The Stranger Study Guide

The Stranger by Albert Camus

BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

Camus gave the world a new kind of hero when *The Stranger* and the accompanying essay collection *The Myth of Sisyphus* burst upon the literary scene in 1942. They were published in the dark days of World War II: France had surrendered to Hitler, the British were under siege, the Americans were still recovering from Pearl Harbor, and the Russians were on the defensive. With such a background, the work and philosophy of Albert Camus were appropriate responses to the tension of resisting the Germans. The individual's resistance was the very definition of freedom. Camus believed, and many agreed with him, that the world was meaningless, absurd, and indifferent. However, he also wrote that in the face of this indifference the individual must rebel against the absurdity felt by the mind and uphold traditional human values.

The Stranger was an immediate success and established Camus, incorrectly, as a major representative of the existentialist movement. The novel tells the story of Meursault, who kills an Arab in a reaction to the environment— the heat and glare of the sun. In the ensuing investigation, the law prosecutes Meursault for his failure to show proper feelings for his deceased mother, rather than for the crime of murder. Aghast at his apparent lack of love, they execute him. The novel, as well as the collection of essays, developed the concept of the absurd and the belief that a person can be happy in the face of the "absurd."

Author Biography

Albert Camus lived in a period of remarkable turmoil in the world—two world wars were fought, and colonized countries, notably India and Algeria, began independence struggles. Camus was born in the latter, a French colony in North Africa, in Mondovi, on November 7, 1913. When he was almost one, his father, Lucien Auguste Camus, was killed in the outbreak of World War I. Left fatherless, Albert lived with his mother Catherine Stintes Camus, his older brother Lucien, his Uncle Etienne Stintes, and his grandmother. They lived in a three-room apartment in the working-class Belcourt district of Algiers.

Camus's mother was a silent woman who rarely showed her sons affection and who expected Camus to work when he was old enough. Fortunately, there were two forces that helped Camus despite his mother's silence—school and sports. Albert excelled in school with the assistance the state provided him as a child of a fallen French soldier: he received free health care and money for his education. In fifth grade, his teacher, Louis Germain, became Albert's patron. Germain helped Camus to overcome the family's opposition to the pursuit of an education. He also assisted Camus with scholarship applications. The other formative force in the making of Albert Camus was soccer. Through team sports he developed social skills which his family life did not encourage.

His athletic career ended when he was diagnosed with tuberculosis in 1930. The doctor suggested that Camus move in with his Uncle Acault, who was a butcher. It was hoped that the access to red meat would help his condition. Uncle Acault also had more money to lend Albert for books. He withdrew his support, however, when Albert began seeing the scandalous Simone Hie.

Camus pursued a variety of activities throughout the 1930s. These included his studies, the beginnings of a literary career, active involvement with the Communist party, and writing for a theatrical troupe. Although Camus preferred drama to prose throughout his life, his plays are not as well known as his fiction. In 1933, he entered the University of Algiers, and submitted his thesis in 1936. From 1938 to 1940, he worked as a journalist with the *Alger-Republicain*. This occupation, as well as the popularity of American authors (like Hemingway), is reflected in the style of *The Stranger,* which Camus began at this time.

In 1940, Camus divorced his wife—they had been separated for some time—and married Francine Faure. When France fell to Hitler, Camus joined the resistance in Paris. He became editor of the daily newspaper *Combat* and became the "conscience of France" through his popular editorials. Two years later, he published *The Stranger* and *The Myth of Sisyphus*. When France was liberated, Camus returned to Algeria.

After the war, he published an enlarged edition of *The Myth of Sisyphus,* as well as his most significant play, *Caligula*. In 1947, another literary classic, *The Plague,* was published. During the rest of his life, Camus struggled with his health, critics, issues of

the Algerian war, and the strain on his marriage caused by his affair with the actress Maria Casarès. His best novel, technically speaking, was *The Fall,* published in 1956. That novel was followed by a collection of short stories, *Exile and Kingdom*. In 1957, he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. Three years later, on January 4, 1960, he was killed in an auto accident.

Plot Summary

Part One

The Stranger opens with the narrator, Meursault, receiving a telegram telling him his mother has died. Departing on the afternoon bus from Algiers, he travels fifty miles to Marengo for the funeral. Upon arriving, he meets the director of the retirement home who leads him to the mortuary where his mother lies in a coffin. There Meursault begins a vigil that will last until the next morning. He dozes, awakening to the sound of his mother's companions at the home. They sit across from him, joining in the vigil. The night is punctuated by fits of crying and coughing by the residents. Meursault remains unemotional. The burial the next day becomes a blur of images for Meursault: the funeral procession in the hot desert sun, the village, the cemetery, the tears and fainting spell of Thomas Pérez—a male companion of his mother—and finally the bus ride back to Algiers. At one point in the day, a funeral helper asks him if his mother had been very old; Meursault gives a vague response because he does not know her exact age. Such seemingly superfluous details resurface with great significance later in the story.

The next morning at the beach, Meursault meets Marie, a former typist at his office. They make a date to see a comedic Fernandel film, after which Marie spends the night at Meursault's apartment. Alone on his balcony the next evening, Meursault concludes that the death of his mother has not changed his life at all. In the stairwell of his apartment building the next afternoon, Meursault encounters two of his neighbors: the aged Salamano, who is cursing his dog, and Raymond Sintès, a pimp. Raymond invites Meursault over for a meal. After dinner, Raymond asks Meursault to write a letter for him to his ex-mistress, a Moorish woman. Raymond wants to lure her back to punish her for having taken advantage of him. Earlier that day, Raymond had been in a fist fight with her brother. Meursault agrees to write the letter.

The next weekend Meursault and Marie hear screams coming from Raymond's apartment. With the hallway full of residents, a policeman arrives and talks to Raymond. His ex-mistress cries out that Raymond beat her. Raymond is given a summons and must go to the police station. Later that afternoon, Raymond asks Meursault if he will serve as a witness for him. Meursault assents and Raymond is eventually let off with a warning. That evening, Salamano tells Meursault that his dog is missing.

The following Sunday, Meursault, Marie, and Raymond take the bus out of Algiers to the coast. This excursion becomes a turning point in the plot. Earlier in the week, Raymond had invited them to a friend's beach house. A group of Arabs, among them the brother of Raymond's ex-mistress, watches them depart. At the beach Raymond and Meursault greet Raymond's friend Masson and his wife. After an early lunch, the three men take a walk on the beach. They encounter the brother and another Arab. A fight ensues. Raymond is cut by a knife and Masson must bring him to a doctor. Later in the afternoon, Raymond and Meursault again walk down the beach. They meet up with the two Arabs near a fresh-water spring. Raymond pulls out a revolver but Meursault

convinces him to relinquish it. The two Arabs suddenly withdraw and Raymond and Meursault return to the beach house.

Preferring neither to walk up the stairs to the beach house nor to remain in the now scorching sun, Meursault decides to walk back along the beach. Struggling against the heat, he approaches the cool spring. Alone in the shade sits the brother. Feeling the breadth of the hot beach behind him, Meursault advances. The Arab pulls out his knife, the glint of which strikes Meursault. Oppressed by the heat, blinded by the flash of light and the sweat falling into his eyes, Meursault fires the revolver and kills the Arab. He pauses without reflection, then fires four more times into the inert body.

Part Two

Meursault is arrested and interviewed. A court lawyer is appointed to him and inquiries are made into his private life. Accusations of insensibility at his mother's funeral surface. Meursault explains to his lawyer that his nature is such that his physical needs often overpower his feelings. He had been tired the day of the funeral. Meursault observes that his mother's death has nothing to do with his crime. The lawyer responds that Meursault obviously has little experience with the law.

Meursault begins the first of many interviews with a magistrate. The magistrate first asks about Meursault's mother, then inquires as to why he paused between his first and second revolver shot. To this latter question Meursault has no answer. Pulling out a crucifix, the magistrate speaks of repentance; he discovers that Meursault does not believe in God. Responding to the magistrate's accusation that he has a hardened soul, Meursault remarks that rather than feeling regret at having killed the Arab, he experiences only a certain ennui, or sadness. Eleven months pass before the trial. Marie is allowed to visit him only once because they are not married. Meursault soon becomes accustomed to the prison routine and looks forward to the now cordial meetings with the magistrate.

With the summer sun and heat comes the trial. The first day, Meursault remarks upon the conviviality of the court scene. The lawyers and journalists mingle and greet one another like members of a club. Meursault watches in silence as witnesses are called forth to testify. The prosecution recalls details from the funeral: Meursault's calmness and lack of emotion, his quick departure after the burial, and the information, followed by a hush from the courtroom audience, that he did not know the age of his mother. The prosecutor characterizes Meursault as Raymond's conspirator: he both served as Raymond's witness at the police station and wrote the letter that set into motion the events that ended in the Arab's death. The prosecutor concludes that the murder was premeditated and that Meursault killed the Arab to help his friend Raymond. According to the prosecutor, Meursault's "irregular" relationship with Marie, begun the day after his mother's funeral, reveals his fundamental lack of respect for social values and reinforces his criminal nature. When Meursault's lawyer objects and questions whether his client is accused of having buried his mother or of having killed a man, the prosecutor retorts that he accuses Meursault of having "buried his mother with the heart

of a criminal." Meursault is finally asked by one of the judges why he killed the Arab. Meursault responds that it was "because of the sun." The prosecutor demands the death penalty. The jury returns a verdict of premeditated murder and the judge sentences Meursault to be guillotined in a public square.

Lying in his cell, having refused three times to speak to the chaplain, Meursault contemplates the social mechanism determining his fate and posits the benefit he would derive from knowing that at least one person had managed to escape the inevitable course of events. Waiting for his appeal, Meursault allows the chaplain to enter his cell. After answering many questions concerning his lack of faith, Meursault suddenly cries out and grabs the chaplain by the collar. In a fit of rage he yells out his certitude about life and death, declaring that all are condemned to die, and that this common end renders life absurd and our choices meaningless. Following the outburst, Meursault is overcome with peace. His speech to the priest has purged him of bitterness and hope and he feels liberated. For his existence to be complete, Meursault only wishes for many spectators to be present the day of his execution and that they greet him with cries of hate:

"In the evening, Marie came to pick me up and asked me if I wanted to marry her. I said that it made no difference to me and that we could if she wanted to. She wanted to know if I loved her. I answered as I already had before, that all that meant nothing but that undoubtedly I didn't love her. 'Then why marry me?' she said. I explained to her that marriage was of no importance and that if she wanted, we could get married. Besides, she was the one asking and I was just agreeing to say yes. She then remarked that marriage was a serious thing. 'No' I said. She was quiet for a moment and looked at me in silence. Then she spoke. She simply wanted to know if I would have accepted the same proposal coming from another woman for whom I would have held a similar affection. 'Of course' I said. She then wondered if she loved me. For my part, I could know nothing about it."

Part 1, Chapter 1

Part 1, Chapter 1 Summary

The Stranger is a story about a young man living in Algiers in the 1940s who accidentally kills a man due to the glare of the sun. He is executed for a crime, but not the one that is expected. As the story begins, a young man named Meursault living in Algiers, North Africa, receives news that his mother has died and the funeral is tomorrow. Meursault asks his employer for two days off. He receives permission for time off but feels that the employer shows no sympathy for the situation. Meursault says that it is not his fault that he must leave to bury his own mother.

In order to catch the early afternoon bus to the village where his mother had lived in a retirement home, Meursault quickly eats lunch at his favorite café and borrows a black tie and armband from a friend. The afternoon heat and the glare of the sun lull Meursault into a state of drowsiness and he sleeps during the entire trip.

