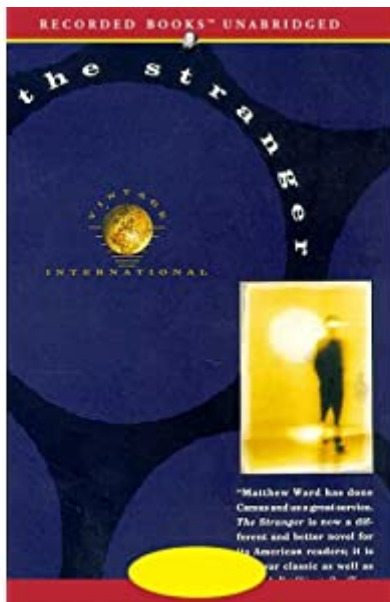


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The Stranger



Synopsis

With millions of copies sold *The Stranger* is one of the most widely read novels in the world. It stands as perhaps the greatest existentialist tale ever conceived. When a young Algerian named Meursault kills a man, his subsequent imprisonment and trial are puzzling and absurd. This remarkable translation by Matthew Ward has been considered the definitive English version since its original publication. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

A challenging book to say the least. I can't help but feel like through out my reading I was on the cusp of "getting" it only to realize I was still not there. That's just one of the reasons I find myself inevitably going back to this book in the future. In sum this is the story of Mersault, a Frenchman living in Northern Africa. The first half of the book tells the story of Mersault's reaction and experiences following his mother's death. The second half details Mersault's views as he goes through a court trial (no spoilers here). Camus' style is relatively easy to read and Mersault is both relatable and a bit revolting. I found myself agreeing with him on a number of points. Still, he is unrepentant of his actions and he behaves and thinks in a number of ways that are counter to what society may think. In some ways I could draw a comparison between Mersault and Holden from *Catcher in the Rye*. The last 20 pages or so of the book seem to hold so much depth but are just out of reach. While I don't profess to be able to analyze this book and understand it, I'll leave that to the academics. But I will recommend this book for anyone who is looking for a challenging and

introspective if dark read.

Meursault, Camus' protagonist in 'The Stranger', is an alienated, anonymous man of no apparent consequence who feels part of nothing, believes in nothing, and stands for nothing. At the start of the 'The Stranger', Meursault's alienation makes him appear cold, unsympathetic but largely benign, however as the plot develops it becomes apparent that his only conviction - that nothing matters - incrementally affects others with ultimately tragic consequences. Although Camus leaves the inner thoughts of his other characters unsaid, presumably the girlfriend of Meursault's petty criminal friend does not wish to be beaten by Raymond and then see him protected by Meursault's false testimony, just as being shot dead on a beach is of some consequence to Meursault's Arab victim. A lesser writer would have made this a simple tale about the perils of alienation in modern society, or railed against the apparent injustice of Meursault being sentenced to death not so much for killing a man as for his apparent lack of contrition. Camus' sparse, direct and deceptively simple writing manages to pose more subtle and penetrating questions through opening doors, even though the reader isn't led through them by the hand. Is the casual yet ultimately cruel indifference of a Meursault the inevitable result if a society tears down traditional (if admittedly imperfect) values and conventions and fails to replace them with anything better? How do we reconcile the right of individuals to see the world and act as they see fit (even if they consider nothing of value) with the right of others - who may consider things important - to be protected from the results of indifference? Highly recommended.

Meursault thinks that things are "pretty simple", most telling in the way he relays information; even the most minute details of the small portion of his life laid out in Albert Camus' *The Stranger* are painstakingly conveyed. He leans on the basic facts, disconnected from any meaning that anyone else would seek to obtain from them. Meursault, then, is a stranger to the world around him and because of this, unintentionally becomes a villain. Absurdism is a philosophical line of thought that finds absurdity in the rift between man's search for meaning and purpose in existence and the inability to find objective meaning and purpose. Camus brilliantly limns the absurd in Meursault himself and Meursault's relationships.

This is an excellent reading of Matthew Ward's equally excellent translation of Camus' masterpiece. The Ward translation corrects the previous more stilted translation. An example is the famous opening line reciting "maman's" death. The earlier translation used "mother", but that did not quite

capture the less formal word used by Camus, and Ward chose to use the French word for lack of a good English equivalent. It is important to appreciate that Camus is not Meursault, the book's hero who opens himself up to the "benign indifference" of the universe. Camus was a progressive who joined the Communist party in the 1930s and who heroically fought in the French resistance during World War II. But Meursault does represent the starting point of Camus' philosophy, which is existentialist in nature, though Camus did not like that term. Meursault never lies; he's a faithful tape recording that accurately recounts the data of various events. Everyone else attempts to inject all sorts of meaning into these events. In the process they sometimes twist the recounting of events into lies, though all for some ironic purpose of higher truth. Meursault rejects efforts to recast events into religious terms. He rejects conventional morality. He seems heartless about his mother's death by not wanting to view the body, by leaving right away, and by immediately becoming involved with a girl. Convention required more outward signs of grief and rituals of mourning. Meursault is not indifferent about his mother, but he accepts her death as an accomplished fact and does not see the sense of mourning rituals and conventions. He agrees to marry his girl friend not because he accepts that convention or because he loves her, but because she asks. She seems to inject some meaning into that ritual, so why not accommodate her? All of this unravels when Meursault is involved in a shooting on the beach. Meursault recounts the data surrounding the event, but he refuses to inject it with any meaning. He actually had a very good self defense claim, as the glint of the sun may have given him reasonable cause to believe that the victim was flashing a knife. But he refuses that easy route and, in what the world sees as a bizarre claim, attributes the crime to "the sun." Meursault is a great device for demonstrating how meaning is entirely a human construct. Existence itself is meaningless and even absurd. But what makes us human is the never-ending quest to superimpose some meaning and purpose on the world. Camus shares Meursault's appreciation for the absurd and his refusal blindly to accept the conventional meanings we tend to impose on the world. But he does not share Meursault's passivity and is prepared to state a belief and to fight for it. Perhaps even Meursault appreciates this at the end when he accepts his fate and hopes to be greeted with jeers of hate at his own execution. After all, what he did was wrong, and perhaps his life will have some purpose as an object lesson for others. This is a great novel in a great format.

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