

Role of narration in camus' the outsider



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The Role of Narration in Camus' *The Outsider*

Reflective Statement:

From my first reading of *The Outsider* by Camus, I had not fully grasped the importance of the Absurd and Existentialism to the novel. The interactive oral discussion greatly increased my understanding of the parallels between the character Meursault and the concepts of the Absurd and Existentialism. From the first reading of the novel most of my classmates with myself included thought that the novel was a critique on society not accepting those who were different from them and Meursault was a tragic hero. However, during the interactive oral the link between Meursault and Camus' ideas on Absurdity was brought and from that point Meursault was no longer viewed as a tragic, but as an Absurd hero.

Unbeknownst to most of the class, prior to the interactive oral presentations was Meursault's close relation to the Absurd. During the interactive oral the class reflected on the resemblance between the actions of Meursault and an Absurd hero. The significance of Meursault's benign indifference was then revealed as it characterized Meursault as an Absurd hero. The characterization of Meursault as an Absurd hero is used by Camus to convey the idea of the Absurd. This was concluded upon by the class after the cultural background of the novel and author was brought up as Camus was a philosophical thinker of the Existentialist movement and founder of the Absurd movement. The time period was also brought up as the novel was written during WWII, when Existentialist and Absurd ideas were gaining popularity due to the bloodshed of WWII. This helped the class understand the context in which the novel was written and why Camus chose to use the

<https://assignbuster.com/role-of-narration-in-camus-the-outsider/>

characterization of Meursault to convey the idea of an Absurd hero, as it helped inform us of the cultural context of the novel.

The interactive oral played a crucial role in our understanding of the importance of the Absurd in the novel. It helped us reflect on the assumptions we made about the novel after reading, such as the conclusion that Meursault was a tragic hero. Through the interactive oral this conclusion was proven incorrect. It made us consider the cultural context in which the novel was written, specifically major emerging philosophical ideas such as the Absurd. Ideas that shaped not only this novel, but the time period itself.

Word count: 383

The Outsider by Albert Camus has been critically acclaimed as one of the best novels of the century by French Newspaper *Le Monde* and has been a mainstay philosophical novel ever since its first publishing in 1942. The most prominent idea explored by Camus throughout the novel is the Absurd. The Absurd is the philosophical idea that life has no meaning, therefore the inherent human nature to find meaning in life is flawed. Through the novel Camus explores Absurdity through the character of Meursault and his development into an Absurd hero. An Absurd hero is a hero that recognizes the futility of life, but finds meaning in life through embracing the struggle and contradiction of living a meaningless life.

One of the ways that Camus characterizes Meursault as an Absurd hero is through the narration of the novel. The novel is narrated in the first person by Meursault, however throughout the novel there are many instances where the narration feels as though it is in the third person, due to the lack of

<https://assignbuster.com/role-of-narration-in-camus-the-outsider/>

emotion from the narrator. The most pronounced example of this would be in the first page of the novel, in which Meursault has found out about the death of his mother. Meursault responds in a way that is opposite to what the majority of humanity would respond with, when notified about the death of a close relative and that is showing no feeling at all. He states that "mother dies today" ^[1] very bluntly and without emotion. Then he debates if it was "yesterday" ^[2], and that he did not "know" ^[3] as he was sent a telegram, which he describes as "not meaning anything" ^[4]. Referring to the fact that the telegram yielded him no information to answer his question. Everything that he says in the first paragraph is without emotion and stated in a very blunt fashion, and could be narrated in the third person rather than the first person. This takes away from the effectiveness of first person narration, as the point of first person narration is to have the reader understand the emotions of the character who is narrating and how they feel towards certain events. This lack of emotion in the narration causes the reader to feel as though the novel is written in the third person rather than in the first person. Camus uses this to highlight the indifference Meursault displays to the tragic event of his mother's death to depict him as an Absurd hero. Camus also uses the emotionless narration to convey the idea of the Absurd nature of life to the reader through Meursault.