The caretaker of the nursing home meets Meursault and shows him to the morgue where the body is lying. Meursault declines the caretaker's offer to remove the coffin lid so that the young man may view the body. The denial surprises the caretaker, but he complies with Meursault's wishes. Eventually, several of Meursault's mother's friends from the home join him in keeping vigil. Silently, Meursault and the friends sit all night until it is time for the funeral the next morning.

A man named Perez joins the funeral procession and the caretaker explains that this man was a very close friend of Meursault's mother. The morning sun begins to beat intently as the small funeral party makes its way to the village cemetery and Perez falls back, taking some short cuts to shorten his walk. The heat is even more intense now and Perez faints from grief and exhaustion. Meursault eventually returns to his apartment, looking forward to twelve hours of sleep.

Part 1, Chapter 1 Analysis

Meursault does not like interruption in his world. He seems more upset about the disruption of his work schedule than he does about the news of his mother's death. Meursault seems to observe life only, not fully participate. He reacts to sensory triggers of light, heat and smells, but he never shows any emotions about what he is experiencing. At least two people visibly grieve his mother's death at the funeral services, but Meursault does not engage in conversation with either of them and barely communicates with the caretaker to make the necessary arrangements. Meursault's behavior and cool demeanor in this situation foreshadows how the world will eventually come to judge him.

Part 1, Chapter 2

Part 1, Chapter 2 Summary

Waking up the day after the funeral, Meursault decides to spend the day at a nearby public beach, where he meets a young woman named Marie. He had worked with Marie at one point and was interested in her, but nothing ever developed into a relationship. Marie and Meursault enjoy the day swimming, sunning and napping and Meursault invites Marie to a movie that evening.

That evening, Marie comments on Meursault's black tie, which represents mourning. She is surprised to find out that Meursault's mother's funeral was just yesterday. The young man seems unmoved by any sort of grief. After the film, Marie accompanies Meursault back to his apartment, where Marie spends the night.

The next morning, Meursault awakes to find that Marie has already gone, so he remains in bed and tries to recapture her essence. He smokes cigarettes until noon. Since it is Sunday, Meursault is aimless and finds himself sitting on a chair by his window all afternoon, just watching the people take strolls and meet friends at a café. Eventually the sun sets and Meursault muses that he has lived through another Sunday and although his mother has just died nothing else has really changed.

Part 1, Chapter 2 Analysis

The author continues to paint Meursault as a physical creature who lacks any real emotion. All physical elements are painfully evident to Meursault. He notes the changes in the sky's colors, the feel of the water on his skin and the scent of Marie left on his pillow. Every person exhibits grief differently, but instead of grief, Meursault shows relief that the weekday will soon be here so that he may resume his normal working schedule. Any interruption to his work routine, whether it is a Sunday or the funeral of his mother, he regards as unwelcome. Meursault does not seem to engage with Marie either. He makes no attempt to contact her after spending the night together.

Part 1, Chapter 3

Part 1, Chapter 3 Summary

Meursault's return to work the next day brings a few questions of concern from his employer. Meursault finds this concern a bit disconcerting and he doesn't even know how old his own mother was at the time of her death. Meursault plunges into the work that has stacked up in his absence and takes particular pleasure in washing his hands before the solitary towel in the room is too wet from usage all day.

Soon, it is time for lunch and Meursault joins his friend Emmanuel for a meal at Celeste's café. Afterward, Meursault returns home to nap for awhile before returning to work. Later that night, as Meursault approaches his apartment, he sees the figure of the old man Salamano, who has his old, mangy dog with him. The sight of the man and the dog is a source of entertainment for those in the neighborhood who watch the struggle of the crotchety old man and the willful dog every day.

Meursault's thoughts return to the boiled potatoes he will have for dinner. He meets another neighbor, Raymond Sintes, who invites Meursault for dinner in his apartment. Raymond is a short, sturdily built man with the demeanor of a boxer. Raymond's hand is bandaged from a recent fight with a man who is the brother of Raymond's mistress. Raymond supports his mistress, who he feels is being unfaithful to him. Raymond asks Meursault's help in the situation.

Meursault agrees to write a letter on Raymond's behalf, begging the mistress to return. When she does, Raymond can insult her and kick her out of his apartment. Raymond is grateful and now considers Meursault his new pal, a concept that seems very odd to Meursault. As a gesture of their new friendship, Raymond offers sympathy for the death of Meursault's mother but adds that it was something that was bound to happen one day anyway.

Part 1, Chapter 3 Analysis

Meursault continues to go through life completely detached from emotional investment, concentrating on superficial things only, such as the ritual of washing his hands or the feel of the air on his skin. It's as if some current is pushing him along and he neither enjoys nor complains. He just exists. The encounter and ensuing friendship with Raymond is just one more event in which Meursault participates but does not fully engage. He agrees to help the pugilistic Raymond without examining the situation and the implications of his help. This overwhelming indifference is a character flaw that will play a huge part in the unfortunate events to come.

Part 1, Chapter 4

Part 1, Chapter 4 Summary

Meursault's life returns to normal with work and social activities. Raymond tells Meursault that the letter to the mistress has been mailed. At the end of the week, Meursault spends time with Marie at a beach. They enjoy a day sunning and swimming and return home to make love in Meursault's apartment, where the cool breeze wafts over their young bodies.

Meursault asks Marie to stay for lunch the next morning and he is overwhelmed by the urge to kiss her when she smiles in a certain way. He is forced to admit that he feels no love for her when Marie asks him the question. Marie hides any trace of disappointment and their conversation is rudely interrupted by a raucous disturbance coming from Raymond's apartment. Marie asks Meursault to phone for the police, but Meursault declines. He does not like to get involved and he does not like policemen.

Many of the building's tenants have gathered at Raymond's door to see about the noise and finally a policeman shows up to investigate the disturbance. When Raymond opens the door, it is obvious that he and the mistress have been physically fighting. The woman continues to call Raymond a pimp. Raymond's verbal abuse earns him a slap from the policeman, who tells Raymond to make himself available for questioning at the police station later on.

After the situation dissipates, Meursault cooks lunch for Marie. She is no longer hungry and leaves. Later on, Meursault agrees to accompany Raymond to the police station to serve as a witness, although he is not sure why or what he is expected to say. Raymond is curious about Meursault's opinion of him and whether or not Meursault expected Raymond to strike the officer in return for the slap he received. Meursault has no expectations whatsoever.

Raymond and Meursault spend the evening together and Meursault rejects Raymond's idea to go to a brothel, saying that he does not go in for that sort of thing. As the two men approach their apartment building, the old man, Salamano, is frantically searching for his dog, which has escaped from his leash. In an attempt to console Salamano, Raymond suggests that most dogs return home to their owners after running away.

The option of checking for the dog at the pound sounds reasonable until Salamano realizes that there would be a fee to retrieve the dog. Later that night, Salamano knocks on Meursault's door for some solace about the loss of his old dog. Again, Meursault advises the old man to look at the dog pound before getting too upset. Salamano returns to his apartment and Meursault can hear the man's cries through the wall.

Part 1, Chapter 4 Analysis

The fully emotional and passionate people in the story create a contrast to the dispassionate Meursault. Marie is drawn to Meursault although he will not say that he loves her. Raymond, who is overly dramatic, sees Meursault as a pal who has a good head on his shoulders. Even the sad old man Salamano seeks out Meursault at the end of the day that the dog disappears. Meursault symbolizes a blank canvas on which the other characters are painted and Meursault is not even moved to comment. This detachment does not seem to be intentional. It is purely an innate behavioral pattern, one that will ultimately prove to be Meursault's undoing.

Part 1, Chapter 5

Part 1, Chapter 5 Summary

Raymond has invited Meursault and Marie to a friend's beach house. Raymond is a little tense because some Arabs have been following him and one of them is his former mistress's brother, with whom he fought not too long ago. Meursault's employer calls Meursault into the office to offer him a job in a new branch of the company, which will be opening in Paris. The employer thinks this is a great opportunity for Meursault because it is a lively city for a young man. Meursault, however, is content to stay with his current position and sees no reason to change his entire life. The employer chastises Meursault for lacking ambition and Meursault thinks to himself that he had ambition once but it all seems so futile now.

This is a day for life-altering decisions for Meursault, as Marie asks him to marry her. Meursault agrees to the marriage but feels no particular emotion about it or for Marie. In spite of his peculiar attitudes, Marie vows her love for Meursault anyway. Meursault mentions the job in Paris, which intrigues Marie. To Meursault, Paris is dark and the people are too pale.

Marie has other plans for the evening and cannot eat dinner with Meursault. He finds himself at Celeste's, where an odd woman seats herself at his table. Neither one engages in conversation. They each consume their respective dinners and Meursault follows her for awhile when she leaves, just because he has nothing else to do.

Salamano greets Meursault later that night with the news that Salamano's little dog has never returned and is not at the pound. Meursault invites the old man into the apartment to talk, even though Meursault is not especially interested in what Salamano is saying. Salamano reminisces about the time when Meursault's mother lived with her son and how the neighbors said disparaging things about Meursault when he put his mother in the home.

Part 1, Chapter 5 Analysis

The author portrays Meursault with an innate sense of his own doom. What others perceive as detachment is simply a resignation to the course of his own fate. The ambition he once possessed is nonexistent now because of its futility. Meursault is a beaten man before he even begins. The passivity he shows toward simple tasks such as eating as well as major events such as a marriage proposal or death is a defense mechanism. Ironically, Meursault's own indifference draws people to him, perhaps in attempts to save Meursault from himself.

Part 1, Chapter 6

Part 1, Chapter 6 Summary

Meursault rises early on Sunday to go to the beach with Marie and Raymond even though his head aches and he just does not feel well. As the three friends depart for the bus stop, they notice a group of Arab men leaning against the building across the way and staring at Raymond. One of the Arabs is the brother with whom Raymond had the fight a few days ago. The trio arrives at the beach without incident and quickly finds the wooden cottage of Raymond's friend Masson and his wife. As Meursault watches Marie converse with Masson's wife, it occurs to him that he is considering the stark reality of marriage.

The morning passes happily with swimming, sunning and dozing until lunch. Masson's wife has prepared the meal. It is only 11:30 and the group has done a lot already because of their early arrival at the beach. The men decide to take a walk while the women clean the kitchen. Meursault has had a bit too much wine, which in combination with the glaring sun, makes him sleepy and a little dizzy.

Soon, two men appear in the distance ahead of the trio. It turns out to be the Arab who has been stalking Raymond and a friend. Raymond and the man fight and the Arab ultimately slashes Raymond on his arm and lips with a knife. Masson fights the other man and soon the Arabs run back in the direction from which they had come.

Masson knows where the doctor lives and takes Raymond there for treatment of his cuts. Meursault returns to the cottage to inform the women of what has happened, but the women's reactions annoy Meursault. He wanders out onto the beach alone. Fortunately, Raymond's wounds are just superficial. Meursault heads back out to the beach and Raymond follows.

Eventually, Raymond and Meursault come across the two Arab men lying in the sun. Raymond has a gun and asks Meursault if he should shoot the Arabs. Raymond hands the gun to Meursault, who thinks that it would not matter if the gun were fired or not, because the result would be the same. The four men stare each other down, weapons in hand and eventually turn and walk away from each other.

When Meursault and Raymond reach the cottage, Meursault is overcome with heat exhaustion. He cannot climb the steps to the cottage, preferring instead to walk down the beach in the other direction. The sun continues to beat down mercilessly and Meursault feels tortured from fatigue, sweat and an overwhelming dizziness. With a single idea of finding a nearby stream, Meursault is stunned to see the Arab man lying near the water.

