

The Outsider Summary

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Background

Albert Camus wrote *The Outsider* (*L'Étranger*) in 1940–41, and it was first published in France in 1942. The inspiration for this work came from Camus's philosophy of Absurdism. He believed that the world is meaningless, yet humans constantly seek meaning. Camus's Algerian life experiences, the realities of colonialism, and the hypocrisy of French society are reflected in this novel. The protagonist, Meursault, is portrayed as detached and emotionless. When he does not cry at his mother's death, society considers him guilty. Although the novel contains a murder, the trial focuses mainly on Meursault's character and behavior. This shows that society values emotion and false morality more than law. Camus's "Absurd" philosophy is clearly evident here: life has no ultimate meaning, yet in facing death, Meursault experiences a sense of peace and freedom. Since its publication, *The Outsider* has stood as a milestone in modern literature and philosophy.

Summary

Death of Meursault's Mother: The main character, Meursault, is a thirty-year-old young man. He is both the hero and the narrator of the novel. He lives in Algiers. One day, he receives a telegram stating that his mother has died. After receiving the news, he prepares for the journey. His mother had been living for a long time in a nursing home at Marengo. Meursault boards a bus to go there. On the way, he keeps falling asleep. The weariness of the road overwhelms him.

When he arrives at the nursing home, he meets the director. The director informs him that his mother's body has already been placed inside the coffin, which has been sealed. When the caretaker offers to open it, Meursault refuses. He spends the night beside the coffin. The caretaker stays there too, talking a lot, which annoys Meursault. Yet, he shows no emotion. He drinks coffee and smokes cigarettes all night.

Morning comes. The next day, Meursault again speaks with the director. The director tells him that his mother's close friend, Thomas Pérez, will join the funeral procession. This old man had once been her companion. The procession begins. The funeral takes place in a small rural area. The scorching sun and heat make the journey unbearable. Thomas Pérez becomes breathless

as he walks. He almost faints. The heat of the sun seems to consume everything.

Meursault himself feels exhausted. To him, the day seems long and vague. Later, he admits that he remembers very little of the funeral. What dominates his memory is the light and heat of the sun. Throughout the entire event, he expresses no grief. His mother's death does not make him sad. After the funeral, that very night, he returns. Calm and indifferent, he goes back to his apartment in Algiers.

(This incident at the very beginning of the novel clearly defines Meursault's character. Unlike others, he does not show grief. His behavior is detached, normal, and indifferent. To him, his mother's death is merely another event in life. This attitude makes him stand apart in society. From here begins the origin of his identity as "The Outsider.")

Meursault's Daily Life: The day after his mother's funeral, Meursault goes to the beach. He swims in the water and finds some pleasure in the presence of nature. There, he meets a former colleague, Marie Cardona. They spend time together. Marie is lively and cheerful. She likes Meursault. They swim, play, and laugh in the sea. The day becomes joyful for both of them.

In the evening, they go to the theater together. They watch a comedy film. The light humor entertains them. Yet Meursault remains completely detached. He does everything mechanically, without emotion. After the movie, they spend the night together. Marie is full of affection and love. But Meursault shows no real feeling. The next morning, he wakes up to find Marie has gone. That day, he lies in bed until noon, doing nothing. In the afternoon, he sits on his balcony. He idly watches people in the street, the passing cars, walking crowds, and busy markets. To him, these are just meaningless scenes, without depth or engagement.

The following day is Monday. Meursault returns to work. At the office, he has lunch with his colleague Emmanuel. The afternoon passes in ordinary routine. That night, while coming home, he meets two neighbors on the stairs. The first is Salamano, an old man. His life revolves around his sick and ugly dog. He often treats the dog harshly, yet his life feels incomplete without it. The other neighbor is Raymond Sintès. There are rumors about him, many say he is a pimp, involved in prostitution. But Raymond insists he is just an ordinary businessman.

That night, Raymond invites Meursault to dinner at his apartment. During the meal, Raymond opens up about his personal life. He explains that he had a mistress. He accused her of being unfaithful and beat her. Raymond clearly states that he has punished her and now wants revenge. At this point, the story takes an important turn. Raymond plans to lure his mistress back. He wants to set a trap. For this, he asks Meursault's help. Raymond wants Meursault to

write a letter on his behalf. The letter will pretend to be filled with love and affection. If the woman falls for it and returns to him, Raymond will then be able to hurt her more.

Meursault agrees without hesitation. He writes the letter with complete detachment, showing that morality or other people's feelings mean little to him. A few days later, on Saturday, Marie Cardona visits Meursault's flat again. She directly asks him, "Do you love me?" Meursault answers, "I don't know." To him, love is meaningless. However, he adds that if Marie wants marriage, he will agree. His response confuses Marie, but she chooses to continue the relationship.

Just then, they hear shouting from Raymond's apartment. Running over, they find Raymond beating his mistress. The police arrive and intervene. An officer slaps Raymond and orders him to the station. In this situation, Raymond turns to Meursault for help. He asks him to testify that the mistress was at fault. Meursault agrees without hesitation.

That same night, another scene unfolds. Salamano loses his dog and breaks down in tears. Although he had always cursed and mistreated the dog, he is completely shattered by its absence. This moment highlights the contradictions of human nature and the pain of loneliness.

(In this part, we see Meursault gradually drawn into different events. He interacts with nature, with a woman, with his neighbors, yet he shows no deep emotion or moral sense. His reactions remain the same: cold, detached, indifferent. Just like his mother's death, love, violence, or relationships all seem to him mere everyday events. Here, his identity as "The Outsider" becomes even clearer.)

