

The Meursault Investigation Study Guide

The Meursault Investigation by Kamel Daoud

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Plot Summary

The following version of the novel was used to create this study guide: Daoud, Kamel. *The Meursault Investigation*. Other Press, June 2, 2015. Kindle.

God, religion, faith and murder all mix in *The Meursault Investigation* by Kamel Daoud, a novel about belief and identity. Harun Uld el-Assas has felt like he has lived in his older brother's place ever since his brother's murder when Harun was only seven. All of his life he can remember accompanying his mother on her quests to search out information about her son's death and his killer. Because there was no body found and she has no proof he was the Arab killed on the beach, no one takes her seriously. She is even denied the pension due her because her son was killed by a Frenchman. In this novel, Harun seeks to give his brother a name and a past. He also discusses his opinion of religion, his inappropriate relationship with his mother and criticizes a book written about his brother's murder.

Harun narrates the story of his brother's murder set in the time period of the War of Liberation in Algeria. Because his brother was killed by a Frenchman, Musa would have qualified as a martyr if he had ever been positively identified as the murder victim. Instead, Musa's body was washed away by the waves from the beach on which he was shot leaving his family without even a body to bury. Because his mother was overwhelmed by grief from Musa's sudden death, Harun felt as if died as an individual and was forced to live as a reincarnation of his brother.

With no one to tell his story to for years, Harun is relieved when the young graduate student to whom he relates his story comes to him seeking information for a thesis paper. The two meet in a bar on several occasions for Harun to tell the man what he knows about his brother and his brother's murder, which turns out to be very little. Harun tells the student his purpose in telling the story is to give his brother a name. His determination to give his brother an identity comes not only from the two newspaper articles written at the time of his death, neither of which identifies Musa, as well as a novel written by Musa's murderer in which the author never includes Musa's name.

About midway through his story, Harun surprises his companion by sharing with him a secret. Shortly after Independence was announced in Algiers, Harun shot and killed a Frenchman who was on the property where Harun and his mother were living. Harun was taken in by soldiers and questioned, but he was not questioned about the murder. Instead, he was interrogated as to why he had never joined the fighting for the resistance. Harun felt cheated when he was set free with no punishment for the murder he had committed.

In the final chapter, Harun draws an unsettling parallel between the story of his brother and the story of God. While people everywhere were willing to pray and sacrifice to a God they had never met and had no proof existed, they were unwilling to believe Harun's story about his brother because he had no firm evidence. When the unnamed

student asks Harun if he believes in God, Harun turns the question back on the student asking if he believes the story he has just told him.



Chapter 1

Summary

The narrator starts his story, which he tells in the first person to an unidentified person, with the quote “Mama’s still alive today” (1) as he tells how his brother was murdered. No one remembers his brother, but the man who killed him has gone down in history because he wrote a well-read novel about the murder. Since his brother is gone, the narrator believes it is his responsibility to speak in his brother’s place and give his brother a name. He describes how he learned to read and speak French so that he could understand the murderer’s thought patterns by reading the book he wrote.

The narrator is angry because his brother was given no name in the novel written by the man who murdered him. He argues he could at least have been called 2 pm, the time when he died, just like another character in a book had been called Friday. He believes that Meursault drew attention away from his brother’s death and the importance of his life because he did not give him a name.

He directs the young man to whom he is speaking to read the first pages of Meursault’s book. The narrator gives a critical view of Meursault’s writing and indicates it was as if he were looking for Musa from the beginning. Since the book seems to insinuate that Musa died of sunstroke, it made it impossible for the narrator and his family to claim that Musa had died a Martyr’s death.

The narrator tells the young man to whom he talks that he not only wants to have a book written telling Musa’s side of the story because he wants justice but also because he believes by doing so, he will finally be free of Musa’s ghost and will be able to die in peace. He describes how his brother’s ghost comes every night and asks him “Harun, why did you let this happen?” (7).

Harun goes on to explain that he and his brother had no sister, as had been described in Meursault’s book. He remembered his older brother giving him rides on his shoulders. To Harun, his brother seemed like a giant who could out power anything. Regardless, he had died in insignificance.

He tells the man he is with that he did not fight in the War of Liberation because he believed the war had already been won before it was even started. At that point in time he believed Meursault had killed his brother because he had lost his mother, as a kind of suicide. Later, he hints that he realizes how much he is like Meursault.

Before the conclusion of this first chapter, Harun stresses to the writer that he wants to give his brother, Musa, a name. He wants him to no longer be just the Arab. He wants proof, for once, that his brother really existed.



Analysis

The first person narrator, whom the reader learns is named Harun, states his purpose right away. "I want you to make a note of my brother's name, because he was the one who was killed in the first place and the one who's still being killed to this day. I insist on that, because otherwise, we may as well part right here" (11, 12). Harun wants to give a name to his dead brother. Even though a book had been written about his brother, he had been referred to only as the Arab. He was never given a name or an identity, an act that Harun believes is a crime. He indicates that he feels the ghost of his dead brother, to whom Harun gives the name Musa, haunts him because no one knew his name.

The book to which Harun refers, the one that tells the story of his brother's death, is an important object in this novel. The book to which he refers is a real novel *The Stranger* in which Meursault appears as a main character. Harun is very critical of this novel because of the way it belittles his brother's death. One can assume that Meursault was killed because of the murder he committed. In one place Harun describes his brother's murder as a way for Meursault to figuratively commit suicide. In another place, when Harun is discussing the way Meursault's part in the story has overshadowed his brother's, Harun makes the comment "there were two of them, two dead men. Yes, two" (1).

Harun narrates his story in the first person to a person interested in making a book of the story. He speaks just as if he were speaking to one specific other person but that person listening is never involved in the story. Even when Harun asks him to read from the book about Musa's death, the text read is not included in the novel but the narrator picks up in the sentence after that request just as if there had been part of a novel read. For instance "Play the disciple and read me the first page or so ... So. Did you understand?" (4).

Harun begins his story with some significant words "Mama's still alive today" (1). He explains he begins his story this way because the story about his brother's death was begun in a different way "Maman died today" (11). The fact that his mother is still alive while the Frenchman who shot his brother was mourning the loss of his mother is one difference between the stories the two men tell. Harun also tells his companion that he and Musa did not have a slutty sister, like Meursault said they did.

There are a few things that Harun shares in this section that will be significant later in the novel. First, he tells his companion that he did not fight in the War of Liberation because "I knew it was won in advance, from the moment when a member of my family was killed because someone felt lethargic from too much sun (10). He also notes that at some point he realizes how similar he is to Meursault after a shift in roles. Both these bits of information will be explained in more detail later in the novel.

Note there are a variety of literary techniques used in the novel as well as a reference to another popular novel. The narrator has a love of simile, comparisons using the words like or as. For instance, he describes Meursault's writing in this way: "his words are like precious stones, jewels cut with the utmost precision" (2). In another section of this first



chapter Harun describes that his brother dedicated days of his life to “to smoking, arguing with Mama, and looking at me like a piece of furniture requiring nourishment” (11). This particular quote, which lists Musa’s activities in a group of three is a technique used frequently by the narrator. The narrator may use this practice of grouping things in three because in literature, three is considered the number of perfection. Another example of this use of a group of three objects in a description comes when Harun indicates how little the reader of Meursault’s novel comes away knowing about his brother. “Who knows whether Musa had a gun, a philosophy, or a sunstroke?” he asks (4).

The novel to which Harun makes reference in his narration is Daniel Defoe’s Robinson Crusoe. He comments how one of the characters in that novel is named Friday. He reasons his brother could even have been given the courtesy of being called 2 pm for the time he died instead of just being called the Arab.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the importance of having a name, as presented in this section of the novel.

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the structure and the tone of the novel as presented so far.

Discussion Question 3

How does the author incorporate humor into the novel? Give specific examples.

Vocabulary

compunction, illiterate, honed, ephemeral, incessantly, nonchalant, impunity, demise, voracious, lethargic, binary, delinquents



Chapter 2

Summary

In their next meeting, the narrator tells his companion that his mother told him the story of Musa every night. The story would begin with the story of Musa's last day, which Harun describes as his brother's first day of immortality. Even though his mother told him various stories of Musa's last day nearly every night, Harun admits to his companion that he did not know what had happened to his brother between the time his brother had left the house and the time he was killed.

Harun describes a tension in the house as if he thought his mother felt she were in competition with another woman when it came to Musa. He wondered if Musa had a girlfriend. He suspects this might have been the woman that Meursault mistook for Musa's sister. It is suggested that perhaps Musa had gone to the beach with Meursault in order to protect that woman's honor. Harun suspects the woman was named Zubida because he heard his brother speak that name in his sleep.

Harun was seven years old when his brother was killed on the beach in Algiers. Since that time he admits that Algiers has always scared him. He tried to go back there at one point, in 1963 — 21 years after Musa's death — but could not even make it out of the train station. He tries to remember how he first heard that Musa had died. He remembers the sounds of angry adults talking outside his house. He was first told that a neighbor's son had been killed trying to defend a woman's honor but later realized it had to do with his family. Harun continues his story by telling his companion that he felt anxiety in his house and began to cry for no reason, he did not understand what the adults were trying to tell him and thought perhaps his father, who had run away and left the family, was finally dead. Harun admits he remembers nothing of the following days.

At the conclusion of this chapter, Harun tells his companion that for years no one believed that Musa was the man, the Arab, killed on the beach by the Frenchman. For this reason, he wonders how the man who talks to him came to find him and who sent him. Harun also mentions a man he calls "the bottle ghost" (26) who comes to the bar everyday but never says anything.

Analysis

The narrator still does not give the man to whom he speaks a name though he mentions that this person sought him out. Harun refers to this man as Mr. Investigator and Mr. Student Investigator, indicating that the person who had sought him out was a male. Even as Harun tells the story of his brother's death, he tends to ramble and get lost in diversions from his story. Despite these ramblings and diversions, however, Harun adds some more to the truth of his brother's story as he sees it in this chapter.



After his experiences in Algiers, Harun admits he is scared to return to that town. He had thought he would return as an adult and do his own research into the story of his brother's death but could not even bring himself to leave the train station. Harun tells his reader in this section that he was only seven years old when his brother was murdered, a very young and impressionable age. His mother told him version of the story of his brother's murder, as she understood it.

