

Stranger show the absurdity english literature essay

[Literature](#), [British Literature](#)



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\n[/[toc](#)]\n \nWays in which the book " The Stranger" can be viewed with different viewpoints to show the irrationality of human life. IB English Extended EssaySession: May 2013Candidate Number: 000765-105Candidate Name: Riya TiwariCenter Number: 000765Supervisor: John Dyer-CaustonCenter: Bangkok Patana School, ThailandWord count: 3741

Abstract

The Stranger or The Outsider (L'Étranger) is a novel written by Albert Camus in 1942. It is a book that changed the world of writing by explicitly introducing a new subject of absurdity in Literature - even though it had been prevalent from decades. Many critics have different viewpoints on the book, some criticize for it irreverent plot while others accept the notion it creates it true. The book seems to be written to create these conflicting viewpoints because it rests out the plot giving no valid reason for every action the main character (Meursault) does. Due to these differing

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viewpoints, it brought to the question: How does the book 'The stranger' show the absurdity of human life? A very in depth analysis was required to answer this research question. As critics have different viewpoints, a definite answer was not possible. Therefore, the question is analyzed using 4 perceptions: Absurdity, Lifestyle, Existentialism, and Nihilism to come to a conclusion. The novel is placed in examination to focus on the main character and assert how he acts in course of the novel to describe human life. Other books and essays written by Camus and various other absurdist writers were used as sources for research. The essay aims to explore the question to show the irrationality of human life in relation to the book. Through my research using various sources and, I concluded that there is a balance of ideas within the novel, however it slightly leans towards suggesting that human life is absurd. 251 words

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Introduction

Famous in pop culture because of songs[1]written under the influence of its scenes, 'The stranger' is a direct and well written novel by Albert Camus in 1943. It was originally printed in French and later translated into English and is also commonly known as 'The outsider'. Written in first- person narrative, it is well-known to be of a philosophical nature. However, the book can be viewed in varied ways; the main reason for it being unceasingly interesting. In various articles[2], Camus, pressures that individual life and everyday actions have no logical significance or order. However, because people have problems recognizing this perception, they regularly attempt to identify or create rational framework and significance in their life. Absurdism is a philosophy stating that the efforts of people to find meaning in life will ultimately fail, because no such meaning exists. The term " absurdity" labels humanity's useless search for logical order where none prevails. Though Camus does not brazenly consult the idea of absurdity in The Stranger, the signs of absurdity function within the novel. Neither the exterior world in which Meursault (the main character of the book) lives nor the inner world of his ideas/feelings direct to any rational route. It reveals that the universe itself is unreasonable, and hence addressing that individual life has no value. 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. This is shown by the characters throughout the book; however it can be debated to be interpreted as something different. We see that the society, however, attempts to build or encourage rational explanations for Meursault's unreasonable actions. It's a brave book to write as early as in

1943, and also bold to question the significance of human life when the notion of meaninglessness might not have been accepted. The idea that things sometimes happen for no reason, and that events sometimes have no meaning might have been disruptive and threatening to society. A book like this might have gone unrecognized, but it only became well sought after a movie was made[3]. The idea that things sometimes happen for no reason, and that events sometimes have no meaning might have been disruptive and threatening to society. Collecting all these ideas together, in this essay, I will demonstrate how the book shows the absurdity of human life. I will relate it to different subjects, and look at the book from different perspectives to come to a conclusion about how the book defines human life. The main character of the book will closely be analyzed and evidences are given throughout the essay. This text particularly compelled me to work because of its aura of written simplicity. It has incomprehensible complexities within the story and not it's writing. This absurdist element leaves a space for us to interpret. The whole book can be viewed in so many diverse ways, and this relates back to the title ' The stranger' itself because human life itself is strange.

Absurdity

The first line of the book itself reveals the absurdity of the novel. " Mother died today. Or maybe yesterday, I don't know." Readers can have two prominent opinions from these; first that the character is not very close to this relatives, and second that the character does not care. The unintended " or maybe" in the phrase reveals the improper action towards something as