The Arab pulls a knife at the sight of Meursault. A glint of light temporarily blinds Meursault and stabs his forehead. All his senses start to reel. Meursault can feel his

finger on the trigger of Raymond's gun, which he still carries. Suddenly, Meursault shoots the Arab once and then four more times. At that moment, Meursault realizes that the day is ruined, as is the calm of the beach where he had been happy.

Part 1, Chapter 6 Analysis

The author uses the technique of foreshadowing in Meursault's demeanor on this morning and his desire to stay home. Meursault's sense of uneasiness and discomfort are premonitions of what lies ahead on this difficult day. It's important to note the introduction of the Arab men into the story as historically representative of the clashes between the French people and the Arab people living in Algeria at this point in time. Ironically, Meursault associates only with people of French heritage and accidentally kills an Arab man, although he shows no visible signs of discord with Arabic people in his everyday life.

Meursault shows some signs of being severely depressed and this could explain why he stays on the beach without Raymond. Perhaps Meursault has hopes of having another encounter with the Arabs, in which he himself may be killed. This act would end his misery and his death would not be at his own hand, which would not be noble.

Part 2, Chapter 1

Part 2, Chapter 1 Summary

Meursault is arrested and questioned by the police and the court appoints an attorney for him. It never occurred to Meursault that the case would be very complicated. As usual, Meursault is acutely aware of his physical surroundings and takes note of the light levels in the interrogation rooms as well as the smells, which are different from his normal life.

Meursault's attorney arrives the next day and is perplexed by the young man's lack of emotion about his current situation or about any of the events which have led Meursault to this place. The attorney has also been investigating Meursault's background. The people who are interviewed comment on Meursault's callous behavior, especially during his mother's funeral.

The local magistrate questions Meursault the next day. The magistrate is more interested in the accused man's personal life than the facts of the crime. Meursault answers truthfully but cannot satisfy the magistrate about why he hesitated before firing four more shots into the Arab's body. All that Meursault can remember is the feel of the scorching sun on his back that day.

The authorities are astonished that Meursault has no emotions about the murder and no sense of remorse or desire to repent. Most men in Meursault's position find God in an attempt to cling to something, but this young man flatly denies any belief in any religion. The interrogations continue for eleven months as the preparations are made for Meursault's case. He reaches such a level of comfort that he feels as if he is part of a big family.

Part 2, Chapter 1 Analysis

Meursault's actions and observations about his prison experience remain completely detached, despite the dire nature of the situation. Meursault's passivity remains intact and he shows no initiative to further his own defense, despite being subjected to almost a year of questioning. Ironically, Meursault feels like he is part of a big family within the justice system and makes friends with the men who are trying him for his life. There is no other form of comfort for Meursault, though, as he does not believe in any religion or afterlife. The author raises many political and spiritual issues through Meursault. He is a non-believer and the religious people who surround him and purport to love all men unconditionally persecute him for his lack of belief.

Part 2, Chapter 2

Part 2, Chapter 2 Summary

In this chapter, the reality of prison life dawns on Meursault. He finally understands that he is being punished by being deprived of things that free men take for granted. At first, Meursault cannot understand why he has been denied his cigarettes, since they do not harm anyone else. A guard explains that withholding the cigarettes is a punishment. Meursault is put into a cell by himself and he can still see the water and the changing shades of the sunlight as each day progresses.

Marie visits only one time and the visiting room is a cacophony of noise and bright lights. The noise and sound distract Meursault so much that it is hard for him to communicate with Marie. The couple is separated by a divider in the huge room, so they cannot touch. Marie tries to instill hope in Meursault by telling him that soon they will swim again and can get married.

Thoughts like these are torture for Meursault, who now resigns himself to thinking like a prisoner to avoid the grief that comes from thinking the thoughts of a free man. Over the months he is incarcerated, Meursault admits that he misses cigarettes and women, not especially Marie, but women in general. The guard confirms that this is a normal reaction.

Part 2, Chapter 2 Analysis

Meursault finally begins to adapt to the conditions of prison life. The loss of the pleasures he enjoyed as a free man still haunt him, especially at night when he can no longer see the sun. It is ironic that the sun features prominently in all the negative occurrences in his life, including the funeral of his mother and the murder of the Arab, but Meursault clings to the constancy of its light now as a way of hanging on to some semblance of normalcy.

Part 2, Chapter 3

Part 2, Chapter 3 Summary

On the day that Meursault's trial begins, he is taken to the courthouse in handcuffs. He waits in a small holding room until it is time for him to enter the room. While Meursault waits, he is conscious of the sound of much commotion inside the main room. Meursault's attorney has told him that the trial should be relatively brief. A case of parricide will follow this one and there has been much publicity about it. Many of the pressmen in town for the parricide trial will also cover Meursault's trial and the courtroom is full.

Upon entering the courtroom, Meursault is overcome by the noise and the intense sun shining through the patterns of the blinds. Meursault is very aware of the eyes of the jury and the pressmen on him. He begins to feel the discomfort of scrutiny for the very first time. The magistrate reads the witness list, which includes the caretaker at his mother's home, the old man, Perez, Celeste, Marie, Raymond, Masson and Salamano. After asking Meursault to confirm his identity, the Magistrate questions Meursault about why he sent his mother to the nursing home. Meursault replies that the two didn't have much to say to each other anymore.

The witnesses begin their testimonies and the caretaker recalls Meursault's unbelievably stoic behavior at the funeral. Perez testifies that he never saw Meursault cry at the funeral. Celeste, the owner of the café, tells the jury that Meursault is his friend and that this is just some horrible accident. Marie's testimony may be the most damaging, since her story reveals that the day after his mother' funeral, Meursault watched a comedy at a movie theater, went swimming and began an affair with a woman he barely knew. Masson tells the jury that Meursault is a decent chap and Salamano recalls Meursault's kindness during the disappearance of the old man's beloved dog. Raymond's testimony is last. Raymond tries to get the jury to understand that he, not Meursault, had issues with the Arab man. Raymond's character is rebuked for his indecent lifestyle. Meursault's attorney tries to contest the prosecution's claim that Meursault lacks emotion, but the people in the room are inclined to believe the prosecution. Meursault now understands the feeling of not being liked.

Part 2, Chapter 3 Analysis

In this chapter, the author's use of becomes very apparent. The witnesses at Meursault's trial testify that he is emotionally detached and although that may be a crippling social characteristic, it is not proof that Meursault is a murderer. The fact that Meursault's life depends on his lack of emotional display is ridiculous and the author wants the reader to understand how forces beyond an individual's control can greatly impact a life no matter what a person's core beliefs or true intentions are.

Part 2, Chapter 4

Part 2, Chapter 4 Summary

As the trial progresses, Meursault grows increasingly distant from the proceedings, as it becomes obvious that the facts of the case are overridden by the ancillary details of Meursault's emotional state. The only rational statement from the prosecutor is that Meursault is an intelligent man, which in turn should lead the jury to believe that Meursault was fully aware of the crime he committed and its consequences. Unfortunately, Meursault has never been able to express regret or project himself into the future and any possible implications of his actions.

Meursault's fate is sealed when the magistrate asks him if he has anything to say in his own defense. Meursault can respond only that the sun was the culprit in the shooting. The people in the courtroom are incredulous of such a statement and Meursault is led out of the room while his fate is decided. When led back into the courtroom, Meursault is aware that his friends are present, but he cannot bring himself to acknowledge them. The jury finds Meursault guilty and the sentence is death by the guillotine.

Part 2, Chapter 4 Analysis

The trial is more a contest between the opposing attorneys than an effort to discover the truth of the case or to fairly judge Meursault. Again, the author wants the reader to understand the mechanics of society and its impact on the common man, who is essentially defenseless against it. In characteristic style, Meursault resigns himself to his fate without any grasp of how to manipulate the trial to his own benefit. The lack of ambition identified by Meursault's employer earlier in the story has had dire consequences for Meursault, who must now pay with his life.

Part 2, Chapter 5

Part 2, Chapter 5 Summary

As Meursault lies in his cell, he ponders his appeal, but his execution is more probably. Fantasies of escape lead him to realize that he has never studied executions well enough to know what methods of escape may be feasible. If he should escape his fate, Meursault vows to attend every execution from now on in order to become better educated with these facts.

Eventually, Meursault accepts the inevitability of his execution. He considers the need for a better system where the condemned man would have some sort of chance for escape. Perhaps a drink could be developed that could kill a person and the condemned could choose from one of ten glasses, knowing that only one contained a non-lethal substance. The guillotine, which sits flat on the ground and not on a scaffold like in the movies, offers no escape from shame. The condemned man simply walks up to it, as if greeting another person.

Part of Meursault's agony is not knowing which day he will be executed. Meursault stays awake all night waiting for the footsteps that will come at dawn one day to take him away. This makes Meursault very aware that each day could be his last and he wonders if execution really matters. After all, each man is destined to die, so the time and place should not be of any consequence.

The chaplain visits Meursault without the condemned man's permission but eventually leaves. Meursault will not concede to a belief in God or the salvation of his soul. Meursault prefers to not waste his last few hours on earth by thinking about God, a force in which he does not believe.

Meursault's only outburst during the whole ordeal occurs when he kicks the chaplain out of his cell. Somehow, the release of emotion is very liberating for Meursault and he feels refreshed for the first time in a long time. Meursault thinks about his mother. He understands now that she must have been very happy to realize that her life was almost over because she would be free of earthly trials. This thought gives Meursault a new perspective on his execution and he feels ready to start a new life for himself.

Part 2, Chapter 5 Analysis

No matter what others may have said or thought about Meursault in his life, the young man remains true to himself. He cannot compromise his beliefs and will not perform for authorities, even though some revision in his behavior could have spared his life. Although noble in theory, this obstinacy does not work to Meursault's advantage and the author wants the reader to explore the concept of his own relationship to the world. Each man is dependent on others to some degree and the caliber of the interactions has implications, although not as dire as Meursault's. There is always the potential for

grave consequences in every connection. It serves no man to be a complete stranger, as evidenced by the unfortunate Meursault.

Characters

Marie Cardona

Formerly a typist in the same office as Meursault, Marie Cardona happens to be swimming at the same place as Meursault the day after his mother's funeral. She likes Meursault and their meeting sparks a relationship. She asks if he loves her but he tells her honestly that he doesn't think so. Still, he agrees to marry her, but then he is arrested.

Marie represents the happy life Meursault desires to live. In fact, she is the only reason he even considers regretting his crime. Meursault sees Marie's face in the prison wall—but the image fades after a time. Marie, for Meursault, was a comfort representing a life of "normality" that he might have lived. However, it did not happen. Instead he becomes certain only of life and death and is executed.

Caretaker

The caretaker takes a keen interest in Meursault. He stays by him throughout the vigil and provides him with explanations and introductions. He also tries to justify his life to Meursault. He explains that he has been to Paris and only became a caretaker when fate made him destitute.

It is the caretaker who provides the most damaging testimony at the trial. The caretaker testifies that Meursault "hadn't wanted to see Maman, that [he] had smoked and slept some, and that [he] had had some coffee." The prosecutor dwells on the caretaker's testimony and asks him to repeat the part about having a coffee and a cigarette with Meursault. It is during this testimony that Meursault "for the first time ... realized that [he] was guilty."

Céleste

Céleste owns the cafe at which Meursault customarily dines. He is called as a witness at Meursault's trial. His theory on Meursault's crime is that it was bad luck. He seems to be a fatalist, believing that one is more the victim of chance than a free agent.

Defense Counsel

The lawyer represents Meursault to the best of his ability. He seems to be the only person who understands the silliness of the trial and the difficulties for someone like Meursault. After the examination of Pérez on the witness stand, he says, "Here we have a perfect reflection of this entire trial: everything is true, and nothing is true!"