The only real detail that Harun seems to remember about his brother's murder is that he did sense some traces of female rivalry as if his brother did have a girlfriend of whom his mother was jealous. Although he is not sure, Harun believes it is perhaps because of this woman that the misunderstanding between Musa and Meursault came. "And there, I've always thought, is where the misunderstanding came from; what in fact was never anything other than a banal score-settling that got out of hand was elevated to a philosophical crime" (19).

When the narrator describes Musa's friends, he again uses three descriptors, the symbol of perfection. He says these friends were "idle young men interested in skirts, cigarettes, and scars" (16). Another literary technique used in this section of the novel is personification. In one particular example, the narrator personifies his anger. He describes it as being the type of "anger that takes you by the throat, tramples you, pesters you with the same questions, tortures you, tries to force you to make a confession or give up a name" (15).

Discussion Question 1

Since Harun was so young when his brother died, it is surprising that he remembers so little of his brother's death? How does he describe the events that led up to his death?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss how the versions of the story that Harun's mother told him each night about his brother's death might have affected his own perception of what happened.

Discussion Question 3

What role does the woman who was possibly Masu's girlfriend play in the story of his death. Why does Harun think the deadly encounter was prompted by the woman?

Vocabulary

hovel, prophetic, blithely, defiance, voracious, insinuations, harem, allude, feudal, implausible, demise, haik, prodigiously, virile, plunder, resolve, gesticulating



Chapter 3

Summary

In Chapter 3, Harun describes the way his mother has aged. He says he does not know how old she is because before Independence people did not keep up with dates. Harun adds that he does not often go to see his mother, who lives in Hadjout, because of a family secret. He explains that after Musa was killed, they moved around in Hadjout until his mother got herself hired as a housekeeper for a household who lived in a house that Harun's mother had her eye on. She waited for Independence when the French settlers who lived in the house abandoned it. She then moved herself and Harun into that house, the house where she still lives.

Changing the subject, Harun asks his companion where Meursault's mother is buried. He says that even though he has looked for her grave, he has never found it. Harun calls Meursault's memory of his mother's funeral as a "too-perfect alibi" (32) and tells his listener how significant it would be if he could prove that Meursault was not at his mother's funeral.

After a brief questioning of his companion's trustworthiness, Harun moves along with his story and tells how his mother had conducted her own investigation into Musa's murder. He says that at that point he was not bothered by the title that was attached to him as the brother of the dead man, it was not until he was older, read Meursault's book and realized what unfair treatment his brother had received.

There was a funeral for Musa even though his body was never found. His mother looked everywhere for the body but it was never found. She tried to question Meursault, whom they knew little about besides he was French and often had a cigarette sticking out of his mouth. After 40 days it was decided that Musa's body had been swept out to sea. They had a funeral at an empty grave.

Afterward, Harun felt like his mother expected him to take the place of Musa, and at the same time was angry at him for not being his brother. His mother lived in an endless time of mourning. Harun felt alive only when he was at school or at work, he compared going home to stepping into a grave. It felt as if he were an object for his mother, not a son. Harun explained he felt that the people were afraid of his mother who kept the two newspaper clippings of her son's death in her bra.

At the closing of the chapter, Harun once again mentions the bottle ghost that has arrived at the bar. He warns his companion that if he turns to look at the man, he will disappear.



Analysis

Significant in this novel is the differentiation of time before and after the Independence of Algiers from the French. One of the things that Harun points out about this point in time is the way time was calculated more strongly after Independence than before. For instance, Harun has no idea exactly how old he is or how old his mother is because dates of birth were not noted at the time they were born. "Before Independence, people did without exact dates; the rhythms of life were marked by births, epidemics, food shortages, et cetera" (27). Harun notes also that it because of the war being fought for Independence that he and his mother were able move into a nice house. His mother had set herself up as a housekeeper for a family whose house she liked. When that French family fled in fear, she moved herself and Harun into their abandoned house. This war for freedom from the French is also a significant factor in Musa's murder. Because Musa was killed by a Frenchman, he should have been considered a martyr. Because his body was never found he was not eligible for martyrdom.

Because Harun's mother treated him like an object instead of a person after Musa's death, Harun has developed a bad attitude toward his mother. Harun believes that she uses him as a substitute for Musa at some times, but at other times she seems angry that he is alive and Musa is not. He mentions that even though she is still alive that he does not go to visit her very often. As he explains to the man to whom he is telling his story, "You want the truth? I rarely go to see my mother nowadays. She lives in a house under a sky where a dead man and a lemon tree are loitering" (28). Although the reader may believe that the dead man who is loitering at his mother's house is Musa, it is important to remember this quote because it will take on a different meaning later.

A pair of graves are significant objects in this section of the novel. Harun indicates to his friend that it would be important to the investigation into his brother's death if he were to learn that Meursault's mother had never died. The book Meursault wrote uses the mother's death and funeral as his alibi. Had his mother not died, it would blow the foundation of the book apart. Musa questions the death of Meursault's mother because he has never been able to find her grave, or anyone who has seen her grave. For this reason it would be significant for Musa to be able to locate this grave.

One grave that does exist and is significant to Harun's story is his brother's grave. Even though Musa's body was never located, it was assumed it was washed out to sea, Musa's mother insisted that he have a funeral. For Muslims, it is not common to have a funeral without a body. Harun remembers the strangeness of the funeral and the empty grave.

Notice also the use of literary techniques in this section of the novel. When Harun describes the things the French left behind when they abandoned Algiers and the other parts of the country they tried to overtake: "They often leave us three things: words, roads, and bones" (32). Notice the use of three items, a symbol of perfection. Similes are also included in this section. Harun describes his mother as being "huddled up in there like a last piece of hand luggage" (27).



Discussion Question 1

Why would it be significant if Harun were able to prove that Meursault's mother did not die and there was no funeral? Give specific examples from the book.

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the bottle ghost. The narrator has mentioned him several times already. Why does the narrator pay so much attention to him? Why does he stand out to the narrator?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the way that Harun says that his mother treated him after his brother's death. How has this treatment turned him into the person that he has become?

Vocabulary

reincarnations, strident, alleged, proliferation, disinterred, alibi, portents, annihilating, mitigate, paradoxically, macabre, certitudes



Chapter 4

Summary

In Chapter 4, the narrator talks more about how his mother forced him to take Musa's place. Even though they were too big for him, she made him wear Musa's clothes. He was not allowed to be out of her sight and was strictly forbidden to go near the beach. In his mother's mind it was the water that was the culprit in Musa's death because it had taken his body away. When he was sick his mother watched over his body. If he hurt himself his mother acted as if it had been Musa whom he had allowed to get hurt. From this behavior, Harun explains that he has learned to feel guilty about being alive, a guilt that still bothers him now.

Harun describes himself and his mother as appearing an odd couple when she took him with her looking for information about Musa's death. He remembered one day she had gotten a tip that had led to a two-story house outside of which his mother stood for two hours. When she knocked on the door it took Harun several minutes to realize that his mother was cursing the woman. Although she was happy with herself because she believed she had cursed one of the relatives of the man who killed her son, Harun realizes looking back that the woman his mother talked to so badly could have been completely unrelated to the entire incident.

One day their travels to question witnesses did take them to the sea. Harun refers to the sea as the last witness they had to question. Harun was at first awed that he was at the site at which it was said his brother was killed. His mother looked at the sea for some time, cursed it, and then took Harun's hand and they left.

Harun continues talking about his surprise that Musa's body was never found when he asks the man who has come to question him if he had thought he could find the body and write a book about his discovery. Even though it is certain he was killed, no trace has been found of the body even though Harun has looked. He tells his interviewer how he and his mother would visit his brother's empty grave in the cemetery every other Friday. He describes the cemetery El-Kettar as the place he symbolically buried his brother by asking him silently to leave him alone.

Returning to his discussion of the book about the murder, Harun says that it is basically a confession, written in first person, but there is no other proof that Meursault is guilty of anything.

Analysis

The central idea in this section seems to be the idea that Musa's body disappeared so completely. Because there was no body to prove a crime, Musa's mother was never able to apply for the pension due mothers whose sons had been killed by the French. Harun suggests his mother was perhaps more interested in the money than she was in



really finding out what happened to Musa when Harun said he was embarrassed by her begging: “as if she was begging for money and not clues” (45).

A significant object in this section is the water, the sea, because Harun’s mother holds it responsible for taking away the body of her son. She teaches Harun to be afraid of the sea and will not allow him to go close to it. The only time they go to the beach where it was said that Musa was murdered, Harun describes his mother facing the sea as if she were interrogating a final witness. He describes the way he feels as he looks at the sea in front of him: “I stood behind her, a child facing the immensity of both the crime and the horizon” (45). Harun is so impressed by this sentence that he asks the man interviewing him to copy it down because he believes it is significant.

Personification is used in this section to describe the sea. Harun says: “I recall the day when we finally arrived at the sea, the last witness left to question” (45). Although Harun refers to the sea as a person that his mother could question about Musa’s death, the sea in reality is an inanimate object, incapable of answering questions. Another example of personification in this section come in Harun’s description of the eyes of the Frenchwoman whom his mother cursed. “Fear stood in her eyes” (44) Harun says, a personification of fear being able to stand. Also in this section appears a case of Harun’s love of using series of three objects. Here, he describes a man as being “the source of that imbroglio of social mores, whores, and honor” (43).

Notice throughout his mother’s investigation into his brother’s death Harun began to believe that the murder did not take place and perhaps his brother had not ever existed. This is a result of how separated Musa has become from the crime because his body was never recovered. “As for my brother Zujj, he’s discreetly removed from the scene and deposited I don’t know where. Neither seen nor known, only killed. It’s like his body was hidden by God in person! There’s no trace in the official reports filed in any police station, none in the minutes of the trial, nothing in the book or in the cemeteries” (46-47). Harun wonders how a person’s body can disappear so completely.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the scene in which Harun’s mother interviews the sea. How is Harun affected by this visit? Why does his mother make him stay away from the sea after that time?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the tone in Harun’s voice as he discusses the way that the disappearance of his brother’s body affected his life and his mother’s life. How is it significant that his brother is never positively identified as the man who was killed?



