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Exploring Aspects of Absurdism in Albert Camus's novel The Stranger



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Abstract

The Stranger as an absurd novel, consists widely of life difficulties in human senseless existence. It also suggests that how to compete with absurdity and learn to know living in it till death. The protagonist, Meursault, being a strange person to his society and his own existence in this absurd universe, how lives his life through absurdity and faces multiple challenges owing to his indifferent attitudes at the funeral of Maman and in the court. So, the main concentration of this paper is to study the minor absurd elements that are represented through plenty of dialogues and usage of different symbols in the novel. Life is a dynamic process of effort but unfortunately, human all actions and elbow greases are in vain. Eventually, the inevitability of death, confrontation between absurd and human struggle to live is highlighted with the recurring death events broadly with easy explanation and argumentations.

Keywords: Absurdism; Inevitability Of Death; Revolt; Absurdity Of Human Existence; Meursault's Execution

Introduction

The stranger was originally published by Librairie Gallimard in (1942) Translated in English by Mathew ward in 1988. The novel consists of two parts and each of them contains similar death events. In part one, an Arab is killed on the beaches of Algiers by a French Algerian man without any specific reason. It mainly shares the themes of absurdity with predetermined hopelessness and purposelessness in human existence. The main character of novel, Meursault, who less cares about the realities of life and its intrinsic "flows" and results He does not feel pain and expresses emotion and feelings at the funeral of his mother, rather he starts a love affair with Marie after one day of death occurrence. But he is still not considered an inhuman, rarely is marked by Strategyvin his view of giving up to life. Indeed, he has human emotions and he feels a kind of pain at funeral of his mother as walking among the cypress trees. He also has the sense of human violence, for instance, he prevents Raymond towards killing of Arab. In part two, except of absurdity and existentialism, the law is also brought in consideration. Imprisonment and trial of Meursault is highly discussed in this part. He is also sentenced to death in the court of Assizes. Knowing the deliberative of the assurance of death, the protagonist wants to flee, that is really absurd and there is no way to escape to absurdity. So, he becomes guilty not for killing an Arab, for not cry at his mother's funeral (Mcknight,n.d.).

In that era, Algeria was colonized by France and France was being over ruled by Nazi Germany during World War 11. The consequences wars brought depression, anxiety and isolation among people which also influenced writers to pen down absurd works around the globe. Similarly, Albert Camus witnessed a lot of causalities during the continues war among different countries, those bad experiences led him along with other people to raise question about the absurdity of life. The novel is written in person point of view and divided into two parts each of them consists different events. It reveals the story of a detached person emotionally, named Meursault, who does not cry at his mother's death. It demonstrates a world without having any redeeming meaning. Albert Camus said about Meursalt (1955, as cited in Gnanasekaran, 2014).

Far from being deprived of anything sensitivity, a profound and tenacious passion motivates him, the passion for the absolute and for the truth. It is a truth that is still negate, the truth of being and of feeling, but without which no conquest of oneself or of the world will never be possible. One would not be very mistaken to read in *The Stranger* the story of a man who, without any heroic attitude, accepts dying for the truth ...I tried to present in this character the only Christ we deserve (p.85). The stranger's main character Meursault, is an isolated person and he does not care about societal norms and values. He just accepts the life as it is. The all events and incidents in the novel, demonstrate a chain of absurdity in the face of life. So, the main aim of this paper to explore those absurd elements and approaches in the text which has not been discussed or focused before by researchers and scholars

Theoretical Framework

Absurdism basically originated from the writings of Soren kierekegaard in 19th century. He suggested to challenge the crisis which human beings face towards an absurd life. He was a Christian and devoted to Christianity. But he was against building Churches because he thought, the large number of Churches keep people away from Christian faith. Similarly, he mingled the Absurdism with religious component. On the other hand, Albert Camus was not interested in the religion. Many people considered him as an existentialist but he, himself rejected that label, he gave a paradoxical statement that" I do not believe in God and i am not an athiest" He expressed him as an absurdist. Through the

philosophy of the absurd, he explained the term "absurd", "as the conflict between human tendency to seek inherent value and meaning in life, and the human inability to find any meaning in a purposeless universe, with the unreasonable silence of the universe in response." Absurdism illustrates a meaningless life. Owing to lack of inherent meaning in universe, human existence is also purposeless. Albert Camus utilized the absurdity in his many works such as *The Stranger*, *the plague*, *The Myth of Sisyphus* and *the rebel*. In this way, the absurdity is also found in the works of Franz Kafka, Sorien kierekegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche. Absurdism is a system of beliefs in which human searches for meaning in a world that is meaningless itself. According to Camus humans have to accept absurdity of life for the sake of their freedom (Chatterjee, 2015).

