, cryptic warning, seeming to suggest, here, that there is no way out of mind-distorting time in prison.

BOOK 2, CHAPTER 3

A year passes and Meursault's trial date arrives. He approaches it with unanxious interest, having never "had the chance" to watch a trial before. As he is being ushered into the courtroom by policemen, he compares the jury to "anonymous passengers" on a streetcar "looking over the new arrival to see if they could find something funny about him."

Meursault approaches the trial as if he were its spectator rather than its subject. His impression of the jury as harmless, anonymous streetcar passengers shows how low he feels the stakes are (Meursault isn't afraid of the people that will determine his future).

The press has given Meursault's case a lot of publicity because of the slow summer season and because a parricide trial scheduled directly after Meursault's has brought a slew of reporters to town. Meursault feels excluded by the jovial greetings and chats among all the reporters, policemen, and lawyers, which, he thinks, is "how I explained to myself the strange impression I had of being odd man out, a kind of intruder."

Meursault's case did not draw a lot of attention in and of itself, but it is about to receive a great deal of attention simply because of where it chanced to fall in the court schedule—a mere coincidence that society will ignore as it comes to see the trial as important. Meursault is, in fact, the odd man out – he does not believe in the social norms and expectations that everyone else in the room subscribes to.

Formal proceedings begin in the packed and sweltering courtroom, reporters recording everything. The witnesses are called and the director, the caretaker, Thomas Pérez, Raymond, Masson, Salamano, and Marie "stand up" from the "shapeless mass of spectators…only to disappear." Meursault notices the strange little woman from the restaurant in the crowd, too.

Though Meursault recognizes the witnesses, they are outnumbered and absorbed by the "shapeless mass" of interchangeable strangers.

After initial questioning on the crime, the presiding judge begins to question Meursault's choice to put Maman in a home, whether it had been "hard." Meursault says no and, in response to the prosecutor asking if he'd intended to kill the Arab, says, no, "it just happened that way."

Meursault speaks honestly –whether his honesty will satisfy the court is another matter.

After lunch, the court reconvenes and the prosecutor calls witnesses. The director and caretaker each attest to Meursault's "calm" at Maman's funeral, how he'd been dry-eyed, didn't want to see her in her casket, didn't know how old she was, smoked/drank coffee beside her corpse. Thomas Pérez says he, in grief, "didn't see anything" including any tears from Meursault.

As Meursault's lawyer predicted, details that seem irrelevant to his crime turn out to be highly relevant to the prosecution. He opens his case with testimony about Meursault's lack of emotion at Mme Meursault's funeral.

When the prosecutor acts triumphant in response to the director's testimony, Meursault thinks, "for the first time in years I had this stupid urge to cry, because I could feel how much all these people hated me." Hearing the caretaker describe him smoking and drinking coffee, Meursault thinks "for the first time I realized that I was guilty."

The prosecutor is triumphant because his witness' testimony has blackened Meursault's image in the jury's minds. Meursault uses the word "guilty" in an emotional, not a legal sense – he always knew he had shot the Arab but now he knows how much people despise him for it. He suddenly feels the burden of others' disdain.

During cross-examining, Meursault's lawyer reveals that the caretaker had smoked and drunk coffee with Meursault, and that Thomas Pérez had not seen Meursault "*not* cry" either. The prosecutor loudly objects to the lawyer's "tactics…trying to taint the witnesses." He shouts, that though coffee might be offered at Meursault's mother's vigil, "a son should have refused it." Meursault's lawyer is optimistic.

The prosecutor is a blatant hypocrite – he himself has just elicited extraneous testimony from witnesses in order to taint the jury. Meursault's lawyer is optimistic, feeling he has exposed the prosecutor's manipulative tactics.

The defense calls witnesses: Céleste, Marie, Masson, Salamano, and Raymond. Céleste calls Meursault "'a friend'" and has prepared a long-winded defense, blaming the crime on "'bad luck'" but the judge cuts him off, explaining the court is "to judge just this sort of bad luck." Hearing Céleste, Meursault feels for "the first time in my life I…wanted to kiss a man."

Like Meursault, Céleste is unable to give the court what it wants. For Céleste, the notion that Meursault's crime was just unlucky chance is entirely comprehensible. For the court, such an explanation is meaningless. Meursault, though, recognizes and sympathizes with Céleste, filling with grateful affection for him.

After Marie is questioned by Meursault's lawyer, the prosecutor questions Marie. He gets her to describe her date with Meursault the day after his mother's death. The prosecutor, voice full of "real emotion," proclaims "the day after his mother's death, this man was out swimming, starting up a dubious liaison, and going to the movies, a comedy, for laughs. I have nothing further to say." Marie sobs, insisting her words were being twisted against her will, but is ushered out.

