

Meaninglessness of Meursault's Life in Albert Camus's *The Outsider*

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Abstract

French literature is, generally speaking, literature written in the French language, particularly by citizens of France; it may also refer to literature written by people living in France who speak traditional languages of France other than French. *The Outsider* [UK version] (*The Stranger* US version) contains various components of Camus's absurdist philosophy. Meursault's life appearing to have no meaning in the grand spectrum of the universe is one component of this philosophy. Camus notes that since death is inevitable to all lives are therefore equally meaningless. Although Meursault believe in this ideology, it's not revealed until the Chaplin talks to him about life after death. Meursault's strong opposition towards Christianity shows his ideology. Meursault finally comes to a conclusion that having hope for sustained life only makes him believe that death is avoidable – hence, he believes he is liberated from these false hopes and all he has to do is enjoy the remaining days of his life.



Albert Camus 1913-1960

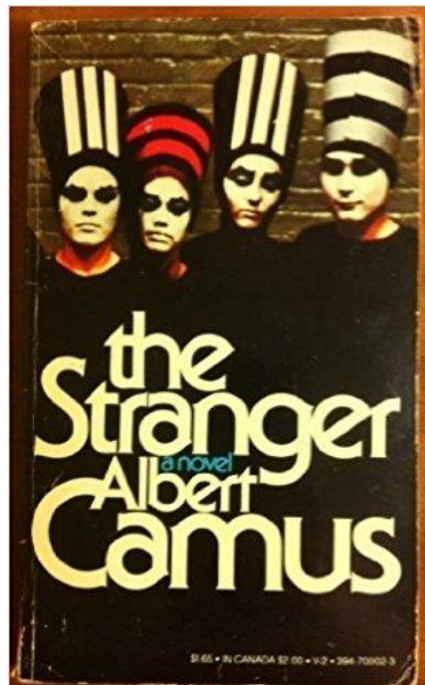
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https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Albert_Camus,_gagnant_de_prix_Nobel,_portrait_en_buste,_pos%C3%A9_au_bureau,_faisant_face_%C3%A0_gauche,_cigarette_de_tabagisme.jpg

Albert Camus

Albert Camus was a French-Algerian writer best known for his absurdist works, including *The Stranger* (1942) and *The Plague* (1947). He won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1957. Albert Camus (1913-1960) was a representative of non- metropolitan French literature. His origin in Algeria and his experiences there in thirties were dominating influences in his thought and work. Of semi- proletarian parents early attached to intellectual circles of strongly revolutionary tendencies, with deep interest in philosophy, he came to France at the age of twenty-five. The man and the times met: Camus joined the resistance movement during the occupation and after the liberation was a columnist for the newspaper *Combat*. But his journalistic activities had been chiefly response to the demands of the time, in 1947 Camus retired from political journalism besides writing his fiction and essays was very active in the theatre as a producer and playwright.

About the Novel



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The Stranger or *The Outsider* was a novel written by Albert Camus in French and translated into English in 1942. He used many themes in this novel. One of the main themes is meaninglessness of Meursault life. A second major component of Camus's absurdist philosophy is the idea that human life has no redeeming meaning or purpose. Camus argues that the only certain thing in life is the inevitability of death, and because all humans will eventually meet death, all lives are all equally meaningless. Meursault gradually moves toward this realization throughout the novel, but he does not fully grasp it until after his argument with the chaplain in the final chapter. Meursault realizes that, just as he is indifferent to much of the universe, so is the universe indifferent to him. Like all the person, Meursault has been born, will die and will have no further importance.

Meaninglessness of Human Being

In this novel Camus describe meaninglessness of human being or absurdist. He used Meursault to absurdam Meursault narrator and main character of the narrative; he is during force behind Camus examination of the absurd. He is like the author does not believe in god and comes to the realization that one must struggle against and with the absurd in order to create meaning in a meaningless work. He leads a highly indifferent life through much of the book, revealing in the physical impulse which made him happy such as swimming and sex and smoking. The second half of the book turns the man who does not judge into judges as the reader watches him indicated for the crime of not giving into society's code of moral or sense of fate and the divine. The ridiculousness of the trial and his reaction to it allows him to finally transcend its symbolic imprisonment and free himself for a life beyond what society could offer him.

Meaningless Life of Meursault

In the novel *The Outsider*, Albert Camus gives expression to his philosophy of the meaningless of Meursault life. The novel is a first- person account of the life of Meursault from the time of his mother's death up to a time evidently just before his execution for the murder of an Arab. The central theme is that the significance of human life is understand only in light of morality, or the fact of death; and in showing Meursault's consciousness change through the

course of events, Camus shows how facing the possibility of death does have an effect on one's perception of life.