The Oxford Concise Dictionary of literary Terms, defines absurd as "a term derived from the Existentialism of Albert Camus and often applied to the modern sense of human purposelessness in a universe without meaning or value." (Baldick. c, 2001). Dictionaries define the absurd in various ways but their main concerns are interconnected with the same concept. Absurdism is a serious area of academic study which makes people think about the universe in that human existence is lost. The term "absurd" deals with an irrational life in which human actions are disorder and confusive. Hence, human beings are helpless before the absurdity, and they cannot escape from it. Because the absurdity exists in universe before human existence. Likewise, human existence being a component of this universe, is also meaningless. The Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard was the one who called Absurdism as a philosophy. According to scholars, there was not a detailed contribution of him in absurdism. Absurdism actually rose in the 19th century, due to the terrors and violations of world wars, human beings were dressed with axiety, depression,

alienation and loneliness.

From those horrible times, writers started the utilization of absurdity in their writings. Everyone did his / her best to interpret Absurdism. The Franco- Algerian philosopher Albert Camus was one of them who studied the Absurdism broadly and who brought it in fictions to show people how our life is absurd. Absurdism with philosophy cannot be defined easily.

Fundamentally, it believes that universe is irrational and that does not have an inherent meaning, humans exist in that purposeless world. Man, kinds would be victim of alienation, isolation and fragmentation in their daily routines when they recognize the real face of life as meaningless on the earth. The emergence of Absurdism was influenced by the world wars that disturbed the normal way of living people, and pushed them into destruction and exhaustion. Similarly, people began to question the existence of God, universe and human. Despite of living in a disappointed world, humans struggle to find meaning in life. Even without knowing the actual purpose of life, they can still be capable to have a happy life and prefer happiness in absurdity. Building such abilities is essential to face the reality and accept its senselessness (Dhyaeddine, 2019).

Discussion

The book consists of different kind of absurd elements including irony, symbolisms and many more. One cannot ignore the minor events and thoughts that are presented repeatedly in different ways. Repetition of some words and ideas are significant for percieving the main motive of the author. The writer has tried to create an absurd picture of life by emphasizing on humorous statements and actions. Representation of incidents is consciously dressed with strange words and phrases that are obscure in surface meaning but rich in hidden meaning. There was not an irrational structure in Meursault's life that he might knew about the mechinical nature of rational structure. He was known as a stranger in his life. Through this reality, he does not follow the rules, norms, and other societal notions. Moreover, Meursault might have a different view of understanding individual life. Being an

absurd hero, the feeling of alienation kept away him from society. Meursault could not accept the imposed rules and regulations of his society, because of this, he was considered a stranger. Like that, he killed an Arab but he could not see a rational explanation to the result of his action. For him, morality was not possible to be percieved, that,s why, he continously questioned the trial.

The court inspite of judging him as a murder, blamed him for his indifferent attitudes at the funeral of his mother. It might show his high consciousness that he tried to hold the absurdity of circumstances. Eventually, Meursault recognized the consequence of his action, his alternative vision and social norms (Baptista valeria, et al, 2022). Here Meursault wanted to begin life all over again naturally. He realized the value of life but still the universe was indifferent for him. This concept led him towards absurdity of human existence. Death is inevitable and no one will be left alone on the earth. It was not matter for him that how and when he dies, each and everything was dark of him. He was also conscious about everything surrounding of his society. So, it was the first time, he saw the inherent beauty of life and did not want to be executed.

Daniel Henke (2013) stated that Albert Camus divided the absurd into three stages: suicide, "acceptance through belief, and defiant revolt." Meursault suffered from these three stages in his life but it was his confrontaion to explore the human inability to

search meaning and create a sense of his bond with the absurd. Rejection of God killing the arab, not believing at the court system and accepting his execution with defiant revolt is an effort to find meaning in his life. However, Camus did not say that absurdity is a negative philosophy rather it shows the "true state of human revolt and existence." To Camus, absurd ends with death, and a greater life does not mean another life. Similarly, throughout the novel, life

looked like a burden for Meursault and he could not perceive it. Finally, the execution of Meursault was seemed purposeless because he was not punished for his actual crime.