Discussion Question 3

Consider the visit that Harun's mother paid to the house where she had been told that relatives of Meursault lived. Why was it so important for his mother to believe that she had spoken in anger to one of the relatives of the man whom she believed killed her son?

Vocabulary

injunction, tainted, clandestine, eroticism, imbroglio, mores, resolutely, incongruously, marauders, pretentious, sublime, agglomerations, travesty, dispossessed, fatalism, passivity, proliferation



Chapter 5

Summary

Harun shares with his companion that he does not know much about the place where his brother's murder is said to have taken place. He explains there are three settings of importance. These include the city, the mountains and the village. He says "when Musa went away into the mountains to speak to God about eternity, Mama and I left the city and went back to the village. That's all" (52). He did not understand more about the murder until he could read the pair of newspaper clipping his mother kept in her bra, and much later was able to read the book Meursault had written. Harun again returns to the idea his brother could have been famous had Meursault just given him a name in the book, regardless of what that name had been. He thinks Meursault did not give his brother a name because it would have been harder on his conscious.

Harun decides to again review the details of the crime. He says that the Frenchman, Meursault, killed his brother, the Arab, who was laying on the deserted beach. It was never certain why Meursault killed his brother, if he was just lazy or if he was affected by the sun. Before that Raymond, a pimp, was angry with a whore and asked Meursault to write her a letter. Meursault somehow believed that Musa had come to defend the woman's honor and ended the whole incident by killing Masu. He indicates that the rest of the story is embellished by Meursault in his book.

Harun goes on to describe how it would explain things if it turned out that Musa had not been killed on the beach where Meursault claimed he had been killed. He believes it would explain why his brother's body was never found and would possibly also provide another, more acceptable place for Musa to have been killed. Harun tells his companion that he has visited the beach several times alone looking for clues but never found anything until the day that he got overheated and believed he saw his brother. It was on that day he cried for his brother. He explains to his friend that he is telling him this so that the man will not go to the beach or even to the cemetery looking for any signs of Musa because he would not find any. He says the story is based on the Cain and Abel. With Meursault being the Cain who killed Harun's brother.

This chapter ends with Harun's description of the bottle ghost. He points out to his companion that he has noticed the man has been creeping closer to them. He has also been cutting articles out of the paper, ones that he assumes are related to murders. He points out that no one has ever heard the man talk.

Analysis

Harun had mentioned once before the two newspaper clippings that his mother kept in her bra about his brother's death. It is in this section that he tells the man to whom he tells his story that he had no idea what the clippings said until he was able to read. It



was at this point that he was able to understand the murder from an uninvolved report. Before that, all he had heard were stories from his mother.

In this section, Harun focuses on the places, or rather the lack of places, where the man wanting to write about the murder can go to research the story. He indicates there are no signs of his death on the beach where Musa was killed. Additionally, although there is a grave, there is no body in the grave. Harun comes to the conclusion that perhaps it would be better if they were to learn that Musa was actually killed in another location. This would perhaps explain why the body was never found and why no signs of the murder were even found.

Harun again criticizes the book that Meursault wrote about Musa's death. He continues to be critical of the fact that Meursault did not give Musa a name or any information about his family. He says of the book "All the rest is nothing but embellishments, the products of your writer's genius. Afterward, nobody bothers about the Arab, his family, or his people" (53). He basically says that Meursault has made up a good deal of the story about Musa's death. Another criticism: "He's the second most important character in the book, but he has no name, no face, no words. Does that make any sense to you, educated man that you are? The story's absurd! It's a blatant lie" (53). Musa accuses Meursault of making up the story.

When Harun talks about settings, he explains that there were three settings of his brother's story — the city, the mountains and the village — again, note the specific reference to things in groups of three. Another use of these three objects comes again on page 53 where Harun indicates that in his book, Meursault "recounts how he stood up to God, a priest, and the absurd" (53). Remember that three is a number that represents perfection. Also in literature there is a rule of three that suggests that readers are more receptive to ideas when they are presented in groups of three. Another use of literary technique in this section of the novel is a simile describing Algiers as "looking like an outdated actress left over from the days of revolutionary theater" (52).

Discussion Question 1

"But no, he didn't name him, because if he had, my brother would have caused the murderer a problem with his conscience: You can't easily kill a man when he has a given name" (52-53). Discuss this quote. Do you agree with Harun? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the way that Harun believes that geography has had an impact on his brother's murder. Why does he indicate that it might explain things if Musa were actually killed some place other than the beach?



Discussion Question 3

Discuss the author's frequent use of groups of three objects or ideas in his writing. Why do you think he does this? Give reasons to support your answer.

Vocabulary

illicit, deigned, avenge, insolence, blatant, fetid, futile, impasse, diaphanous



Chapter 6

Summary

In Chapter 6, Harun tells his companion that when he was a child, the only way he could get his mother to recognize him as an individual was to do something to disappoint her. He describes telling his first lie on the day his mother forced him to go to a mosque that served as a day care center. He was crying because he had crushed some grapes his mother had given him to try to coax him to behave, but told the adult at the mosque that another child had hit him. He said that just like Meursault, he told his first lie on a summer day.

Harun goes on to say that his brother was not intending to kill Meursault and his friend on that day in Algiers. Like the rest of the Muslim people, his brother was just waiting for them to leave. Harun remembered how the Muslims would even look at the houses the French people had built, deciding which one they would try to claim once the French were forced to leave.

One mystery to which Harun has never found an answer is how his brother wound up on the beach where he was killed. Harun believes that his brother was supposed to meet with a friend, named Larbi, but by the time Musa was killed Larbi had vanished from town. He returns to the story that Meursault wrote about his brother and wonders why he had his brother die trying to protect the honor of a sister who was a whore. He suggests the whore character was perhaps an allegory for the land of the Muslims in general.

Along with wondering why his brother was on the beach the day he was killed, Harun also wonders why Meursault was on that beach. He argues that it was Meursault who came looking for Musa, not the other way around, by reminding his companion that according to the book, Musa had been on the beach first. He wonders why a Frenchman was a full life ahead of him wound up on the beach where he became a murderer.

Analysis

In this section Harun goes so far as to call the book written by Meursault an insult. Not only does he say that it is an insult because of the way it does not give his brother a name or give his family any credit, it also is an insult because it suggests that Musa had a sister who was a whore. "I acknowledge that your hero had the talent to create a tragedy out of a newspaper clipping and bring a mad emperor to life out of a fire, but I confess, he disappointed me there. Why a whore? To insult Musa's memory, to smear him and thus diminish the gravity of the author's own misdeed?" (62). Harun comes up with two different explanations why Meursault might have chosen to include the whore in his novel. In the first, which Harun describes in the previous quote, Meursault was



perhaps trying to smear Musa's reputation. In the second, Harun suggests that Meursault was attempting to create some sort of allegory where Musa's whore sister represented the Muslim country. Musa was not trying to protect just his sister, but his country.

Harun begins to compare himself to Meursault in this section, beginning with the reference to the fact that he told his first lie on a hot summer day, just like Meursault killed Musa on a hot summer day. Harun blames his behavior on his mother by saying that he had to do things to anger her or disappoint her to make her realize that he was a different person from Musa. In this section he makes a reference to eating the forbidden fruit. This is an allusion to the Christian Bible where Adam and Eve are expelled from the Garden of Eden because they ate a particular fruit that God ordered them not to eat.

As has become his habit in this novel, Harun continues his habit of referring to things in groups of three. For instance he says of his brother's death. "You can get dizzy thinking about it and then wondering how a man could lose his name, plus his life, plus his own corpse, all in a single day" (61).

Discussion Question 1

What is your opinion of Harun's speculation that perhaps the whore whom Meursault wrote about in his book was not a whore at all but instead a representation of the land of the Muslims as a whole?

Discussion Question 2

Why do you think that Harun points out how the Muslim people were waiting for the French to leave? Why does he suggest that his brother was not intending to harm anyone, including the Frenchman who killed him, but instead was just waiting for him to leave?

Discussion Question 3

What is strange about all of the witnesses to Musa's murder? How does Harun go about pointing out that all of the witnesses disappeared?

Vocabulary

armoire, jubilation, contrite, intuition, rendezvous, foray, bombastic, improbable, avenge, inexplicable, swindle



Chapter 7

Summary

In Chapter 7, Harun talks to his companion about his neighbor, he reads the Koran out loud every night. This segues into a discussion of Harun's relationship, or lack of a relationship more properly, with God and religion. Even though he does not know anything about his biological father, Harun thinks that he must be like him because he left his family before he ever had one. He explains that he has never loved a woman because he has found no woman who has freed him from the anger he felt toward his mother because of the way she treated him.

Harun introduces Meriem whom he says is the only woman who has been able to love him. Other women had seemed to sense that he belonged to his mother and for that reason was not available for a relationship.

He returns to his criticism of religion by explaining to his companion how he dislikes the way that the religious seem to dress and conduct themselves in a way that is lazy on Fridays. He describes the prayer services in a way that make them seem meaningless and hypocritical. Because of the emptiness of these ceremonies, Harun suggests that God did not rest on Friday but instead ran away and never returned.

Harun refers to another scene that he sees continuously in his mind, that of the beach where his brother died. He notes how the man he sees there does not look like the man he killed. As he talks about this man that he killed, Harun says that there is always another one in every story.

Analysis

In this section of the novel Harun discusses his dissatisfaction with God and organized religion. In the Muslim religion the people come out and pray on Friday. Additionally, the bars are closed on Friday so Harun has to stay at his apartment and watch the people gather at the mosque to pray. He describes the scene as he experiences it: "The imam's voice, shouting through the loudspeakers, the rolled-up prayer rugs tucked under people's arms, the thundering minarets, the garish architecture of the mosque, and the hypocritical haste of the devout on their way to water and bad faith, ablutions and recitations" (68-69). Notice the way that Harun uses words to convey the emptiness he senses as he watches these times of prayer. The imam's voice is described as "shouting" a descriptor that indicates perhaps the man was angry, not delivering a positive message about God. The mosque is described as being "garish" while the minarets are "thundering." Harun indicates with these word choices that he thinks the mosques are ugly and overpowering. At one point he even describes the mosque as being "so imposing, it's as though it prevents you from seeing God" (65). Harun even describes the people themselves as being less than devoted to God. He calls the way



they hurry to the prayer service as being “hypocritical.” Notice also the continued use of a list of three items when he indicates the people are on their way to “bad faith, ablutions and recitations.”

