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*The Stranger* Seminar Prep 1/29

1. What message do you think Camus is trying to share with his readers about how to live a life of meaning? What can you learn from Meursault’s personality and his experience throughout the novel about how to live (or not to live) your own life?

Camus uses Meursault’s indifference to emphasize the “acceptable” reaction to the recognition of the Absurd. At the end of the novel, Meursault takes responsibility for the choices that he has made and does not try to blame another for the course of events. He realizes that he is a murderer because of the choices that he has made, and he decides that, if this is the way his life must end because of his decision, he wants people to hate him, and to give his life that purpose.

I think Meursault serves as an example of what not to do in the way that he never takes an active role in life. He is a passive observer, content just to watch and make judgments on other. In fact, the only real time that Meursault engages in life in a substantial way is when he kills the Arab. He never feels strong emotion, and, as a result, has sort of a mediocre life in terms of happiness. He isn’t “unhappy,” but he never encounters real inspiration that makes him excited about being alive.

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| **Existentialism Key Term** | **Page # and excerpt of the quote** | **Brief description of how this passage represents the key term** |
| The Absurd | “I was about to tell him he was wrong to dwell on it, because it didn’t really matter. … all men believed in God, even those who turn their back on him. That was his belief, and if he were ever to doubt it, his life would become meaningless.” (69) | The judge is trying to find meaning in Meurseult’s meaningless action. He is almost projecting his own religious beliefs onto Meursault as a way to explain the motivations of the murder. Not only this, but the judge anchors the entirety of the meaning of his life in the belief in a higher power. His quest to find purpose in God in a meaningless universe is the very definition of the Absurd.  |
| Existence precedes Essence | "‘You’re young, and it seems to it’s the kind of life that would appeal to you.’” (41) | Meursault’s boss makes assumptions about Meursault based upon his age and the societal expectations of young men. They are supposed to be impulsive and have a strong desire to see the world. In this way, his boss has assigned Meursault a societal label because of his age.  |
| Alienation | “He went on like that, saying ‘I’ whenever he was speaking about me. … I thought it was a way to exclude me even further from the case, reduce me to nothing, and, in a sense, substitute himself for me. But I think I was already far removed from that courtroom.” (103) | Particularly during the courtroom scene, Meursault feels a disconnect with himself. Everyone is talking about his soul and making assumptions about him, leaving him with the distinct impression that his consciousness is removed from his physical body. He questions the point of his presence if he can be so easily replaced by another.  |
| Angst/Individual Freedom & Responsibility of choice | “It occurred to me that all I had to do was turn around and that would be the end of it. But the whole beach, throbbing in the sun, was pressing on my back. … The sun was the same as it had been the day I’d buried Maman, and like then, my forehead especially was hurting me, all the veins in it throbbing under the skin. It was this burning, which I couldn’t stand anymore, that made me move forward.” (58-9) | In this moment, Meursault is aware that he alone has the power to pull the trigger and take a human life. As soon as this realization occurs, he has physical manifestations of stress and anxiety (sweating, throbbing, pain) that ultimately pressure him into making the decision to kill the Arab.  |

2.

3. Who is “The Stranger” and who is he estranged from?

Meursault is the stranger. He is not only estranged from people in his life, but he is estranged from life itself, and from the audience as well. Camus, it seems, is careful to not allow the audience to get close to Meursault. We never learn his first name, we don’t know anything about his childhood, and he is so indifferent to the world that he is like this abstract idea of a human that doesn’t engage with anything.

Beyond Meursault, I think the “stranger” is the result of becoming so passive in life that you become a stranger to your own self. It is alienation of the self.