

Candidate evidence

Candidate 1

1,458 words

Is Meursault condemned to death for events that took place prior to the murder of the Arab?

L'Étranger is the first novel by Albert Camus and was published in 1942. *L'Étranger* follows the life of Meursault, a young man living in Algiers, after his mother's death. Meursault goes to his mother's funeral and soon after returning is asked by Raymond, Meursault's neighbour, to testify to the police that Raymond did not beat his Arab mistress. Meursault agrees to do this although he doesn't truly care about the issue at hand. Meursault then goes on a trip with Raymond and they run into a group of men including his mistress's brother, referred to only as «L'Arabe» throughout the novel, who takes out a knife and attempts to cut Raymond with it after Raymond had beaten the man. Meursault sees this and shoots «L'Arabe». Meursault is arrested and tried for this crime. During Meursault's trial the prosecution focus on Meursault's odd behaviours and his treatment of people, particularly the treatment of his mother as he put her in a home and did not show any emotion at her funeral. He even went on a date with Marie, whom he was courting at the time, the day after his mother's funeral rather than mourning her death. The jury - which represents the views of society - perceive Meursault as some sort of monster due to his rather peculiar behaviour. Meursault is sentenced to death by guillotine. However, the trial focuses on Meursault's character and his reaction to his mother's death, which is seen as extremely odd to the jury, rather than the actual crime he was arrested for. This begs the question was Meursault prosecuted for murdering a man or for his behaviour prior to this incident?

Meursault is a peculiar character that appears to be emotionally detached from everyone and seems to be completely indifferent to everything. One of the best examples of this at the very beginning of the book is the opening sentence of the novel.

«Aujourd'hui, maman est morte. Ou peut-être hier, je ne sais pas. J'ai reçu un télégramme de l'asile : «mère décédée. Enterrement demain. Sentiments distingués. » Cela ne veut rien dire. C'était peut-être hier. »¹

This extract clearly shows the reader Meursault's emotional indifference due to the fact that rather than dwelling on the death of his mother he is focusing on the exact time that her death occurred. This is a seemingly trivial detail and yet it preoccupies Meursault's mind and takes importance over the death of his mother. The extract also states «cela ne veut rien dire», this can be taken to have two different meanings. The first being that the telegram did not contain any information of value, and the second being that Meursault does not care that his mother has died. However, it also shows us that Meursault refers to his mother as «maman» which is a childish, affectionate way to call your mother, similar to "mummy" in English. Throughout the novel Meursault consistently refers to his mother this way while other characters use the standard «mère» to refer to madam Meursault. Meursault's use of «maman» suggests a close relationship with his mother which contradicts his words and makes them even more jarring and impactful.

Camus uses a very impactful style in *L'Étranger* as he writes in short sentences that lack any extra information. Camus uses this style throughout the whole novel. This style is very similar to the style that Ernest Hemingway - an American author that began his career in the 1920's - used and was famous for². Hemingway typically used short, declarative sentences that are simplistic and unadorned by any needless technique. The style is coined as "The Iceberg Technique"³ and is defined as a technique in which that the deeper meaning is under the surface of the story due to it not

¹ CAMUS, A. *L'Étranger*. 1st ed. Gallimard. 1942.

² <https://www.google.co.uk/amp/s/www.newyorker.com/magazine/1998/11/09/last-words-6/amp> (accessed on the 29th of March 2019)

³ <https://ernesthemingway2k17.wordpress.com/the-iceberg-technique/> (accessed on the 29th of March 2019)

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needlessly describing everything that happens in a story and instead focusing on the key aspects of the story that will push the plot forwards. It is called the iceberg theory due to an iceberg being mostly submerged under water with only the very top of it showing. This style of writing is very similar to journalistic techniques. This is especially important in Camus' case due to the fact that he was a journalist and worked at the *L'Alger Républicain* newspaper for a time.⁴ This style of writing helps a wider range of themes become apparent to the reader due to them having to pick up on them by themselves rather than being fed the information by the author. This also helps the reader achieve a deeper understanding of the underlying themes within a piece of work as they have to think for themselves and fully understand the piece of work to truly grasp the themes.

