

SYNOPSIS

The Outsider (L'Étranger) is a novel by Albert Camus published in 1947. Its theme and outlook are often cited as exemplars of existentialism, though Camus did not consider himself an existentialist. The novel is divided into two parts/chapters.

Part one begins with Meursault learning of his mother's death. At her funeral, he expresses none of the expected emotions of grief. When asked if he wishes to view the body, he says no, and, instead, smokes and drinks coffee with milk in front of the coffin. Rather than expressing his feelings, he only comments to the reader about the others at the funeral. He later encounters Marie, a former employee of his firm, and the two become re-acquainted and begin to have a sexual relationship, regardless of the fact that Meursault's mother died just a day before. In the next few days, he helps his friend and neighbour, Raymond Sintès, take revenge on an Arab girlfriend suspected of infidelity.

The situation escalates when she (Raymond's girlfriend) slaps Raymond after he tries to kick her out, and Raymond beats her. Raymond is taken to court where Meursault testifies that she had been unfaithful, and Raymond is let off with a warning. After this, the girlfriend's brother and several Arab friends begin haunting Raymond. Raymond invites Meursault and Marie to a friend's beach house for the weekend, and when there, they encounter the spurned girlfriend's brother and an Arab friend; these two confront Raymond and wound him with a knife during a fist fight.

Later, walking back along the beach alone and now armed with a revolver he took from Raymond so that Raymond would not do anything rash, Meursault encounters the Arab. Meursault is now disoriented on the edge of heatstroke, and when the Arab flashes his knife at him, Meursault shoots. Despite killing the Arab man with the first gunshot, he shoots the corpse four more times after a brief pause. He does not divulge to the reader any specific reason for his crime or emotions he experiences at the time, if any, aside from the fact that he was bothered by the heat and bright sunlight.

Part Two begins with Meursault's incarceration, explaining his arrest, time in prison, and upcoming trial. His general detachment makes living in prison very tolerable, especially after he gets used to the idea of not being able to go places whenever he wants to and no longer being able to satisfy his sexual desires with Marie. He passes the time sleeping, or mentally listing the objects he owned back in his apartment building. At the trial, Meursault's quietness and passivity is seen as demonstrative of his seeming lack of remorse or guilt by the prosecuting attorney, and so the attorney concentrates more upon Meursault's inability or unwillingness to cry at his mother's funeral than on the actual murder. The attorney pushes Meursault to tell the truth but never comes through and later, on his own, Meursault explains to the reader that he simply was never really able to feel any remorse or personal emotions for any of his actions in life. The dramatic prosecutor theatrically denounces Meursault to the point that he claims Meursault must be a soulless monster, incapable of remorse and that he thus deserves to die for his crime. Although Meursault's

attorney defends him and later tells Meursault that he expects the sentence to be light, Meursault is alarmed when the judge informs him of the final decision: that he will be decapitated publicly.

In prison, while awaiting the execution of his death sentence by the guillotine, Meursault meets with a chaplain, but rejects his proffered opportunity of turning to God, explaining that God is a waste of his time. Although the chaplain persists in attempting to lead Meursault from his atheism, Meursault finally accosts him in a rage, with a climactic outburst on his frustrations of the human condition and his personal anguish at the meaninglessness of his existence without respite. At the beginning of his outrage he mentions other people in anger, that they have no right to judge him, for his actions or for who he is, no one has the right to judge someone else. Meursault, in the end, is executed.