Unconsciously, the lawyer has just sided with Meursault— the truth of the court is arbitrary and meaningless.

Director of the Home

The director of the nursing home where Meursault's mother lived is a very matter-of-fact man. Death in his community means taking care of ceremony and keeping, as much as possible, the other patients from being too much on edge. Consequently, everything is done "as usual" so that while a funeral is a stress to the community, it is also a habitual ritual. The director accompanies the funeral procession to the gravesite and offers Meursault information about his mother's life at the home, but Meursault is not very interested.

Examining Magistrate

The magistrate, as an investigator, is interested in what other people think. This makes him the exact opposite of Meursault in psychological makeup. He examines Meursault's testimony for the insights they might provide about Meursault's mind, rather than making an effort to establish the facts of the murder. He tells Meursault that with God's help, he will try to "do something" for him. The magistrate asks Meursault if he loved his mother before asking about the five shots. Thus, the connection between Meursault's behavior at his mother's funeral and his act of murder is made concrete.

The magistrate then presents Meursault with a Bible and crucifix, hoping to save Meursault's soul. The ruse backfires because Meursault refuses to see the relevance of religion to the state's case against him. Having failed to "do something for him," the magistrate never brings up the matter again.

The magistrate is an important character in the story as the representative of society's law. He fails in his attempt to make Meursault acknowledge either the authority of law or that of religion. The magistrate is entirely unable to understand Meursault, and after a few sessions speaks only to his lawyer.

Lawyer

See Defense Counsel

Masson

Masson is the owner of the beach house to which Raymond takes Meursault and Marie for the day. Masson is an obese, carefree fellow who wants them all to live there in the vacation month of August and share expenses. He believes that lunchtime is when one is hungry and that it is good to do things when one wants and not according to schedule. Thus he is simply a man who likes to live well and to be happy.

Arthur Meursault

Meursault is a French Algerian clerk who learns that his mother has died. He attends the funeral and, on the following day, goes to the beach. There, he meets Marie, with whom he begins a relationship. A neighbor invites him to the beach where they encounter some Arabs. Meursault shoots one of the Arabs for no apparent reason. He is arrested, tried, and executed. Until the moment when the judge pronounces him guilty, Meursault is annoyingly indifferent to the activities of the real world. The judgement jars him into an examination of life, at the end of which he concludes that life is absurd. He finds peace and happiness in this acknowledgment. This conclusion of his analysis, Meursault discovers, is liberating.

The Stranger is the manifestation or incarnation of Camus's theory of the "absurd" man. Meursault reveals Camus's theory through his actions. That is, the protagonist Meursault possesses a curious psychology whose activity is of more interest than the fact of his crime. Meursault is an "outsider" — a person who lives in his own private world and maintains no interest in anyone else, least of all in how they view him. However, he is not unaware of others. Several crucial moments demonstrate this: at the opening, Meursault is aware that his boss shows him no sympathy upon hearing of his mother's death. Next, he is aware that one is expected to mourn the dead, which he refuses to do. He knows he could say he loved Marie and that she would accept his love, but he does not. Lastly, he is aware, throughout his own trial, that he ought to say certain things, but he does not.

Finally, as Camus himself said, Meursault is a Christ figure who dies for everyone who misunderstands him. Meursault becomes aware of the meaninglessness with which society pursues its notions of propriety, and, in the case of the prison chaplain, its dogmas. Meursault is convicted as much for his psychological indifference, his selfish and asocial behavior, and his lack of mourning for his mother, as for his crime. His position is not without logic. For example, when the magistrate tries to persuade him to believe in God so that he might be forgiven, Meursault asks what difference that makes when it is the state that will find him guilty and then execute him—not God.

It is before the priest, however, that he finally explodes: "none of [the priest's] certainties was worth one strand of a woman's hair. Living as he did, like a corpse, he couldn't even be sure of being alive. It might look as if my hands were empty. Actually, I was sure of myself, sure about everything, far surer than he; sure of my present life and of the death that was coming. That, no doubt, was all I had." Meursault dies because he knows this truth—he is killed because the others cling to their illusions.

Monsieur Thomas Pérez

Pérez is an old man who was a friend of Meursault's mother at the nursing home. He insists on attending the burial. Because of a limp and his age, Pérez falls behind the procession but still manages to attend. He is called as a witness at the trial and is unable to say whether or not he had seen Meursault cry.

Raymond

Raymond is a neighbor who asks Meursault to write a letter for him. Meursault agrees to do so because it is easier than saying no. Consequently, they become friends and Meursault even testifies to the police that Raymond's girlfriend was cheating on him. In response, the police let Raymond off (for beating her) with a warning. However, the girlfriend's brother is not so benevolent, and, along with a group of Arabs, starts following Raymond. A showdown takes place when Raymond and Meursault visit Masson's beach house. A fight ensues, and Raymond is cut. Shortly after this, Meursault shoots one of the Arabs.

Raymond represents the small-minded man who views things in terms of possession—he beats a woman for not being solely his; he insists that Meursault is his friend because he agreed to write the letter. Relationships, for Raymond, are his certainties and life fills in around them. It is Raymond, contrary to the evidence, who unquestioningly believes that Salamano's dog will return.

Salamano

Salamano is a disgusting older man who beats his dog. His routine walk with his mutt and his muttering give Meursault daily amusement. This routine is part of the general rhythm of tedium that is Meursault's universe. Sadly, the dog goes missing, and Salamano comes to Meursault for help. Meursault offers him none and Salamano acknowledges that his whole life has changed. The disruption of routine caused by the loss of the dog is one of many signs that Meursault's tedious universe has collapsed.

Themes

Absurdity

Absurdity is a philosophical view at which one arrives when one is forced out of a very repetitive existence. As Camus says in "An Absurd Reasoning" from his essay collection *The Myth of Sisyphus:*

It happens that the stage sets collapse. Rising, streetcar, four hours in the office or the factory, meal, streetcar, four hours of work, meal, sleep, and Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday and Saturday according to the same rhythm—this path is easily followed most of the time. But one day the "why" arises and everything begins in that weariness tinged with amazement.

This description characterizes Meursault perfectly. The essay collection explained the philosophy of the absurd, and the novel demonstrated the theory.

Meursault's repetitive life runs smoothly. Then, little by little, Meursault's happy stasis is pulled apart by the rest of the world's movement and collapse begins. His mother dies, and with her, a sense of stability he has had his whole life. He becomes involved with Marie, who asks him whether he cares for her and in asking nearly breaches his safe isolation. Raymond insists upon being his friend. Salamano's dog just disappears, thus disrupting a parallel repetitive rhythm. He shoots a man, and the law demands that he die. Each subtle disruption of Meursault's desire to be indifferently static brings him to a mental crisis. This crisis is resolved when he comes to understand the utter meaninglessness of his individual life within the mystery of the collective society. The events of his story only make sense that way. Any other explanation leads him to theology—represented by the priest—or fate.

In an expression of Camus's humanist logic, neither theology nor fate can offer men of intelligence (men like Meursault, willing to use only bare logic to consider the question of life) an explanation for the absolutely senseless things that humans do—war, murder, and other heinous acts. The alternative, therefore, is absurdity. Meursault recognizes the "truth" that life is meaningless. That means life is just what one makes of it while being conscious of two certainties—life and death. In doing so, Camus argues, one would uphold traditional human values because they safeguard one's life. In other words, human values (what we understand today as "human rights") lead to the greatest happiness of the greatest number. When one is truly willing to face this Truth, one can be happy. Unfortunately, Meursault is executed before he can live in this fashion.

Colonialism

There are no hints which suggest that the novel takes place in a colonized country. There are, however, hints that racial tensions exist between French-Algerians and

"Arabs." From the first page the reader knows that the novel is set in Algeria and that the date of publication is 1942. Therefore, it can be guessed that the novel occurs in a colonized setting. In addition, the narrator hints at the racial tension by telling the story as if it took place solely among some French people who happened to live in Algeria. Meursault only associates with French-Algerians, and the only people he names are French-Algerians. Then, for no apparent reason, he shoots an Arab.

While it could be argued, and usually is, that the issue of race and colonialism is not an important theme to the novel (because the novel is about the larger concern of absurd individuality), it is still important to note its existence. First, none of the Arabs in the book, including the murder victim, receive a name. In fact, the nurse at the nursing home is given no other attribute aside from having an abscess that requires her to wear bandaging on her face. The reader sees her as marked by this condition, and she is described as an "Arab." The reader gains little information about her. Another Arab woman is Raymond's girlfriend. She accuses him of being a pimp, and he beats her. She has no name. In fact, Meursault comments on her name, saying, "[W]hen he told me the woman's name I realized she was Moorish." It does not bother him that his "friend" is having relations with an "Arab," nor does it bother him that Raymond wants to mark her for cheating on him. He wants to cut her nose off in the traditional manner of marking a prostitute. Finally, her brothers and his friends begin to follow Raymond. It is this nameless group of Arabs who Meursault, Masson, and Raymond encounter at the beach. One member of the group is found by Meursault alone and is shot.

The issue of race is the most troubling and unresolved issue of the novel. If one reads the novel solely in terms of the theme of absurdity, the action of the story makes sense—in a meaningless sort of way. However, read in terms of a lesson on human morality and the ethics of the Western tradition wherein a white man goes through a struggle—or *agon*—in the land of the "Other," then the story is very contradictory and highly problematic. Meursault certainly does arrive at a "truth," but that arrival was at the cost of a man's life as well as a ruined love.

Free Will

Though the possession of a free will is taken for granted by most people, the presentation of its "freeness" in *The Stranger* is rather unsettling. Meursault consistently expresses his awareness of his own will as free. In some instances, this might be interpreted as indifference, but Meursault is decidedly, perhaps starkly, free. He does not feel the temptation to encumber his reasoning with considerations or dogmas. For example, he is never worried and is repeatedly doing a systems check on his body—he declares states of hunger, whether he feels well, and that the temperature is good or the sun is too hot. These are important considerations to Meursault, and they pass the time. Conversely, the magistrate is frustrated, tired, and clings to his belief in God. Meursault discerns that the magistrate finds life's meaning only through this belief. But when the magistrate asks if Meursault is suggesting he should be without belief, Meursault replies that it has nothing to do with him one way or the other. This is because the only things

that should concern Mersault, he decides, are elemental factors, such as keeping his body comfortably cool.

Style

Narrative

Psychological self-examinations are common in French first-person narratives, but Camus's *The Stranger* gave the technique of psychological depth a new twist at the time it was published. Instead of allowing the protagonist to detail a static psychology for the reader, the action and behavior were given to the reader to decipher. Camus did this because he felt that "psychology is action, not thinking about oneself." The protagonist, along with a failure to explain everything to the reader, refuses to justify himself to other characters. He tells only what he is thinking and perceiving, he does not interrupt with commentary. By narrating the story this way, through the most indifferent person, the reader is also drawn into Meursault's perspective. The audience feels the absurdity of the events. However, other characters, who do not even have the benefit of hearing the whole of Meursault's story as the book's readers do, prefer their ideas of him. They are only too ready to make their judgments at the trial. Moreover, they readily condemn him to death as a heartless killer without regret

Structure and Language

Camus's narration was immediately recognized as extremely innovative. His language, while recognized as similar to the American "Hemingway style," was seen as so appropriate to the task as to be hardly borrowed. The style that Camus uses is one of direct speech that does not allow much description. He chose that style because it backed up his narrative technique. The reader is focused on the characters' reactions and behavior as they are related through Meursault.