When Meursault is on trial the prosecution interrogates him about his mother and his reaction to her death more than they do the murder of Raymond's mistress's brother. This can be seen with the quote;

«Un homme qui tuait moralement sa mère se retranchait de la société des hommes au même titre que celui qui portait une main meurtrière sur l'auteur de ses jours. »⁵

This reinforces the fact that Meursault is seen as a freak and as irregular from the rest of society due to his treatment of his mother. It shows how society looks down on Meursault for being seen as different, as something other from the rest of society. It shows that Meursault's treatment of his mother is seen as odd and due to this oddness in the eyes of society this offence is on the same level as murdering a human being. It is also said by the prosecutor in Meursault's case who – as I personally see it- is acting as a spokesperson on behalf of society.

As the title of *L'étranger* would suggest Meursault is truly an outsider. Meursault is an outsider in society and Camus manages to subtly reinforce this fact by using Meursault's surroundings. The Novel is set in Algiers which is the capital city of Algeria, a country in northern Africa. The majority of the population were Arab people. Camus himself lived in Algiers for almost 3 decades and moved away in 1941⁶ thus he knows what it was like for French people in Algeria during the time period when *L'étranger* was set. This is important as it makes Meursault an ethnic minority as well as being a foreigner. This manages to remind the reader that Meursault is truly different to other people. The poor relations between Algeria and France⁷ could also play a part in Meursault being an outsider as most, if not all, interactions between Meursault and Arab people are quite negative. However, Camus may not have been aiming for this as the French-Algerian war⁸ was not until 12 years after *L'étranger* was published. It is also mentioned that Meursault feels like an outsider in the court room.

«J'ai pensé que c'était m'écarter encore de l'affaire, me réduire à zero et, en un certain sens, se substituer à moi. Mais je crois que j'étais déjà très loin de cette salle d'audience. »

This shows that Meursault feels that he is not similar to these people. I personally have theorised that the court room – the jury in particular – are a metaphor for society and the

⁴ BEAUGY, H., *Modern Languages Study Guides, Literature Study Guide For AS/A-level French, L'étranger Albert Camus*. 1st ed. Hodder Education. 2017.

⁵ CAMUS, A. *L'étranger*. 1st ed. Gallimard. 1942.

⁶ BEAUGY, H., *Modern Languages Study Guides, Literature Study Guide For AS/A-level French, L'étranger Albert Camus*. 1st ed. Hodder Education. 2017.

⁷ <https://www.britannica.com/event/Algerian-War> (accessed 29th of March 2019)

⁸ <https://www.britannica.com/event/Algerian-War> (accessed 29th of March 2019)

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way that the jury sentences Meursault to death represents the way that society hunts, and attempts to change people. When society can not change people, such as Meursault who refused to alter himself to please people, it destroys them. In my opinion Meursault being sentenced to death is showing how society managed to destroy him, in essence Meursault's strong sense of individuality, by literally killing him and figuratively taking away all sense of his individuality.

In conclusion I feel that Meursault was sentenced to death due to events that happened prior to the killing of the Arab. I feel this way because during the trial the prosecution kept coming back to and dwelling on Meursault's relationship with his mother rather than questioning him about the murder and the things that transpired on that day. This leads to the jury judging Meursault mostly on his treatment of his mother and subsequently how he behaved at her funeral and the days after her death. Meursault and his mother are hinted at as having a somewhat close relationship, for example Meursault referring to his mother as «maman», but due to the unconventionality of this relationship society and the jury view him as guilty for the unspoken crime of not loving his mother and therefore – although not physically harming her – killing her. Meursault is also seen as a strange man by society as they don't understand him or his motivations which frightens them. Therefore, to get rid of this man who has no similarities to the rest of society and refuses to bow down and lie about who he truly is to appease them Meursault is sentenced to death, not for his crime but for his character.

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Portfolio option (please tick (✓) <u>one</u> option only)	
Literature	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
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Portfolio title	<p>IS Meursault condemned to death for events that took place prior to the murder of the Arab?</p>
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Word count (excluding quotations and bibliography)	1458

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