

People's Democratic Republic of Algeria
Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research
Amar Thelidji University, Laghouat
Faculty of Letters and Languages
Department of English



A Philosophical Interpretation of Albert Camus's Postmodernist Literary Endeavor in *The Stranger* (1942)

A Dissertation Submitted to the Department of English in Partial Fulfilment for the
Requirements of Master Degree in Civilization and Literature

Presented by:

Chouib Mohammed

Supervised by:

Dr. Bentahar Soumia

Board of Examiners:

- Mr. Khalfa Sayah, University of Laghouat, Chairman
- Dr. Bentahar Soumia, University of Lagouat, Supervisor
- Mrs. Mouissa Fattom, University of Laghouat, Examiner

2022-2023

Dedication

This work is a reflection of my unwavering determination, perseverance, and passion. It represents a significant milestone in my academic journey, and I am proud of the effort that I have put into it. I dedicate this work to myself for my commitment to achieving my goals and for the perseverance that I have shown in pursuing my dreams.

I also want to express my gratitude to my supervisor, who has provided invaluable guidance and support throughout this journey. Your expertise, constructive feedback, and encouragement have been instrumental in shaping this work and my academic growth. I am grateful for the opportunity to have worked with you and for the knowledge and insights that you have imparted to me.

Therefore, I dedicate this work to myself and my supervisor, for our shared commitment to academic excellence and for the perseverance that we have demonstrated in pursuing our goals.

Acknowledgements

I am filled with gratitude as I write this acknowledgment, looking back on the journey that led to this moment. This would not have been possible without the unwavering support of my family, whose love and encouragement kept me going even when I felt overwhelmed by the challenges ahead. To my supervisor, who guided me through every step of the process with patience and wisdom, I owe a debt of gratitude that can never be fully repaid. Your mentorship has always been invaluable to me, both personally and academically. Thank you.

I also extend heartfelt thanks to all those who offered their time and expertise along the way, from librarians who helped track down hard-to-find sources, to fellow colleagues and friends including Mr. Fouad, Mr. Faudel as well as Ms. Aicha who provided much-needed support in moments of doubt. Thank you all.

And finally, to myself, thank you for believing in your dreams and working tirelessly to make them a reality. This represents not only an academic achievement, but also a personal milestone and triumph.

Abstract

This dissertation uses a philosophical framework to understand the postmodernist literary endeavor of the French philosopher, Albert Camus (1913-1960), in his acclaimed novel, *The Stranger* (1942). Since Camus's book has been abundantly and excessively read as an existentialist work of fiction, the current dissertation, however, chooses to use an interdisciplinary approach that seeks to understand the novel's postmodern dimension. Through the lens of the philosophical triad of Derrida, Foucault, and Baudrillard, this dissertation explores how Camus employs postmodern literary techniques in *The Stranger* to deconstruct meaning, challenge power dynamics, and blur the lines between fiction and reality. While Camus's philosophy is often situated within modernism, *The Stranger* exhibits numerous postmodern qualities that point to Camus's prescience as a writer on the cusp of a new era in literature. In bringing these three postmodern philosophical strands together through a close reading of *The Stranger*, this dissertation has shed new light on Camus as a postmodern thinker. His blending of existential philosophy with postmodern storytelling techniques has subtly yet profoundly revolutionized narrative form and pointed the way toward the radically fragmentary and self-referential literature that would emerge in the late twentieth century.

Keywords: Camus; *The Stranger*; postmodern perspective; deconstruction; power dynamics; narrative revolution.

Table of Contents

Dedication	i
Acknowledgements	ii
Abstract	iii
Table of Contents	iv
General Introduction	1

Chapter I: Postmodernism in Literature: A Triad of Philosophical Influences

Introduction.....	9
1. Jacques Derrida’s Deconstruction: Challenging Fixed Meanings	10
1.1 Deconstruction and its Objectives.....	10
1.2 Fragmentation and the Destabilization of Meaning	12
2. Michel Foucault’s Power/Knowledge Dichotomy	15
2.1 The Relationship Between Power, Discourse, and Truth.....	15
2.2 Challenging Traditional Narratives and Dominant Ideologies	16
3. Jean Baudrillard’s Metafiction and Intertextuality.....	18
3.1 Baudrillard’s Perspective on Intertextuality.....	19
3.2 Baudrillard’s Hyperreality.....	20
Conclusion.....	21

Chapter II: The Reception of *The Stranger* as a Postmodern Work

Introduction.....	23
1. Scholarly Perspectives on <i>The Stranger</i> as a Postmodern Novel.....	23