Throughout the novel there are several occurrences where Meursault would state his opinion of a certain event or thing, but then afterwards would disregard his own opinion. This would give the reader this sense of unreliability from the narrator, while also detaching Meursault further from what most readers would consider 'normal'. One of the more pronounced

occasions that this happens is when Marie questions Meursault if he loved her, and his immediate response is to say that “ it didn't mean anything, but that [he] probably didn't” ^[5]. Meursault disregarding the value of his own opinion before, he even answers the question shows the unreliability of the narrator, as the purpose of first person narration is to express the perspective of the narrator to reveal more of himself. However, Meursault does something that is counter-intuitive when answering a question based on opinion, which is to devalue his own opinion on the topic. This action not only devalues his own opinion, but also shows to the reader that Meursault places no importance on aspects of human life that others would place high value on; such as love.

Meursault does this again in the second part of the novel, when going through options for his defense in his murder case with his lawyer. His lawyer suggests to use the death of his mother in the court case and asks Meursault if he felt any grief from his mother's death. Meursault responds saying that he “ probably loved mother quite a lot” ^[6], but he says that “[it] didn't mean anything” and that “ [he'd] rather that [his] mother hadn't died” ^[7]. The use of ‘ probably’ in Meursault's response once again shows the reader Meursault's unreliability as narrator, as he is unsure of his feelings toward his mother. Then he goes on by saying that “ it didn't mean anything” ^[8] once again disregarding his own feelings and opinion. The uncertainty that he shows towards his own feelings toward his mother and afterwards his indifference to own opinion, consolidates the character of Meursault as a person who is indifferent to life. This event is also important as it was the second mention of the death of his mother by the narrator, the first being in <https://assignbuster.com/role-of-narration-in-camus-the-outsider/>

the first page of the first part and the second now being in the beginning of the second part. The second mention of his mother's death is important, as both times Meursault places little value on the death of his mother. In the first part he is more concerned with trivial details regarding the murder such as the date in which she died. In the second part, when he mentions her death, he puts more importance on his mother's death, however it is not much as he says that he preferred that she had not died. This indifference towards his mother's death, and shows his indifference to the concept of death as it is inevitable and inescapable.

The motif of the inevitability and inescapability of death is hinted at earlier in the novel, after the funeral procession of Meursault's deceased mother. Meursault does not describe any of the funeral procession besides the carrying of the hearse to the grave, being more concerned with the actions and appearance of Perez. Afterwards he notes that "[he doesn't] remember any of it anymore." ^[9] except for what the nurse describes about the funeral procession afterwards, noting that it was too hot, so "if [they went] slowly, [they] risk getting sun-stroke. But if [they went] too fast...then in the church [they would] catch a cold." ^[10] Meursault not remembering events and relying on the nurse to recount anything in relation to the funeral procession; again shows the unreliability of Meursault as a first person narrator. This unreliability leads to the depiction of the weather of the funeral procession by the nurse. The description illustrates the inevitability to be affected by the sun whether they did the procession slow or fast. The inescapable sun and heat during the funeral procession represent the inevitable nature of death and, how because death is inevitable life has no inherent meaning to it. By

agreeing to this statement by the nurse, Meursault is unconsciously agreeing with the idea of Absurdity of life. Camus uses this unreliable narration to further illustrate Meursault as an Absurd hero. The author uses the characterization of Meursault as an Absurd hero to convey the Absurd nature of human life and futility of life. The unreliable narration also allows Camus to convey the ideas of the Absurd through the lenses of different characters such as the nurse.

The role of narration is critical in the characterization of Meursault as an Absurd hero in the novel *The Outsider* by Albert Camus. As Camus uses the unreliability of Meursault's first person account of events throughout the story and the lack of emotion to make the novel seem as if it was written in the third person rather than first. This highlights the indifference that Meursault shows towards the many aspects of human existence, therefore connecting him to the idea of Absurdity. The unreliable narration from Meursault also allows for the novel to be told from the perspective of other characters to convey Camus' idea of the Absurd throughout the novel such as the nurse. Camus uses narration in *The Outsider* to illustrate Meursault as an Absurd hero to communicate the idea of the Absurd to the reader.

Word count: 1329

Works Cited:

Camus, Albert. *The Outsider*. Translation by Joseph Laredo. Penguin Books, 2010

[1] Camus, Albert. *The Outsider*. Translation by Joseph Laredo. Penguin Books, 2010 Pg. 1

[2] Ibid Pg. 1

[3] Ibid Pg. 1

[4] Ibid Pg. 1

[5] Ibid Pg. 44

[6] Ibid Pg. 65

[7] Ibid Pg. 65

[8] Ibid Pg. 65

[9] Ibid Pg. 22

[10] Ibid Pg. 22