

How do octavio paz and albert camus convey their respective views on death

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How do Octavio Paz and Albert Camus convey their respective views on death? World Literature 1 22/08/2010 Many aspects of death are pondered and questioned throughout Octavio Paz's poems, the two I have chosen to particularly focus on are Plain and Near Cape Comorin. Albert Camus has also considered the aspect of death within his novel, *The Outsider*. The title, *The Outsider* is vital to the text, as it reflects many aspects of the author's life. David Simpson explained that ' Camus lived most of his life in various groups and communities without really being of them' (iii).

This also shows similarities between Camus and the protagonist, Meursault, as throughout *The Outsider*, Meursault seems to neutralise all his emotions allowing himself to watch his own life as an ' outsider'. However, Camus was born as and brought up to be an outsider, whereas Meursault assumes his detached, individualised life himself. Both Camus and his protagonist share an existentialist view on death, this is evident in the novel *The Outsider*. Whereas Paz shows a more positive stance on death.

Both Paz and Camus convey the notion that death is an inevitable product of life, however they go about this in very different ways. While Camus takes a negative view of death, hauntingly reflected in his protagonist's amoral, emotionless attitude towards his death sentence, Paz juxtaposes images of death and decay, with that of beauty, and nature. Plain is saturated with sexual imagery, however, it is displayed to the reader in a grotesque manner, suggesting that life shares an intrinsic link with death.

Visceral imagery such as that of 'decapitated phalluses' and a gushing 'open wound' would normally point towards mortality, but the presence of sexual imagery contrasts this notion as, sexual intercourse is representative of the <https://assignbuster.com/how-do-octavio-paz-and-albert-camus-convey-their-respective-views-on-death/>

fruition of life. Camus presents a similar concept in *The Outsider*; as he articulates the idea 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 theory manifests itself in Meursault's nonchalant response to his own impending death. Whereas during his trial Meursault passively observed the judgements levelled against him, in prison he begins to ponder the fact of his inevitable death. He begins to see his life as having a past, present, and future, and concludes that there is no difference between dying soon by execution and dying decades later of natural causes. This revelation comes about when Meursault experiences a sense of liberation in his jail cell.

His emotional outburst towards the chaplain, 'hurl[ing] insults at him' (124), contrasts hugely against the blunt, nonchalant opening sentence 'Maman died today. Or yesterday maybe, I can't be sure' (11). While awaiting his execution, Meursault takes the final step in the development of his consciousness. This capacity for self-analysis is a new development for Meursault, and it contrasts greatly with his level of self-awareness earlier in the novel. This is significant, as it catalyses his self enlightenment, enhancing his mindset into that of an existentialist.

Meursault's approach to death, and in fact his entire belief structure points to that of an individual with an amoral stance on life. He is neither moral or immoral, he simply does not make the distinction between good and bad in his own mind. His encounter with the chaplain presents the reader with a clear binary opposite; differentiating between a rational, Christian system of belief and that of Meursault who refuses to succumb to Christianity.

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Meursault concludes that the universe is, like him, totally indifferent to human life.

He decides that people's lives have no grand meaning or importance, and that their actions, their comings and goings, have no effect on the world. This realisation is the culmination of all the events of the novel. When Meursault accepts 'the benign indifference of the universe,' (127) he finds peace with himself and with the society around him, and his development as a character is complete. Paz asks similar philosophical questions in *Near Cape Comorin*; using the first person to rhetorically inquire: 'Am I a lost soul or a wandering body? In the same poem he uses nature to convey various elements of religion, as it is universally known that people look for answers in their faiths. Hinduism is alluded to, with references to 'a troupe of begging monkeys'; possibly a nod to the Hindu deity " Hanuman". This is juxtaposed with references to Christianity; such as the 'cobra' from Genesis; a binary representation of western versus eastern religion. Nature is also used to depict death in *Plain* when Paz talks of 'the buzzing of the flies' connoting decay.

The theme of insects continues as he mentions a statue of 'a saint painted blue and pink. From his left eye' streaming 'grey winged insects that... fall turned to dust'. This again, savours of death and decay; creating in the reader's mind, the image of a rotting corpse. This is starkly juxtaposed with the cheery colours of the 'saint' which could themselves represent the gender stereotyped clothes given to newborn babies. Lastly, death itself is evoked with the personification by Paz, of a 'a bird dressed in black'.

This is a regularly used symbol of death, and the notion that the 'bird flies in circles' points to the cyclical nature of life and death. This bird, however, may also be used to portray hope as it 'rests on the only living tree' showing hope in the preservation and search of life. This hope is also present in *The Outsider* because once Meursault dismisses his perceived difference between execution and natural death, he must deal with the concept of hope.

Hope only tortures him, because it creates the false illusion that he can change the fact of his death. The leap of hope he feels at the idea of having another twenty years of life prevents him from making the most of his final days or hours. Hope disturbs his calm and understanding, and prevents him from fully coming to grips with his situation. By using imageries of religion, nature and sex, Paz creates a relatively positive outlook on death, in stark opposition to Camus' melodramatic, emotionless stance on death.

Through Meursault's actions, Camus implicitly challenges society's accepted moral obligations, which state that one should grieve over death, especially for a loved one or family member. Because Meursault does not grieve, society classes him as an outsider, a possible threat, a man with 'a criminal mentality' (105) and stands 'no place [within] a community' (108). Meursault's mindset and possibly that of Camus is transferred to his views on death; views which fit into an existentialist way of thinking.

Paz also portrays death as an inevitable product of life and existence, as exemplified by the sinister bird, 'dressed in black', flying in monotonous circles, landing on 'the only living tree' presumably as a portent of its certain death. (1, 133 words) Bibliography: • Camus, Albert (1971) *L'Étranger*, <https://assignbuster.com/how-do-octavio-paz-and-albert-camus-convey-their-respective-views-on-death/>

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