The novel begins with the death of Meursault's mother. Although he attends the funerals, he does not request to see the body, though he finds it interesting to think about the effects of heat and humidity on the rate of a body's decay. It is evident that he is almost totally unaffected by his mother's death- nothing changes in his life. He says that, "Mother died today. Or maybe yesterday, I don't know. I had a telegram from the house."(p.9)

When Meursault recalls his mother's death he elicits little to no emotion of her memory. He is detached from her life, her death and her entire being for he had previously put her in home. He is detached both emotionally and physically from his mother so passes away nothing truly changes in his life. Meursault is initially apprehensive about speaking with the caretaker so after his mother's death. He is even more concerned about drinking and smoking a cigarette in front of her dead body. However, he soon forgets both her presence and his attachment towards her and lights a cigarette. Although Meursault's body is present at his mother's burial plot, his mind is elsewhere. He can think of only his home in Algiers and his desire to be in bed, as opposed to standing outside in the heat. He is quite detached from the idea of a funeral, and rather sees the afternoon as an annoying day outside.

When Meursault and Raymond meet and begin to talk, they realize that they share the same detachment sentiment about humanity and relationships. Raymond understands Meursault's mentality of not openly speaking about his mother's death and his emotional with Marie. They share the feeling of wanting to be alone, without other disturbing their solidarity. When Raymond beats his X girlfriend, Meursault is slightly shocked, still he and Raymond feel no remorse for having inflicted violence on other human being.

After Meursault's boss calls him into his office to criticize his work ethic and lack of his professional motivation, Meursault returns to his desk and continues on with this work as if nothing happened, where a typical response would be fear or sadness. Meursault is different. It

matters little to him whether he works for the company or not. Only after the police begins to question him, does Meursault realize that he has, in fact, killed a man. He does not understand why the police begins to question him. Does Meursault realize that he has, in fact killed man? He does not understand why the police continue to question him and feels detached from the current legal situation.

Detached and Distant

Meursault feels distant from Marie when he sees her briefly visiting house. He believes that he could get used to any type of life, regardless of the constraints and frustration, without friendship, without family. Those extra portions of life are detached from what he considers to be important. Meursault has difficulty understanding his connection with the case. When the court proceedings begin, he often feels detached and distant from his body and entire self. He wonders about the murders on trial and must deal with the consequences of his actions. Meursault listens as if he is just another member of the audience. He has difficulty in understanding and believing that it is he who is on trial.

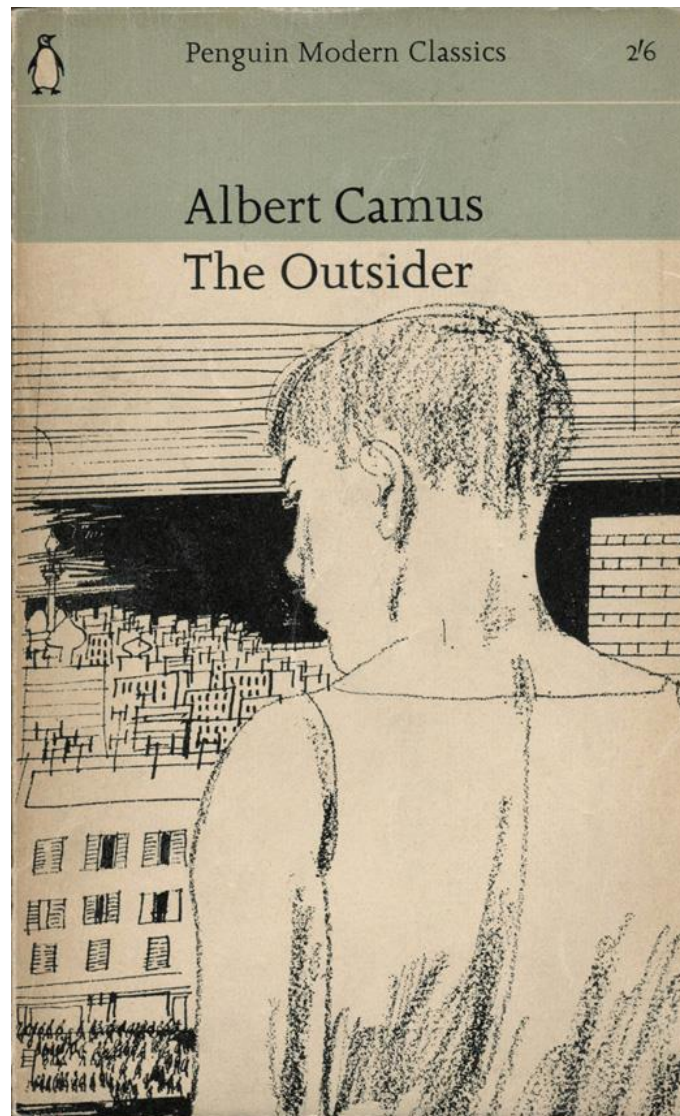
“Absurd”

Meursault’s story is an example of that opposition between man and the external universe that Camus terms the ‘absurd’. Meursault is a man who wants to be happy, who wants to continue living, who would have liked, when he was a student, to plan a useful life for him. He comes up against a universe, however, that will not allow these desires to be fulfilled. He has been aware, from the time he gave up his studies, that ambition is futile. His life is monotonous repetition of tasks at work; Sunday spent watching people from his balcony. He realizes at the end of his story that death is the common fate of all men, that the death renders any attempt to plan for the future – whether a job in Paris or marriage to Marie – meaningless.

