

The tragedy archetype

[Science](#)



The seven archetypes is a theory in which there are seven ways of story-telling namely Quest, Voyage and Return, Rebirth, Comedy, Overcoming the Monster, Rags to Riches and Tragedy. The Tragedy archetype is one of the seven archetypes used in story-telling mentioned by Christopher Booker in *The Seven Basic Plots*. This archetype is known to expect a specific reaction from the readers often using grief, destruction and death.

As the archetype manifests itself through time, there are many ways authors have interpreted the archetype through their stories. An element in the archetype that can be carefully observed is the notion of Rebirth where the main character eventually comprehends their misinterpretation of the world and their blunders which had caused their destruction, typically hubris. This suggests that there is a part of the Rebirth archetype in the Tragedy archetype. The question is, is tragedy a type of the rebirth archetype?

The absurdist novel entitled *The Stranger* (*The Outsider*), also known as *L'Étranger* by Albert Camus clearly portrays the rebirth in the story but is still engulfed by the tragedy concepts seen in many literature examples. "Once you're up against it, the precise manner of your death has obviously small importance" (Camus, 71). *The Stranger*, written by Albert Camus is a tragedy book based on the story plot of a man named Meursault who is a psychologically and socially detached individual. He is also known to be amoral, not caring or knowing what is right or wrong and sees feelings in a physical sense.

In one scene of the book, his mother had passed away and instead of grieving, he impassively looks at his mother's grave and refuses the re-opening of the casket, which surprises many. He is also not responsive to

human emotions such as desires and love. When the prospect of marriage was mentioned by his recent lover, Marie Cardona, he responds with " If she was keen on it, we'd get married. " (28, Camus.) The Stranger can go under the tragedy archetype where it is classified by Booker as ' the hero as a monster' since Meursault himself is the cause of his own death.

This happened since he stopped a friend, Raymond Sintes from shooting an Arab who was his " mistress's" brother. And for no apparent reason, he came back and killed the Arab with a gun. A factor that may have affected his actions was probably because of the condition of the beach that was " pulsing with heat" (38, Camus). Although hubris is a common cause in the tragedy archetype, Meursault did not think of himself highly or more superior than others, but rather as an observer where reality is harsh for those who have no poignancy.

He does not express himself much but with the reader as an observer as well, this creates the feeling of sadness for the main character even though he doesn't experience much of it. As the titles of the book says, he is merely a victim tortured by the difference in perspectives, this small difference makes him unique, or even a threat to others. Not only did Meursault set up his own death, but the society in which he lived in contributed as well. The core of the consequences can be traced by Hamartia, a Greek term meaning the fatal flaw of the hero which causes their death in the tragedy archetype story.

In The Stranger, Meursault's flaw can be seen as his lack of emotions and his frankness. Even though being emotionless does not affect his daily life or well-being, the environment of the situation created was greatly affected. An <https://assignbuster.com/the-tragedy-archetype/>

example is of how the people in court see him and how they also judge his beliefs, not for what he is, but what he says. When Meursault met a magistrate who tried to convert him, he called Meursault “ Mr. Antichrist” (45, Camus) for being open and truthful about his beliefs, this then advocated his execution.

Meursault sees things that other do not, which is one of the main causes of the resulting consequence. Humans often act on impulse, not by logic and the miscommunication between the other characters and Meursault creates conflict and sadly, the majority regularly wins in the tragedy archetype. The tragedy archetype is known to end with death, which is the norm for many stories, including *The Stranger* as well. Booker had also stated that the archetype sometimes involves the rebirth of the main character which usually comes before the tragic end of the main character.

In comparison to *Looking for Alaska*, a modern novel written by John Green, *The Stranger* is more eye-opening since the concept of rebirth is directly experienced by the main character whilst the rebirth element in *Looking for Alaska* is not quite clear because the main character, Miles, continues on with his life as nearly the same person even though his friend, Alaska's, death had a tremendous effect on other characters. With the longer lingering rebirth in *The Stranger*, Meursault finds comfort in the end where he becomes a ‘ new person’ within himself, which proposes the idea of self-discovery.

In his last moments, Meursault thoughts were “ To feel it so like myself, indeed, so brotherly, made me realize that I'd been happy, and that I was happy still. ” “ For all to be accomplished, for me to feel less lonely, all that

remained to hope was that on the day of my execution there should be a huge crowd of spectators and that they should greet me with howls of execration" (76, Booker). Even though the happiness was short, there was still a change in him as seen before the end of the book. In Booker's analysis of the rebirth archetype, there are two types of rebirth which is physical and mental rebirth.

An example of a physical rebirth could be found in the folktale of The Sleeping Beauty as she literally wakes up from her curse. A mental rebirth example could be found in Crash (2004), where a Farhad, a character realizes that his rage had clouded his judgment and he becomes calm and content, different from how he was from the start. The Stranger goes under the mental rebirth category since Meursault's own conclusions resulted in the enrichment of his own mind as he begins to accept things in life.

However, this does not necessarily mean that The Stranger can be directly 'put under' the Rebirth archetype. When referring to Booker's analysis, it is stated that "we have only seen this return of light partially, ultimately insufficient to prevail against the forces of darkness which have been unleashed, and which eventually sweep the hero or heroine away" (Booker, 192). This means that in the tragedy archetype, 'the light' which is the rebirth of the character, can be seen only for a moment before it dissipates with the main character's demise.

This could be compared to a candlelight where it flickers in the dark but does not last forever since it cannot maintain the flame and eventually, will be engulfed by darkness, which is, the sins or the consequences that slowly yet surely, catch up to the main character. All in all, even though The Stranger

contains the Rebirth of a character who wakes up from an inner sleep or obliviousness, the tragedy archetype had proved itself to be more complicated and deeper with many fundamentals and forms that had manifested overtime.

This then revealed the inner workings of the archetype including the profound meanings in the book. It is difficult to justify realistic and life-like story into separate categories as there are many factors, emotions and feelings brought in different events. But as they say, the end justifies the means in this particular book where Meursault dies a miserable and solitude death within the clutches of society. Again, regardless of the light' in the story, *The Stranger* is a tragedy story weaved with the rebirth archetype's features which implies that the tragedy archetype could also contain mixes but still maintain its structure throughout history whether it is in an old-world or modern literature. In short, the tragedy archetype is one of the most interesting and riveting of the seven archetypes that seem basic; but with careful observation and research can prove to be a very useful way of storytelling that can be remembered by readers despite of the era or time in which the archetype had laid itself upon.

Bibliography (Citations)

1. Innovateus. " What Is Hamartia in Greek Tragedy? " What Is Hamartia in Greek Tragedy? Innovateus, 2011. Web. 02 Mar. 2013.
2. Booker, Christopher. " Chapter 9: Tragedy. " *The Seven Basic Plots: Why We Tell Stories*. London: Continuum, 2004. N. pag. Print.

3. Booker, Christopher. " Chapter 11: Rebirth. " The Seven Basic Plots: Why We Tell Stories. London: Continuum, 2004. N. pag. Print. " The Stranger. " SparkNotes. SparkNotes, 2013. Web. 02 Mar. 2013.