As for his personal relationship with God and religion, Harun describes religion using analogy with transportation. He says, “As far as I’m concerned, religion is public transportation I never use. This God — I like traveling in his direction, on foot if necessary, but I don’t want to take an organized trip” (65-66). Harun also seems to have come to the conclusion that God has deserted mankind. Instead of resting on Friday, Harun instead believes that “he decided to run away and never come back. I know this from the hollow sound that persists after the men’s prayer, and from their faces pressed against the window of supplication” (69). Harun’s opinion of God is perhaps drawn from his opinion of his own father who abandoned his family.

At the conclusion of this chapter, Harun seems to be changing gears in his story. He begins talking about a man he killed. A Frenchman he refers to at this point as the other one.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss how Harun’s mother and his relationship with her affected his relationship with women.

Discussion Question 2

Discuss how Harun’s father has impacted his opinion of and relationship with God.

Discussion Question 3

Discuss Harun’s opinion of religion.

Vocabulary

concoction, obsequious, cowardice, negligence, nuances, ablutions, abhor, absconded, voracious, soliloquy, venerations, masturbatory



Chapter 8

Summary

In Chapter 8, Harun describes firing a gun twice, once into a man's belly and once in his neck. His mother was standing behind him as if trying to make him follow through with the shooting and not run away. Even though he knew the murder was terrible, Harun began trying to excuse it first because the man was not a Muslim and second because it could be considered a killing for restitution. He thought because the War of Liberation was still ongoing he would not be questioned about the murder, that it would be considered an act of combat. He also thought that his mother would do what she needed to in order to protect him.

While Harun was still shocked by what he had done, his mother was thinking about the grave and ordering Harun to work fast. He describes the way they cleaned the murder scene as being like stage hands cleaning a set after a play is finished. Harun indicates that in his mind he turned back the internal clock back to the time that Musa was killed that afternoon in 1942.

Harun explained to his companion that no one seemed to notice the two shots that killed the Frenchman who entered their courtyard because there were a good deal of random killings in the first days after Independence was declared. The Muslims, like Harun and his mother, were busy trying to protect the property they had taken over when the French abandoned it. Harun and his mother had taken over the house after the Larquais family, the one for whom his mother had worked, ran from their home. They took over the house and stayed there by right of possession. He describes the way they spent their nights sleeping little during that time because of the killing and stealing. They had to protect the property they had taken possession of from other Muslims hoping to take their own choice pieces of property.

One day while he was looking for an open shop in the village Harun saw the man whom he later killed. He was trying to blend in with the crowd, but Harun recognized him as a member of the Larquais family. Harun goes on to tell his companion how he was woken that night by a noise. He went to his mother's room and unwrapped the gun. It was two in the morning as Harun and his mother tracked the noise to a shed on the property. His mother stood behind him as he pointed the gun at the man. He knew she would not allow him to leave because she believed the death of this Frenchman would give her a sense of revenge. They buried the man together under the lemon tree in their courtyard.

Analysis

By figuratively setting time back to the time of his brother's death, Harun connects his murder of the Frenchman to Meursault's murder of his brother. Ironically, it was 2 am when Harun, a Muslim, killed the Frenchman while it was 2 pm when the Frenchman,



Meursault, killed Musa, a Muslim. Even though it is Harun who went for the gun when he heard noises on the property of which they had taken possession his mother followed behind him, pushing him to kill the man because to her, that man's murder was a form of retribution, the life of a Frenchman for the life of her son.

This murder takes place in the days following the end of the War of Liberation and the beginning of Independence. Harun describes the time period as one fraught with violence and theft. The Muslims were taking over the homes and possessions that the French were leaving behind. People were being killed and injured in these fights to get the best property. Meanwhile, Harun seemed to have a mark against him in terms of being a Muslim because he did not fight in the war. The only Frenchman he killed was the one who tried to invade the house in which he and his mother had settled. Harun believes that even if anyone were to find out about the death of the Frenchman, they would pass it off as being a war death. Regardless, Harun believes that his mother will be able to work things out so that he will not be punished for the crime. This belief on Harun's part will be significant later in the novel.

A variety of literary techniques is used in the description of the murder and hiding of the body. The lemon tree and the moon are both personified and referred to as witnesses to the murder and burial: "The moon was looking on..." (76) and, "the lemon tree, the sole witness to the scene" (85). Earlier in the evening before the Frenchman was killed Harun describes how: "The lemon tree in the courtyard of our house trembled under the black, hot sky" (75). The idea that the tree "trembled" gives the reader the idea that the tree anticipated something bad was about to happen.

Meanwhile, a simile is used to describe the gun that Harun used to kill the Frenchman. He says it was a "heavy old revolver that looked like a metal dog with one nostril and gave off a strange odor" (83). He describes the two shots that came from the rifle as being "like two sharp raps on the door of deliverance" (85). Harun associates the shots with the sound of deliverance because it was from this point on that his mother believed she had finally gotten justice for her son's murder. Of course, no section of this novel is complete without at least one reference to a listing of three objects. Here, Harun lists three objects with which Harun and his mother celebrated Independence. "And that was the way we celebrated Independence: with a house, a jacket, and a cup of coffee" (81).

Discussion Question 1

How was the murder of the Frenchman some sort of restitution in the mind of Harun's mother? Why do you think the death of the man who killed her son did not give her the closure she desired?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the atmosphere in Algiers in the first few days after the end of the Algerian War?



Discussion Question 3

What is the tone at this point in the novel? Why do you think Harun has turned from the story of his brother's murder to the story of his own act of murder?

Vocabulary

contorted, languor, vigilance, extricated, cadaver, proprietors, impunity, obscure, reprieve, bequeathed, pallid, denouement



Chapter 9

Summary

In Chapter 9, Harun describes to the man interviewing him that after he had killed the Frenchman he condemned himself of murder. He did not need the opinion of a judge or God. He imagines what sort of trial he might have since he already considers himself dead, a sacrifice to his mother after Musa's death. He again compares his position to that of Cain and Abel, and says that it was not a case of revenge, but instead a trap.

Harun changes the subject by commenting that his companion seems surprised that he is able to speak French so well. He explains that he learned French from Meriem. She was also the one who introduced him to the book that Meursault had written about Musa's murder.

Harun goes back to the subject of the murder he committed and explains that the thing that he misses most about his life before he committed a crime was the "border that had existed until then between my life and crime" (90). After that point he began to think how easily conflicts in his life could be solved just by killing someone. He also believes that because he killed someone, he also lost the ability to see life as being sacred. Harun additionally shares with his interviewer that he believes his mother was living and waiting only for the day when she could, through him, take the life of a Frenchman.

Analysis

Even though he was the one who pulled the trigger, it is very clear that Harun believes his mother was somehow responsible for bringing things into alignment so that he would kill the Frenchman whom they later knew to be Joseph Larquais. He says: "This isn't a trite story of forgiveness or revenge, it's a curse, it's a trap," (89). In several different instances in this chapter Harun compares his own story to the story of Cain and Abel from the Bible. According to this story, Cain was the first murderer after he killed his brother. Cain killed Abel because God favored Abel's sacrifice over Cain's. Harun describes his murder as being the Cain and Abel story at the end of the story of the world instead of the beginning. Again connecting the murder he committed to murder of his brother, Harun imagines his brother holding his mother's arm as she held his arm to make him shoot the gun.

Even though Harun says that he never got a trial, it does not appear that he needed one. He could not have felt worse about himself if a judge had found him guilty of murder. Harun has already declared himself guilty of murder.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the way Harun's opinion of crime changed after he committed his first murder.



Discussion Question 2

Read the account of Cain and Abel in the Bible. Do you understand why Harun relates to that story? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

Harun argues he was trapped into the act of killing the Frenchman. Do you think his description is accurate? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

absolved, vertigo, insolent, protagonist, trite, fetish, meticulous, maniacal, petrified, anecdote, depriving, atrocious, devoid



Chapter 10

Summary

In Chapter 10, Harun tells his companion that the day after he killed the Frenchman, he was awoken by the smell of coffee and sound of his mother singing. He had not heard her singing in years. He decided not to go out and instead went back to sleep. His mother woke him telling him that two soldiers had come about the shots heard the night before. The colonel wanted Harun to come to the town hall to talk to him. Harun wondered what the soldiers really wanted from him. He believed they would not convict him of guilt in the murder of the Frenchman even if he were to show up with that man's body. He thought instead because he was so different from other people that the soldiers wanted to question him.

When Harun finally went to the town hall, five days after he had been called there, he was arrested and put in a jail cell. The next day he was taken in a Jeep to another place which he assumed was the police station. On the way he saw his mother walking. He tried to smile at her but she did not change her expression. She later came to visit him. She told him only that she had told the soldier that Musa had died and he had not joined the resistance because he was the only son she had left. The colonel did not seem to believe her even when she showed him the newspaper article because it did not name Musa specifically.

Later, in his cell, he thought about the way that people had always made fun of him because he had not joined the resistance. They wondered what was wrong with him. He knew he would have to answer now to an officer with the Army of National Liberation.

Analysis

Harun realizes that he is being brought in for questioning not because he killed a man but because he did not join the fight against the French. His mother makes the excuse for him that he did not join the fight because his brother had already been killed by the French. In reality it does not appear that Harun really put any thought into joining or not joining the fight, it was something that just happened. He notes in an earlier chapter that he felt that he and the others were just waiting for the French to leave. In Chapter 1, Harun told the man interviewing him that he did not join the resistance because he believed the French had already lost. It is perhaps his act of killing the French man that has brought the attention of the soldiers to his house and his family.

Notice again the personification in this section of the novel. The lemon tree is practically another character in this section of the novel as it has been witness to the murder and burial. Regardless of what it has witnessed, Harun tells his companion "the lemon tree practically pretended not to have seen anything" (95). The writer again uses groups of three in his writing. In this quote for instance: "My mother's nearness, her kindness, her



consideration were of the sort reserved for a child prodigy, or a traveler who's finally come home, or a relative given back by the sea, dripping and smiling. She was celebrating Musa's return" (95). There are two groups of three in this section "my mother's nearness, her kindness, her consideration" and "a child prodigy, or a traveler who's finally come home, or a relative given back by the sea." The idea of the quote is that Harun's mother is seeing Harun as Musa reincarnated. The evidence that the soldiers have been at Harun's house include "two empty cups, some cigarette butts, and traces of footsteps in the dirt" (96).