Camus also divided the story at the murder. Part one opens with the death of Maman and ends with the murder of the Arab. In part two of the novel, Meursault is in prison and at the end is awaiting his execution. The division reinforces the importance of Meursault in the universe of the story. Normality is jarred throughout the first part until it dissolves into chaos because of the murder. The second half shows the force of law entering to reestablish meaning and therefore bring back order through the death of Meursault. The structure and the language, then, are technically at one with the greater theme of absurdity.

Setting

Environment is a very important element to Meursault. He reports the heat of rooms, the way that the sun affects him, and all the other conditions of the habitat he lives in. The story itself is set around the city of Algiers and the beach. It is always daytime and the sun is always out. Curiously, in the universe of *The Stranger* there is no night, no darkness outside of mental obscurity. Things happen overnight, but no plot action occurs in the dark. The only moment when darkness does threaten is at the start of the

vigil, but the caretaker dispels the darkness with the electric light. Other things that happen overnight include private encounters with Marie (we assume) and the verdict, which is read at eight o'clock at night. However, the novel's events occur during the day, long days that are hardly differentiated from each other. Such facts of time emphasize the absurdity of Meursault; everything is meaningless except for the current state of the body in the environment.

Foreshadowing

This technique is used to indicate a happening before it occurs, and this foretelling can be foreboding. A disturbing moment for Meursault, as well as the unsuspecting reader, occurs while Meursault is sitting near his Maman's coffin. "It was then that I realized they were all sitting across from me, nodding their heads, grouped around the caretaker. For a second I had the ridiculous feeling that they were there to judge me." Later, in part two, it is precisely his behavior at this funeral with which the state prosecution is concerned. The way in which Meursault honors his mother has everything to do with his guilt. In other words, the sense of judgement he felt from those sitting across from him at the funeral vigil foreshadowed the solitary condemnation at the trial.

Historical Context

Algeria

Resuming a policy of imperialist expansion after the Napoleonic era, France invaded Algeria in 1830. The French soon controlled the city of Algiers and some coastal areas, but not until 1857 did they subdue the whole region. France sent settlers to colonize the conquered region, but even as late as 1940 the French in Algeria were outnumbered 9 to 1. During World War II the Algerians fought on the side of Germany, which occupied France. However, they were not too keen on resisting the Americans, and when General Eisenhower landed in November of 1942, he met little resistance. That invasion prevented Camus from leaving France and joining his wife in Algeria until the liberation of France in 1944. Throughout the rest of the war, the Algerian independence movement grew due to contact with other Westerners—British and American soldiers.

The independence movement continued to grow after the war but was violently put down by French troops. The struggle escalated when the National Liberation Front (FLN) wrote a new constitution in 1947. Unable to deliver on the promise of the new constitution, the FLN began a war of independence with France in 1954. By 1962, Charles de Gaulle agreed to grant the country independence.

World War II

World War II was in full swing in 1942, since America had declared war on Japan and Germany in response to the Pearl Harbor attack. However, the Allied cause did not look good. France had fallen to the Germans, and British troops were pushed from their holdings in the Pacific to India by the Japanese. On the Russian front, the Germans seemed to be on the verge of capturing Stalingrad when they attacked in February. This attack took the form of a gruesome siege. There was still hope, however, because both the British and the Russians refused to give in. Geography aided the Russians and the superiority of the Royal Air Force made the siege of Britain hazardous.

Summer began and the Allies started to gain against the Axis Powers. American troops were more successful than not in flooding the Allies with needed supplies through their base in Iceland. June brought real progress when the American Navy met the Japanese in the Battle of Midway. This decisive victory ended Japanese expansion in the Pacific and irreparably crippled their naval strength. In November, Eisenhower led a joint British-U.S. force in a landing in Algeria. In Russia, the Germans were still unable to claim victory since the Russian army was refusing to give way. In the end Russia lost 750,000 soldiers throughout the year. The Germans gained against the Russians only to lose all but eighty thousand men, who survived by cannibalism, and surrendered by February of 1943. Slowly the tide was turning against the Germans.

Critical Overview

The success of *The Stranger* has been matched by an unceasing flow of criticism. Most of that criticism has been a positive affirmation of Camus's place as a master of French literature. One reviewer even described Camus as the writer America had been waiting for since Hemingway. The criticism has also had the effect, good or bad, of rendering the novel a moral treatise. This occurred early on when Jean-Paul Sartre reviewed the work in 1943 and said, among other things, that with this work "Albert Camus takes his place in the great tradition of those French moralists." Philip Thody, in a more recent article, says this is a misleading approach to *The Stranger* since in moral terms the novel is full of contradictions, whereas if read for its absurd theory, no breakdown exists.

Taking the cue from Sartre, other reviewers of the 1940s matched the novel with Camus's writings in *The Myth of Sisyphus* and criticized Camus's ability to handle Heidegger and Kierkegaard. Richard Plant, however, did not seem to need the heavy guns of philosophy to enjoy the novel, according to his 1946 article "Benign Indifference." Instead, he claims, the novel presents the protagonist's philosophy as "nothing but a rationalization of his sublime indifference." Unfortunately, Plant seems to grow confused and therefore moves very quickly to compare Camus with the American style of writing. Plant says that the way Camus handles the shooting of the Arab should serve as a model to Americans of the "tough school." Finally, Plant says, "Camus emerges as a master craftsman who never wastes a word."

During the 1950s most critics were more concerned with Camus's political stance in response to the Algerian independence movement as well as his disagreement with French intellectuals—namely Sartre. The strife of the decade, accompanied by ailing health, gave Camus a horrendous writing block and left him silent but for a few rare occasions. Critics generally enjoyed *The Plague* of 1947 and *The Fal*l of 1956. His Nobel prize was seen as well deserved.

Two exceptions to the above were Norman Podhoretz and Colin Wilson. The latter wrote a book in 1956 detailing the trend in modernity, and its fiction, toward a hero who stood for truth. Wilson entitled this work in honor of Camus's novel— in its British translation—as *The Outsider*. This character is defined as follows:

The Outsider's case against society is very clear. All men and women have these dangerous, unnamable impulses, yet they keep up a pretense, to themselves, to others; their respectability, their philosophy, their religion, are all attempts to gloss over, to make look civilized and rational something that is savage, unorganized, irrational. He is an Outsider because he stands for [this] Truth.

Sartre wrote similarly about the phenomenon Camus's *Stranger* represented. However, Sartre believed such a being had a place in society whereas Wilson was simply recording a literary trend.

Podhoretz was also interested in this new hero. In 1958, he credited Camus with the correct identification of this new hero. "It was, of course, Camus who first spotted the significance of [the] new state of nihilism and identified it, in *The Stranger,* with the pathological apathy of the narrator Meursault— the French were far in advance of the Americans in seeing that the 'rebel' was giving way in our day to the 'Stranger.'"

Camus's death in 1960 shifted the discussion surrounding his work to an automatic respect, followed by criticism. Exemplifying the criticism that arose in the face of his death, Henri Peyre wrote in a 1960 article, "Camus the Pagan," "the works of Camus, as they stand interrupted by fate, utter a pagan message which is to be set beside that of the great pagans of antiquity and that of some of the modern pagans to who Christianity owes an immense debt of gratitude." If Camus could be said to have had a religion, it would have been atheistic humanism. Writing in a 1962 introduction to "Camus: A Collection of Critical Essays," Germaine Bree commented: "Camus's rapid rise to celebrity between 1942 and 1945 is unparalleled in the history of French literature: *The Stranger, The Myth of Sisyphus,* and the two plays *Caligula* and *The Misunderstanding,* together with Camus's role in the Resistance and the widespread interest in his *Combat* editorials, started his career in meteoric fashion."

By the 1970s, criticism had returned to traveled, but still fruitful, paths of inquiry. In 1973, Donald Lazere wrote, "*The Stranger,* like the *Myth,* asserts the primacy of individual, flesh-and-blood reality against any abstract notion that claims to supersede it." But then with the rise of Post-Colonial criticism, there was a turn to aspects of *The Stranger* that were not often discussed. Philip Thody, in "Camus's *L'Etranger* Revisited" (1979), wrote that despite the fact that Camus championed the cause of Algerian independence in his journalism, he did not escape or confront colonialism in his fiction. For support Thody points to the obvious and striking absence of names for Algerians. Neither the nurse (who has an abscess), Raymond's girlfriend, nor the Arabs (who follow Raymond) have names. They are simply part of the scenery affecting Meursault when he pulls the trigger.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

Moser is an assistant professor at the University of California-Davis. In the following excerpt, Moser describes The Stranger *in terms of its Existential elements, Camus's philosophy of the absurd, and other viewpoints*.

The Stranger is probably Albert Camus's best known and most widely read work. Originally published in French in 1942 under the title *L'Etranger,* it precedes other celebrated writings such as the essays *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1943) and *The Rebel* (1951), the plays *Caligula* (1945) and *The Just Assassins* (1949), and the novels *The Plague* (1947) and *The Fall* (1956). Set in pre-World War II Algeria, *The Stranger* nevertheless confronts issues that have preoccupied intellectuals and writers of post-World War II Europe: the apparent randomness of violence and death; the emptiness of social morality in the face of an irrational world; a focus on existential and absurd aspects of the human condition. Through the singular viewpoint of the narrator Meursault, Camus presents a philosophy devoid of religious belief and middle-class morality, where sentience and personal honesty become the bases of a happy and responsible life.

What perhaps strikes the reader first about *The Stranger* is the unemotional tone of the narrator, Meursault. The novel begins: "Today, mama died. Or maybe yesterday, I don't know. I received a telegram from the retirement home: 'Mother deceased. Funeral tomorrow. Deepest sympathy.' That tells me nothing. It could have been yesterday..." Meursault's flat response to the death of his mother conveys a sense of resignation, one supported by his lack of ambition at work and his indifference in personal relationships. Save for his tirade against the chaplain at the end of the novel, Meursault remains rather monotone throughout; his only pleasures are immediate and physical: the taste of a café au lait; the warmth of sun and water; the touch of his fiancée, Marie. Thus, from the opening words, Camus projects his remarkable philosophy through an unremarkable protagonist: since death is both arbitrary and inevitable, and since there is nothing beyond death, life only has importance in the here and now, in the day to day activities that make up our existence. Camus's simplistic narrative style, influenced by the journalistic tradition of Hemingway and his own experience as a reporter, helps to convey the sense of immediacy that lies at the foundation of his philosophy.

From a literary standpoint, *The Stranger* offers aspects that complement both modern and tradi- tional sensibilities. With regards to the former, the story is presented as the subjective experience of a first-person narrator. We do not know his first name, what he looks like, or precisely when the action of the story takes place. He does not divulge much information about his past, nor does he attempt to present a cohesive view of, or opinion about, the society in which he lives and works. Such qualities are in stark contrast to the Realist novel tradition represented by such nineteenth century writers as Honoré de Balzac (1799-1850), whose works attempt to reproduce a complete account of French society through the eyes of a moralizing, omniscient third-person narrator.

In a more classical vein, *The Stranger* offers order and balance. The novel is organized into two parts of equal length, and the central episode of the book—the shooting of the Arab—is both preceded and followed by five chapters. Themes are maintained with strict focus: the story opens with the death of Meursault's mother, the murder lies at the exact center of the book, and the novel concludes with the death-sentence of Meursault. Within the story Camus creates scenes of explicit parallel and contrast. The tears and fainting of Thomas Pérez at the funeral, for example, offer a foil to Meursault's lack of emotion. The noise of Salamano cursing his dog directly precedes the screams of the Moorish woman as Raymond beats her; both relationships share qualities of physical love and abuse. One might argue that Camus's sense of literary balance is an attempt to put into practice an existential philosophy: the only order in a disordered world is the one we create for ourselves.

