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Albert Camus

The Stranger

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Preface

This book is an examination of Camus's *The Stranger*, a work that is regarded as a twentieth-century classic. The main section, Chapter 2, begins with an analysis of the language of the novel, and then deals with the many problems posed by the narrative structure, the relationship between Part 1 and Part 2, and so on. Much has been written on *The Stranger* and this chapter is an attempt to synthesize existing interpretations. One theme has been singled out, namely, the treatment of the Arab, because it seems to me to have been somewhat neglected. But even here no attempt is made to offer a completely new reading.

The other chapters provide supplementary information. Chapter 1 begins with a biographical sketch of the young Camus and readers who believe that the link between a man and his work is unimportant, may prefer to skip it. The remainder of the chapter deals with the historical context – or more precisely the conflicting *contexts* – in which *The Stranger* may be set. Chapter 3 examines the parallels and contrasts between the novel and some of Camus's other early books; it also discusses the young Sartre. Chapter 4 offers perspectives on Camus' complex relation to Algeria and its troubled history. Chapter 5 summarizes the reasons why *The Stranger* is regarded as a classic, sets some of the criticism written on it in a historical context and makes suggestions for further reading.

An attempt has been made to write simply and without unnecessary jargon. All quotations have been translated into English by me and such translations have been kept as literal as possible. References to *The Stranger* are to the most accessible edition: *L'Étranger* (Paris: Gallimard, Folio, 1984). Other references to Camus's writing are to the two-volume Pléiade edition (Paris: Gallimard, 1972 and 1974) of his *Collected Works*. Titles are given in English wherever possible,

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except in Chapter 5 where precise bibliographical information is provided. In Chapter 2 references to other critical works have been kept as concise as possible in order not to burden the text. Complete references to all these works are given in Chapter 4.

L'Étranger is translated as *The Outsider* in the British version and as *The Stranger* in the US. The latter title has been adopted in this book because the term 'Outsider' has acquired cultural connotations that have nothing to do with Camus, whereas the term 'Stranger' is neutral.

I wish to express my gratitude to Valentin Mudimbé for reading Chapter 2 and to James Grieve for his comments on the Stuart Gilbert translation of the novel.

Washington DC

Patrick McCarthy

Chronology

	Camus's life and work	Literary events	Historical events
1902		Gide, <i>The Immoralist</i> .	
1912		Claudel, <i>Tidings Brought to Mary</i> .	
1913	C. born at Mondovi, Algeria.	Proust, <i>Swann's Way</i> .	
1914	Father mortally wounded in Battle of the Marne.		Outbreak of First World War.
1919			Treaty of Versailles.
1926		Hemingway, <i>The Sun also Rises</i> .	
1930	First attack of tuberculosis.		Centenary of conquest of Algeria.
1932		Céline, <i>Journey to the End of the Night</i> .	
1933	Attends University of Algiers.	Malraux, <i>Man's Fate</i> .	Hitler becomes Chancellor of Germany.
1934	Marriage to Simone Hié.	James M. Cain, <i>The Postman always Rings Twice</i> .	February riots by right-wing Leagues.
1935	Joins Communist Party.		Mussolini invades Abyssinia.
1936	Leaves university. Travels in Central Europe. Marriage breaks up. Starts theatre group.	Céline, <i>Death on the Instalment Plan</i> .	Remilitarization of the Rhineland. Popular Front to power. Spanish Civil War.

Chronology (cont.)

	Camus's life and work	Literary events	Historical events
1937	Leaves Communist Party. Travels in Italy. Refuses teaching post in Sidi-Bel-Abbès. <i>Between and Between</i> .		Arab nationalist protest organized in Algeria by Messali.
1938	Journalist at <i>Alger-Républicain</i> .	Malraux, <i>Man's Hope</i> . Sartre, <i>Nausea</i> . Nizan, <i>The Conspiracy</i> .	Failure of Blum-Viollette plan to expand Arab franchise. Daladier forms government. Munich agreement.
1939	<i>Nuptials</i> . Articles on Kabylia.	Sartre, <i>The Wall</i> .	Germany occupies Czechoslovakia. Franco's victory in Spain. Nazi-Soviet pact. Invasion of Poland.
1940	<i>Alger-Républicain</i> banned. Moves to Paris and works at <i>Paris-Soir</i> . Evacuation to Lyon. Marriage to Francine Faure.		German occupation of France. Vichy government established.
1941	Loses <i>Paris-Soir</i> post. Returns to Oran.		Hitler invades Soviet Union.