Discussion Question 1

Discuss Harun's belief that even if he had arrived at town hall with the body of the Frenchman on his back it would not be because of that murder, but instead his strangeness of which the soldiers would convict him.

Discussion Question 2

Why does Harun's mother believe it will make a difference in Harun's case that his brother was killed by a Frenchman? Again, how are Harun and his mother punished because his brother was never given a name in the newspaper article about his brother's murder?

Discussion Question 3

Why does the author include in the story that Harun saw his mother walking down the street when he was being transported to the police department? Why is it noted that Harun's mother did not smile at him but remained stone faced? Why is this scene significant?

Vocabulary

certitudes, meticulousness, torpor, equidistant, poignant, treatise, minarets, primordial, austere, ascetic, taciturn, interminably, anomaly



Chapter 11 -12

Summary

In Chapter 11, Harun tells his companion that an officer of the Army of Nation Liberation did finally talk to him. One of his first questions was if he knew Joseph Larquais, the man whom he had murdered. At that point Harun knew he was not there because he had killed that man but because he had killed him by himself and at the wrong time.

During another interview later that day, the same officer waved a small Algerian flag in front of Harun and asked why he had not joined the resistance. He explained it made a great deal of difference that Harun had not killed the Frenchman as part of the army, and that he had killed him after the war had ended. Harun smarted off the officer and the officer slapped him. He did ask if Harun really had a brother killed by a Frenchman. Harun said he did but that it had been before the war had started. Harun told his brother's story when the officer asked. The officer declared that while Musa was a martyr, he was not sure about Harun. That evening in his cell, Harun panicked because he knew that the officers were going to set him free without charging him with anything. He felt insulted because he knew they were taking his guilt so lightly.

Later, Harun said that his mother had told him that she wanted him to kill Joseph because of the way that he enjoyed swimming in the sea. She had apparently studied Joseph and decided he was the one she wanted Harun to kill. He thought she was crazy and lacked good reasoning. In fact, he decided at that point that his entire life was built on a lack of good reason.

At the end of this chapter, Harun suggests to his interviewer that perhaps it is time to invite the bottle ghost to join them since he has noticed that man getting closer and closer to them.

In Chapter 12, Harun discusses his opinions of love and death. He says that love scares him while death is the only thing that remains a mystery to him. He speaks of Meriem, the only woman whom he ever loved and seems to believe that perhaps if Musa had not been murdered they might have had a different kind of life together. As the chapter concludes, Harun asks his interviewer if the bottle ghost is refusing to answer his questions. Harun suggested that he insist that his questions be answered, just like he did when he was dealing with him.

Analysis

Timing is a significant topic in this section of the novel. Harun indicates that his crime is not because he killed the Frenchman, but because he did not kill the man during the right period of time and under the correct pretenses. "I knew I wasn't there for having committed a murder but for not having done so at the right moment" (107) Harun tells the man interviewing him. The officer with the army seems most concerned that Harun



did not kill the French man before July 5, the day that the war was said to be finished. Harun knows the officer is also upset because Harun did not kill the man as part of the official war. He did so on his own pretenses.

The Algerian flag that the officer waves at Harun is a significant symbol because the officer uses it to try to incite some sense of loyalty in Harun. Harun knows that he is considered strange because he did not fight in the resistance. Perhaps some of his reason for not fighting in the resistance is because his brother was killed by a Frenchman in cold blood, yet no one in his country acknowledges Musa's death or his family's loss. It is hard to feel loyal to a country that denies a personal loss. Harun also shared with his reader in an earlier part of the novel that he did not fight in the resistance because he believed the fight was already won. He was of the opinion that if those living in Algeria just waited long enough, the French would leave.

When Harun talks about his murderers, as is his habit, he lists three suspects. He says to his friend "it was Musa, Mama, and your hero, those are my three murderers" (116).

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the significance of time in this section of the novel. Why is it significant that Harun killed Joseph when he did? Why is it significant that Musa was killed before the War of Liberation began?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the idea that Harun's mother had chosen her victim. Do you think this is really possible or did Joseph just happen to be in the wrong place at the right time?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Harun suggest that they invite the bottle ghost to join them? Who do you think this ghost represents? Give examples to support your answer.

Vocabulary

exasperate, pensively, improbably, chagrined, ardor, vague, flippancy, obliterating, oblivious, stupefied, inexplicable, inevitable, elicits, precarious, dubious



Chapter 13

Summary

In Chapter 13, in his interview, Harun begins to talk about the year of 1950 when his schooling began. He said he was brilliant in school and enjoyed learning French. He learned to read because he hoped that ability would help him to locate his brother's murderer. When he was finally able to read the two newspaper clippings his mother kept, his mother made him read them for her again and again, hoping for him to understand something new each time. He was upset by the way the newspaper handled Musa's death but not as upset as when he learned nothing about his brother from the book written by Meursault. He admits he was hoping to learn his brother's last words or any tidbit about his final moments.

When his mother first realized that Harun was learning to read and write she had begun pushing the newspaper articles at him. He realized at that point that even though he felt he had never been able to completely live his life because of Musa's death, and felt he was dead, he realized that his mother also expected him to be able to resurrect Musa by reading the article to her. When he finally was able to read the article, he told his mother not only what the scant article said but enhanced the words "so Mama got a complete imaginary reconstruction of the crime" (121). He felt his process of learning was focused around the beach on which Musa was killed. Somehow he feels that Joseph's death helped to counterbalance the strangeness that had taken over their lives at that point.

It was at this point that Meriem entered Harun's life wanting details about Musa and his death. His mother had gotten him when she learned what Meriem was wanting. At this point Harun indicates that he and his mother were living like recluses in the house. He had not even thought of a woman since his mother was so overbearing. Meriem told Harun that she was working on a book about Musa's murder that would be told by the man who murdered him. When he understood what Meriem was saying to him, Harun felt as if his brother had been killed a third time. She had read the book and decided to do her own investigation. The trial of this investigation had led her back to Harun and his mother. Harun admits to the student to whom he is talking that he was both in love with Meriem and hated her because she had disturbed the strange balance in his world.

Analysis

Because he was finally able to read the two newspaper clippings that his mother kept about his brother's murder, Harun felt that his schooling, along with everything else he did in his life, had been done so he could be of service to his mother by reading the articles to her. To make her happy he added to the articles so he told her far more than what they actually said. Harun admits that when he was first able to read the articles for himself, he was offended by how little information they had about his brother. Likewise,



Harun was also disappointed when he read the novel. He had expected to find some account of his brother's last minutes and discovered that the book did not even identify him with a name.

In the timeline, Meriem comes in March of 1963, just less than a year after Harun killed the Frenchman. Musa had been killed in 1942, more than twenty years prior.

Meriem's entrance into Harun's story illustrates how out of the ordinary Harun's relationship with his mother is. First, he wonders if things might have been different with himself and Meriem if Musa had not have died. He and his mother both recognize the attraction between Harun and Meriem. Harun describes it feeling as if the balance in his world was thrown off course.

There are several examples of the author's use of the rule of three in this chapter. In one example Harun says, "I had enough to do, what with extracting myself from Mama's womb, burying the dead, and killing fugitives" (124). He gives these three activities as reasons that he had never had time to pay attention to women before. A second use of this rule of three deals with Musa and his symbolic third death. Harun explains that he felt like his brother died a third time when Meriem told him and his mother that a book had been written about Musa by his murderer. "And that's how Musa my brother died three times in a row. The first time was at two o'clock in the afternoon on "the day of the beach"; the second time, when I had to dig him an empty grave; and the third and last time, when Meriem entered our lives" (124-126).

Discussion Question 1

What impact did Meriem have on Harun and his mother's life?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss Harun's claim that his brother was killed three times. Do you understand his reasoning? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss Harun's opinion of his schooling. Do you believe he was sent to school only so he could help his mother with her investigation of Musa's death by reading the articles to her? Why or why not? Give reasons to support your answer.

Vocabulary

dissonances, embellishing, brevity, brandishing, ricochet, convalescents, pugnacity, equilibrium



Chapter 14

Summary

In Chapter 14, Harun recounts how Meriem described in more detail how she was planning to write a thesis on Meursault's book but had wanted more information about the murdered Arab and his family. Meriem showed Harun the book, which bore the title *The Other*.

Harun describes the shock that he and his mother felt when they realized there was an entire book that told the story of the death of Musa, including giving an identification of the man who had killed him, something they had never known. Just like the world did not know the name of the man killed but Harun and his mother did, the world as a whole knew the identity of Musa's murderer, information that Harun and his mother never had before. The day after Meriem's visit, Harun's mother told him not to open the door if Meriem returned. He had, however, already agreed to meet with her at the train station. With Meriem, he says that he experienced the feeling of falling in love, an experience he felt that his mother had been trying to keep from him.

Before they parted their first time alone together, Meriem asked Harun who she would need to talk to and where she would need to go to prove that the Arab in Meursault's book was his brother. He told her that was the root of the problem because they barely had a family name. He was hurt when she laughed at him.

When Harun read Meursault's book for himself, he felt as if it had been written by God. He said the author seemed to be a man on a divine mission to prove that Musa had no identity. At the same time, reading the book and seeing into the soul of the man who killed his brother was like looking into his own soul. Harun tells the student to whom he is talking that he wanted the same thing the murderer wanted, to have a large crowd condemn him and cry out their hate for him. He notes that he never told his mother about the book.

Harun admits to his current interviewer that he knew that his relationship with Meriem would not last. He does not know what it was for sure that ended the relationship but does not believe Meriem was angry with him. While he was seeing Meriem, he knew that his mother sensed something different. He had wished at the time he could free himself from his mother once and for all but did not. In fact, he even makes up a scenario where he asked Meriem to marry him as a joke on the man interviewing him. He says that he did go through the house breaking all of the dishes and cursing when Meriem left and he realized she was not going to come back. His mother had reacted only by smiling because she knew she had won Harun back. They wrote to one another but eventually her letters got shorter and shorter, and then stopped coming entirely.