The Murder of the Arab: Raymond appears in court, but later he is released on bail. Thus, he does not spend much time in prison. Soon after, Marie Cardona again proposes marriage to Meursault. She asks, "Do you love me?" Meursault replies indifferently that love has no meaning. However, if Marie wishes, they can marry. This emotionless answer does not break the relationship. They decide to marry. The following Sunday, Meursault, Marie Cardona, and Raymond Sintès go to visit their friend Masson, who has a house near the beach. They swim, enjoy themselves, and share lunch together. The day seems joyful.

But in the afternoon, the situation changes. While walking along the beach, they encounter two Arab men. One of them is Raymond's mistress's brother. A sudden fight breaks out. In the struggle, Raymond is injured. He is carried back to Masson's house. After first aid, he feels somewhat better. Later, Raymond and Meursault return to the beach. Once again, they meet the Arabs. Raymond, agitated, draws his revolver, ready to fire. At that moment, Meursault

seizes the gun from him. He does not want Raymond to commit an unnecessary murder.

A little later, however, Meursault walks back to the beach alone. The blazing sun blinds his eyes. The suffocating heat overwhelms him. The glare of the sun makes him restless and unsettled. Suddenly, he comes face-to-face with the Arab, who holds a knife in his hand. In a moment of strange tension, Meursault fires. With the first shot, the Arab collapses to the ground. Then Meursault fires four more times. The young man dies. This killing has no rational motive. Later, Meursault himself admits that he fired "because of the sun."

Meursault's Strange Behavior: After Meursault kills the Arab, the police arrest him and send him to prison. His initial reaction is different from that of others. He shows no remorse for his crime. This detached attitude surprises his lawyer. The lawyer had expected at least some sign of regret, but Meursault remains calm and indifferent. Even at his mother's death, he had not cried. The lawyer is disturbed by this as well.

One day, the Magistrate comes to speak with him. The magistrate tries to bring him back to religion. Holding up a crucifix, he urges Meursault to believe in God, saying that such faith might ease his path to freedom. But Meursault firmly responds that he does not believe in God. Nor does he believe in life after death. Shocked by this reply, the magistrate becomes angry and leaves the room, both shaken and frustrated. During this time, Marie Cardona visits Meursault in prison. She encourages him, saying that everything will be fine and that they will marry. Yet Meursault shows no special reaction. He remains emotionless as ever.

While waiting for his trial, Meursault gradually adapts to prison life. At first, it is difficult for him. He misses the beauty of nature, the closeness of a woman, and the habit of smoking. Being deprived of these makes him restless. But slowly, he adjusts. He learns to live without cigarettes. He manages to survive without the presence of women or the sight of nature. Eventually, most of his days pass in sleep. The monotony of prison life becomes normal for him. In this way, it becomes clear that Meursault's responses are always unusual and different. Whether it is crime, love, or faith, he shows no real emotion toward anything. His indifference makes him appear strange and unacceptable in the eyes of society.

Absurdity and the Acceptance of Nothingness: After the murder, Meursault spends a long time in prison before his trial. At last, one morning, he is brought to court. The courtroom is crowded with spectators, witnesses, journalists, and curious onlookers. Everyone wants to see his face. From the very beginning, it becomes clear that this is not only a murder trial. It is a trial of Meursault's character. The prosecutor argues that Meursault's real crime is his lack of emotion. His mother died, yet he did not cry. At her funeral, he showed a cold indifference. This, the prosecutor claims, reveals his inhumanity.

Witnesses are called. The director of the nursing home testifies that on the day of the funeral, Meursault showed no grief. Thomas Pérez had tears in his eyes, but as her son, Meursault's eyes were dry. The caretaker also testifies that Meursault drank coffee and smoked cigarettes instead of mourning. Next, Marie Cardona is called. Hesitantly, she admits that the very day after the funeral, she and Meursault went to the cinema and swam together. To the court, this is proof of moral corruption.

The prosecutor brands Meursault a "monster" and an "anti-social man." His reasoning is that someone who cannot weep for his mother is unfit to live in society. The murder, he insists, is only a result; the real problem is Meursault's lack of morality and character. When Meursault is asked why he fired the shots, he replies, "because of the sun." The glare and heat of the sun had confused him. This answer seems ridiculous in court. No one accepts it. In the end, the judge delivers the verdict: Meursault has no sense of morality. His indifference is dangerous to society. Therefore, he is sentenced to death.

Meursault returns to prison. Now he waits for death. At first, he cannot accept it. The sentence makes him feel that his life is already over. He dreams of escape. He imagines winning an appeal, finding some legal loophole. For a while, faint hope lingers. But as time passes, hope fades. He realizes no appeal will ever succeed. Death is inevitable. Slowly, this realization calms him. One day, a chaplain comes to visit him. The priest urges Meursault to turn back to faith. He says that if Meursault remembers God before death, he will find salvation. There is life after death, and peace awaits there.

But Meursault rejects it all. He says he does not believe in God. He does not believe in life after death. The chaplain is shocked. He continues to persuade him, but to no effect. Finally, Meursault loses patience. He seizes the chaplain by the collar and shouts that the world is meaningless. There is no God, no eternal truth. There is only the present, and it ends in death.

This explosive declaration marks the first time Meursault truly accepts life's reality. He realizes that death is inevitable and life is meaningless. Humans will always die. Therefore, hopes, desires, and plans have no ultimate purpose. And yet, this realization brings him freedom. He feels that life, as it is, is beautiful. By accepting death, he discovers a new meaning in living. In the final scene, Meursault looks up at the night sky. The world appears vast, indifferent, and strange. It is within this indifferent world that man must live. By embracing this truth, Meursault feels an odd joy. Facing death, he finally finds peace.