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A Stylistics Analysis of the Meaning of Death in the Novel “The Stranger” by Albert Camus



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Abstract

The present study aims to present a stylistic analysis of the meaning of “Death” in the novel “The Stranger” written by Albert Camus. Stylistics in general is the scientific study of the “style” followed by various writers in their works. The present study involves the stylistics features as well as the literary features utilized within the novel under study in order to highlight the meaning or concept of death which is one of the most argumentative themes of the novel and which he (Albert Camus) has described and highlighted through various names and concepts. In this context, the stylistics features such as grammar, lexical meanings, words, phrases, sentence structure and other linguistics features have been taken into consideration for the understanding the issue under study whereas the literary features such as figure of speech, similes, metaphors and alliteration have also been discussed for the sake of more clarification of the topic under discussion. Moreover, it is a qualitative study in nature. The text of the novel has been used a primary source for collection of data. The text of the novel “The Stranger” has been thoroughly and critically studied by the researcher in order to collect the required data according to the nature of the study. Furthermore, the Text-World theory presented by Paul Werth (1994, 1995, 1997) has been used as a theoretical and analytical framework. Its analytical tools have been used by the researcher to highlight the problem under study.

Introduction

The present study aims to present a stylistics analysis of the meaning of death in Albert Camus’s novel “The Stranger”. Stylistics according to Crystal and Devy (1969, p.9) under their book on Stylistics under the title “Investigating English Style” and Leech (2008, p.54) in his book under the title “Language in Literature: Style and Foregrounding” is a sub branch of linguistics which deals with the systematic study or systematic analysis of style in language and it’s variation in respect of genre, context and historical period. Wales (1989, p.438) further argues that style is looking systematically at the formal features of a text and the determination of its operation or functional significance for the sake of its interpretation. Keeping in view the above arguments we can say that the basic concern of Stylistics is to take into consideration the style of particular texts, relating it to its representation of a genre, or an author or the texts themselves.

Published in 1942, the novel “The Stranger” written by Albert Camus is his first novel dealing with his narrative and philosophy of his absurdist view, existentialism and cosmopolitan outlook of the human life and existence in the universe. He has a profound knowledge of all these school of thought and has also proved himself and his competency in the philosophical world as a famous literary figure of the time. He has own idea and theory regarding the meaning and concept of death in his writing. According to his basic philosophy of death, he argues that as nothing in this world occurs in order due to which life has no rational or redeeming meaning. In other words life is futile and useless in this world.

The novel “The stranger” is a brilliant story of the protagonist named Meursault. He is an emotionally detached and amoral young man so much so that he even don’t cry at the death of his mother. Even he doesn’t believe in God and kills a human being due

to his irrational attitude towards human life. It is due to this crime, he is declared as a threat to the peace and health of the society and is sentenced to death by the law. It is through the character of the Meursault that Camus express his well-known philosophy that implies that all the moral orders in this world possess no rational or natural order due to which life in this world doesn't has a higher meaning or value which also lead people towards despair.

Research Question

How does the novelist present the concept or meaning of death stylistically in the novel under the study?

Research Objective

To highlight the concept of death in the novel.

To highlight how does the writer express his views about the concept of death stylistically.

Literature Review

Stylistics is generally considered as a branch of linguistics which applies the models, techniques and approaches of linguistics to critically analyze, interpret and discuss the literary works. According to Widdoson (1975) it is the study of literary discourses from a linguistics orientations whereas Short and Candle (1989) Stylistics is the approach using linguistics description to the analysis of literary works or texts. As a matter of fact, this term has been proved as a controversial one due to numerous approaches and techniques which the analysts adopt. According to Wales (1989) these various approaches and orientations exist due to the basic influences of linguistics and literary criticism. David Crystal (1980) observes Stylistics as a branch of linguistics which analyses specific aspects of language variation while Widdowson (1975) sees it as a link that connects the linguistics and literary criticism which are two different disciplines.

Stylistics Analysis: in the light of the above arguments, we can say that stylistics analysis aims to investigate and highlight the specific choice of the writer in the collection and selection of words and sentence structure for the creation of a specific emotion and meaning. Leech and Short (2007) also describes the term as the technique which a writer uses in order to convey his point of view to the readers. In the beginning stylistics analysis was considered as an approach for the exploration of the meaning of literary work but in the view Thornborrow and Wareing (1998) it has now evolved a more pragmatic representation to connect choices in text to its social and cultural context means choices made by an author in light of a particular context. Different researchers have discussed the novel "The Stranger" written by Albert Camus from various point of views and perspectives. Majd (2022) in his research article under the title " Social Aspects of Alienation in Albert Camus's Novel the Stranger Between Quantitative and Qualitative Analysis" has investigated the social aspects of alienation in the novel such as meaninglessness, self-estrangement, social – estrangement, and powerlessness. Ucan (2007) has presented the comparative picture of social realism in the novel. According to him in his research article "Absurd Philosophy in the Novel Aylak Adam by Yusuyl Atilgan and in the Novel the Stranger by Albert Camus: Alienation, Doubt, Loneliness, Giving the Subject the Prime Place and Search for Identity" the novel is about man, status of human being, society and