Components of Absurdity

The Outsider contains various components of Camus’s absurdist philosophy. Meursault life appearing to have no meaning in the grand spectrum of the universe is one component of this philosophy. Camus notes that since death is inevitable to all alike, all lives are therefore equally

meaningless. Meursault finally comes to a conclusion that having hope for sustained life only makes him believe that death is avoidable. Hence he believes he is liberated from these false hopes and all he has to do is enjoy the remaining days of his life.



Meursault's Awakening and Recovery

The Stranger is the story of Meursault's awakening and recovery. Early in the novel, he is unmoved by his mother's death itself holds no meaning for him. After murdering the Arab, Meursault progress by degrees to a full recognition of his own purposelessness and impending death. During the long months of imprisonment, he slowly realizes that his former life was not

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empty. He misses the freedom to make love to a woman, smoke cigarettes at will, or go for a swim. These small joys, once meaningless, take on new importance when denied. Meursault begins searching for the purpose of his existence but ends by creating one. Finding the loophole in his sentence becomes his raison.

Interested More in the Physical Aspects of the World

The Stranger shows Meursault to be interested far more in the physical aspects of the world around him than in its social or emotional aspects. This focus on the sensate world results from the novel's assertion that there exists no higher meaning or order to human life. Throughout *The Outsider*, Meursault's attention centers on his own body, on his physical relationship with Marie, on the weather, and on the other physical elements of his surroundings. For example, the heat during the funeral procession causes Meursault far more pain than the thought of burying his mother.

The sun on the beach torments Meursault, and during his trial Meursault, and during his trial Meursault even identifies his suffering under the sun as the reason he killed the Arab. The style of Meursault's narration also reflects his interest in the physical. Though he offers terse, plain descriptions when glossing over emotional or social situations, his descriptions become vivid and ornate when he discusses topics such as nature and weather.

Camus's Philosophical Notion of Absurdity

Though *The Outsider* is a work of fiction, it contains a strong resonance of Camus's philosophical notion of absurdity. In his essays, Camus asserts that individual lives and human existence in general have no rational meaning or order. However, because people have difficulty accepting this notion, they constantly attempt to identify or create rational structure and meaning in their lives. The term *absurdity* describes humanity's futile attempt to find rational order where none exists. Though Camus does not explicitly refer to the notion of absurdity in *The Stranger*, the tenets of absurdity operate within the novel. Neither the external world in which Meursault lives nor the internal world of his thoughts and attitudes possesses any rational order. Meursault

has no discernable reason for his actions, such as his decision to marry Marie and his decision to kill the Arab.

Society's Attempt to Manufacture Rational Order

Society nonetheless attempts to fabricate or impose rational explanations for Meursault's irrational actions. The idea that things sometimes happen for no reason, and that events sometimes have no meaning is disruptive to society. The trial sequence in part two of the novel represents society's attempt to manufacture rational order. The prosecutor and Meursault's lawyer both offer explanations for Meursault's crime that are based on logic, reason, and the concept of cause and effect. Yet these explanations have no basis in fact and serve only as attempts to defuse the frightening idea that the universe is irrational the entire trial is therefore an example of absurdity- an instance of humankind's futile attempt to impose rationally on an irrational universe.

Meursault is a man who has his idea of honesty; being true to his immediate impressions, refusing to exaggerate or give consistency to his emotions, refusing to say more than what he knows. He lives by this one principle, which has nothing to do with the behavior that society expects. Since he is tried for example, he sleeps at the vigil for his mother; he does not create a good impression. He is 'vexed' that the murder occurred, but will not admit to feeling remorse, because he can only be true to his present emotions, and cannot pretend to change the part. Meursault's principle does not permit him to judge others, for how can he claim to know anyone feels when he refuses to analyse his own emotions? Because he is true to his belief, Meursault is judged a monster by society and is condemned to die. He accepts this role; like Christ die for his belief. By saying that Meursault is the only Christ we deserve, Camus suggests that Meursault's principle of simple honesty to himself is the only guideline mankind can have.

There is no abstract moral rule to be taught. Nor, according to Camus, can anyone die for our sins and promise morality. That is a false hope. Meursault knows that the only happiness lies in accepting the present. His life recalls that of Christ, not as a God or savior, but as a man whose example of living by his believes could be inspire others.

Conclusion

The Stranger has often been considered one of the best novels written in French during twentieth century. This paper has shown not only the psychological interpretations of the novel but also how skillfully Camus has constructed the plot to show his ideas, how well the way in which Meursault tells his story express his personal vision of life. As a heroic exemplar of the sensibility of an era, Meursault has an enduring place among the characters of world fiction.

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