The Stranger and its author have often been linked to Existentialism, a post-World War II philosophy that has become synonymous with the name of Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-80). Although Camus was a one-time friend and supporter of Sartre, he denied being an existentialist. Nevertheless, there are clear existential themes in the *The Stranger,* a product of the intellectual climate of the times. Camus's preoccupation with the nature of being, for example, and his rejection of reason and order in the universe, are both existential concerns. When Camus presents the Arab's murder as the result of a random series of events, and Meursault refuses to lie in court to help win his case, we enter into existential realms of human action and responsibility. There is no outside force governing our lives, according to the existentialists; individuals must take responsibility for their own actions. Meursault's ultimate vindication is in having remained true to himself and to his feelings in a society that cultivates deception and hypocrisy.

Since its publication, critics have interpreted Meursault's plight in many ways. From a mythic or structuralist viewpoint, Meursault reenacts a timeless struggle of an individual caught up in the forces of fate, driven toward the murder by divine powers acting through the sun and the sea. In psychological readings, the protagonist acts out issues held by the author: an oedipal love for his mother and the desire to kill his father. Poststructuralist accounts concentrate on the novel's language and Meursault's inability to explain his actions adequately in court. This inability should be read as the failure of language, these latter critics argue, since it lies outside of reality, and not that of society's justice system or of its moral code. If there is a reading Camus himself preferred it was one that took into account his philosophy of the absurd. Many readers, following Sartre's first review of the novel in 1943, look to Camus's *The Myth of Sisyphus* for the most revealing commentary on the work. Published the year after *The Stranger,* the essay defines the absurd as arising from the meeting of two elements: the absence of meaning in the natural world, and mankind's inherent desire to seek out meaning. Meursault's ultimate dignity resides in the knowledge that his quest for meaning will always go unfulfilled; happiness is achieved only in a life without illusions. Notions of the absurd become an important part of post-World War II literary production in France, the principal writers, Samuel Beckett, Jean Genêt and Eugène Ionesco, forming what has become known as the "Theater of the Absurd."

Meursault's experiences with the natural world draw out elements of Camus's philosophy of the absurd. Meursault's name itself has been associated with the environment that affects him so strongly throughout the novel. In French, *mer* means "sea"; *sol* means "sun." Standing under the penetrating rays of the midday sun at the beach, "the same sun" that burned the day he buried his mother, Meursault faces off with the Arab. Suddenly scorched by a hot blast of wind from the sea, blinded by the sweat in his eyes, Meursault fires the revolver and shatters the silence of the day. Later, in court, he will tell the judge that he killed the Arab "because of the sun." He shows no remorse for the crime he has committed, realizing that it occurred only because of chance circumstances. This meeting between man and nature, like all such meetings, ends in a meaningless act. All that remains is for him to acknowledge what he has done.

Not surprisingly, much commentary has focused on the colonialist aspects of the novel, above all because the victim of the murder is an Arab. Camus's philosophy of the absurd may point to the murder as meaningless, but during a time of straining relations between Arabs and French (war broke out in 1954 between France and Algeria and concluded in 1962 with Algerian independence), the killing of an Arab by a French-Algerian could have been interpreted, and was, as a meaningful act indeed. A critic of colonialist oppression and a proponent of social justice for Muslims, Camus—a *pied-noir* or Frenchman born in Algeria—is nevertheless silent in his novel on the volatile political issues of the time. Although not depicted as social inferiors, Muslims in the novel are relegated to the periphery: a deformed nurse, an abused mistress, prisoners, and shiftless hangers-on. Camus considered himself an "Algerian" writer, yet his two-dimensional treatment of Arabs in the novel has, for some, aligned him more on the side of the French.

Early on in his career, Camus planned out the stages that his work would follow. *The Stranger* belongs to the first stage of his writing career, a period that also includes such titles as *The Myth of Sisyphus* and *Caligula. The Stranger* projects a "zero point," according to the author, an "absurd" state of existence reduced to immediate sensations. Camus's later works, informed by his years working in the French Resistance and his experience with totalitarian governments, move beyond the leveling effect created by *The Stranger* and build upon positive social values. *The Just Assassins* and *The Plague,* belonging to the later period, recount tales of community, justice, and solidarity.

Source: Patrick J. Moser, in an essay for *Novels for Students,* Gale, 1999.

Critical Essay #2

In the following excerpt, Tarrow discusses the development of the novel's principal character, Meursault, "from an acquiescent figure who admits no limits to a combatant who claims the right to be different."

The Stranger, which grew out of the experiment of *A Happy Death* and was nourished by Camus's political experiences, constitutes an attack on the accepted norms of bourgeois society. It calls into question many aspects of an oppressive colonial regime: the use of the judiciary, religion, and above all, language to maintain dominance. It is an ironic condemnation of colonialist and racist attitudes. The novel also develops a theme with variations on indifference and difference, a theme rooted in the Algerian experience, as Camus's articles in *Alger-Républicain* have shown. If the hero Meursault has a moral message—and the reference to him as a Christ figure would suggest that he has—it is one that plays a constant role in Camus's thought; there are no absolutes to which one can adhere, only limits, and the vital nuances are played out within those limits. Total indifference and apathy allow others to act without limits. Meursault develops from an acquiescent figure who admits no limits to a combatant who claims the right to be different.

The story has a simple plot. Meursault, a clerk in an Algiers shipping office, attends his mother's funeral at an old people's home in Marengo. The following day he goes swimming, meets an old friend, Marie, takes her to see a Fernandel movie, and initiates an affair with her the same evening. With another friend, Raymond, he spends a Sunday on the beach with Marie, where they encounter three Arabs, one of whom has a grudge against Raymond. In the ensuing confrontation, Meursault shoots one of the Arabs.

The second half of the novel relates Meursault's trial and conviction, and his growing selfawareness during the months in prison. After being sentenced to death, he affirms his own system of values and rejects that of established society.

When *The Stranger* was first published in 1942 the aspect that evoked the most interest among critics was the use of the *passé composé,* the compound past tense, since the traditional tense used in literary narrative is the *passé simple*. Sartre, in his review of the book, comments that the effect of the *passé compose* is to isolate each sentence, to avoid giving any impression of cause and effect. Meursault's experience is a succession of presents. During the transition from Mersault to Meursault, Camus changed the form of the narrative: an omniscient author using the *passé simple* and the third person was replaced by a first-person narrative in the *passé compose*. The author leaves his hero in a situation where he is dominated by the power of language rather than in control of it; language is equivalent to destiny.

Camus's concern with language is evident in *The Stranger*. [The] use of language beyond [Meursault's] mastery reveals an intellectual confusion that stems from the limits of his education. It is true that Meursault was once a student; but in rejecting ambition,

he also rejected the value of an intellectual life. Rational thought is not worth the linguistic effort involved. Ironically enough, misinterpretation is not limited to Meursault. The French authorities misinterpret too.

"Literature" obscures the true nature of reality: Meursault is someone who has "given up language and replaced it with *actual revolt*. He has chosen to do what Christ scorned to do: to save the damned—by damning himself." Viewed in this light, Meursault's deliberate firing of four more shots into the dead body is an act of revolt, a defiance of the society in which he lives. Meursault, who places no reliance on language, throws down the gauntlet but fails to justify his action in the eyes of the world.

[It] is obvious that Meursault is in conflict, albeit unconsciously, with all the norms of the French system; in response to his narration of events, the reader's sympathies lie with the Arabs defending their honor rather than with the unsavory Raymond. Meursault refuses to play the game, to be part of the family. The authority figures are all predisposed to be kind to Meursault: the soldier on whose shoulder he falls asleep on the bus, the director of the old-age home, his employer, the examining magistrate, his lawyer, the priest. It is only when he says no that they begin to resent him; he declines to view his mother's body, he turns down a promotion that would take him to Paris, he refuses to recognize the Cross, or to misrepresent the details of his case. When he says yes, it is to the "wrong" things: to a cup of coffee, to a Fernandel film, and to Raymond's sordid plan.

During the trial, it becomes clear that Meursault is being tried not for his action, but for his attitudes. The ironic presentation of the prosecutor's arguments, in which the narrator's use of free indirect discourse shows up the emptiness of the rhetoric, makes the trial seem farcical. Indeed one could assert that Meursault is innocent with respect to the invalid reasons for guilt attributed by the prosecution: "I accuse this man of burying a mother with a criminal heart." The implications of "the void in the heart that we find in this man" are enlarged to the scale of "an abyss into which society could sink." Meursault is accused of two crimes which he has not committed: burying his mother with a criminal heart (although psychoanalytical studies of this text have concluded there is some basis for his feelings of guilt at her death), and killing a father, since the prosecutor affirms in a flourish of rhetoric that he is responsible for the crime that will be tried in court the following day.

Bearing in mind the trials in Algeria that Camus covered as a journalist, one could conclude that the parodic deformation is mild, for in many of those cases the charges were politically motivated, the witnesses bribed, and the verdict a foregone conclusion. It is true that Meursault makes no effort to defend himself; but it is because he does not understand the ideas behind the verbiage, nor the consequences of his own words and deeds. The words used do not express reality, but Meursault and his friends are unable to counteract the force of their intent. They are verbally ill-equipped. The prosecutor, however, rejects such a defense before it is voiced. "This man is intelligent.... He can answer. He knows the value of words." In a sense, this is true. Meursault refuses to use words that do not precisely translate his feelings, words like *love, guilt, shame*. Society is accustomed to euphemism and lip-service.

Meursault finds a voice and an adequate command of language in the final pages of his narrative. The reader is led to suppose that his execution is imminent and that his voice will be silenced: the guillotine effectively dislocates the very source of speech.

Only in his final outburst does Meursault consciously evaluate other people, although still in a negative way. Camus called him "a negative snapshot." In an absurd world, all men are equal. It is through a kind of askesis, a narrowing down of his field of vision, that Meursault reaches an initial state of awareness, just as Mersault did. But Mersault is committed to death, and Meursault is committed to life.

Camus is playing ironically with ambiguity here, but this does not detract from the *moral* intent, to demonstrate that judgment is unjust because it is based on ambiguous data. Misinterpretation can be accidental or intentional, but in either case the consequences can prove fatal.

Metaphysical absurdity is mirrored by the social situation depicted in *The Stranger;* as Camus remarked, "*The Plague* has a social meaning and a metaphysical meaning. It's exactly the same. This ambiguity is also present in *The Stranger*." The injustice of that social situation is in turn reflected and complicated by the particular attributes of a colonial society. Meursault learns in the course of writing his life that it is not meaningless, and his desire to relive it is the first positive affirmation he makes.

One aspect of Meursault's statement, which will be a constant in Camus's ideas on rebellion, is the emphasis on the concrete and the present. The prison chaplain embodies exactly what Meursault rejects: a nonphysical relationship with the world and with human beings, a passive submission to the injustices of God and society, and a dogmatic faith in a better life in the future. Meursault is solidly involved in the here and now, convinced that joy is one of the most precious of human emotions, not to be sacrificed for some abstract and hypothetical goal. He sums up, but only for his readers, his notion of happiness during the final day in court: "While my lawyer went on talking, I heard the echoing sound of an ice-cream vendor's horn. I was overwhelmed by the memories of a life that was no longer mine, but in which I had found the simplest and most persistent joys...: the smells of summer, the neighborhood I loved, a certain evening sky, Marie's laughter and her dresses." The core of Camus's arguments in *The Rebel* is here in embryo.

Source: Susan Tarrow, "The Stranger," in her *Exile from the Kingdom: A Political Rereading of Albert Camus,* University of Alabama Press, 1985, 215 pp.

Critical Essay #3

In the following excerpt, Feuerlicht analyzes the transformation of the protagonist's psyche— from indifference to an understanding of the world. He concludes that Camus's novel conceals a variety of possible interpretations.