1942	Illness forces C. to return to France and convalesce in Massif Central. <i>The Stranger</i> and <i>The Myth of Sisyphus</i> . Moves to Paris. Reader at Gallimard. Meeting with Sartre. Winter 1943/4: journalist at resistance newspaper, <i>Combat</i> . Meeting with Maria Casarès.	Ponge, <i>The Voice of Things</i> . Sartre, <i>Being and Nothingness</i> and <i>The Flies</i> . Malraux joins Resistance.	Allied invasion of North Africa. German occupation of Southern France. Italian surrender. Growth of Resistance.
1944	<i>Cross Purpose</i> . C. and Pia run the now legal <i>Combat</i> .	Céline flees France to avoid trial as collaborator. Sartre, <i>No Exit</i> .	Allied landings in Normandy. Liberation of Paris. Ho Chi Minh proclaims independence of Vietnam.
1945	C. visits Algeria. Articles attacking French policy. Birth of twins – Jean and Catherine. First performance of <i>Caligula</i> .	Sartre, <i>The Age of Reason</i> .	Armistice. Sétif massacre in Algeria. Bombing of Hiroshima.
1946	Visit to United States.		De Gaulle resigns.
1947	Leaves <i>Combat</i> . <i>The Plague</i> .	Malraux joins Gaullists.	Communists leave government. Marshall Aid. Rebellion in Madagascar.

Chronology (cont.)

	Camus's life and work	Literary events	Historical events
1948	<i>State of Siege</i> . Resumes love affair with Maria Casarès.	Sartre, <i>What is Literature?</i> and <i>Dirty Hands</i> .	Prague Communist coup.
1949	Visit to South America. Renewed tuberculosis. <i>The Just</i> .		Signing of North Atlantic Treaty.
1950	Convalescence at Grasse.		Korean War.
1951	<i>The Rebel</i> .	Gide's death.	
1952	Quarrel with Sartre.	Sartre, <i>Communists and Peace</i> . Céline, <i>Fairytales for Another Time</i> .	Ridgway riots/Cold War worsens.
1953	Wife ill, C. depressed and unable to write. Director at Angers theatres festival.	Barthes, <i>Writing, Zero Degree</i> . Robbe-Grilliet, <i>Erasers</i> .	
1954	<i>Summer</i> .		Fall of Dien Bien Phu. Mendès France government. Algerian War breaks out.
1955	Visit to Greece. Articles for <i>Express</i> .		

1956	<p>Visit to Algiers and appeal for truce. Withdrawal from <i>Express</i>. Illness and depression. Separation from wife. <i>The Fall</i>. <i>Exile and Kingdom</i>. <i>Caligula</i> performed at Angers. Nobel prize. Controversy over Algerian War.</p>	<p>Sarraute, <i>The Age of Suspicion</i>. <i>Céline, Castle to Castle</i>. Robbe-Grillet, <i>Jealousy</i>.</p>	<p>Independence of Morocco and Tunisia recognized. Suez invasion. Intensified fighting in Algeria. Budapest uprising.</p>
1957	<p><i>Actuelles III</i> : C's articles on Algeria. Buys house at Lourmarin in Southern France.</p>	<p>Simone de Beauvoir, <i>Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter</i>.</p>	<p>Revolt of army and French-Algerians. De Gaulle returns to power. Fifth Republic established.</p>
1958	<p>Adapts and directs Dostoyevsky's <i>The Possessed</i>. Working on novel, <i>The First Man</i>.</p>	<p>Malraux becomes Minister of Culture.</p>	
1960	<p>4 January: killed in car accident at Villeblevin.</p>	<p>Sartre, <i>Critique of Dialectical Reason</i>.</p>	<p>French-Algerian revolt against De Gaulle.</p>