

AFTERWORD

A long time ago, I summed up *The Outsider* in a sentence which I realize is extremely paradoxical: 'In our society any man who doesn't cry at his mother's funeral is liable to be condemned to death.' I simply meant that the hero of the book is condemned because he doesn't play the game. In this sense, he is an outsider to the society in which he lives, wandering on the fringe, on the outskirts of life, solitary and sensual. And for that reason, some readers have been tempted to regard him as a reject. But to get a more accurate picture of his character, or rather one which conforms more closely to his author's intentions, you must ask yourself in what way Meursault doesn't play the game. The answer is simple: he refuses to lie. Lying is not only saying what isn't true. It is also, in fact especially, saying more than is true and, in the case of the human heart, saying more than one feels. We all do it, every day, to make life simpler. But, contrary to appearances, Meursault doesn't want to make life simpler. He says what he is, he refuses to hide his feelings and society

immediately feels threatened. For example, he is asked to say that he regrets his crime, in time-honoured fashion. He replies that he feels more annoyance about it than true regret. And it is this nuance that condemns him.

So for me Meursault is not a reject, but a poor and naked man, in love with a sun which leaves no shadows. Far from lacking all sensibility, he is driven by a tenacious and therefore profound passion, the passion for an absolute and for truth. This truth is as yet a negative one, a truth born of living and feeling, but without which no triumph over the self or over the world will ever be possible.

So one wouldn't be far wrong in seeing *The Outsider* as the story of a man who, without any heroic pretensions, agrees to die for the truth. I also once said, and again paradoxically, that I tried to make my character represent the only Christ that we deserve. It will be understood, after these explanations, that I said it without any intention of blasphemy but simply with the somewhat ironic affection that an artist has a right to feel towards the characters he has created.

Albert Camus,
8 January 1955