The ambiguity of the novel starts with the title. With regard to whom or to what is Meursault a stranger or an alien? The word *étranger* is only used twice in the *récit,* but not for Meursault. Alienation or estrangement is said to be the mood of Camus's *L'Etranger,* and this short novel allegedly demonstrates a person's complete lack of relatedness to other human beings. Meursault, however, is not like Baudelaire's "Etranger," who has no friends, like the "stranger" in Schnitzler's short story "Die Fremde," or like the outsiders in Thomas Mann's early writings, who create an atmosphere of cold estrangement whenever they meet other people. Meursault is not odd, certainly not odder than, for instance, Salamano. True, Marie once calls him "bizarre," but this does not apply to his way of life, or his character, only to his unconventional views of love and marriage. He is not a stranger to Masson or to his boss. He has friends, such as Celeste, Emmanuel, Raymond; and his friends stay by him when he is in trouble. People in the neighborhood know him and he knows them. He is one of them.

Thus, it is rather obvious that Meursault is not a stranger to others. However, it is more difficult to determine whether he is a stranger to himself, as it has often been said.

There can be hardly any doubt, however, that Meursault is a stranger to society. As Camus states in his "avant-propos," "il est étranger à la société où il vit, il erre, en marge, dans les faubourgs de la vie privée, solitaire, sensuelle." (One might perhaps question both "errer" and "solitaire"). He is, according to Camus, not playing society's game, because he does not lie, even where and when everybody lies in order to simplify life, and because he rejects time-honored formulas, such as expressing regret after a crime, even when this rejection means the death sentence. Whether this actually stems from a "deep, though silent passion for the absolute and for truth" is debatable; this passion being too silent to be noticeable. To be sure, he is not only sincere when he refuses to pretend before the investigating judge that he feels genuine remorse, but also when he refuses to pretend to Marie that he loves her, and his sincerity makes him even say dogmatically that one is never allowed to pretend. Yet when he congratulates his lawyer in court, he is aware of not being sincere, and his testimony in behalf of Raymond at the police station is not a proof of his absolute sincerity either.

Meursault may also be termed a stranger to society because of his unconventional ideas about love, marriage, and how to get ahead in a job. Love, a conventional concept according to *Le Mythe de Sisyphe,* does not mean anything to him, and marriage, a conventional basis of society, is not a serious matter. He also declines the opportunity of going to Paris. Not to have any professional ambition is an affront to modern society. Meursault antagonizes society also by his "friendship" with the pimp Raymond and, above all, by not displaying the usual signs of grief at and after the burial of his mother.

Meursault is also a stranger to society because he sometimes feels left out. In the courtroom he has the bizarre impression of being just an intruder. Though he is sometimes tempted to "intervene" in the proceedings, he is told by his lawyer to keep quiet. His own trial seems to be held without him and his fate is decided without anyone asking him about his opinion. He is "reduced to zero" precisely by somebody who "acts" in his interest and who, according to convention, identifies himself with him by using "I" many times when he speaks of him. Meursault's helplessness during the proceed- ings in court may be symbolic of man's precarious place in a mass society whose workings he does not control nor even understand and whose leaders may speak in his name to further their own interests.

Meursault not only disregards some of society's time-honored conventions, but also some of its most valued achievements. Unlike another "stranger," Jean Péloueyre in Mauriac's *Le Baiser au lépreux,* he makes no reference to his former studies. Literature, philosophy, science, art do not seem to exist for him. No great personality, living or dead, is ever named in the book. Although he went to a university, there are only a very few instances which would indicate that his education might be more than elementary. Raymond obviously assumes that Meursault can write better to his prostitute mistress than he himself could. Meursault remembers having learned in school something about the guillotine and about the events of 1789 (the only historical fact mentioned in *L'Etranger*). He apparently read some mystery novels, and also thinks he should have read books dealing with executions. These are rather few and strange examples of the education society has given him. His short, "disconnected" sentences and his almost exclusive use of the *passé compose* may also be taken to be—among other things—a rejection of school rules and conventional writing.

This negative attitude toward culture perhaps reaches its climax in that unbelievable description of Paris, the cultural center of his nation: "C'est sale. Il y a des pigeons et des cours noires. Les gens ont la peau blanche." (It's dirty. There are pigeons and dark alleys. The men have white skin.) This is not meant to be funny. Meursault does not crack jokes and Marie does not laugh when she hears it, although she usually laughs at almost anything. It seems that *L'Etranger* is directed not only—as it has often been noted—against the *Pharisiens* but also against the *Parisiens*. Camus, of course, has often been critical of Parisian life and society, comparing it with the happier and more natural life in sundrenched Algeria.

However, this stranger to society never attacks society as such. He is not an anarchist or a rebel, he does not accuse or deride the judicial system, even praises some of its features, and is, according to the warden, the only prisoner who understands and approves certain punitive aspects of prison life. He is a law-abiding citizen, holds a steady job, works hard and well, and wears a black tie and a black armband as a tribute to convention. He is respectful to everybody, including the authorities ("Oui, monsieur le Directeur," "Oui, monsieur le Président") and does not deny conventional politeness: he thanks the director for arranging a religious funeral and later for attending the funeral. He compliments Masson on his cabin and thanks the newspaperman for his friendly words. He never uses offensive language.

Meursault, the stranger to society, never speaks of "society," although the public prosecutor and the papers do. It is "the others" who have condemned him, that faceless, anonymous, undistinguishable group of people that sit in the jury box as well as in the streetcar and judge any new arrival.

A word that is stressed by Camus in connection with estrangement, especially in his *Le Mythe de Sisyphe,* and has perhaps become the most popular word of his philosophical vocabulary, is "absurd." It has confusingly different meanings, and often is synonymous with "indifferent" or "stranger"-like. Meursault, therefore, has also been called an absurd man, his style "style absurde," and *L'Etranger* an absurd novel or a novel of the absurd. In the novel the word is used only once. In his outburst at the end Meursault calls his life, not life in general, "absurd." But "absurd" has no meaning without the assumption of a meaning, and it is not clear which meaning Meursault thinks or feels his life has been lacking. This somewhat corresponds to the "poor joys" of his life he speaks about, which imply great and real joys, of which, however, there is not the slightest intimation in the novel.

According to the terminology and the illustrations of *Le Mythe de Sisyphe,* Meursault's basic indifference is absurd, since the absurd teaches that all experiences are indifferent. In addition, some of his experiences can be called absurd, such as that of the "inhuman landscape" and that of the independent reflection in the mirror of his tin can. In *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* Camus also calls the uneasiness absurd which one feels on discovering how non-human men really are and how mechanical their gestures can be. In *L'Etranger* Meursault is fascinated by the little woman who one day sits down at his table in the restaurant. Twice he calls her "bizarre," and he even follows her to watch her. Her gestures have the precision of an automaton. This woman automaton, as he calls her, observes him in court as intently and seriously as the young newspaperman. Since the latter is to some extent Meursault (and Camus) himself, this encounter with her may indicate his discovery of his own mechanical way of life. The jerkiness (*saccade*) of her gestures also corresponds to the frequent jerkiness of his style. But the "femme automate" is not a "reflection" nor a "more extreme version of him." He lacks her "incredible" precision, speed, and assurance. Also, Meursault apparently sees "la mécanique qui écrasait tout" not in his life but in his execution. By the woman automaton Camus may have intended to symbolize the mechanization of modern life in this story that uses the style of modern American fiction.

"Indifference," which plays a key role in Camus's world, is a concept related to estrangement and absurdity and often synonymous with either. His teacher, Jean Grenier, wrote an essay "De l'Indifférence," and the original title of Meursault's story was "L'Indifférent." In the preface to the 1957 edition of *L'Envers et l'endroit,* Camus diagnoses a deep indifference in himself which is like a natural weakness and has to be corrected. In *Le Mythe de Sisyphe,* however, he finds a *noblesse Profonde* in indifference and sees that man at an advanced stage will nourish his greatness with the wine of absurdity and the bread of indifference. The world reveals to him a serene indifference to everything. The sky, in particular, is indifferent, has an inane, indifferent smile, pursues with the earth an indifferent dialogue, and is even indifferent to the "atrocious victories and just defeat of Nazi Germany." But it also has charm, beauty,

sweetness, and tenderness. This "explains" the paradoxical "tendre indifférence du monde" in the last paragraph, when Meursault looks at the starry sky.

Meursault is never called "indifferent" in the novel, but a group of hostile Arabs watch Raymond's house with indifference and the court reporters seem indifferent. It is clear from these two occurrences that indifference is not identical with apathy, but rather with lack of emotionalism. Meursault displays indifference at the death of his mother, at Raymond's offer of friendship, at Marie's desire to marry him, and at his employer's proposal to transfer him to a Paris office. After his mother's death "nothing has changed." One cannot change one's life; at any rate, all lives are of equal value. Meursault's indifference is probably not congenital, like Camus's, but the result of a drastic experience of an undisclosed nature. The break came when he had to give up his studies and ambitions. Now he knows that "all that" has no real importance and in various situations he repeats the slogan of indifference: "It's all the same to me." The prospect of impending death shakes his indifference considerably, although he tries to maintain it by looking at the sky, and in his violent anger at the chaplain he even loses it to some extent, but only to regain and reaffirm it on a higher, lyrical, or mystical level. Again he maintains that nothing has any importance, that all lives and men are equal (because of death); but now with the "stars on his face," he feels that the world's "tender indifference" is penetrating him. As he finds the world brotherly now, it is a kind of mystical union, not with mother nature, but with brother world. Whereas the end of the first part, which leads to a violent death, is dominated by tension, hostility, destruction, and misfortune (*malheur* is the last word of this part), the end of the second part leads Meursault, who expects a violent death, to vague feelings of truce, peace, tenderness, brotherhood, and happiness. The last word (*haine*) is harsh again, but it means in its context the conquest of solitude and the reconquest of indifference.

Although Camus once states that "those are very poor who need myths" and that Algerians live without any myths, he himself reinterpreted or recreated old myths and perhaps created some new ones. In particular, his *L'Etranger* has been thought of as embodying various old and new myths. The multiplicity of mythical interpretations points definitely to the suggestive intensity of Camus's novel, but perhaps also to the elusive vagueness or to the abuse of "myth" as a literary term.

While representing the myths of modern man, of Oedipus and Sisyphus, Meursault is also said to be a reincarnation of the myth of Christ. Indeed, it is almost generally believed that this little office clerk, who cannot feel sad at his mother's death, who does not believe in a life hereafter, who kills a fellow-man, who does not seem to have any set of moral values, and who, consequently and perhaps not quite jokingly, is called "Mr. Antichrist" by the investigating judge, is a Christ figure, a tragic hero who takes upon himself the burden of humanity, a "sacrificial victim," or the "scapegoat of a society of pharisees and Pilates." Camus himself calls him— "paradoxically," as he says— "the only Christ we deserve." True, Meursault is like Christ a "victim of a judicial error," is like Christ unprejudiced toward social outcasts, and is executed at approximately the same age Christ was. But, in spite of Camus, one cannot see how Meursault "accepts to die for truth." He does not "incarnate truth," he does not die *for* the sake of sincerity, but *because* of his sincerity (whatever the causes of his sincerity may be), because his

attitude is not "conventionnelle, c'est-à-dire comédi- enne." He does not live or die for anybody or anything, nor does he think he does, and his death does not change anything or anybody.