serious as a mother's loss. In a regular society, mother and father are special to children, and a death of a parent would mean extremity of sadness in normal cases. " Mother died today" is directly used to emphasize that the protagonist seems to have no emotion. The phrase also embodies Meursault's absurdist outlook on life, his emotional indifference and detachment to people, and his passive but quiet alienation from the rest of society. It's also a big flashing clue that our protagonist is unaware – and apathetically so. The author also goes on to say that after the funeral " the death will be a classified" and would be " a more official aura". His view is objective, similar to working a job instead of his mother's funeral being a ' responsibility'. The starting of the book is parallel to the end of it with the theme of death upholding. The opening lines have an outrageous absurd factor that gives a hint about the upcoming in the plot. Most of the philosophical ideas of the novel complicates near the end, where Meursault is in a jail cell waiting for his execution; and a series of heated up discussion follows where the prison chaplain wants to convert him to Christianity to repent for his sins. Meursault denies the chaplain's entreaties, informing him that he has no intention to believe in God. He wants to stay with the certainties of this lifestyle, even if his only assurance is the death that is in the offing. Meursault is an absurd hero both on a figurative and a literal level. At a figurative level, Meursault, reprehended to death and forthcoming execution, is a metaphor for human condition. On a literal level, Meursault absolutely indicates the absurd features of rebel, independence, and attention defined by Camus in one of his famous essay called The Myth of Sisyphus[4]. In the essay, Camus introduces his philosophy of the absurd:

man's futile search for meaning, unity, and clarity in the face of an unintelligible world devoid of God and eternal truths or values.[5] Meursault will not conform himself with custom, and claims his independence by doing what hits him as appropriate at any given time. This contains smoking all the time and displaying apathy at the vigil for his deceased mom, going to the seaside and romancing with a lady the day after his mom's burial, and creating a terrible letter for the sake of his buddy Raymond, who is a criminal and a pimp. This exercise of independence also symbolizes a rebel against any effort to have limitations on his life. His passion is obvious in his eager quest of new treats and new ordeals: he loves being alive. Meursault also preserves the type of interesting detachment we would anticipate from an absurd protagonist. He prefers observing activities to getting direct involved in them; one section of the novel explains Meursault investing a whole day seated on his terrace viewing passers-by in the road. Even when he is engaged in activities, he is incapable to get too caught up in them. When his lover, Jessica, requests him to get married to her, he informs her that he doesn't like and also that it does not matter to him if they marry or not. Even when he kills an Arab, there is a sensation that he is not really there, not really doing what he is doing. He seems to be observing himself killing the Arab rather than actually committing the crime. In his last episode with the chaplain in jail, Meursault gathers up a lot of his absurd outlook, firmly stating that nothing really matters, that we all live and we all die, and what we do before we die is eventually unrelated and unimportant. After the chaplain gives up, Meursault relishes a final, revelatory moment: " And I felt ready to live it all again too. As if that blind rage had washed me clean, rid

me of hope; for the first time, in that night alive with signs and stars, I opened myself to the gentle indifference of the world. Finding it so much like myself—so like a brother, really—I felt that I had been happy and that I was happy again." Totally exempt from hope, Meursault acknowledges himself in a universe without significance and without meaning. At the end of the novel, he comes to a complete approval of his absurd place in the universe and concludes that he is happy of what he's done. Meursault exemplifies all the characteristics of absurd hero. Camus efforts to display what he defines in *The Myth of Sisyphus*: the characteristics of the absurd artist. In *The Stranger*, Camus describes (and does not explain) common activities without getting too captured up in their philosophical significances and without trying to point to any universal themes. The first aspect of the novel, in particular, treats in explaining the many stress activities and unique figures that complete Meursault's lifestyle. We see Salamano and his dog, captured in a going love-hate connection, and discovers the delights of lying in the sun at the seaside. In all of these descriptions, we find a fascination and exuberant joy at the myriad possible life experiences. Any universal themes we draw from the novel do not arise from excessive sermonizing or over-heavy symbolism, but from a cohesive and coherent worldview that is engaging and arresting.

Lifestyle

For Camus, lifestyle has no rational significance or sequence. We, as readers, have problems interacting with this concept and constantly battle to discover rational structure and meaning in our life. This battle to discover

significance, where none prevails, is what Camus is calling the absurd. Our stubborn want for 'significance' is so deep that we disregard the fact that lays out outside of the concept- there is none to be discovered[6]. Camus has written *The Stranger* as a lure to his audience, to think about their own death and meaning behind their existence, he has created a drive to find this 'significance' in human life. The hero, or anti-hero, does activities are unusual to us, there seems to be no purpose behind them. We are given no reason why he selects to get married to Jessica or gun down Arab. For this, he is a stranger us. And when confronted with the absurdity of the stranger's life, society reacts by imposing meaning on the stranger.[7]It's important to note here that *The Stranger* is sometimes translated as *The Outsider* but this is incorrect. Camus does not want us to think of Meursault as 'the complete odder who lives' outside' of his society' but rather a man who is 'the stranger within his society'. Had Meursault been some type of outsider, a foreigner, then quite probably his functions would have been approved as irrational evil. But Meursault was not an outsider; he was a participant of his community - a community that wanted significance behind actions. In the second part of the book, Camus represents society's attempt to produce significance behind Meursault's activities. The trial is absurd in which judge, prosecutors, attorneys and court try to discover meaning where none is to be discovered. Everyone, except Meursault, has their own 'reason' why Meursault killed the Arab but none of them are, or can be, appropriate. In life there are never shortages of viewpoint as to why events happen and we do not get in close proximity to any of them. A fascinating theme in *The Stranger* is that of watching or observation. Camus is writing a book about

