

Exploration of Existence in Exile: An Analysis of the Theme of Isolation in Albert Camus' *The Stranger*

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Abstract

Albert Camus' novel, The Stranger, a classic in world literature, serves as a philosophical assessment of alienation within the human situation having existentialism as its background. This paper examines the varied dimensions of alienation as represented through Meursault, the central character in The Stranger. Contextualizing Camus' rational outlooks on existentialism, this research scrutinises how Meursault's alienation from society, relationships, and even from his own self, emphasises Camus' thematic investigation of the absurdity of existence. Camus' existentialism suggests that life misses in-built meaning, and persons must traverse this meaningless existence. Alienation is a vital theme in The Stranger, abridging Meursault's practice of alienation. The study affirms that Meursault's inescapable alienation signifies Camus' philosophical analysis of the existentialism. Central to this paper is the exploration of Meursault's alienation from society, clarified by his unconcerned response to his mother's demise. This alienation is additionally illustrated in his relationships, predominantly with Marie, where passionate depth and societal norms embrace little importance for him. Besides, Meursault's internal exile mirrors his struggle with self-identity and sense. Meursault's experience aids as a metaphor for the contemporary human state, resonating with modern existential predicaments in adjoined and traditionalist world. His alienation reiterates the sense of alienation felt by human beings amidst communal pressures and existential ambiguity. Through an in-depth analysis of Meursault's alienation from society, relationships, and himself, this paper captures the crux of Camus' existential and absurdist analysis. The Stranger continues to exist as a pivotal work in world literature, providing deep discernments into human alienation and the hunt for meaning in an indifferent world. Through Meursault's character, Camus skilfully communicates the theme of alienation, making The Stranger a permanent classic in world literature.

Keywords: Alienation, Exile, Existentialism, Relationship, Self-identity

Introduction

Albert Camus, a French-Algerian philosopher and writer, is generally acknowledged for his contributions to existential thought. He is of the view that life is inherently meaningless, an outlook that greatly influences his literary works. *The Stranger*, one of Camus' best novels, embodies his exploration of existentialism. This novel can be viewed as a formative work of art in world literature, which exposes the notion of alienation, a repeated theme in existential treatise. *The Stranger* discloses the story of Meursault, an unconcerned and alienated protagonist whose life and actions plainly disapprove societal customs and anticipations. Through Meursault's experiences, Camus brilliantly renders the absurdity of existence. Meursault's sense of alienation which is obvious in his relations, his societal connections, and his meditative contemplations works as a metaphor for the human condition. This study asserts that Meursault's alienation from society, relationships, and even himself shows Camus' philosophical exploration of the absurd. "The Greeks were the very foundation of Camus' thinking and a source to which he turned early and often in his attempt to

make sense of his own experience and of the world in which he lived” (Srigley 3). By scrutinising the diverse dimensions of Meursault’s alienation, this research pursues to contextualize Camus’ existential beliefs within the narrative of *The Stranger*. It aims to interpret how Meursault’s alienation echoes broader existential problems, resonating with contemporary readers in a split and conformist world. Through this enquiry, *The Stranger* is endorsed as a foundation stone of existential fiction, continuing to give awareness into human alienation and the pursuit for meaning.

Contextualization of Albert Camus and his Philosophy

Albert Camus arose as one of the most prominent philosophers of the 20th century. His childhood, marked by scarcity and the demise of his dad in World War I, severely designed his world view and academic quests. He is honoured for his presents to existential philosophy, which defy conservative ideas of meaning in life. As Camus stated in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, “the absurd is born out of this confrontation between the human need and the unreasonable silence of the world” (Camus 28). This notion features much of his art works, comprising *The Stranger*. Existentialism pinpoints that individuals are accountable for filling their own lives with sense in an uncaring, chaotic world. “Existentialism puts forward the idea that man is an independent being who has the freedom to make its own interpretation of the purpose of existence” (Barrett 1). The absurd comes up from the clash between people’s yearning for clarity and the unreasonableness of the world. As Camus uttered, “Man stands face to face with the irrational. He feels within him his longing for happiness and for reason. The absurd is born of this confrontation between the human need and the unreasonable silence of the world” (Camus 26). In *The Stranger*, these themes of existentialism and the absurd are embodied in the protagonist, Meursault. His emotional detachment and indifference reflect Camus’ philosophical exploration of life’s inherent meaninglessness. “Alienation is the state of being alienated or estranged from something or somebody; it is a condition of the mind” (Adam Abdullah and Saksono 37). Through Meursault, Camus explains the thought that individuals must travel existence without in-built purpose, representing the alienation that characterises the hero. This contextualization of Camus’ life gives an understanding of his thematic concerns in *The Stranger*.