Meursault did not believe in God and he also did not care about what he did with an Arab. Execution and punishment both were painful events but he was not upset anymore, because, everything seemed to him absurd even though his own existence. In this situation, he could not understand the social restrictions and boundaries. He wanted to transcend the limitations and barriers that kept him stop from living in his own way. Like this, he did not believe at law and court. He knew that he believed that he was not punished for his original sin, but he wondered about the death connection of his mother with his murder case. Reader cannot find him very serious about his trial throughout the novel. He never thinks of his trial very much, and just accepts the current circumstances with relaxation.

As Meursault explained his lawyer's points in the novel "he sat down on the bed and explained to me that there had been some investigations into my private life. It had learned that my mother had died recently at the home. Inquiries had then been made in Marengo. The investigator had learned that I had "shown investivity" the day of Maman's funeral"(Camus, 1946, p.74).The Meursault's lawyer made him aware about the investigation and A about their blames. They criticized Meursault for his apathy attitude and behavior in the day of funeral. Insensitivity and indifference both were important to be brought into consideration because the protagonist behaved everywhere in the same way and he did not want to bring a change in his personality and in his thoughts. He was standing a bridge that did not have any strong pillars so that he would had believe on it. No never, he believed in anything that was in doubt. He was a rational personal but his socially illogically acts made people very sensitive about him.

Further, Meursault says "I answered that I had pretty much lost the habit of analyzing myself and that it was hard for me to tell him what he wanted to know. I probably did love Maman, but that did not mean anything"(Camus, 1949 p.75). Meursault was far from inner feeling and emotion, and he did not remember his previous state whether he was sad while his mother died or not. The word "probably" is used to show a very strange love for Maman. It is clear that he could not decide things in a good way in everywhere. There is no any surety in his statement that he adored his mother and cared for her. Any word he uttered was left incomplete with a huge gap. In part one, when the caretaker asked him about the age of his mother "was she old?" He answered "fairly"(23) He did not know the exact age of his mother because he had indifferent attitude towards everything. Absurdity of life was in its peak, it did not allow him to be a responsible person and a caretaker like others are, in society. He just took all things as if they were before. For him, nothing mattered and nothing created a sad situation even though his mother's death. He looks like an emotionless person who does have feeling of pain, feelings of love and feelings of sympathy.

Whatever he thought he did and did not care whether that was fair or not. He did not

seek a proper time for doing a proper thing. Meursault as a stranger in his society followed the conventions and other rituals like other. He also tried to maintain his trial as others will do. He did not refuse happiness and joys in life. Meursault was just a stranger to himself and to his own existence. He did not have emotions and feelings for living a valuable and a planned life. Meursault's death showed human reality and real condition. His trial ended by his death sentence, rather he was not exiled from his society by human beings. It demonstrated his involvement in human society.

Death is an essential part of life, and Meursault's death shows the human race. There was no any rational cause for his death because he was sentenced for not weeping at the funeral of

his mother. The stranger suggests that life is meaningless but it also rejects the concept of committing suicide (Plamer, 1980 p.125). The points that were offered by R.Barton plamer, are not valid in some places. Meursault did not like to act as society and he also did not follow the rituals and notions of society completely. If he did so, he would had been accepted in his society, and his society including court did not blame him for his mother death. He did not want to maintain his trial like others. Rather his attitudes were indifferent towards his own trial, and he did not pay too much attention in his trial. He did not defend himself and not took the case very serious.

He himself become an obstacle for his own pleasures and joys in life. When he was in prison, the priest asked him to believe in God, and his all sins would be forgiven but he did not accept his offer. It means he was not happy to be happy in life. Meursault did not show the human real condition rather it showed human's actual cruelty and injustice. As mentioned in the novel "my appeal was denied". "Well, so I am going to die." Sooner than other people will, obviously. But everybody knows life isn't worth living. Deep down that know perfectly well that it doesn't much matter whether you die at thirty or at seventy, since in either case other men and women will naturally go on living and for thousands of years"(Camus, 1946, p.125).

