

The concept of individualism and absurdity in Camus' the stranger

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Abstract: The article discusses the philosophical foundations of modernist literature, particularly existentialism, individualism, and the theory of the absurd. It primarily focuses on Albert Camus' works, analyzing his views on individualism, absurd philosophy, and the meaninglessness of human life.

The article deeply examines aspects of modernism related to social alienation and the spiritual crisis of individuals in society. The philosophy of the absurd is explained based on the ideas of Camus and Sartre, emphasizing that the essence of human life is shaped through personal choices. Camus defines the absurd as the contradiction between a person's desire to find meaning in life and the indifference of the universe.

"The Stranger" is analyzed as a novel where the protagonist, Meursault, exhibits indifference to life and refuses to conform to societal norms. Similarly, "The Myth of Sisyphus" is interpreted as a symbol of the absurd man. "The Plague" and "The Rebel" are discussed in terms of human rebellion against an absurd world.

The article explores the essence of Camus' philosophy, examining his literary legacy and his perspectives on the absurd nature of human existence.

Keywords: Modernism, existentialism, individualism, absurdism, absurd, alienation, personal freedom, loneliness, egoism, rebellion, meaninglessness.

Introduction: The literature of the 20th – century modernist era stands out in terms of both its expressive style and the objects of its depiction. One of the main reasons modernism emerged primarily in Western literature and art is the devaluation of lofty ideals, the monotonous and meaningless life devoid of peace and comfort, and the disorder within the human psyche. Moreover, although people became materially wealthier, their spiritual impoverishment and self – serving mentality inevitably aligned with the philosophical principles of social alienation. As a result, modernist literature deeply engaged in the exploration of human nature. In general, it has long been accepted as an axiom that "the main subject of literary fiction is the human being" [Sarimsoqov 2022, 131].

Writer Nazar Eshonqul's views on this matter are also noteworthy. He states that "by the 20th century, the study of human nature had deepened, and conclusions about the meaning of life no longer fit into traditional

frameworks and perceptions. Consequently, artistic thinking evolved to match the complexity of human psychology, and literature became more diverse. True literature was no longer shaped directly by readers' demands but rather by the intellectual demands of the new era, focusing on the analysis of the human being" [Eshonqul 2014, 109]. It is no surprise that this need led to the emergence of various literary movements such as modernism, postmodernism, existentialism, and absurdism – each dedicated to analyzing human consciousness – first in French literature and later throughout Europe and the entire world.

METHODOLOGY

The artistic – philosophical views of existentialists lead to the following general conclusions: Absurdity in literature arises from the collision of relationships between humanity and nature, between the individual and society. As a person strives to comprehend the world, they wander between the beginning and the end

of life in a state of uncertainty. Philosopher Viktor Alimasov expresses this idea as follows: "Life constantly presents new challenges to people, which they solve depending on the situation and their willpower... The criterion that shows a person as a conscious and living being is their actions" [Alimasov 2005, 92].

Albert Camus is one of the leading writers of 20th – century French literature. His philosophy consists mainly of existentialism, individualism, and the concept of absurdity. According to Camus' existentialist views, a person gives their own life meaning, content, and opportunities. This idea can also be found in Sartre: "Life does not inherently possess meaning. Life does not mean anything until one has lived it. A person can assign meaning to their own life" [Sartre 1996, 17].

There is no mere causality in the world: a person knows, sees, feels, and journeys through existence. In Camus' concept of absurdity, there is a strikingly cold view of the human being as a "discarded body." More precisely, man is a creature torn from the cosmos and cast down onto the earth. Here, the question "Why?" naturally arises. After all, among all beings, only the human being holds the highest status. The entire problem lies in this contradiction, which is central to Camus. It represents the conflict between a "strong desire" for clarity and the "groundless silence of the world," between human consciousness and will and an opposing extraordinary contradiction: "But the absurd is the confrontation between the irrational and the desperate desire for clarity that resonates in the human heart" [Camus 2013, 39], as Camus explains.

The theory of absurdity is based on four principles: freedom, passion, struggle, and rebellion. In Camus' works, these principles unite around two fundamental poles, which correspond to the two stages of his philosophical orientation: freedom and rebellion. The first pole involves the realization of life's absurdity, which means that even though one must pay the price for freedom, they do not abandon the idea of living freely. This pole includes works such as *The Stranger* (*L'Étranger*, 1942), *The Myth of Sisyphus* (*Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, 1942), *The Misunderstanding* (*Le Malentendu*, 1944), *Caligula* (*Caligula*, 1945), *State of Siege* (*L'État de siège*, 1948), and others. The second pole encompasses humanity's revolutionary response to catastrophe, which is reflected in *The Plague* (*La Peste*, 1947) and *The Rebel* (*L'Homme révolté*, 1951).

