Dialectical Journal: *The Stranger*, by Albert Camus

Part 1, Chapter 1

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| Note Taking | Note Making |
| “Maman died today. Or yesterday maybe, I don’t know. I got a telegram from the home: “Mother deceased. Funeral tomorrow. Faithfully yours.’ That doesn’t mean anything. Maybe it was yesterday” (3). | This is how the novel opens. It is a blunt announcement that the narrator’s mother has died. Meursault shows no emotion at all over his mother’s death—and doesn’t throughout the chapter. Here he seems rather concerned with the basic details—which day she died—but he doesn’t seem to care either way.  The words “That doesn’t mean anything” are revealing. They could mean that the telegram doesn’t tell him anything, or they could mean that his mother’s death doesn’t really mean anything. As Camus, the author, was known for an existentialist perspective, it is likely that these words will be important in the novel and that now they are used to characterize Meursault. |
| “I caught the two o’clock bus. It was very hot. I ate at the restaurant, at Celeste’s, as usual. Everybody felt very sorry for me…I was a little distracted because I still had to go up to Emmanuel’s place to borrow a black tie and an arm band” (3-4). | Meursault still seems to have no reaction to his mother’s death. He focuses on mundane details: what time the bus is, the heat, eating, and getting the tie and armband. He eats at the local restaurant “as usual.” |
| “For the first few days she was at the home she cried a lot. But that was because she wasn’t used to it. A few months later and she would have cried if she’d been taken out. She was used to it. That’s partly why I didn’t go there much this past year. And also because it took up my Sunday—not to mention the trouble of getting to the bus, buying tickets, and spending two hours traveling” (5). | This passage seems to characterize Meursault. He clearly sees visiting his aged mother as an inconvenience and not worth all the trouble he would have to go to. He also seems to dismiss her emotions and suggest that everything can be gotten “used to.” It is as if not much matters and emotions are not real to him. |
| “Having this presence breathing down my neck was starting to annoy me. The room was filled with beautiful late-afternoon sunlight. Two hornets were buzzing against the glass roof. I could feel myself getting sleepy” (7). | Meursault seems to be very focused on the physical. Throughout this chapter, he has few thoughts that are not centered on his physical sensations and wants. He seems only to be aware of sensory details around him and to be detached from any emotions—his own or those of others. |
| “I wasn’t hungry. Then he offered to bring me a cup of coffee with milk. I like milk in my coffee so I said yes, and he came back a few minutes later with a tray. I drank the coffee. Then I felt like having a smoke. But I hesitated, because I didn’t know if I could do it with Maman right there. I thought about it; it didn’t matter. I offered the caretaker a cigarette and we smoked” (8). | Again, Meursault is focused on his physical wants. He is aware that he is not hungry. He likes coffee with milk, so he drinks it. He likes to smoke. For a moment, he questions whether smoking by his mother’s body is appropriate, but “it didn’t matter.” This echoes the earlier “It didn’t mean anything,” which suggests Camus’ existential philosophy. |
| “It was pleasant; the coffee had warmed me up, and the smell of flowers on the night air was coming through the open door. I think I dozed off for a while. It was a rustling sound that woke me up. Because I’d had my eyes closed, the whiteness of the room seemed even brighter than before. There wasn’t a shadow anywhere in front of me, and every object, every angle and curve stood out so sharply it made my eyes hurt” (9). |  |
| “One of the women started crying…I wished I didn’t have to listen to her anymore. But I didn’t dare say anything…The woman’s sighs and sobs were quieting down. She sniffled a lot. The finally she shut up. I didn’t feel drowsy anymore, but I was tired and my back was hurting me. Now it was all these people not making a sound that was getting on my nerves…some of the old people were sucking at the insides of their cheeks and making these weird smacking noises. They were so lost in their thoughts that they weren’t even aware of it. I even had the impression that the dead woman lying in front of them didn’t mean anything to them. But I think now that that was a false impression” (10-11). |  |
| “It was going to be a beautiful day. It had been a long time since I’d been out in the country, and I could feel how much I’d enjoy going for a walk if it hadn’t been for Maman” (12). |  |
| “Then there was the church and the villagers on the sidewalks, the red geraniums on the graves in the cemetery, Perez fainting (he crumpled like a rag doll), the blood-red earth spilling over Maman’s casket, the white flesh of the roots mixed in with it, more people, voices, the village, waiting in front of a café, the incessant drone of the motor, and my joy when the bus entered the nest of lights that was Algiers and I knew I was going to go to bed and sleep for twelve hours “(18). |  |