It is also rather difficult to see how the sea and the sun are used as "mythic religious symbols" in *L'Etranger* and especially how they are "associated in Camus's mind" with the mother and the father. The homonymy of *mere* and *mer*. does not mean much, since most of the time Meursault calls his mother "maman." It is impossible to see the connection between the colorless, boring old woman, as Meursault sees his mother, whom he hardly cares to visit at the old age home, and the fascinating and beautiful Mediterranean, which he likes to watch and where he enjoys swimming. And while the sun is in *L'Etranger* the most powerful force, the father is weakness personified. All that Meursault knows about his father is that he vomited after witnessing the execution of a stranger, whereas his "stranger"-son finally expects his own execution with a feeling of near elation....

Camus in the "avant-propos" calls Meursault "un homme pauvre et nu." Indeed many a reader may sympathize when seeing poor Meursault suffer from an excess of light and heat, or dine on *boudin,* or "lost" in the forensic maze, or subjected to monstrous accusations. To be sure, there also are extenuating circumstances for his crime: the preceding scuffle, the beginning of a sunstroke, the lack of premeditation, the excessive consumption of wine, the feeling of the hostility of the world, the reflex (or defensive) nature of the first shot. But Meursault is no innocent, as most critics assume, unless one adopts the "absurdist" point of view, which "makes murder at least indifferent." Meursault's deed is not altogether an accident or a stroke of bad luck, as his friends in the courtroom and the magazines have called it. It comes as a climax: first, Masson, Raymond, and Meursault walk on the beach, then Raymond and Meursault, and finally, Meursault alone; at first, Meursault tries to prevent Raymond from shooting, then he thinks that one could shoot or not shoot, which is not a very innocent thought, and finally he does shoot. As he stands by the body of the dead man, he does not even feel that he has committed a crime. He understands that he has destroyed the equilibrium of the day and the exceptional silence of a beach— which is a credit to his feeling for nature— but he does not feel that he has also and above all destroyed a human life. He has to be told that he committed a crime and actually remains to the very end a "stranger to his crime."

Paradoxically Meursault gets even more elusive when he reaches what is generally assumed to be "lucidity" at the end. The light which illuminates for him his past life and life in general is not bright sunshine, but seems to come from the stars which he sees. His rejection of a future life, his reaffirmation of indifference, his contention that death equalizes all men and makes everything look unimportant, seem clear, in spite of the passionate tone; his lyrical reflections at the very end, when he has regained his calm and reached the height of lucidity, are the least clear passages of the whole novel....

Those who see in Meursault a Christ figure recall "the last moments of Christ, whose crucifixion was preceded by cries of hatred from the crowds." But then one must also explain why Meursault suddenly and consciously identifies himself with Christ or

parodies him. When one thinks that Meursault deserves the hatred of the people because he "has denied their myths," and they see in him the symbol of their fate, which is usually masked by myths, one overlooks the fact that Meursault does not speak of *expecting,* but of *wishing* those cries of hate; also he has never been aware of his denying collective myths or of his being a symbol of something. When one believes that Meursault "wants the crowds to be there because he wants society to give some sign that it realizes how much he defies it," one forgets that the death penalty is a clear enough sign of how society regards him.

Meursault's strange last wish is above all proof of the firmness of his indifference in contrast to his attitude in court where the mere sight of people who, as he thought, detested him, made him feel like crying. He actually does not express that strange wish, but he feels the desirability or necessity of it; that wish probably means the ultimate height of tender indifference, which he thinks he has not achieved yet, but may or will very soon achieve.

The number and the violent reaction of the spectators are, of course, also a sign that people care about him, but a possible connection with the Salamano episode seems to be more enlightening. The only other time "haine" is employed in *L'Etranger* is to denote Salamano's feelings toward his dog. The old man even constantly uses what might be called "cris de haine" toward his dog: "Salaud, charogne." Since after his presumably violent death the hated dog makes his former master cry with affection and unhappiness, Meursault's possible identification with the generally detested dog may be an indirect way of expressing his desire to be remembered well by the people who despised him before his death. Meursault's identification with a dog at the time of his execution recalls Josef K., who in Kafka's *Der Prozeb;* is executed at the end "like a dog."

Meursault's final illumination does not quite illuminate him in the eyes of the reader, who is left in the dark about the narrator's outward appearance (except his complexion), about his first name, and, above all, about his childhood and youth. In addition, Meursault shows baffling inconsistencies in his attitudes and actions. At ten in the morning he barely manages to walk three quarters of an hour because of the sun, but he walks the same distance at four o'clock the day before after a bus ride without any complaints; he takes a sunbath the day after, races after a truck and jumps on it at twelvethirty two days later, and enjoys lying in the sun for hours. He shuns the "effort" to climb a few wooden steps, but instead takes a long walk in the broiling sun. He first wants to "see his mother right away," but then repeatedly declines to see her. He does not care about Sundays, but does not want to waste a Sunday visiting his mother. And why does he keep Raymond's revolver? And why does he (as well as the prosecutor) mistake the day of his mother's burial for the day of her death (is this another "burial of the burial")?

These are some of the puzzles which the numerous critics of the book have failed to solve or even to notice. Prompted by their philosophical preoccupations, some have in ingenious "superstructures" discussed ill-defined alienations or discovered non-existent myths and "absurdities," while they often failed to see obvious facts and to explain

disturbing difficulties. One ventures to hope that careful and searching attention will turn to the "properly esthetic" facets of the book, such as the varied style and the enigmatic point of view. *L'Etranger* itself will continue radiating its charm and challenge.

Source: Ignace Feuerlicht, "Camus's *L'Etranger* Reconsidered," in *PMLA,* Vol. 78, No. 5, December, 1963, pp. 606- 21.

Adaptations

There has been only one adaptation of Camus's novel to the screen. Directed by Luchino Visconti, *L'Etranger* was produced in 1967 by Paramount pictures. The film failed to capture the Camus's style, but fortunately, the role of Arthur Meursault is executed brilliantly by Marcello Mastroianni and Anna Karina delivers a fine performance as Marie Cardona.

Topics for Further Study

Consider the element of time in the novel. Suggest some reasons why Camus chose not to establish the date or era. Keep in mind the historical context of the novel and the universal pretension of the theme.

Consult psychological literature and create a profile of the "outsider." What sort of mental condition creates a person of moral indifference? Begin with the book *The Outsider* by Colin Wilson.

Do some research on the condition of freedom of the press in France under Nazi occupation and the role of journals such as *Combat* in the resistance to this occupation. Does the refusal of Meursault to abide by the societal code of the world in which he lives have anything to do with the conditions under which Camus struggled?

Read the *The Myth of Sisyphus.* What is the absurd man? Was Camus successful in creating a character in terms of his theory of the absurd? Does Meursault have a place in reality?

Read the first American existential novel by Richard Wright, entitled *The Outsider* (1953), and compare to Camus's *The Stranger*.

Often encyclopedic entries on existentialism will list Camus as a representative author. Select an existential novel (by such authors as de Beauvoir or Sartre) and compare its themes to Camus's theory of the absurd. Agree or disagree with such a categorization.

Much has been made of the evident moral clash between Meursault and the magistrate or the priest. Do you think that Camus's project was the outlining of a moral code or the presentation of the absurd man?

Compare and Contrast

1942: Algeria is a French colony under Nazi occupation. Today: The political party which established Algeria as an independent nation has lost power to more fundamentalist groups.

1942: Mahatma Gandhi is imprisoned as a part of the British government crack-down on India's demand for independence.

Today: Independent India has a population of just under billion people and, according to Bill Gates, is soon to catch up with the United States in terms of technological sophistication. India's middle class is currently the largest of any nation on Earth.

1942: Roosevelt's $59 billion-dollar budget called for $52 billion to be spent on the war effort.

Today: In peace time, the U.S. spends 6 times that amount on military expenditure.

What Do I Read Next?

The obvious next step from *The Stranger* would be to read Camus's other 1942 work, *The Myth of Sisyphus*. There, through a collection of essays, he explains his position on the absurd at the time of writing *The Stranger*.

Camus was regarded as the conscience of occupied France for his writings in *Combat*. For that paper he wrote such editorials as *Neither Victims Nor Executioners* (printed in the fall of 1946 and reprinted in 1968 by Dwight Macdonald). This piece argued the logical basis of an anti-war stance consistent with his own theories. He argued that murder is never legitimate, silence between those in disagreement is intolerable, and fear must be understood. In short, he defined a modest position "free of messianism and disencumbered of nostalgia for an earthly paradise."

Camus's 1947 novel, *The Plague,* is seen by many to be a parable about World War II that demonstrates his moral philosophy. In this novel, a town is struck by plague but survives not by beliefs and prayer but through the rational investigation and practice of medical science.

There are other works which deal with the theme of absurdity. One very famous work was a play written by an Irishman who also took part in the French Resistance. The play is *Waiting for Godot* (1952) by Samuel Beckett.

A more properly existentialist work is the 1947 work, *The Age of Reason,* by Jean-Paul Sartre. Camus worked in the Resistance with Sartre but they had a falling out after the war. Sartre, more than Camus, exemplifies the philosophy of existentialism.

Another existentialist was Simone de Beauvoir. She is best know for *The Second Sex.* In 1943, she wrote an existential novel entitled *She Comes to Stay*. It is an interesting contrast to Camus's novel of the year before.

Further Study

Robert J. Champigny, *A Pagan Hero: An Interpretation of Meursault in Camus's 'The Stranger'*, translated by Rowe Portis, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1969.

Champigny analyzes Mersault through several readings which show the character as innocent but whose characteristics set the stage of his guilt. Champigny also argues that Meursault's reaction to his guilt make him a hero.

Raymond Gay-Crosier, "Albert Camus," in *Dictionary of Literary Biography,* Volume 72: *French Novelists, 1930- 1960,* edited by Catherine Savage, Gale Research, 1988, pp. 110-35.

The article presents an overview of the life and works of Albert Camus.

Adele King, *Notes on L'Etranger: The Stranger or The Outsider,* Longman York Press, 1980.

King offers an introduction to the novel, detailed summaries of the chapters, and brief critical commentary that touches on the most important parts of the novel: theme, historical context, structure, style, etc. An invaluable aid.

Patrick McCarthy, *Camus: A Critical Study of his Life and Work,* Hamish Hamilton, 1982.

A book-length investigation of Camus's life and works, placed within the historical context of war and struggle.

Norman Podhoretz, "The New Nihilism and the Novel" in his *Doings and Undoings,* Farrar, Straus, 1964, pp. 159-78.

According to Podhoretz, Camus was the first writer to identify the transition of the hero in twentiethcentury fiction from rebel to stranger. In so doing, Camus spotted the significance of the new nihilism and identified it.

Jan Rigaud, "Depictions of Arabs in *L'Etranger,"* in *Camus's L'Etranger: Fifty Years On,* edited by Adele King, Macmillan, 1992.

In a collection of essays that spans many approaches to the novel—literary influence, textual studies, comparative studies—Rigaud's article highlights an important and often overlooked aspect of *The Stranger*.

English Showalter Jr., *The Stranger: Humanity and the Absurd,* Twayne, 1989.

A readable introduction to the novel that offers historical context, the work's importance, and an introduction to critical reception of the novel. The second half of the study presents a close reading of the novel.

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Donald Lazere, *The Unique Creation of Albert Camus,* Yale University Press, 1973.

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Jean-Paul Sartre, "An Explication of *The Stranger,*" in *Camus: A Collection of Critical Essays,* edited by Germaine Bree, Prentice-Hall, 1962, pp. 108-21.

Philip Thody, "Camus's *L'Etranger* Revisited," in *Critical Quarterly,* Vol. 2, Summer, 1979, pp. 61-69.

Colin Wilson, *The Outsider,* Houghton Mifflin, 1956.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Novels for Students (NfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, NfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in NfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by NfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

NfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Novels for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Novels for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Novels for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from NfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from NfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Novels for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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