our endless search for meaning. We are all looking for a purpose in our lives. The characters of *The Stranger* all watch each other and the world around them. Meursault watches the world go by from his balcony. He later passively watches his own trial. The world around him is a fascination to Meursault. He keenly observes the sun, the heat, the physical geography of his surroundings. The eyes of the other are also depicted by Camus. Antagonism behind the eyes of the Arabs, as they watch Meursault and his friends. The eyes of the jury and witnesses at his trial. Finally the idea of the watching crowd, representing the eyes of society that constantly watches upon us and our life. In a literary perspective, *The Stranger* offers factors that enhance both contemporary and traditional sensibilities. With regards to the former, the plot is provided as a very subjective encounter of a first-person narrator. We do not know his first name, what he looks like, or at what time it occurs. He does not release many details about his past life, nor does he make an effort to elaborate a natural perspective of, or viewpoint about, the community in which he works. Such features are in mark comparison to the Realist novel tradition showed by 19th century authors as Honoré de Balzac, whose works[8]make an effort to recreate a complete account of early French society through the sight of a moralizing, omniscient third-person narrator. In a more traditional line of thinking, *The Stranger* provides order and balance. The novel is structured into two areas of equivalent duration, and the climax of the book—the shooting of the Arab—is both preceded and followed by gathering life of a person in 5 chapters. Styles are managed with tight focus. One might dispute that Camus's feeling of literary stability is an effort to put into exercise an existential philosophy:

the only purchase in a disordered world is the one we make for ourselves.

But is this true for human life?

Existentialism

The Stranger and Camus have often been connected to Existentialism, a post-World War II viewpoint that has become symbolic of the name of Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-80). Although Camus was a close friend and promoter of Sartre, he declined being an existentialist. However, there are obvious existential styles in the The Stranger. Camus's preoccupation with the nature of being, for example, and his denial of reason and order in the universe, are both existential issues. When Camus provides the Arab's killing as a result of varied sequence of events, and Meursault does not lie to the judge to help win his situation, we enter into existential realms of human action and responsibility. There is no outside power regulating our life, according to the existentialists; people must take liability for their own doings. Meursault's greatest vindication is in having stayed real to himself and to his emotions in a community that cultivates fraud and hypocrisy." The Stranger never explicitly denies the need for a moral form of social conduct, which would increasingly concern Camus as he grew older, but it clearly highlights a bohemian individualism that the author would never fully relinquish. The conflict between them remains, and as a consequence Meursault becomes both an exemplary and a cautionary figure. Critics have often seen this as a deficiency, and perhaps Camus' refusal to resolve the motivations of the main character - or " make matters clear" - adds to its difficulty. Again, it remains an open question whether this is a weakness or strength: an

abdication of responsibility or recognition of ambiguity. Camus' connection with existentialism is underestimated: Camus no less than most existentialists considered such conflicts between subjective intention and objective judgments philosophically irresolvable and all universal solutions inherently abstract." [9] Existentialists sustain that the universe is useless, and human existence serves no purpose. From this viewpoint would not our actions and mind-set towards most factors be approximately similar? Meursault doesn't care about individuals because existence doesn't matter. He commits murder and then reveals no feelings over it, because the life served no objective, and moreover, as an existentialist, he regarded in his own overall freedom and denied all values. Furthermore, in the quote below, Meursault hints about his concepts of destiny, as though the universe was behaving to be uncaring, irrational entity, exactly like existentialists believe it does." Nothing, nothing mattered, and I knew why. So did he. Throughout the whole absurd life I'd lived, a dark wind had been rising toward me from somewhere deep in my future, across years that were still to come, and as it passed, this wind leveled whatever was offered to me at the time, in years no more real than the ones I was living. What did other people's deaths or a mother's love matter to me; what did his God or the lives people choose or the fate they think they elect matter to me when we're all elected by the same fate, me and billions of privileged people like him who also called themselves my brothers." Ultimately Meursault cannot be an existentialist, because while existentialists believe that life is useless [10], they also highlight the liability of individuals for developing their characteristics, and they highlight the value of individual choices.