Meursault’s Alienation from Society

Meursault’s alienation from society is unambiguously marked in his unconcerned reaction to his mother’s passing away. When he gets the telegram telling him of her passing, his answer is shockingly detached: “MOTHER died today. Or, maybe yesterday; I can’t be sure” (Gilbert 4). This absence of emotional reply refutes societal expectations of sorrow and lamentation, showcasing his cutting off from societal norms. At the burial, Meursault remains worried with bodily uneasiness like the heat and the effort needed to attend, rather than the emotional seriousness of the event. His concentration on ordinary details rather than conveying grief further stresses his emotional distancing. Meursault’s dispassionate reaction to societal expectations spreads beyond his response to his mother’s demise. His connections with others are in the same way marked by an absence of orthodox emotional involvement. For example, when his sweetheart, Marie, questions if he loves her, he replies with indifference. It didn’t mean anything. This absence of passionate sentiment highlights his lack of ability to adapt to societal norms concerning relationships and emotions. Meursault’s conduct is not a mindful revolt against society but a replication of his intrinsic character, which expresses the existential subject of the absurd. The court-martial of Meursault further reveals his alienation from society. At the trial, the attention shifts from the real crime of murder to his character and ethical judgments. The prosecutor lays emphasis on Meursault’s apparent moral shortcomings rather than the murder itself, saying, “Gentlemen of the jury, I would have you note that on the next day after his mother’s funeral that man was visiting the swimming pool, starting a liaison with a girl, and going to see a comic film. That is all I wish to say” (Gilbert 59). The verdict is less about the action of killing and more about his inability to display generally acceptable feelings and behaviours. This trial becomes a manifestation of societal disapproval of his unresponsiveness

and non-conformity, rather than an honest legitimate proceeding. Meursault's alienation is thorough as he is judged and penalised not for the killing, but for his emotional and ethical deficiency. Society's response to Meursault underlines Camus' appraisal of social norms and the alienation intrinsic in the human condition. "Meursault experienced alienation as a direct consequence of his individualistic, absurdist nature and rejecting the traditional views that developed in society" (Adam Abdullah and Saksono 36). The trial helps as a thinking of how society administers conformity and disciplines those who move away from its beliefs. Through Meursault, Camus transfers the theme of alienation, making *The Stranger* a potent commentary on the human circumstance.

Meursault's Alienation from Relationships

"Albert Camus depicts the novel's protagonist, Meursault, as being emotionally detached, apathetic, cold and unfeeling equally in both good and hard times" (Mahdi 37). Meursault's alienation from relationships is affectingly showed through his contacts with Marie. Regardless of indulging in a loving relationship with Marie, Meursault seems to be emotionally isolated and indifferent. When Marie asks whether he loves her, Meursault's answer is unemotional. This admittance emphasises his disinterest in agreeing to societal expectations of love and emotional affection. His association with Marie is more carnal and convenience-based than rooted in any emotional association. It shows his alienation from human connections. Meursault's failure to establish emotional connections goes beyond his relationship with Marie. Throughout *The Stranger*, he intermingles with others in a way that is empty of conventional emotive gravity. His companionships such as with Raymond are shallow and based on conditional convenience rather than sincere affection. Meursault's relations are characterized by a lack of emotional ties that stereotypically outline human relationships. This dispassion is a manifestation of his alienation. His emotional unresponsiveness forms a fence that stops meaningful associations and reinforces his isolation. This behaviour challenges societal expectations, which sees emotive engagement and interpersonal connections as important constituents of the human experience. Society assumes individuals to develop bonds, show emotions, and partake in the common human experience. Meursault's inability to do so keeps him as an outsider, which deepens his sense of alienation. Likewise, his detached behaviour during his trial further elucidates his alienation. When questioned about his mental state toward his crime and his relationships, Meursault stands indifferent and unresponsive, which surprises the court and strengthens his image as a social exile. As the prosecutor tells, "Especially when this lack of every decent instinct is such as that of the man before you, a menace to society" (Gilbert 63). This verdict indicates the broader alienation that Meursault experiences. Meursault's alienation from associations emphasises the existential subject of the absurd in *The Stranger*.