Of all the witnesses, Marie loves Meursault most deeply and it's ironic that her testimony is also the most damning. Marie is dismayed to hear the meaning of her words twisted by the prosecutor, who presents them as reflections of Meursault's character and insinuating their connection to the shooting of the Arab, even though no such connection exists.

Masson's and Salamano's subsequent testimony on Meursault's honesty and kindness is largely ignored. The prosecutor exposes Raymond as a pimp, cites Meursault's involvement writing the letter and serving as witness to the police. He asks Raymond whether they were friends. "We were pals," Raymond says. Meursault agrees. The prosecutor calls Meursault "a monster…without morals" who murdered to "settle an affair of unspeakable vice."

Meursault's relationship with Raymond hurts his case –Raymond's own nefarious activities taint Meursault by association. Meursault, of course, never participated in Raymond's criminal activities, he just didn't care enough to care about them, but the prosecutor twists the meaning of that into a new story in which Meursault is a monster.

Meursault's lawyer protests "'is my client on trial for burying his mother or for killing a man?'" and, though the court laughs, the prosecutor sobers them by insisting on the "profound, fundamental, and tragic relationship" between the funeral and the murder, accusing Meursault "of burying his mother with crime in his heart." Court adjourns for the day.

The crowd laughs knowing that Meursault's behavior at the funeral is largely irrelevant. Still, the courtroom cannot resist the prosecutor's passionate emotional appeal, his weaving of a story that attributes meaning—most people are always looking for meaning; Meursault, alone, seems not to.

As he's driven back to prison, Meursault can hear from the van "the familiar sounds of a town I loved" (newspaper vendors and sandwich sellers calling, birds, streetcars turning) and noting it's the time of day "when, a long time ago, I was perfectly content…as if familiar paths traced in summer skies could lead as easily to prison as to the sleep of the innocent."

As usual, physical experience proves most evocative for Meursault. Hearing the same sounds he used to hear as a free man connects him to that old life. Meursault does not think of prison as the logical consequence of crime – rather, he thinks of prison as just another chance (and totally arbitrary) fate, as likely as "the sleep of the innocent."

BOOK 2, CHAPTER 4

As the trial continues the next day, Meursault reflects that "it's always interesting" to listen to people discuss you, even on trial, and, at his trial, "maybe more [was said] about me than about my crime." Still, he can see little difference between his lawyer's speech and the prosecutor's: the former proclaims guilt with an explanation while the latter proclaims guilt without one. They seem to argue the case without regard to Meursault's opinion, and he wants to interrupt to say something. But he realizes he has nothing to say, and he notes, too, that he "got bored very quickly" with the speeches, and tuned out.

Meursault's description of the difference between his lawyer's and the prosecutor's cases encapsulates what's at issue: meaning and intention. Though both sides agree Meursault shot and killed a man, they disagree about the meaning of that action – the prosecution insists it was intentional and evil (and that Meursault is himself evil); the defense insists it was unintentional and simply unlucky. Meursault, meanwhile, finds the attribution of any meaning at all to be pointless and boring, and barely pays attention.

The prosecutor attempts to show that Meursault's crime was "premeditated," relying on "the blinding clarity of the facts, and…the dim light cast by the mind of this criminal soul." He reminds the court of Meursault's "insensitivity" towards Maman and association with Raymond. Meursault finds his argument "plausible," and privately agrees he has no remorse. Yet he wishes he could explain to the prosecutor "cordially, almost affectionately" that he's never felt true remorse for anything.

The prosecutor claims to rest his case on the "clarity of the facts" – yet not only are his facts themselves unclear (since they're subjective opinions about Meursault's "insensitivity") their relevance to the case is also extremely murky. Meursault has never felt remorse for anything because he never sees meaning in anything; everything is just something that happened—how could he feel remorse for that?

The prosecutor talks about Meursault's soul, or lack thereof. He says it isn't Meursault's own fault he has no soul, but calls for "loftier…justice" over "tolerance" in this case in which "the emptiness of a man's heart becomes…an abyss threatening to swallow up society." The prosecutor connects Meursault's crime to the parricide being tried the next day. Both crimes sever their actor "from society in the same way." He proclaims that Meursault is not only "morally guilty of killing his mother," he "is also guilty of [parricide]." He asks for the death penalty.

The prosecutor is muddling multiple arenas of justice when he should be sticking strictly within the bounds of legal justice. His discussion of Meursault's soul introduces divine justice. His discussion of Meursault being "morally guilty" brings in ethical or moral justice. Of course, the prosecutor is just trying to get a conviction, and in contrast to Meursault he does understand people and how susceptible they are to a good story.

