

Albert Camus

Reading the stranger by Albert Camus was a particularly eye-opening experience in my young life. I wasn't very familiar with the existentialists at the time. Of course, I had read No Exit by Sartre, but I have had sort of mixed feelings about it. He seemed to be saying some pretty obvious things and taking himself very seriously with them. I'm not saying Sartre was a bad writer, but I wasn't getting as much out of him as many of my friends were.

With Albert Camus, however, it was different. I absolutely loved "The Stranger" from the very first page and to the very last sentence. I was reading it as part of the French class, and it was a little bit more difficult to understand because it was in French. For the most part, however, I could understand and appreciate what was happening in it. My French was pretty sophisticated by that point, so comprehension wasn't a very big problem.

What I liked most about Albert Camus' writing was the ambiguity of it. Since that time, I have seen The Just, read the Myth of Sisyphus, and been exposed to many other works by Camus. Most of them exhibit this ambiguity. The author doesn't tell you what to believe in most cases. He just shows you the behavior of different characters and what will happen in the situation and lets you make your own decision.

In The Stranger, for example, we follow the adventures of Meursault, A character whose mother has just died. He doesn't seem particularly upset about this fact, and goes about his business as usual. As the book continues, we realized that he doesn't have any strong feelings about anything. The characters is not exactly a bad guy, but he certainly isn't good. He simply goes along with the flow and eventually falls into a very bad situation.

Albert Camus seems to be exploring the perils and pitfalls of losing touch with the meaning of one's own existence in this book, yet there is no heavy-handed preaching to it. The reader is free to identify with Meursault or to see him as a buffoon. In The Just, on a similar note, we watch several revolutionary figures launch an assassination attempt on figures of the czarist Russian government. Whether their act of terrorism is warranted or not by the situation is for us to decide. We simply see them and their rationale for their actions.