2. An Ambiguous Novel Inviting a Multiplicity of Readings.....	28
3. Influence and Legacy	30
3.1 Influence on Existentialism	30
3.2 Influence on Absurdism.....	31
3.3 Influence on Postmodernism.....	32
Conclusion	33
 Chapter III: Using a Philosophical Triad to Understand Camus’s	
Postmodernist Thinking in <i>The Stranger</i> (1942)	
Introduction.....	35
1. Deconstruction of Meaning and Identity	35
1.1 The fragmented nature of Meursault’s identity	35
1.2 The Absurdity and Meaningless of Meursault’s Actions and Decisions	37
1.3 Meursault’s Detachment from Societal Norms.....	39
2. Language, Discourse and Power.....	41
2.1 Examining Instances of Linguistic Play and Word Games	42
2.2 The Limitations of Language in Expressing Truth and Meaning	44
2.3 Camus’s Use of Language & Narration Structure	46
2.4 The Power Dynamics Between Characters.....	48
3. Metafiction and Intertextuality	49
3.1 The Novel’s Metafictional Elements	50
3.2 Hyperreality in <i>The Stranger</i>	52
3.3 Intertextuality to Other Works of Literature	53
Conclusion	55

General Conclusion.....	57
Works Cited.....	59
ملخص	64

General Introduction

General Introduction

General Introduction

Albert Camus's *The Stranger* (1942) is a complex work of literature that can be interpreted through a postmodern lens. The postmodern movement in literature has emerged in the mid-20th century, challenging traditional narratives and questioning the modernist nature of reality, truth, and language. The novel was written and published in 1942 during the Second World War, a time of great social upheaval and political turmoil. The war had exposed the limitations of reason and progress, and had raised important questions about the nature of existence and the relationship between the individual and society. *The Stranger* takes place in Algeria during the early 20th century, when France had colonized the region. Against this backdrop of colonialism and cultural upheaval, Camus tells the story of Meursault; a man who is detached from society and seemingly indifferent to his own fate. The novel has garnered significant critical attention and various interpretations since its publication.

Dr. Sujata Bamane's (2014) article "Faith in Man's Dignity: A Study of Albert Camus's *The Outsider*" delves into the thought-provoking themes of faith and man's dignity in Albert Camus's novel *The Stranger*. She focuses on the main character, Meursault, who begins the story as a self-absorbed individual but undergoes a transformation and becomes a man of truth by the end of the novel. The paper explores Meursault's journey towards redemption and salvation, and how he achieves this without the support of faith in God. Dr. Bamane argues that Meursault's obedience to his conscience and his rejection of societal norms and values highlight the dignity and value of human life. The paper also delves into how Meursault's experience of being confined and alone, leads him to a greater understanding of himself and the truth (25). This transformation brings him closer to the beauty of life and the universe. The paper ultimately aims

General Introduction

to study how Meursault's journey towards salvation without faith in God (26) highlights the importance of individuality and self-discovery in the pursuit of a meaningful life.

Jean-Paul Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* (2002) is a seminal work that can provide a valuable framework for understanding the philosophical underpinnings of *The Stranger* from a postmodern perspective. Moreover, Sartre's book explores the ways in which individuals experience emotions like anxiety, despair, and alienation, which are all emotions that Meursault experiences throughout the novel. Sartre's philosophy emphasizes the importance of confronting and accepting these feelings, rather than attempting to escape or deny them (Sartre 89).

One notable postmodern perspective on *The Stranger* is offered by Patricia Waugh in her (1992) book, *Postmodernism: A Reader*. In this study, Waugh argues that the novel's protagonist, Meursault, embodies the postmodern condition of alienation and disconnection from society. She suggests that Camus portrays Meursault as a character who is unable to connect with others due to his lack of emotions and his refusal to conform to societal norms.

Another influential postmodern reading of *The Stranger* comes from Jean-Francois Lyotard's essay "Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?" (1998). In this seminal essay, Lyotard suggests that the novel can be seen as an example of the postmodern rejection of grand narratives and the fragmentation of language and meaning. He argues that the novel's lack of a clear moral message or resolution is emblematic of the postmodern condition of uncertainty and skepticism towards established values (78). This perspective has important implications for literary analysis, as it challenges the traditional ways of interpreting literature that rely on the assumption of a unified and stable reality and a clear moral message.