When the appeal of Meursault was rejected, he became sad and a terror of death entered in his soul. This made him think about life and other people who want to live. To him, life was purposeless, and other people were foolish to think about living it more. What they would do if they live anymore in life. He further explained that one would live for thousand years but he or she would have to face death finally. Death is unavoidable anyway; therefore, life does not matter much. Human existence with its origin is senseless. Similarly, Meursault further in the same page says that "In fact, nothing could be clearer. Whether it was now or

twenty years from now, I would still be the one dying. At that point, what would disturb my train of thought was the terrifying leap I would feel my heart take at the idea of having twenty more years of life ahead of me... Since we are all going to die, it's obvious that when and how don't matter."

In these sentences, Meursault have just accepted the flow of things. Whatever was happening, did not matter to him. Human beings have to die whether now or twenty years later but death is unescapable and inevitable. It is not important for human where, when and how they die, just they die one day and this life is not permanent. Here is the symbol of Absurdism that captured meursault's existence as absurd and he was not afraid of his final consequence of life because he knew that it was the only reward of living in this world and could not get rid of it any rate. Through these all dialogues, it is obvious that Meursault is an absurd character and he just keep going

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with time whatever time decides he accepts them normally. In these meaningless universes, feelings, hardworking, positions and all other belongings are in vain. Therefore, human beings have to accept their present moments and live in them happily. As he states:

For the first time, in a long time I thought about Marie. The days had been long since she had stopped writing. That evening, I thought about it and told myself that maybe she had gotten tired of being the girlfriend of a condemned man. It also occurred to me that maybe she was sick, or dead. These things happen. How was I to now, since apart from our two bodies, now separated, there was not anything to keep us together or even to remind us of each other? Anyway, after that, remembering Marie meant nothing to me. I was not interested in her dead. That seemed perfectly normal to me, since I understood very well that people would forget me when I was dead. They would not have anything more to do with me. I was not even able to tell myself that it was hard to think those things (Camus, 1946, p.126).

It was that time when Meursault was in grief and remembering his girlfriend Marie in the prison. He thought about her physical and spiritual aspects in his deep thinking. All the memories related to Marie, were worldly pleasures for him. The past days with her did not attract Meursault anymore. Because of this, her death and life both would not bring a change in his life. Her presence and absence also would not differ to him. Meursault's own existence did not have value on the earth then how he would have to be worried about other people; it gave him a short term of sympathy with others, no one would be remembered for a long time. Life is a repetition of actions that does not allow people setting to bring others in their memories all the time. It is the real face of world of absurdity among people to forget all things that has once been their part in life. Further he elaborates.

So, he asked Marie to describe briefly that day when I had first known her. Marie did not want to, but at the prosecutor said that after Marie had given her statements to the examining magistrate, he had consulted the movie listings for that day. He added that Marie herself would tell the court what film was showing. In an almost expressionless voice, she did in fact tell the court that it was a Fernandel Film. By the time she had finished there was a complete silence in the courtroom. The prosecutor then rose and, very gravely and with what struck me as real emotion in his voice, his finger pointing of the jury, the day after his mother's death, this man was out swimming, starting up a dubious liaison, and going to the movies, a comedy, for laughs. I have nothing further to be said. (Camus, 1946, p.104).

Here the prosecutor urged Marie to explain the story from the first day when she met with him. She uncovered some secrets about Meursault that how he swam with her and how they both went for watching comedy, or movie. Meursault did these all things just one day after the death of his mother. These kinds of acts are not socially acceptable and appropriate, but he challenged the social conventions and traditions by doing so. That is the

reason that his society did not accept him as a normal person. Because, Meursault was different from other people in his age. He was accused for not crying at the funeral of his mother and was investigated not for murdering an Arab. All people who knew him witnessed that he was a good man but the court mentioned him as an irresponsible citizen among others. Meursault did not try to defend himself because he believed on reasoning rather than hypothesis.

Like this, he knew the true nature of life and universe. He could not turn his face to

reality of his existence. For him, everything was different and strange, he always wanted to see or think life differently. He had the ability of acceptance and understanding of rationality towards things. Therefore, it was not a big issue for him to leave Marie or to accept execution silently. He knew that these all things would happen one day. Demanding more time, for him was useless and more a burden of life. All the universe seemed absurd and was not worth living anymore. His emotions were burnt and he did not feel pain for any relationship and friendship. Dying and passing away is a routine of life in the absurd world, for it, mourning is not a solid solution and response. Agreement of circumstances and situations are more valid than mourning on them for rest of life. Happiness and joys are part of life don't destroy them for the upcoming sorrows and pains. These are some lessons for that Camus gave them in his novel, the stranger. According to Camus (1938, as cited in Foley, 2008)