Changing the subject, Harun tells the man interviewing him that since this was their last time to meet together, he wanted the bottle ghost to join them. It is at this point that Harun learns from the bar tender that the man is a deaf mute.

Analysis

Consider in this section that the bottle ghost is a character who represents God, or at least Harun's perspective of God. Through the course of the novel Harun has been distracted by the man who sits alone, appearing to be eavesdropping on the conversation between himself and the student. Harun almost becomes obsessed with the idea the man is interested in what they are talking about and that he should invite him to join their conversation. It is only in this section of the novel that Harun learns there is no way the man could be eavesdropping because he is a deaf mute. Just like Harun has indicated in a previous chapter that he believes God, whom many people believe is interested in their lives and actions, has actually run away and is not aware of what they are doing; Harun believed this deaf mute was interested in the conversation between himself and the student. When he learns the man is a deaf mute, it means the man had no interest in their conversation. If he had moved closer to them, it was not for the purpose of hearing their conversation because he could not hear at all.

In this section of the narrative, the book written about Musa's murder is given a fictitious name. It is referred to as *The Other*. The actual novel to which this book is a sort of answer is called *The Stranger* by Albert Camus that deals with an Arab shot on a beach by a Frenchman named Meursault. Harun lets it be known rather quickly what he thought of the book when he first read it. He describes it as telling "a murder story with the genius of a mathematician examining a dead leaf" (127). He believes the book is insulting because it mentions so little about his brother, but focuses instead on the murderer. Significant is Harun's admission that he has never told his mother about the novel. He does not want to have to spend his life reading that book to her like he was forced to read the articles to her. He may also have in mind that the contents of the book will not make her feel any better about Musa's death. Like he was insulted by the book, he believes she will only be disappointed by how little information is included about him.

Use of literary techniques continues in this section. When Harun's mother comes to tell him not to open the door if Meriem should return to talk to them he describes her as looking "like a threatening old sorceress" (129). Also in a sentence that includes a set of three facts, Harun describes how with Meriem's visit "We had just discovered, all at once, the last traces of Musa's footsteps, his murderer's name — which we had never known — and his exceptional fate" (128).

Discussion Question 1

Discuss how Harun felt when he learned a book had been written about his brother's death but that he and his mother neither one were aware that it even existed?



Discussion Question 2

Why do you think that Harun's relationship with Meriem did not work out? Give reasons to support your answer.

Discussion Question 3

Do you agree with Harun's reasons for not telling his mother about the book? Why or why not? Give reasons to support your answer.

Vocabulary

thrall, aptness, gauche, veritable, digressions, polygamous, lecherous, tribulations



Chapter 15

Summary

In Chapter 15, Harun admits that as long as he has lived, he believes he should have learned something deep and profound about the universe. He feels he has done nothing with his life except play the murder of his brother over and over. He describes himself as a ghost that has only observed life. Even though he has wanted, on occasion, to tell someone his story, he knew no one would believe him.

Because of the way he has lived his life, Harun tells his friend that he sees Meursault in every crowd. He is angry with the crowds and with organized religion. He would like to go to the top of a prayer tower and broadcast all of his imperfections and religious failings to anyone who would listen. He claims the only time he was able to catch a glimpse of divine order was in Meriem's face.

One day the imam told Harun he should at least pray like everyone else but Harun replied that he did not want to waste what time he had left on God. He was angered when the imam offered to pray for him. When the man interviewing Harun asks if he believes in God, Harun tells him that is not a question he can answer. That is a question that should be asked of God himself. The question makes him feel as if he is really in the prayer tower and people are trying to break down the door to get him out. He shouts to them there is no one there, there was never anyone there.

Harun ends his discussion asking if the student believes his story. He describes it as being the same as the story of God since no one has ever seen or been able to prove his existence either. At the end of the novel, Harun calls the student by the name El-Merssoul, the Arabic version of the name of the man who wrote the novel about Musa's death, indicating he can choose to be the messenger of the tale.

Analysis

Perhaps this is not so much a story about finding an identity as it is about proving the hypocrisy of religious belief. There are so many people who do not question the existence of God, even there is no proof that he exists. While they believe in God with no proof, only because a book tells them about him; they are unable to accept the fact that Musa was the man who was murdered and that he was Harun's brother and was the son of the same mother as Harun. In retrospect there are a good deal of things in Musa's story that are similar to that of Jesus. Musa was killed unjustly, just like Jesus was killed unjustly. There was no body to bury either in Musa's case nor in Jesus' case. It is believed that Jesus was raised from the dead while it is believed Musa's body was carried to sea but in both instances, the lack of a body seems to point to the idea there was no death.



Names are also important at this point in the story. Harun calls the student to whom he speaks El-Merssoul as they part. This name, El-Merssoul, is the Arabic version of Meursault the name of the man who killed Musa. Since El-Merssoul means the messenger, it is clear that Harun intends for this student to spread the message he has been given about Musa.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss Harun's rant about the existence of God included in this chapter. Do you agree with him that it is futile to ask man if God exists? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

How has the death of Musa been allowed to overtake Harun's life? Do you think he is correct in his belief that he had done nothing but relive Musa's death over and over? How did his mother add to this shortfall in his life?

Discussion Question 3

When Harun asks the student if he believes his story, do you think that Harun is referring only to the one about his brother's death, or is there perhaps a larger story about which Harun asks? Give reasons and examples to explain your answer.

Vocabulary

triviality, entrails, rancid, invective, sacrilege, impieties, fanatics, provocation, compulsive



Characters

Harun Uld el-Assas

Harun is the main character and narrator of the novel. He is the younger brother of Musa and was seven when his brother was killed. Since the death of his brother, Harun felt as if his mother expected him to surrender himself and become a form of Musa reincarnated for her. Harun never married, never had friendships and felt as if he were sent to school to learn to read only so he could read the newspaper articles that his mother had kept about his brother's death. Harun does not believe in God. In fact, he believes God abandoned humanity during a Friday day of rest.

As an old man, Harun narrates to a graduate student the story of Musa's death as he knows it. Because he was so young when his brother died, Harun really does not know that much about what happened. He also shares with the young man to whom he is talking that he killed a Frenchman who had trespassed onto the property on which he and his mother were living. Because the killing took place after liberation Harun was taken in and questioned by soldiers. Harun was disturbed because the soldiers who questioned him seemed more upset that he had not fought with the resistance than that he had killed a man.

Harun and Musa's Mother

This woman, the mother of both Musa and Harun is never given a name. After Musa's death, his mother begins her own investigation in an attempt to determine what happened to her son. She is never able to make any progress in her investigation, however.

According to Harun, his mother made him into a substitute version of Musa by making him wear Musa's clothes. Once he learned to read, Harun had to read the newspaper articles over and over again to his mother. Because she was so possessive of him, not because she loved him but because she saw him as Musa, Harun believed that his mother scared away prospective girlfriends.

Harun blames his mother for his act of shooting the Frenchman. Even though the man did not appear to have a reason for having come to their house, Harun's mother believed he had been sent there on purpose. When Harun shoots the Frenchman, his mother believes that Musa's death has finally been vindicated. Even though she is so old she barely speaks to anyone any longer, Harun's mother is still alive at the time that he speaks to the student about Musa's death.



The Bottle Ghost

The bottle ghost is the name of a man in the bar with whom Harun becomes obsessed. He believes the man is a ghost because he is so silent. The man sits in the bar drinking and clipping articles out of a newspaper. Harun believes the articles he cuts out are associated with murders. The man also appears to be eavesdropping on the conversation between Harun and the student. It is only near the end of the novel that Harun learns that the man is a deaf mute so there is no way he has been eavesdropping on the conversation between Harun and the graduate student.

Meriem

Meriem is the girl who approaches Harun and his mother wanting to write Musa's story. Even though his mother did not approve of the relationship, Meriem is the only girl with whom Harun ever fell in love. After Meriem returned to school, the two eventually drifted apart from one another.

Meriem is the one who taught Harun how to read and speak French. She is also the one who tells him about the novel written about his brother's death and helps him to understand that book.

Musa Uld el-Assas

Musa is the name that Harun gives to his brother Zujj for purposes of talking to a graduate student about Musa's murder. At the time that Harun talks to this student, his brother has been dead for about seventy years.

Harun, who was only seven when his brother was killed, tries to piece together what happened to his brother. He knows very little, only that it has been said that he was shot to death on a beach near Algiers.

Joseph Larquais

Joseph Larquais is the man whom Harun kills in the courtyard of the house in which his mother lives. Because Harun killed the man a day after the ending of the war, he was imprisoned for the man's death.

Regardless of when her son killed Joseph Larquais, Harun's mother believed that Joseph's death was a way to avenge the death of Musa.

Zubida

Zubida is the woman whose name Harun believes he heard his brother call out in his sleep the night before he was murdered. Harun wonders if this woman was the one



whose honor Musa was trying to protect. Harun believed that he saw Zubida the day he and his mother left Algiers.

Officer in the Army of National Liberation

After Harun was arrested for Joseph's murder, he was questioned by an unnamed officer with the Army of National Liberation. This officer is more interested in the fact that Harun did not fight with the resistance than the fact that he killed Joseph. He is also disturbed because Harun killed the man one day after the war was finished.

Graduate Student

The graduate student is a young man who seeks out Harun for the story of Musa's murder from the viewpoint of Musa's family. This young man is never given a voice in the novel but it is to him that Harun tells Musa's story with the hopes of giving Musa a name.

Larbi

Larbi is the friend of Musa whom Harun understood his brother was going to see the day that he died. After Musa's death, Harun was never able to find Larbi to talk to him about his brother's death.

Raymond

Raymond is the man who, according to Meursault's novel, wrote the threatening letter to the woman whose honor Musa was trying to protect.



Symbols and Symbolism

The Other

This book is symbolic of the reaction that Harun and his mother have always gotten when they claim that Musa, their relative was the man killed on the beach by a French man. People do not believe their story because they have no proof. The book, even though it is written by the man who was most familiar with what happened, besides Musa, does not provide them with any proof because it does not include Musa's name or include any reference to him at all with the exception of calling him an Arab.