Meursault's Alienation from Himself

Apart from societal alienation and alienation in relationship, Meursault goes through internal exile and tussle with self-identity. Throughout *The Stranger*, Meursault shows lack of self-reflection and self-awareness, which highlights his existential difficulty. His perceptions on life, and meaning are minimal and often shallow. It exhibits his disconnection from his own sense of self. This internal alienation is a main phase of Camus' depiction of the absurd hero, who must sail across a world devoid of in-built meaning. One example is his reaction to his own deeds and their aftereffects. After murdering the Arab, Meursault does not ponder on the moral or existential repercussions of his action. Instead, he is more anxious with the instantaneous bodily sensations and the sun's burning heat. He states, "Wherever I looked I saw the same sun-drenched countryside, and the sky was so dazzling that I dared not raise my eyes. Presently we struck a patch of freshly tarred road. A shimmer of heat played over it and one's feet squelched at each step, leaving bright black gashes" (Gilbert 59). This unresponsiveness to his own ferocious act and the consequent lack of self-examination demonstrate his alienation from his own inner life. He accepts the purposelessness of life but does not strive to reconcile this with any form of individual philosophy or meaning. His alienation from

his own self is again marked during his trial. He remains unresponsive and detached when questioned about his motives and feelings. He is unable to express the meaning of his actions. As Meursault himself tells, “who is on trial in this court” (Gilbert 27). This alienation from his own life and fate unravels his internal exile.

Meursault as a Metaphor for the Human Condition

For contemporary existential dilemmas, Meursault’s experiences in *The Stranger* stand as metaphor as it captures the essence of alienation and disconnection that is found in the contemporary society. His life made up of alienation and emotional indifference exposes the struggles of individuals struggling with existential crises in a world that is fragmented and devoid of meaning. Meursault’s alienation from society, his relationships, and even himself, reflects the broader themes of isolation and disconnection that are central to existential thought. Meursault’s indifferent reaction to his mother’s death, his unemotional interactions with Marie, and his passive acceptance of his fate highlight the sense of alienation that defines his existence. This alienation resonates with individuals who feel disconnected from societal norms and expectations, experiencing a sense of isolation amidst the pressures of conformity and the search for meaning. As Camus writes, “I laid my heart open to the benign indifference of the universe” (Gilbert 76). His character embodies the modern individual’s struggle to find authentic connections in a world that often prioritises superficial interactions and societal approval. As Meursault states, “It was as if that great rush of anger had washed me clean, emptied me of hope” (Gilbert 75). Camus uses Meursault’s character to explore the intrinsic alienation that accompanies the human quest for meaning in an indifferent universe.

Modern Resonance of Meursault’s Alienation

Meursault’s alienation in *The Stranger* remains significant in today’s fragmented and conformist world, where many individuals wrestle with comparable existential dilemmas. In the present society which is ruled by swift scientific progress and social media, the sense of isolation Meursault experiences is echoed in the lives of many individuals. The pressures to follow, the shallow nature of many social relations, and the perpetual quest for meaning amidst turmoil reflect the existential trials Camus discovered through Meursault. Meursault’s indifference and detachment signify an unending human tussle to discover authenticity in a world that often demands conformity. The importance of Meursault’s alienation is seen in how current existential struggles manifest in daily life. Individuals today face a sense of isolation despite being repetitively connected through technology. Social media platforms, while facilitating communication, often intensify feelings of loneliness and inadequacy. As Camus notes, Everyone was “seemingly quite indifferent” (Gilbert 57). It affirms Meursault’s acceptance of the absurdity and isolation inherent in human life. His incapacity to engage feelingly with others equals the superficial nature of many modern connections, where sincere relations are often outdone by societal expectations and digital person as. The existential angst Meursault embodies is resonant with the experiences of those who feel alienated by the pressures to conform and succeed in a competitive, indifferent world.

Conclusion

Albert Camus’ *The Stranger* skilfully explores the theme of alienation against the backdrop of existentialism and the absurd. This research paper has delved into the multifaceted dimensions of alienation as portrayed through the character of Meursault. By contextualizing Camus’ rational outlook on existentialism, it has been demonstrated how Meursault’s alienation from society, his relationships, and even himself underlines Camus’ thematic investigation of the absurdity of existence. Meursault’s indifferent reactions, unemotional relationships, and lack of introspection illustrate his detachment, serving as a powerful metaphor for the human condition in an indifferent universe. Meursault’s experiences resonate with the sense of isolation and disconnection felt by individuals in today’s fragmented and conformist world, reflecting broader existential challenges. *The Stranger* remains a pivotal work in world literature, giving deep insights into human alienation and the quest for meaning.

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