man's status in the society. Whereas Dewi (2008) in his research dissertation under the title "The Idea of Existentialism as Revealed through the Main Character in Albert Camus' *Stranger*" has highlighted the notion of existentialism through the character of the protagonist.

Gnanasekaran(2014) in his article under the title "The Psychological Interpretation of Camus' *The Stranger*" has highlighted the in depth understanding of existentialism, absurdism, and the concept of Freudian's concept of unconscious mind through psychological and psychoanalytical criticism. According to Simon (1991) in his research paper under the title "Palais de Justice and Poetic Justice in Albert Camus' *The Stranger*" Camus has violated the law of poetic justice in the novel by depicting a criminal as innocent human being who arises sympathies in the hearts of the readers and has declared him as a hero at the end. Dawn (2022) has also discussed the novel under the study in his research article under the title "Exploring Law and the Concept of Justice in the *Stranger* by Albert Camus". He argues that the novel highlights the societal impact of justice due to which the court's concept of morality is liable to change.

In the words of Francev (2014) in his book entitled with "Dualism in Albert Camus" in the novel " *The Stranger*" Albert Camus is not endorsing the protagonist, Meursault, but he is trying to expose his prejudices. Therefore, it should be read on the basis of duality in respect of philosophical perspective as well as in respect of the surface meaning.

Research Methodology

The study is qualitative in nature which has been conducted to highlight the stylistics analysis of the concept or meaning of death presented by Albert Camus in his novel "The *Stranger*". Qualitative researches are carried out in social sciences mostly as they deal with the social issue of day today life of human beings, their attitude and their behavior. Thus human nature and behavior are its basic tools of analysis whereas books, research publications, research papers and interviews are its basic sources of data collection. The present paper involves a thorough critically study of the text of the novel under the discussion. The important characters, passages and events have been analyzed critically whereas Paul Werth's theory of Text-World (1994, 1995, 1997) has been used as theoretical framework to highlight the basic issue of the study. Werth's theory of Text-World aims to argue the notion that how the readers and the hearers make sense or meaning of complex utterances when they receive them? According to Werth(1999, p. 7) the answer to this question is that the readers or the hearers do this by constructing " Mental constructs" which he termed as the " The Text-World" means the conceptual scenarios providing information which are enough to make a sense or meaning of the particular utterances they correspond to. This cognitive theory depends on three necessary elements i-e the author, the text and the reader.

The Discourse –World and the Text- World are the two important elements of this theory. The Discourse –World according to Werth(1997, p. 7) is the immediate real world situation in which an author communicate or addresses to a reader. It includes all the participants within the discourse and the Context which means the relevant situational background including all the surrounding physical objects and entities. The Text-World according to Werth(1997, p.117) is constructed by the reader to make sense of the communicative event. It consists of world building elements and

function- advancing prepositions which are present in the text. World-building elements are the Time in term of tense and aspect of verb phrases, Characters which are realized in terms of proper nouns and pronouns, Objects which are realized through nouns and pronouns, Location which are realized through adverbial and noun phrases, specifying places in the text.

Data Analysis and Discussion

The novel under the discussion “The Stranger” written by Albert Camus in 1942, revolves around the central character of Meursault who is the protagonist of the novel also. Albert Camus has made him a mouthpiece of his basic philosophy, about his existentialism, his absurdist thoughts and the meaning and concept of human life and death. In fact the very title of the novel “ The Stranger” is ironical in nature as it signifies the absence of reason, known and unknown. The notion of death is an inevitable fact in the novel and constitutes a crucial aspect of Camus’s basic philosophy also. According to him every one has to die someday’ it is the ultimate reality that has to be felt by everyone and to Meursault as well in the novel. Though in the beginning, he is not very much concern about it. This realization of death contributes to his indifferent attitude towards everything. First, death or the idea of death fails to annoy him deeply. He takes it a normal thing through which Camus wants to illustrate the exposure of the ignorance of humanity towards it that’s inevitable or the unknown end of human life. Meursault is indifferent towards it because he knows that it has to come someday. His basic idea towards this indifferent attitude is the result of his thinking that everything in this world doesn’t occur in order and that there is no proper reason behind every reasonable happening due to which the whole human life is futile and meaningless.