"Believing in the meaning of life always implies a scale of values, choices, and preferences. Belief in the absurd, on the other hand," Camus continues, "teaches the opposite according to our definition. If I convince myself that this life has no meaning other than absurdity, if I believe that all its balance results from the

constant contradiction between my conscious rebellion and the clarity in which it hides, then in debate, I must argue that it is not about living well but about living long. In this case, all value judgments are nullified" [Camus 2013, 42].

With this statement, Camus raises a controversial issue. The idea that living long is preferable to living well is characteristic of a medically unhealthy individual. His view resembles that of a terminally ill adolescent who has not yet fully enjoyed life. In reality, the world itself is not absurd. Rather, the absurd lies in resisting its nature and in the passionate, irrational desire for the "light" (the ideal world) that echoes in the human soul. Thus, absurdity does not exist in either man or the world alone but in their unity.

ANALYSIS

Camus states: "We cannot live without recognizing this fate as absurd; if we do not do everything we can to maintain this absurdity, renewed by our consciousness, then life means living with the absurd." To apply this to life, one must first look at it... Thus, one of the only consistent philosophical processes is rebellion. This is man's eternal contradiction and his own darkness. He opposes the world at every moment..."

In this way, Camus contrasts the spirit of suicide (which, in a certain sense, accepts the absurd) with the spirit of those condemned to death, that is, with the spirit of renouncing conscience and death. According to him, this rebellion ensures the significance and grandeur of life, elevating one's consciousness and pride to a high position.

The absurd philosophy that Camus sought to absolutize arose from the catastrophe caused by the two world wars of the 20th century. Replacing the problem of conflicting reason and faith with the vital force of belief, Camus ultimately grants the "absurd man" of *The Myth of Sisyphus* the figure of a "Nietzschean aristocrat": the absurd man, proud of his newfound strength, does not see himself as a proud and solitary judge who passes judgment on others. In doing so, Camus equates Sisyphus with the gods.

As Suvon Meli has pointed out, "Literature portrays humans in various forms and conditions. The author's attitude is felt in every created character, landscape, or situation, and this attitude is also a certain interpretation. However, in the great artistic monuments created by humanity, the depicted and expressed states of being possess such imperceptible waves and currents that it is completely impossible to understand and interpret them immediately and definitively." [Meli 2020, 13 – 14].

Camus' characters are complex, and it may be difficult

for readers to understand their absurd, unhappy, and happy experiences. However, it is not hard to see the tragic and unfortunate fate of his characters in his works. Yet, understanding Camus' interpretation of unhappiness as a singular experience is quite difficult. The means of overcoming oneself lies in tragically transforming oneself. In this sense, his works do not merely depict tragic events but also testify to Camus' concept of rebellion. If this is the case, then even in an unhappy world, happiness must also be felt—a notion that exemplifies Camusian philosophy.

In most of Camus' works, the world is depicted as incomprehensible and absurd for human beings. In his novels, characters often suffer and perish without explanation. However, when confronted with absurdity and misfortune, they sometimes decide to rebel against their suffering.

In one of his studies, the Japanese – born French professor Hiroki Taura concludes: "Camus' characters find their happiness in hopeless and unfortunate situations" [Taura 2004, 11]. Like X. Taura, we also observe that Camus' characters react to an unhappy world in unexpected ways. When faced with despair due to their conflict with the world, Camus' characters often make surprising and astonishing choices. Yet, we see a common theme in his work: the search for meaning and the desire to find happiness in the world. Humans know how to live, but understanding why they live, grasping the purpose of their existence, is difficult—and sometimes, they never come to know it at all.

RESULTS

Camus recalls certain events that fade into futility and then distract a person from daily life. For example, a young man who has reached the age of thirty and is striving toward the future creates a situation for himself, experiencing the impact of time's flow. His goal is to carry it through without resistance. The tomorrow he once sought to build now gradually reveals the horizon of his own death. Thus, Camus returns to what he considers the most dominant element of the absurd: the death of a loved one. On the one hand, he becomes convinced of life's inevitable end, while on the other, he perceives the world's strange appearance and adopts the form of a "dead body" — "he is now an immobile body, affirming the existence of those who have suddenly disappeared" [Camus 2013, 30].

The common feature of these various events is that, although everyday life holds pragmatic meaning, these occurrences deprive it of that meaning. The existential experience simply signifies a detachment from the organized, formalized world of daily life. A person who feels alien to both himself and the world begins to

question why he is living; he possesses only his own belief and fate.

The Stranger reveals a story about a character who is indifferent to everything around him. The novel is based on the principles of individualism, portraying a protagonist, Meursault, who believes himself to be sincere and self – loving. He ignores all social phenomena and grants himself the freedom to live according to his absurd reactions (living for himself).

The main conflict of Camus' protagonist lies between two poles: alienation (self – isolation) and social integration. On the first pole, the feeling of loneliness in an incomprehensible and "strange" world is vividly depicted in Meursault's character. He is alienated from others, from social norms, and from human emotions. Before killing the Arab, Meursault had sought to distance himself from others, even from his loved ones, to live without worries or suffering, believing that he had achieved happiness. To him, others seemed to be mere obstacles to his happiness. In Meursault, we see a character associated with a certain indifference, extreme passivity, or apathy.