Within the same scope, Robert Zaretsky's biography of Albert Camus, *Albert Camus:*

General Introduction

Elements of a Life (2010), is a book that tells the story of Camus's life and the cultural and political context in which he wrote *The Stranger*. The book provides insights into Camus's personal experiences, his relationships, and the events that shaped his worldview. From a postmodern perspective, Zaretsky's biography helps us understand how Camus's ideas were influenced by the post-World War II era of skepticism and uncertainty towards grand narratives. Zaretsky explores the themes of absurdity and existentialism in Camus's work, including *The Stranger*, and suggests that Camus's rejection of traditional values and his emphasis on individual freedom and subjectivity reflect a postmodern perspective. Moreover, Zaretsky's biography also highlights the ways in which Camus's personal experiences during World War II and the French Resistance shaped his ideas. Camus's experiences during this time led him to reject traditional political ideologies and to embrace a more nuanced and complex understanding of human nature, which is reflected in *The Stranger*.

To expand on the literature review, Alice Kaplan's book *Looking for The Stranger: Albert Camus and the Life of a Literary Classic* (2016) provides an insightful analysis of the cultural and historical context of *The Stranger*. She argues that the novel was a response to the trauma and uncertainty of the Second World War, and reflects the disillusionment of French society at the time, in addition to exploring the relationship between Sartre and Albert Camus, who were both prominent figures in the existentialist movement but had different views on the philosophy (Kaplan 23).

Furthermore, David Detmer's book *Sartre Explained: From Bad Faith to Authenticity* (2008) provides an in-depth analysis of Sartre's existentialist philosophy and its relevance to *The Stranger*. Detmer argues that Sartre's ideas on consciousness and the self are reflected in Meursault's character, who is depicted as a detached and disengaged observer of his own life.

General Introduction

Detmer also explores the novel's themes of freedom and authenticity, which are central to Sartre's philosophy. (Detmer 72)

Postmodernism, characterized by its skepticism towards grand narratives and fixed meanings, provides a valuable framework for analyzing Camus's existentialist and absurdist themes in the novel. This dissertation draws upon a triad of influential postmodern thinkers, namely Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and Jean Baudrillard to elucidate the postmodern elements present in *The Stranger* and shed light on the novel's reception, philosophical underpinnings, and narrative techniques.

While Albert Camus's *The Stranger* has been extensively analyzed through an existentialist lens, the postmodern qualities of the work have been relatively overlooked. Camus wrote the novel in 1942, just as postmodern philosophies that challenged the stability of meaning, reality, and truth were emerging. *The Stranger* systematically dismantles the meaning and coherence of language, identity, and narrative. However, few analyses have examined how the absurdist work achieves this through its embodiment of postmodern concepts derived from the theories of Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and Jean Baudrillard. This dissertation aims at filling this gap by addressing the following questions:

1. How does the chosen philosophical framework help us understand Albert Camus's postmodernist literary approach in *The Stranger*?
2. How can Jacques Derrida's deconstruction theories be applied to destabilize fixed meanings within *The Stranger*?
3. In what ways does Michel Foucault's power/knowledge theory challenge traditional narratives within *The Stranger*?

General Introduction

4. What are some examples of Jean Baudrillard's hyperreal, metafictional elements found throughout *The Stranger*?

Besides analyzing Camus's *The Stranger* from postmodern and philosophical perspectives, the present study will also focus on two main objectives: first, to analyze the ways in which postmodern philosophical ideas, particularly those of Derrida, Foucault, and Baudrillard, are present in Albert Camus's *The Stranger*. This objective involves examining the novel's themes, language, and narrative structure to identify the postmodern features and techniques that Camus employs. Second, to investigate how the themes of alienation, purposelessness, and moral relativism in *The Stranger* reflect broader cultural shifts towards postmodernism and a rejection of traditional beliefs in objective truth. By achieving these objectives, this study would help to demonstrate how *The Stranger* fits within the broader context of postmodern literature, and how it contributes to the ongoing philosophical and literary discussions about postmodernism.

To achieve the above mentioned goals, we see it necessary to employ an interdisciplinary approach as it allows to draw pertinent insights from as well as meaningful connections between two different frames: philosophical and postmodern. The study utilizes a triad of philosophical influences: Jacques Derrida's deconstructionist approach to language, Michel Foucault's power/knowledge dichotomy, and Jean Baudrillard's theories on metafiction and intertextuality as tools for analyzing the novel's themes, characters, and narrative structure. In order to gather data for this analysis, the researcher will conduct an in-depth examination of primary sources such as the novel itself, as well secondary sources including scholarly articles that discuss relevant concepts within postmodernism. Additionally, the researcher will engage with critical debates surrounding Camus's work by reviewing various interpretations of it across different

General Introduction

literary movements. Data collected through these methods will be analyzed using thematic and stylistic analysis that allow for identification of recurring patterns or ideas throughout the text.

