

sensation of being alive. The question is now, not to live well in a moral sense—for the absence of moral rules renders this meaningless—but *vivre le plus*, replace the quality of experiences by their quantity. At first sight Meursault seems a very poor example of the absurd man. For whereas in *The Myth of Sisyphus* Camus describes three men—the actor, the seducer and the conqueror—who by the nature of their lives illustrate 'the passion to exhaust everything which is given'—or, expressed in more vulgar terms, to get the most out of life—he creates in Meursault a character remarkable for his apparent lack of passion. Yet Meursault has his own *morale de la quantité* which is equal to that of the most versatile actor or the most energetic conqueror. It was partly for aesthetic reasons—a work of imagination must not be too close an illustration of a work of reasoning—partly because Meursault already existed as an autonomous character in his mind, and essentially because of a certain taste for irony and mystification, that Camus made his outsider not a conqueror, an actor or a Don Juan, but a clerk in an office. He wished to show that the three types of man whom he described were not the only ones to which a philosophy of the absurd could give rise, and that his essay was essentially an exploration of a certain kind of experience, rather than an attempt to lay down fixed attitudes. The clue to the real relationship between *The Myth of Sisyphus* and *The Outsider* is to be found in the phrase in the essay where Camus says that 'a temporary employee at the Post Office is the equal of a conqueror if he has the same consciousness of his fate'. Meursault has recognized the absurdity of life and has gone through the experience of the absurd before his story begins. His lack of consciousness is only apparent—at several points of the story he shows himself a shrewd observer of men and society—and is partly the result of a technique of narration which seeks to represent a universe entirely devoid of order and significance. Meursault, although an outsider in society and a stranger to himself, is by no means completely indifferent to the world. His domain is the physical life. To swim, to run, to make love, to feel the sun on his face, to walk through Algiers in the cool of the evening—it is these experiences which have given him happiness and which make him wish to live the same life again. His indifference is not towards life itself but only towards those emotions to which society, living on the dead belief that the world is reasonable and significant, attributes an arbitrary importance. He is the outsider who refuses to play the game of society because he sees the emptiness of the rules, and his failure to conform causes society to will his death. His last desire—'the final thing I had to hope for was that there would be crowds of people waiting for me on the morning of my execution and that they would greet me with cries of hatred'—expresses a revolt against this society and a scorn for its conventions. In the pantheism of the closing pages—'As if this great rage had purged me of evil, emptied me of hope, in front of this night heavy with signs and with stars, I opened myself for the first time to the tender indifference of the world'—the cult of the physical life which has been latent throughout the novel comes to the surface. The passage corresponds to the description, at the end of *The Myth of Sisyphus*, of the immense importance which pure physical existence assumes for Sisyphus as he prepares, once again, to push his stone to the top of the hill. 'Each of the specks on this stone, each glint of light on the surface of this mountain shrouded in night, is a universe in itself. The fight towards the summit is in itself sufficient to satisfy the heart of man. We must imagine Sisyphus as happy.' Both Sisyphus and Meursault—the proletarian of the Gods and the proletarian of modern society—are at one and the same time both happy and unreconciled. In the different versions of the myth of Sisyphus, Camus finds that he is always characterised by his 'scorn for the Gods, his hatred of death and his passion for life'. These are qualities which can also be found in Meursault. Far from inviting his readers to a *delectatio morosa* in their own hopeless condition, Camus found that the absurdity of the world was, paradoxically, an invitation to happiness.

It was here that his originality lay. In making the absurd the centre of his preoccupations he was dealing with a problem which had been popularized by thinkers before being made acute by everyday life. As early as 1926 Andre Malraux had dealt quite fully with it in his *La Tentation de l'Occident* and had made of Garine, the hero of *Les Conquerants*, a man who rejected normal society because of its absurdity in his eyes. In 1938 Sartre's *La Nausee* had been almost entirely devoted to the expression of the absurdity of all existence. The thinkers whom Camus discussed in *The Myth of Sisyphus* were well-known, at least in philosophical circles, before the war. Camus neither invented the absurd nor introduced it into France. Wishing to express his own views on life in a fashionable manner he chose to write a philosophical novel and an essay on the absurd. By studying the way in which other writers on the absurd abandon their revolt and become reconciled, he confirmed his own instinctive

indifferent towards social conventions and human emotions, not towards life.

His indifference to human emotions is a consequence of his acceptance of the absurd.

→ answer to question on pg 2

→ focus only on physical existence, not on emotions

→ when they accept the absurd.

→ when you stop looking for an explanation and accept existence you are finally happy

→ he did not like being labeled for this, and he did not consider himself an existentialist