Furthermore, they do have values of types, one based around good and effective contribution in lifestyle they lead. Meursault took no liability for anything. He prevented choices; instead of being a good, effective individual in lifestyle, he was merely a tired, frustrated viewer, and one not above eliminating a man with no purpose. An existentialist would have to properly value all of these factors. But Meursault did not. As an individual completely disinterested in everything -he must be regarded nihilistic.

Nihilism

" Nihilism is, literally, the belief in nothing. Originally the term was used to attack accused heretics during the Middle Ages. Over time, however, the term became applied to a particular branch of philosophy, a radical form of skepticism maintaining the nonexistence of any objective basis for truth. From this standpoint they demanded the complete rejection of all established views and institutions, being constructed on a foundation of subjectivity." 2Meursault seems to be the essential nihilist. A man psychologically at possibilities with the whole universe, he plods through life understanding no certainties and looking after for nothing- much like us. Despite certain features in typical with existentialism, another philosophical university giving nihilism's denial of recognized opinions, but putting focus on liability and contribution in lifestyle, it must be said that because of Meursault's refusal of purpose fact, and denial of regulations and organizations, he is a nihilist. The first and most considerable suggestion to Meursault's nihilistic propensities is his refusal of any purpose base for fact. This quite difficult to determine, because due to the uncertain characteristics

of the story, very little is actually recognized as 'true'. It is, however, an apparent attributes of Meursault, as can be recognized through his mind-set toward his own lifestyle. But, Meursault snacks seemingly essential choices with excellent apathy, and requires little or no attention in anything. It makes readers wonder what the author is trying to suggest. This brings to the question: If nothing prevails and it is difficult to know anything (because anything you think you know is absolutely subjective), why hassle doing anything? The core of the question that rises itself suggests that the book portrays a Nihilistic landscape on human life. Primary to all thematic components in The Stanger are Camus' hard-won existential ideas. In all existential thinking, the actual supposition is that there is no afterlife. Thus, there is no heavenly objective for the universe or for life. Man, gathers a common everyday living with the lower animals, is unique because of his attention, his ability to think and reason. He alone can search for and create details for his own death. Understanding death, of purposeless loss of life, is known as The Stranger. Most people operate instantly, sightless to the absurdity of their condition. Some, however, experience an attention to absurdity; a rapid understanding that lifestyle is useless. According to Camus, this attention is followed by either destruction or restoration. Both activities suggest returning back to making decision.

Conclusion

Camus's absurdist viewpoint is the concept that human lifestyle has no redeeming significance or objective. Camus claims that the only certain factor in lifestyle is the inevitability of death, and, because all individuals will

gradually fulfill death, all life is all similarly meaningless. Meursault progressively goes toward this knowing throughout the novel, but he does not recognize it until after his disagreement with the chaplain in the ultimate section. Meursault is aware that, just as he is unsociable to the universe, the universe is unsociable to him. Like all individuals, Meursault has been blessed, will die, and will have no further significance" If you go slowly, you risk getting sunstroke. But if you go too fast, you work up a sweat and then catch a chill inside the church." She was right. There was no way out. (1. 1. 27)The nurse speaks of both the weather and human condition. The sun's heat is inescapable, just as death is inescapable. There was no way out except through acceptance. Paradoxically, only after Meursault gets to this apparently hopeless knowing is he able to obtain pleasure. When he completely comes to conditions with the inevitability of death, he is aware that it does not issue whether he passes away by performance dies an gradual death. Knowing this, allows Meursault to put aside his dreams of getting out of routine by processing a effective lawful attraction. He is aware that these illusory wants, which had formerly engaged his thoughts, would do little more than create a bogus feeling: death is preventable if he abides by the rules of society. Meursault recognizes that his wish for continual lifestyle has been a problem. His freedom from this false wish indicates he is completely able to exist for what it is, and to create the most of his life. The concepts of independence and its peculiar characteristics are frequent in the novel. He is either more conscious than others, knowing that he has the independence to do as he wants(and therefore does not preoccupy himself with the possible repercussions or with small public conventions) or else he

understands that everything he does is already identified by past events (and therefore still seems dissociated from his actions' repercussions or from public norms). He does not care about what community believes of him, nor does he experience the need to delay to what community desires to be or believes of him. This is why Meursault is regarded an unfamiliar person to community. Hence, the book suggests he is a character leading to an absurd life even though there are aspects of other ideas created throughout the book as explained in the essay.