Musa's Grave

Musa's grave is empty because his body was never located. It is a symbol of the way that Musa just disappeared when he died.

Dwarf Lemon Tree

This dwarf lemon tree is a symbolic silent observer of the murder of the French man. Harun notes several times how this tree stood witness over the man's death and burial, seeing everything but saying nothing.

Musa's Clothes

These clothes symbolize Musa. Harun's mother makes him wear his brother's clothes even though they are too big for him because she wants him to look more like Musa.

The Water

To Harun's mother, the water in the sea symbolizes the culprit in the mystery of Musa's death because the sea swept Musa's body away before it could be recovered.

The Grapes

These grapes, which Harun smashed because he did not want to go to day care, are a symbol of the first lie that he ever told.

Little Algerian Flag

This flag is a symbol of Algeria and the pride that the officer in the Army of National Liberation believes that Harun should have in his country.



Two Newspaper Clippings

These two ragged newspaper clippings are symbols of how little information Harun and his mother have about Musa's death.

The Mosque

The mosque that stands near Harun's apartment is a symbol of religion. Harun notes at one point that this mosque (religion) blocks his view of God.

Meursault's Mother's Grave

Because Harun had not been able to locate the grave of Meursault's mother and had not talked to anyone who knew where it was, Harun believed that perhaps Meursault's mother had not really died. In this case, the grave would symbolize a lie, proof that Meursault's story was built on a false alibi.



Settings

Algiers

Algiers is the name of the city in which Harun and his family lived when his brother was murdered. He and his mother moved out of the city of Algiers soon after Musa died. Harun was so afraid of the city he was not even able to go back there to do his own investigation of his brother's death.

Oran

Oran is the city in which Harun lives as an adult. It is also in Oran where the bar is located where Harun meets to talk to the graduate student who wants to write a story about Musa and his death.

Djebel Zendel

Djebel Zendel is the name of the bar where Harun meets the graduate student to tell him Musa's story.

Hadjout

Hadjout is the name of the village where Harun's mother lives. She and Harun moved to this village after they left Algiers. It was in this village that Harun lived when he killed Joseph.

El-Kettar

El-Kettar is the Arab cemetery where a grave was dug for Musa even though his body was never located. Harun tried to symbolically bury brother's presence at this cemetery by yelling at him to leave him alone.



Themes and Motifs

Harun's View of Religion

Even though Harun says he doubts the existence of God, he uses a good deal of religious imagery and refers to many Biblical stories in his novel. This use of religious imagery and stories indicates that Harun is very intelligent and has a deep understanding of religion and religious background. He has apparently not made his decision that he does not believe in God lightly. Along with comparing the public's willingness to believe the story of Musa with their belief in the story of Jesus, Harun compares situations he has encountered in his life to several well-known Biblical stories.

One of the first Biblical references to note in the novel are the names of Harun and his brother. The names Harun and Musa are significant Biblically. Harun is the Arabic form of Aaron while Musa, the name that Harun chooses to give his brother is the Arabic form of Moses. In the Bible, because Moses did not believe he had adequate public speaking skills, Aaron was chosen as his spokesperson. This story parallels Harun's idea that his purpose in life is to speak on behalf of his dead brother, giving him a voice and a name.

The story of Cain and Abel is mentioned quite frequently. In this following quote the French man is Cain while Harun's brother, whose given name is Zujj even though Harun calls him Musa, is Abel. "You'll get a better grasp on my version of the facts if you accept the idea that this story is like an origin myth: Cain comes here to build cities and roads, and to domesticate people and soil and plants. Zujj is the poor relative, loafing in the sunshine, his whole attitude so lazy it's evident he owns nothing, not even a flock of sheep that could arouse envy or motivate murder. In a certain way, your Cain killed my brother for ... nothing! Not even for his livestock" (57-58). In this quote, Harun argues that even in the Bible, there was a reason why Cain killed Abel. Meursault, however, apparently had no reason to slay Musa, making the crime seem even more senseless than the violence between Cain and Abel.

Harun also references the story of Cain and Abel when he talks about his act of murdering the French man. In this use of the story, Harun is Cain symbolically killing his brother Musa. Even though he did not actually kill his brother, but instead a man of French descent, Harun believes his mother will see this murder as a retribution. Harun believes that by killing the man he will finally be able to free himself of the responsibility he feels toward his brother.

Also significant is the way Musa's murder has affected the way that Harun views religion. Both the story of his brother's death and the Christian story of the resurrection of Jesus have a good deal in common. Both were innocents killed by opposing forces. In both cases there is an empty grave and no body to prove a death. People believe the story of Jesus' death and resurrection, and even worship the God in charge of Jesus' experiences on Earth. They believe this story despite the lack of proof and evidence that it really happened. In Musa's case, however, the people do not believe that it was



Musa who was killed simply because of a lack of evidence. Because there was no body to identify, Harun's mother has been denied her rightful pension and Musa has been denied his identity as a martyr.

At the end of the novel, Harun asks the student if he believes his story. This question comes right after the student had apparently asked Harun if he believed in God and Harun told him that man was not equipped to answer questions about God. The questions are parallel and speak to the source of Harun's life of suffering. What he wants to know from the student is if he believes his story, though he has lack of proof and evidence. If he does believe in God, of whom he has no proof; then why does he not blindly believe Harun's story as well.

Criticism of The Other

Harun is critical of the novel *The Other*, not only because he calls some of Meursault's information lies but also because he does not give his brother a name or an identity. As he talks about his brother, Harun is highly critical of the book written by Meursault, the man who claims to have killed Musa. His major complaint is that the book does not give his brother a name, and thus no identity. Harun also criticizes Meursault's information calling some of his details "blatant lies" (53). An additional criticism of the novel is that the story gets lost in Meursault's talented writing. Harun thinks people believe it just because Meursault is able to write so convincingly.

When Harun first reads Meursault's book, he is insulted because even though his brother is the second most important character in the story, he is not even given a name. "He has no name, no face, no words" (53) Harun says of the presentation of Musa in the novel. Harun believes this act of giving Musa no name made it easier for Meursault to be able to write about the murder he had committed.

One fact that Meursault winds into his novel that Harun calls a lie is the detail about the sister. "We didn't have a sister, much less a slutty one, as your hero suggested in his book" (7-8) Harun tells the student. In fact, Harun indicates that he is insulted by the description of Musa as having a whore as a sister. "Did he have to make up such an improbable story, a working whore whose brother wanted to avenge her?" (62) Harun asks. He reasons that perhaps there was a girl his brother was seeing but has never heard that she was involved in the murder.

Harun is frustrated by the book that Meursault wrote because he feels he is not able to write in book in the same style for his brother. "The original guy was such a good storyteller, he managed to make people forget his crime" (1) Harun says of Meursault. He speaks of privilege, the privilege that the French had that many people in Algeria did not have. Even as an old man, Harun is still looking for someone willing to tell his side of Musa's story. For Meursault it was easy because he had the education and skills needed to write a book. Harun believes it is the man's writing style and technique that makes his story so believable. Beyond the lies that Harun says the author invented and the fact that Musa was not even given a name, Harun says of the novel "All the rest is



nothing but embellishments, the products of your writer's genius. Afterward, nobody bothers about the Arab, his family, or his people" (53).

Harun's Discovery of his Similarities to Meursault

When Harun reads Meursault's book, he is shocked not only because his brother is not called by name in that text but also because Harun recognizes himself when he gets to know Meursault. Harun compares his own act of murdering a French man to Meursault's act of killing Musa. He not only understands Meursault's feelings and contemplations as he sat in his jail cell by himself, he also relates to Meursault's wish that people would condemn him. In their crimes, Harun and Meursault are also accused more sharply of less significant crimes than their original crimes of murder.

Because Harun relates so closely with Meursault, his book begins and ends with similar quotes. While Harun states that his mother is still alive, Meursault's reads that his mother is dead. It is her death and funeral that are somehow tied up in the circumstances that led to Musa's murder. Harun indicates that at the end of his book, Meursault states that he wants a large crowd, crying with hate, to attend his execution. Harun says that he would like the same thing. Instead of being executed for the murder he committed, however, Harun has been allowed to go free.

Both Harun and Meursault were found guilty of crimes much less terrible than the murders they committed. For Meursault, Harun says "the killer's condemned to death for having buried his mother badly and spoken of her with too much indifference. Technically, the killing itself is due either to the sun or to pure idleness" (53). Harun does not believe Meursault was found guilty of Musa's death. He believes the people conducting the trial were much more interested in his mother's death and funeral. Likewise with Harun. Even though he had killed Joseph, the officer who questioned Harun about what he had done seemed much more interested in the fact that Harun had not fought in the war than the fact that he had killed a man. The fact that Harun had killed Joseph the day after Independence was declared also bothers the officer. He believes the crime would have been more acceptable had it taken place before the declaration than afterward.

Of course the main actions in their lives that ties them together is their act of murder. While Harun has spent his life affected by the actions of Meursault and cursing Meursault for killing his brother, Harun realizes after he kills Joseph that he is no better. As he reads the novel, Harun says that he is both insulted by the way Meursault does not give his brother a name but also because he feels the book reveals him to himself. Harun is devastated by how much he discovers he identifies with his brother's killer.

Harun's Relationship with his Mother

Because his brother was murdered, Harun's relationship with his mother turns detrimental as a result. His mother expects Harun to take the place of Musa. Because she clings so tightly to Harun, she keeps him from having the normal relationships that a



young man should have. Harun tells his companion, the graduate student, that he believes that his mother expects him to be a sacrifice in her attempt to reincarnate Musa.

After Musa's death, Harun explains that his mother's attitude toward him began to change. She treated him not as her son, but instead a person who could take the place of Musa. She forced Harun to wear Musa's clothes even though they were too big for him because it made him appear to be Musa. Harun indicates that he felt that his mother wanted him to sacrifice himself so that he could become the Musa reincarnated that she wanted him to be.

Another detrimental effect that Harun's mother has on his life is that of her impact on his social life. As a child, Harun is most often known as the dead man's brother. He does not have his own identity. When he is older, Harun senses that women do not want to have anything to do with him because of his mother's hold on him. They seem to know that Harun is already taken, even if it is by his mother. It appears that Meriem is the only woman whom Harun knows who is strong enough to have a relationship with Harun despite the influence that his mother has over him.