"The realization that life is absurd cannot be an end, but only a beginning This is a truth that nearly all great minds have taken as their starting point. It is not this discovery that is interesting, but the consequences and rules for action that can be drawn from it"(p.1)

The protagonist, meursault, being an absurd person realised that life requires struggle and hardworking for being alive. There are certain rules and regulations that shape the actions of human beings and provide them a proper consequence throughout their life struggle. Understanding life as absurd is a realization of value of life. The story of Meursault looks like a real story of someone's life. It is closely connected to human conscious and human psychology. It grasps the fundamental understanding of human mind. No one can elope from the reality of being fed up of life in some spaces. Visualizing the beauty of life is fascinated with some expectations but it does not mean completely a happy picture of human nature. All human beings are not able to see in this particular angle, maybe they are suffering from it unconsciously but are unfamiliar to its actual face. As, Salamano loved his dog a lot and even he became sad for losing his dog Why the dog was so important for him and why he was upset for that more than anything. On the other side, Meursault did not show any pain and sorrow at the death of Maman. There is a big different between them, Salamano was worried for an animal but meursault did not care about the death of his loved ones and human beings.

As Meursault says in the novel, it was true, when she was at home with me, Maman used to spend her time following me with her eyes, not saying a thing. For the first few days she was at the home, she cried a lot. But that was because she wasn't used to it. A few months later and she would have cried if she has been taken out. She was used to it. That's partly why I didn't go there much this year. Ana also because it took up my Sunday-- not to mention the trouble of getting to the bus, buying tickets, and speaking two hours traveling (Camus ,1946, p.12). It declares human situation in lonely world with an absurd life. Modern people are alienated to each other due to various causes. Mostly, materialistic approach and financial instability create a strange o thought between Meursault and Maman. He could not give time

his mother in the race of development and progress that kept a great effect upon their lives. That is a key concept of an absurd life that brought a disastrous impact on Meursault's life. In an unreasonable world, human is unable to find any sense to live life with a proper meaning. missing in life, is an illusion that can never be accessible to anyone for being happy in his entire life. Similarly, Camus said that the Absurdism

is a "confrontation between human need and the unreasonable silence of the world" (Camus, as cited in Foley, 2008, p.6). Helpless human being has been ruined spiritually by the silence of absurd universe. They are facing difficulties and miseries in different stages of their lives but are unable to get any positive response from the cruel world. This is a continuous war in which human beings search for meaning and salvation in order to keep the certainty of their life. But they failed miserably because who are traveling towards a senseless destination. Disappointments and hopelessness have shaped human existence and these elements have been a cause of static of life. inspite of these all, humans have the mentality to struggle and find a meaning in their life.

Marie as the girlfriend of Meursault, did not want to leave him and intends to marry with him. On the contrary, Meursault did not care much about her happiness and feelings. When Marie asked Meursault about marriage, he responses that he had not thought so He just want to be in the moments of life and enjoy the having time with his girlfriend. He did plan about his future and thought of building a family like others. He actually refused the ongoing customs and traditions in the society. His way of living is definitely different from his companies. He is somehow pessimistic in his approach of life; he let the things to be happened in their flow and never control the coming situations of life. His relationship with Marie was not a serious relation rather a time passing excuse for removing his loneliness.

Conclusion

A mirror of an absurd life is being demonstrated and visualized in the stranger. Most of the natural elements such as sun, sky and clouds, are utilized to elucidate the intensity of absurdity on the face of life. Moreover, Camus developed a hero who typifies the modern life characteristics and human existential crisis in this temporary world. The non-identical death occurrences in disparate sites are signs for the lack of meaning in human existence. These all events combining have given an instance of human true nature and condition in an absurd world. Meursault as a stranger, lives a life of consciousness and accept the meaninglessness of life by facing the reality of his own death with courage.

He refuses to believe in God and religion, in much as who is the only unique and rational persona among public. So, different aspects of Absurdism have been put in the novel and they are applied in various places for specific and appropriate senses. Then, the absurdity of universe and the instability and insensitivity of human beings with paucity of emotions and feelings in an absurd world, are the key concepts of the discussion of novel. There still have possibilities of confabulation on the selected topic of this research and it is opened to be analyzed and anatomized further. Thus, a lot of works have been done regarding Absurdism and its application in this novel, this small piece of work would might be supportive and informative for upcoming researchers.

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