Given a chance to add onto the prosecutor's speech, Meursault, dizzy in the **heat**, claims he'd "never intended to kill the Arab," then blunders on, saying he did it "because of the sun." The court laughs.

Again, Meursault's honest answer—once again driven by the heat, the symbol of the indifference of the world—holds no purchase in court, and entity whose entire purpose is to ascribe value and intention to actions, while Meursault can't comprehend that any actions have value or intention.

Meursault's lawyer gives his summation, speaking in the first person as if he were Meursault. Meursault is surprised at this tactic, thinking it's a way to "exclude me even further from the case" but when he questions his lawyer he's told it's standard procedure. He finds his lawyer ridiculous, much less talented than the prosecutor. His lawyer also discusses Meursault's soul (though positively) but he doesn't mention the funeral, which Meursault finds "a glaring omission."

Meursault has professed to think people are interchangeable (and told Marie so to her face), yet he is uncomfortable when the principle is applied to himself. Meursault assesses the trial with personal indifference, noting the prosecutor is more talented without seeming to register the implications of that talent for his own life.

All the talk about his soul has given Meursault "the impression of a colorless swirling river that was making me dizzy." He focuses, instead, on the ice cream truck he can hear outside and recalls "the simplest and most lasting joys" of small, particular details. Overcome by the trial's "pointlessness," he wants to return to prison to sleep.

As usual, Meursault is more comfortable with physical than with mental or emotional experience. Others might call the sounds outside trivial, but Meursault finds them "lasting" and the trial "pointless."

The jury files out to determine the verdict. Meursault's lawyer is confident that Meursault won't be sentenced to death. After forty-five minutes, the jury returns and Meursault is brought in to hear the sentence passed. He is told "in bizarre language" that he will be decapitated "in the name of the French people." He sees "a look of consideration" on everyone's face. His mind is blank and he declines to speak when given a chance to.

Unacquainted with legal procedure, Meursault finds the formal rhetoric of the court sentence "bizarre." He sees the same look on everyone's faces – "a look of consideration" – but either does not recognize or cannot understand the feeling associated with that consideration.

BOOK 2, CHAPTER 5

Now back in prison, Meursault has three times refused a visit from the chaplain. Meursault is focused only on "escaping the machinery of justice, seeing if there's any way out of the inevitable." He has filed for appeal. He's been moved to a new cell from which he can no longer see the ocean, only the sky. He regrets not having "paid enough attention" to executions as he then might have known a case where "chance and luck" had intervened to stop "unrelenting calculation." Even knowing only one such case would, he thinks, be enough: "my heart would have taken over from there."

The death sentence has, ironically, snapped Meursault out of lifelong indifference. He is focused and goal-oriented, even ambitious. He regrets his past apathy and disinterest. He acknowledges his "heart." The view from his cell window reiterates his imminent death: before his sentence, Meursault's cell window held a view of Earth (the sea); post-sentence, his cell window only shows the sky.

In spite of Meursault's "willingness to understand, I just couldn't accept such arrogant certainty." He finds the certainty of the verdict "ridiculously out of proportion" with the arbitrary circumstances and ordinary humans ("men who change their underwear") that led to it. Still, Meursault admits that since it's been passed, "its consequences became as real and serious as the wall" he presses his body to.

The disproportion here is between, on the one hand, the jury's fallibility as human beings and, therefore, their susceptibility to human error and, on the other hand, the fat that once these fallible people give a verdict it is treated as infallible and its outcomes are certain—death.

Meursault recalls the only story he knows about his father: having reluctantly gone to see an execution, he'd spent hours afterwards vomiting. Though, in the past, Meursault was disgusted by this story, "now I understood, it was perfectly normal." He marvels that he hadn't "seen that there was nothing more important than an execution." He vows, if he's freed, to watch every execution. The very thought of freedom fills Meursault with a "poisoned joy" that soon gives way to chills.

Meursault has also learned to empathize. His newfound emotion and investment in life enable him to connect with his father, whom he'd previously felt no real tie to. How does Meursault's use of the word "normal" here compare with his uses of the word "natural"?

Meursault states that the problem with the guillotine is that "you had no chance at all," that the condemned was "forced into…moral collaboration" hoping that the blade killed him the first time (since, if it failed, it would be dropped again and again until it worked). Meursault wants to reform the law to give the condemned (whom he would call "the patient") a chance: a poison that would kill nine tenths of the time. "The patient" would have to know these odds. Meursault is also disturbed that the guillotine is not lofted on a platform, as he'd imagined it, but at ground-level.