On the other pole, Meursault develops a romantic relationship—though not particularly serious—with Marie, an old acquaintance, and maintains a friendship with his neighbor Raymond. In the final part of the novel, after being imprisoned for murder, Meursault begins to reflect on his relationships with others and realizes that isolation is not necessary: "Juda ko'plardan beri, mana, birinchi marta onamni o'yladim" [Камю 2013, 190]. Furthermore, in the last moments of his life, while awaiting execution, he develops a desire to live: "Mana, men, men ham qayta boshdan yashashga tayyor turibman" [Камю 2013, 120].

DISCUSSION

Ukrainian literary and aesthetics theorist Yuriy Borev, in the mid – 20th century, interpreted Camus' portrayal of lonely individuals as both a force of society and a symbol of humanity's hope, explaining their unification in the process of dispersion:

"It emerged as a result of two conflicting reasons. The first (important, but insufficient on its own) is egocentrism. The second is the mechanical nature of modern civilization (progress), which unites individuals while simultaneously being absorbed by the colossal mechanisms of the state. The modern bureaucratic system, especially in its ultimate form—totalitarian governance—is devoid of vitality. As individuality is suppressed under the weight of collectivity, as the person is broken down and absorbed into an alien existence, the individual is reduced to a mere part of the societal machine. The type of unification characteristic of mid – 20th – century individuals in

Camus' works leads to a desire for solitude. Fearful of merging into a soulless mechanical mass that opposes humanity, people do not seek paths of human unity but rather choose the road of separation. These ideas find their reflection in existentialist art." [Borev 2011, 174 – 175].

Indeed, Camus' character Meursault appears as an extremely complex, extraordinary, and unique being. On the surface, Meursault leads an ordinary life like everyone else – he works at a government job and is occupied with daily tasks. However, his character is exceptionally sincere, free from hypocrisy, and indifferent to others' opinions about him. He does not even consider what others think of him. What sets him apart is his inability to accept the formal life that the rest of society has adopted and follows. Because of this trait, Meursault feels alienated not only from society and its entire system but even from the reader.

The events unfolding in society, human interactions, Meursault's inability to align with society, his alienation from others, the fact that he is misunderstood, and all the inconsistencies in his thoughts confirm his sense of detachment. Furthermore, Camus views man as a being disconnected from nature and the cosmos. In his perspective, the universe is lifeless and abstract. It never understands man, and man is not connected to it. As a result, humans become isolated and lonely, and life turns into a bleak and monotonous existence. However, due to necessity and obligation, humans must endure this meaningless life. This concept, characteristic of Camus' philosophy, is extensively embodied in the character of Meursault. His entire existence within the novel serves this purpose.

Writer and literary scholar Ulugbek Hamdam argues: "The court should have judged Meursault not for whether he cried over his mother's corpse, but for the circumstances of the murder itself." [Hamdamov 2020, 32]. He emphasizes that the court and its participants deemed Meursault an outsider to both themselves and society. While Hamdam seems to sympathize with Meursault to some extent, he actually criticizes certain societal flaws. He poses bitter questions: "Isn't every member of society becoming a stranger to themselves, to their natural state, their childhood, and sincerity? Aren't the real outsiders those who act against their own conscience, those whose hearts and tongues speak differently?"

Additionally, Hamdam states: "Meursault does not change—he speaks exactly what he thinks and feels, refusing to engage in hypocrisy. However, in this world, being sincere turns out to be extremely dangerous. Meursault is sentenced to execution for his honesty. He is deemed an outsider in society precisely because of

his sincerity." [Hamdamov 2020, 32]. With this assessment, he accurately interprets the novel's events and Meursault's condition.

This is why it is extremely difficult for Meursault to conform to others and lead a formalized life like them. It is as if he is caught in the mechanics of daily life, resembling a mechanical human. In his eyes "turmushda hech narsani o'zgartirib bo'lmaydi, hammasi doim birday" [Камю 2014, 49].

CONCLUSION

Camus' novella *The Stranger* may seem simple to the general audience, but for a more discerning readership, Meursault's story is free from such a narrow interpretation. In reality, Meursault represents the quintessential figure of a 20th – century Western citizen, whose actions exhibit informality and unconventionality in response to his absurd world.

Of course, Meursault did not mourn his mother's death, but his sentence takes on a different dimension. In fact, the verdict against him is not solely for the murder he committed but rather for his lack of mourning over his mother's death, his nonconformity to societal norms, and his refusal to ask for forgiveness. This highlights the absurdity of a so – called "healthy" society that cannot find direction even on its smoothest path. He is considered a "selfish man." Meursault can be seen as a person marginalized by ethics and high morality.

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