

The Stranger [15]

2025 France/Belgium 122 mins

UK released **10 April 26**

Director **François Ozon**

Screenplay **François Ozon** (based on **Albert Camus: L'Etranger**)

Cinematography **Manu Dacosse**

Music **Fatima Al Qadiri**

Cast **Benjamin Voisin** (Meursault); **Rebecca Marder** (Marie Cardona); **Pierre Lottin** (Raymond Sintès); **Denis Lavant** (Salamano); **Swann Arlaud** (the Priest)

“That's when everything began to falter (...) I realised that I had destroyed the balance of the day, the exceptional silence of a beach where I had been happy.” By deciding to bring Albert Camus' unique and cult classic masterpiece *The Stranger* (published in 1942 and now a symbol of existentialism) to the big screen, François Ozon took on a major cinematic challenge (one that Luchino Visconti had already attempted, with mixed results, in 1967), as the opaque interiority of the character of Meursault, his first-person narrative and the accurate capture of the atmosphere of Algiers in the 1930s seemed almost insurmountable obstacles to creating a transformation that would appeal to contemporary audiences.

But the filmmaker's subtle art of adaptation, his finely crafted direction in dazzlingly pure black and white, and a perfect cast (led by the captivating Benjamin Voisin) sweep away all doubts and potential pitfalls, making *The Stranger* a masterful and major work.

“Don't you want to see your mother one last time? – No. – Why not? – Because there's no point.” The plot is well known: Meursault, a young man in his thirties, learns of his mother's death, attends her funeral without showing the slightest emotion, begins an affair with Marie (Rebecca Marder) the very next day, and allows himself to be drawn into the orbit of his neighbour, the pimp Raymond (Pierre Lottin), until he commits murder, killing an Arab, a gesture with almost inexplicable motivations. It is a drama that resonates

with a personality who appears completely indifferent to everything (“all lives are equal,” “I don't care,” “I don't know,” “I feel a certain boredom,” “I don't want anyone's help,” “we are all guilty and all condemned”), refusing to lie and to lie to himself. Is this a façade? What is Meursault hiding? Prison and the trial may provide some clues to the answer...

Constructed in two parts (preceded by a clever prologue of archive footage recontextualising Algiers during the colonial era), the film unfolds in a fascinating, highly ascetic atmosphere, always centred on Meursault (observing himself and observing the world), almost "Melvillian" in its restraint and the precision of its gestures, glances and movements. A mechanical and captivating sketch in its sequence of events, which nevertheless proves to be hyper-sensitive and sensual (the Baths of Algiers, the sea, the physical perception of the sun). A paradoxical cocktail of coldness and warmth, fuelled by suggestive details that shed light on the place assigned to Arabs by Westerners (the Majestic cinema "forbidden to natives", the lawyer emphasising that Meursault would be "neither the first nor the last to kill an Arab", etc.) that the director has very subtly adjusted ("everything is true and nothing is true") in order to mirror the exciting and enigmatic heart of the novel (up to its disturbing metaphysical climax) while bringing it into line with the thinking of our time.

A true gem in every respect (from Manu Dacosse's cinematography to Fatima Al Qadiri's music), *The Stranger* is undoubtedly the most artistically accomplished feature film of François Ozon's prolific career, with its combination of cinematic excellence and essential world literary heritage.

Fabien Lemercier, *Cineuropa*, 2 September 2025 (abridged)

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