Meursault objects to the guillotine for the precise grounds that society embraces it: its certainty. Calling the condemned "the patient" translates justice into the medical arena and implies that criminals are people involuntarily suffering disease, not people who have chosen to commit crimes.

Meursault is preoccupied by thoughts of dawn (when those to be executed that day are brought from their cells) and of his appeal. He waits all day and night for every dawn. He tries "to be rational" in thinking of his appeal by making himself imagine each outcome equally. He knows "perfectly well that it doesn't much matter" when one dies. Yet imagining himself being pardoned fills his heart with such "delirious joy," he has trouble being "level-headed."

Though Meursault aspires to the same cool-headed objectivity he embodied earlier in the novel, he is no longer capable of it. That is because he has always cared about physical life (as opposed to emotional life). And it is his physical life that is about to get cut off.

One evening, Meursault is thinking about Marie, who has long since stopped writing letters to him. He thinks she might have tired of him, or be sick, or died. After he thinks of her as dead, "remembering Marie meant nothing to me." Meursault thinks the fact that her death means "nothing" to him is "normal," and claims to know full well that his death will mean nothing to anyone either.

The point is that Meursault has not changed—he is no more able of connection to another human being than he was before. It's his situation that has changed—a society, with ideals he not only disagrees with he can't even really understand, has decided to take away his life based largely on how he acted in a situation irrelevant to the actual murder he committed.

As he's thinking, the chaplain arrives to try to talk to him about God, even though Meursault insists he doesn't believe in Him, doesn't need help, and doesn't have time for what doesn't interest him. The chaplain tries to engage Meursault in discussing the afterlife, in considering divine justice and repenting for his sins. Meursault insists he knows only about human justice and that nothing more can be asked of him. When the priest speaks of God's face, Meursault speaks of Marie's. When the priest speaks of "another life," Meursault insists that there is only earthly life. Meursault calls the priest "monsieur," explaining that the priest isn't his father.

Meursault adamantly refuses to accept religion's 'higher meanings' and insists on the importance of physical experience. For every religious notion the chaplain proposes (the afterlife, the face of God, divine justice), Meursault exchanges a worldly alternative (this life, Marie's face, human justice). He replaces the priest's religious title, "father," with a secular title, "monsieur."

Meursault suddenly snaps and starts yelling, "cries of anger and cries of joy." He shouts that the chaplain "was living like a dead man," that "none of his certainties was worth one hair of a woman's head." Meursault yells that he is sure of his own life and death, entirely, that, though he might equally have lived his life a different way, it doesn't matter. "Throughout the whole absurd life I'd lived, a dark wind had been rising toward me from somewhere deep in the future," leveling everything. Everyone was equally privileged and equally condemned. Everyone is worth the same. He has grabbed the chaplain by the collar in the heat of argument and guards have to tear the chaplain free from Meursault. The chaplain leaves without giving a rebuttal.

Meursault's rant defends the idea of human interchangeability that he's believed since novel's start. Yet, while his previous attitude towards the idea seemed apathetic and indifferent, Meursault here describes the notion passionately. He presents it as an ideal of human equality. He is arguing that to live for some meaning in some other supposed life is to not live at all. That because your life could have turned out any way, but just happened to turn out this way, you have to treasure it and accept it for what it is.

Exhausted after the chaplain leaves, Meursault falls asleep and, waking, smells and hears the summer night. He feels full of peace. He thinks of his mother for the first time in a long time and feels "as if I understood why at the end of her life she had taken a 'fiancé,' why she had played at beginning again…So close to death, Maman must have felt free then and ready to live it all again. Nobody, nobody had the right to cry over her."

Meursault again defends old behavior with a new spin: his lack of emotion at his mother's funeral appeared, at the time, a kind of passive indifference. Yet, thinking back, Meursault sees it as a righteous act: he now sees mourning a person's death as a form of disrespect. Instead, one should appreciate that person's freedom and love of life. He interprets Maman's decision to take a fiancée in the old people's home as evidence of that love of life, that freedom. She had lived her life, and she wanted to live it again!

Meursault, too, feels "ready to live it all again." Feeling that "blind rage" had "rid me of hope…I opened myself to the gentle indifference of the world. Finding it so much like myself – so like a brother really." He realizes he has been, and is, happy and that "to feel less alone," he would just need for his execution to be watched by a crowd making "cries of hate."

Meursault is no longer indifferent towards the world's indifference. Instead, he embraces it and relates to it "like a brother," an equal. (Note the difference between the brotherly relationship Meursault envisions and the top-down, fatherly relationships prescribed by the Church). He realizes that he, as a member of humanity, is not isolated or alone. Regardless of what people think of him individually, even if they hate him, the human race at large is his companion because every life could turn out every way, and so they are all united even though they happened to turn out this way.

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