The present paper aims to highlight the basic concept or the notion of death in the novel under the Text-world theory of Paul Werth in order to justify the issue under the discussion. The notion of death occurs repeatedly in the novel in fact the very opening lines of the novels reveals the incident of death. The researcher has selected the important paragraphs and events which illustrate the key concept of death of Albert Camus in the novel.

MOTHER died today. Or, maybe, yesterday; I can’t be sure. The telegram from the Home says: YOUR MOTHER PASSED AWAY. FUNERAL TOMORROW. DEEP SYMPATHY. Which leaves the matter doubtful; it could have been yesterday (page.1)

The underline paragraph is a discourse on the indifferent attitude of a son towards the sudden death of his mother. According to the text of the novel the notion of death is not a big issue of concern for the human beings in the beginning of the novel, especially for the protagonist, Meursault. He is indifferent towards his mother first and he is indifferent towards her death later on. The paragraph reveals the indifferent attitude of human beings towards death in general. Men don’t fear death in the beginning like Meursault but when they start believing, it stands on their heads. This is the reality of the time in most cases which is revealed by Albert Camus in this novel.

Statistical Analysis: The underline paragraph reveals the setting of two text-worlds according to Werth’s Text-World theory. The first text-world is created by the 1st person in past simple narration. The speaker is the protagonist, Meursault. Time factor

is also indicated in the paragraph through the words like **today, yesterday, tomorrow**. The paragraph generates the 2nd text- world by the narrator in simple present narration, **I don't know**, and **"that doesn't mean anything"**. The composition of the lines in capital form **“: YOUR MOTHER PASSED AWAY. FUNERAL TOMORROW. DEEP SYMPATHY”** indicates the importance of the issue “Death” by the writer but it doesn't move the protagonist at all. He even doesn't show any sympathy towards his mother which reveals his indifferent attitude towards the matter. The above paragraph also states the basic philosophy of Albert Camus that we shouldn't be very much concerned about anything in life which doesn't follow any order or reason. There is a repetition of “d” sound in the passage as well in words like **“died, today, and deep”**.

“I've had the body moved to our little mortuary—so as not to upset the other old people, you understand. Every time there's a death here, they're in a nervous state for two or three days. Which means, of course, extra work and worry for our staff.”(p.1 &2)

The underline paragraph is a discourse on the fear of death on human beings. Death is the ultimate reality of human life that is accepted by all. Human beings fear death and the idea of death also frightens them also. This fear of death has been best exemplified by the Warden who is convincing Mersault that they have the dead body of his mother to the little room only to save the other old people from the trauma of death because it proves to be horrific dream for them for three days. The underline message is that death is a bitter and horrible experience for everyone so much so that nobody likes to hear about it.

Statistical Analysis: According to Text-World theory of P.Werth the first text-World is created by the 1st person narrator in simple present progressive narration which highlight the fear of death in the hearts of the human beings. The line **““I've had the body moved to our little mortuary”** the agent of death in words “Dead body” whereas the succeeded line **“so as not to upset the other old people, you understand”** reflects the consequences of death for the human beings is in the simple present narration. The 2nd text-world is produced by the writer **“Every time there's a death here, they're in a nervous state for two or three days**. in the 1st person in simple present progressive narration also describing the impact of death in general while the time specification is also revealed through words such as **“ Every time, for two or three days”**.

But I wasn't sure if I should smoke, under the circumstances—in Mother's presence. I thought it over; really, it didn't seem to matter, so I offered the keeper a cigarette, and we both smoked.9p.6.

The underline paragraph is a discourse on the impact of the consequences of death on the human beings. The passage, discursive in nature expresses the indifferent attitude of human beings towards death which is a serious matter. The discourse narrator is reflecting the indifferent and cold attitude of Mersault towards his mother's death. Mersault believes that as nothing in this world is permanent and that no moral thing or event happens on the basis of reason and follows no order so, it's matters shouldn't be taken so serious. Death is not a strange thing to happen. Human beings shouldn't stop

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leading their lives but as a matter of fact they should live accordingly as usual. It is due to this notion that he is not moved by the presence of his mother's dead body and is enjoying smoking cigarettes in the company of the keeper.

Statistical Analysis: The above paragraph produces the 1st text-world in line **"But I wasn't sure if I should smoke, under the circumstances—in Mother's presence"** describing the confusion of the narrator under the dire situation of his mother's death, is in simple past progressive narration. The succeeded line **"I thought it over; really, it didn't seem to matter, so I offered the keeper a cigarette, and we both smoked"** creates the 2nd text-world which is also in simple past progressive narration. It highlights the result in response to the event of death or the step taken by the narrator in response to the death of his mother. Words such as **"thought, offered. Smoked"** are all used in the second form of the verbs pose the real imagery of the event described in the passage. Words like **"sure, over, mother and matter"** also enhance the rhyme in the passage.