Even as a child, Harun felt that everything he did was seen only in the form of a benefit to his mother. For instance, Harun was sent to school where he learned to read. When his mother realized that he was learning to read, she began forcing him to read the newspaper clippings that she had saved from his brother's murder. He was called to read these clippings over and over to her as she hoped he could find some new information. When Harun learned that there had been a book written about his brother's murder, he decided that the best option was not to tell her about the book so he would not have to read it to her over and over.

Impact of the War of Liberation

Playing a major role in this novel both in Musa's murder and the murder that Harun commits is the War of Liberation against the French. At the time of Musa's murder, the War of Liberation in Algeria had just begun. When Harun killed the French man, the connotations of his crime were affected by the point in time in which the murder fell.

Even though the French had invaded their country with the intent of taking it over, many Algerians believed that the French would eventually leave their country. At one point, Harun tells the student that he did not join the resistance because he believed the French had already lost the war. Harun's mother apparently believed this as well because she picked out a family to work for based on the home in which they lived. She knew if she bided her time, she would eventually be able to take possession of the home on which she had her eye once that family abandoned it and went back to France.

The timing of Musa's murder is significant because it takes place at the beginning of the War of Liberation. Had Musa ever been positively identified as the victim of the murder, his mother would have been due a pension as the mother of a martyr. Musa would have



been a martyr, because he was an innocent killed in the war. Because he was never identified, however, Musa was forgotten.

The timing of the murder that Harun committed is significant because it takes place just after the War of Liberation ends and Independence is declared. Had Harun killed Joseph before the end of the war, the act of murder could have been more easily overlooked. Because it took place after the end of the war, however, the rules are different. The officer who questions Harun about the murder he committed is concerned about the crime only because the time at which it took place, and because Harun was not fighting with the resistance and did not kill Joseph as a member of the armed forces.



Styles

Point of View

This story is told from the first person point of view of a Muslim named Harun. He tells the story not only of what he knows about his brother's murder, but also the similarities he sees between himself and the person who murdered his brother. Harun was a seven year old child when his brother died and about twenty-seven when he killed the Frenchman. Harun is perhaps in his mid seventies as he tells his story.

Harun tells his story to a graduate student who wants to write a story that tells the story of Musa. He insists that the young man, who is never given a name or a voice in the novel, refer to his brother by his name. By telling this story, Harun hopes to give his brother a name and a past.

Language and Meaning

There is nothing particularly outstanding about the language of this novel. The most significant aspect is that Harun, the narrator, does speak directly to the student to whom he is telling his story. The only words recorded are those spoken by Harun. The graduate student's words are not recorded in the novel though it is clear he is a speaker as well. For instance: "You hear that door cracking? Tell me, do you hear it? I do. It's about to give way" (142). In this quote Harun speaks directly to the student, even asking him questions but does not allow him to answer. The indication is that the student is not important to the story. He is merely a vehicle to allow Harun to tell his brother's story.

Structure

This story is divided almost evenly in half. The first half is devoted to Harun telling the graduate student what he knows about his brother and the circumstances under which he was killed. In the second half Harun tells the student about the secret that he and his mother have kept, the story of the man whom Harun killed. The exposition of the story comes with Harun's description of what little he knows about his brother's murder. Rising action comes when he begins talking the murder and the effect that it had on his life. The climax comes when he realizes how much he has in common with the man who killed his brother.



Quotes

It happened, and everyone talked about it. People still do, but they mention only one dead man, they feel no compunction about doing that, even though there were two of them, two dead men.”

-- Narrator (Chapter 1)

Importance: Harun makes the statement that although two men died as a result of Musa’s murder only one, the murderer, is remembered because he was memorialized through a book that was well read.

And I’ve got another reason besides: I want to pass away without being pursued by a ghost.”

-- Narrator (Chapter 1)

Importance: Harun tells the graduate student that he wants to tell Musa’s story because he wants to give his brother a name. He also wants to ensure that Musa’s ghost will allow him to die in peace because he has been vindicated.

Do you realize what it would mean if I could prove what I’m telling you, if I could prove your hero wasn’t even present at his mother’s funeral?”

-- Narrator (Chapter 3)

Importance: Harun suggests that if he were able to prove that Meursault did not attend his mother’s funeral or that the funeral never happened, he could disprove the foundation of Meursault’s book.

I found my status — the ‘dead man’s brother’ — almost agreeable; in fact, I didn’t begin to suffer from it until I was approaching adulthood, when I learned to read and realized what an unjust fate had befallen my brother, who died in a book.”

-- Narrator (Chapter 3)

Importance: It was not until Harun realized that Meursault had written a book about his brother’s murder that did not even give his brother’s name that he became angry about his brother’s murder.

After the religious waiting period of forty days, Musa had been declared dead — swept away by the sea — and therefore the absurd service was performed, in accordance with Islam’s provisions for the drowned.”

-- Narrator (Chapter 3)

Importance: Because Musa’s body was never found, it was assumed that he was swept out to sea. For this reason, Harun’s mother never got the pension due to mother of a martyr. Musa also had to be buried according to the rules laid out by Islam for those who had drowned. Regardless, Harun thought that the symbolic burial of his brother was a farce.



As I told you before, Musa's body was never found. / Consequently, my mother imposed on me a strict duty of reincarnation."

-- Narrator (Chapter 4)

Importance: Because Musa's body was never found, Harun's mother pretended as if he were Musa reincarnated. It made Harun feel like he was not really an individual person.

The Arab is killed because the murderer thinks he wants to avenge the prostitute, or maybe because he has the insolence to take a siesta."

-- Narrator (Chapter 5)

Importance: Harun indicates it has never even really been determined why his brother was killed by Meursault.

Ever since that day, I've cultivated a wild hypothesis: Musa wasn't killed on that famous Algiers beach! There must be another, hidden place, a setting that was disappeared. That would explain everything, all at once!"

-- Narrator (Chapter 5)

Importance: At one point when he is telling the graduate student the story about his brother's death, Harun comes up with the idea that if his brother's murder did not actually take place on the beach in Algiers, it would explain why his body was never found and no evidence of the murder was ever located.

There you are, now you know our family secret. You and the treacherous ghost behind you. I've watched his progress — he gets closer and closer to us from one evening to the next. Maybe he heard everything I said, but I don't care."

-- Narrator (Chapter 8)

Importance: It is after Harun tells the graduate student about killing Joseph that he notices how close the man he calls the bottle ghost has gotten to them. It is only later that he learns that this bottle ghost is actually a deaf-mute.

Mama was there, forbidding any attempt of mine to dodge away, and demanding what she couldn't obtain with her own hands: revenge."

-- Narrator (Chapter 8)

Importance: Harun describes how his mother was behind him when he held the gun that he used to shoot Joseph. It was as if she was there to ensure that he did not run away without having killed Joseph.

At the moment when I committed my crime, I felt a door somewhere was definitively closing on me. I concluded that I had been condemned — and for that, I'd needed neither judge nor God nor the charade of a trial. Only myself."

-- Narrator (Chapter 9)



Importance: After Harun killed the Frenchman, he immediately condemned himself for the crime. He immediately felt the difference in himself and his outlook on life.

Even if I showed up with the Frenchman's body on my back, my crime wouldn't be the one the eye could see, but that other crime, the one the intuition could guess: my strangeness."

-- Narrator (Chapter 10)

Importance: After Harun's mother is questioned by the new leaders of Algiers, Harun realizes the people in charge are not interested in him because he is guilty of the Frenchman's murder, but because he is strange and because he did not fight with the resistance.

There was even something unjust about their letting me go like that, without explaining whether I was a criminal, a murderer, a dead man, a victim, or simply an undisciplined moron. I found their casual attitude toward my crime almost insulting."

-- Narrator (Chapter 11)

Importance: Harun seems most disturbed that he is never punished for having killed Joseph.

It seems to me that the feelings love elicits in other people are, well, pretty much the same as the ones death elicits in me: the sensation that every life is precarious and absolute, the rapid heartbeat, the distress before an unresponsive body."

-- Narrator (Chapter 12)

Importance: Harun describes why he believes he is not attracted to love. He believes that perhaps he gets the feeling from death that other people get from falling in love.

I learned to read, not because I wanted to talk like the others but because I wanted to find a murderer, though I didn't admit that to myself in the beginning."

-- Narrator (Chapter 13)

Importance: Harun tells the graduate student that he learned to read because he believed that skill would help him to find the man who murdered his brother.

There I was, expecting to find my brother's last words between those covers, the description of his breathing, his features, his face, his answers to his murderer; instead I read only two lines about an Arab."

-- Narrator (Chapter 13)

Importance: This quote tells how disturbed Harun was when he read the book that was supposed to tell the story of his brother's murder only to discover that the book did not even give his brother a name.

She explained to me in French that she was a teacher, and she was working on a book that told my brother's story, and the book was written by his murderer."



-- Narrator (Chapter 13)

Importance: Meriem is the teacher who teaches Harun how to read and speak French, and introduces him to the novel that had been written about his brother's murder. Meriem, like the man to whom Harun is talking in this novel, was also trying to write a story about Musa.

And that's how Musa my brother died three times in a row. The first time was at two o'clock in the afternoon on 'the day of the beach'; the second time, when I had to dig him an empty grave; and the third and last time, when Meriem entered our lives."

-- Narrator (Chapter 13)

Importance: Harun likes to introduce things in groups of three. This particular quote is an example of this habit. In this case, he reasons that his brother died three different times. These groups of three are significant because in literature, things presented in groups of three are considered to be representative of perfection.

The whole world knew the murderer, his face, his look, his portrait, and even his clothes, except ... the two of us!"

-- Narrator (Chapter 14)

Importance: When Harun does read the book about his brother's murder, he is surprised how much information about the murderer, information that he and his mother never had, is contained in the novel.

It was a perfect joke. I was looking for traces of my brother in the book, and what I found there instead was my own reflection, I discovered I was practically the murderer's double."

-- Narrator (Chapter 14)

Importance: When Harun reads the novel about his brother's murder, he is disturbed because he does not find his brother's identity in the book but because he does see himself in the murderer.