I took the two-o'clock bus. It was a blazing hot afternoon. I'd lunched, as usual, at Céleste's restaurant. Everyone was most kind, and Céleste said to me, "There's no one like a mother."(page.1)

The passage is a discourse about the indifferent attitude and reaction of a son towards the death of his mother. The passage also reveals the value and importance of motherhood. Mersault, after the burier of his mother, takes a bus and travels for two hours to reach his residency. Everyone is expecting him to be upset and aggrieve but he's relaxed as usual. He eats his lunch at Celeste's restaurant where everyone looks to be very considerate and benign towards him. Celeste tries to console him by saying that mothers are like no more. But as a matter of fact Mersault is not so much aggrieved on his mother's death. Unlike other event, he thinks it as mere an event that is common to all.

Statistical Analysis: The 1st text- world is produced in the line **"I took the two-o'clock bus"** by 1st person in simple past participle narration in which the flight of Mersault after the burier of his mother to his formal home, is described. Here is a repetition of **"t"** sound as well. While the 2nd text-world is created by the succeeded line **"I'd lunched, as usual, at Celeste's restaurant"** by 1st person in simple past perfect narration. The phrase in the inverted commas **"There's no one like a mother"** possesses the figure of speech "simile" which indicates the comparison of mother with the rest of the relationships of the world. The passage also indicates the specification of time through words like **"Two o'clock, afternoon and lunched"**.

The Prosecutor turned toward the jury. "Not only did the man before you in the dock indulge in the most shameful orgies on the day following his mother's death. He killed a man cold-bloodedly, in pursuance of some sordid vendetta in the underworld of prostitutes and pimps. (Page, 41 chap. 4)

The passage, discursive in nature, highlights the public opinion about the murder of a human being by the protagonist in the novel under the study. The prosecutor is diverting the attention of the Jury towards the hardheartedness of the Mersault who

not only remain indifferent towards his mother's death but also kills a man mercilessly the other day. He belongs to the notorious world of criminals and prostitutes due to which he is indulged in such criminal activities. Every evil has to be punished one day in the same way Mersault has to be punished with due punishment for his crime.

Stylistics Analysis: according to the Text-world theory of Werth, the 1st text world is produced in line **"The Prosecutor turned toward the jury"** by the 1st person in simple past narration in which the Prosecutor diverts the attention of the Jury towards the crime committed by Mersault. The following lines **"Not only did the man before you in the dock indulge in the most shameful orgies on the day following his mother's death"** is also in simple past narration creates the 2nd text -world which employs the indifferent behavior of Mersault after the death of his mother and the activities in which he is involves during the hours due to which he acts the most heinous mistake of his life. The 3rd text-world is originated by the 1st person through the mouth of the Prosecutor in line **"He killed a man cold-bloodedly, in pursuance of some sordid vendetta in the underworld of prostitutes and pimps"** in simple past narration, describing the result of indulging of Mersault in the bad activities in the company of prostitutes and pimps. The words used by the writer such as **"turned, did, killed"** are all used in simple past participle and intact closely to the basic idea of the writer. The phrase **"cold-bloodedly"** indicates the killing of the man by Mersault meaningfully too. There is repetition of **"d"** sound in the line **"He killed a man cold-bloodedly"** whereas the repetition of **"p"** sound is also there at the end of the sentence **"prostitutes and pimps"**.

Findings

The novelist has made a full use of stylistics features such as apostrophes and rhetorical questions in order to give the story the form of address or speech narrated by the 1st person to highlight the meaning of death in the view of Albert Camus. The words and phrases are meaningfully blended together to convey the basic idea underline the study. Camus has an indifferent attitude towards death that is clearly revealed in the novel through the character of Mersault and various incidents happened to him. Mersault is a mouthpiece of Camus in this novel. He is indifferent, careless and existentialist in nature and the same message has been delivered to the readers through his character.

Conclusion

The application of stylistics features have given this novel the form of speech or an address on the issue of death which is delivered by the Protagonist, Mersault. The whole story revolves around this basic theme which has been conveyed through the implication of meaningful words and events. The language used by the novelist to highlight the notion of death is simple, eloquent and understandable. There is immense use of rhyming, alliteration and musical words to create a musical sound pattern in the passage. The story is in the form of 1st person narration and allegorical in nature. The title of the novel **"The Stranger"** is allegorical in nature too i-e the story of the person who has an indifferent, careless and detached views towards death.

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