This dissertation consists of three chapters. In the first chapter, we will delve into the three key postmodern philosophers whose theories have greatly influenced literary discourse: Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and Jean Baudrillard. Derrida's concept of deconstruction challenges fixed meanings and seeks to expose the inherent instability of language and signs. Fragmentation, as a deconstructive tool, becomes instrumental in destabilizing conventional interpretations. Moving on to Foucault, his ideas on power and knowledge reveal the interplay between power structures, dominant ideologies, and the construction of truth. By challenging traditional narratives, Foucault's theories provide insights into the postmodern critique of societal norms. Finally, Baudrillard's exploration of metafiction and intertextuality examines the dissolution of reality and the emergence of the hyperreal. These three philosophical influences form the theoretical foundation for understanding postmodernism in literature and will guide our analysis of *The Stranger*. The second chapter will focus on the reception of *The Stranger* as a postmodern work. We will examine the scholarly perspectives and critical interpretations that have emerged over time, exploring how the novel has been situated within the broader context of postmodern literature. The multiple readings and inherent ambiguity in *The Stranger* contribute to its postmodern nature, inviting diverse interpretations and challenging fixed meanings. Finally, we will discuss the influence and legacy of *The Stranger* in the literary world, considering its impact on subsequent postmodern works and its enduring relevance. In the third chapter, we will employ the philosophical triad of Derrida, Foucault, and Baudrillard to analyze *The Stranger* from a Sartrean postmodern perspective. We will explore how the deconstruction of meaning and identity is reflected in the fragmented nature of the protagonist, Meursault. The

General Introduction

absurdism and meaninglessness of Meursault's actions and decisions will be examined in light of Sartrean existentialism. Furthermore, we will explore Foucault's knowledge/power nexus in the novel, as well as Baudrillard's intertextuality and hyperreality.

It is hoped that this study will contribute new insights into *The Stranger* and postmodern literature as a whole as it ultimately seeks to demonstrate how *The Stranger* can be read as a complex and challenging example of postmodernism that continues to resonate with readers today. Not only does studying *The Stranger* from a postmodern perspective allow for a deeper understanding of the novel's themes and motifs and situates it within a larger cultural and literary context, but it could shed light on the broader implications beyond literary studies. Postmodernism has had an impact on many different areas of thought and culture, from art and architecture to politics and social theory. By exploring how these ideas intersect with Camus's novel, the author could help shed light on larger cultural trends or intellectual currents.

Chapter One:

Postmodernism in Literature: A Triad of Philosophical Influences

Introduction

Postmodernism has emerged in the mid-20th century as a complex movement, spanning a diverse range of disciplines such as art, architecture, literature, philosophy, and social theory. It is a reaction against modernist principles that emphasized universal truths and objective knowledge. Postmodernism promotes the fragmentation, complexity, and contingency of the human experience (Lyotard, “The Postmodern Condition” 4).

As a heterogeneous philosophy, postmodernism draws from a range of philosophical traditions, incorporating elements from existentialism, structuralism, deconstruction, and poststructuralism. Existentialism, emphasizing subjective experience and authenticity, aligns with postmodernism’s focus on subjectivity and the plurality of meanings (Sartre “Being and Nothingness” 35).

A notable figure in the development of postmodernist thought is Michel Foucault who espouses theories like that found in post-structuralism. Through its focus on the instability of power relationships while rejecting fixed identities as well as hierarchies, post-structuralism challenges mainstream societal norms. Postmodernism builds off these concepts to investigate how power plays a significant role in shaping both Knowledge and Truth claims (Discipline and Punish 72).

Deconstruction theory, proposed by Jacques Derrida, challenges stable meanings as it aims at revealing contradictions and ambiguities present in texts. Highlighting the fluidity and ambiguity of meanings (Of Grammatology 17) is something that Postmodernism achieves through its adoption of a deconstructive approach.

1. Jacques Derrida's Deconstruction: Challenging Fixed Meanings

1.1 Deconstruction and its Objectives

Postmodernism owes much to Jacques Derrida's iconic theory of deconstruction which has significantly impacted fields such as philosophy, literary criticism, and cultural studies. Deconstruction is fundamentally a critical technique that aims at exposing the implicit suppositions and contradictions in a given text or discourse.

According to Derrida, language is not a transparent vehicle for communication, but rather a complex system of signs that is always in flux, constantly undermining its own meanings and hierarchies (qtd. in Culler, "Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction" 93). One of the key principles of deconstruction is that all discourse is characterized by a tension between opposing concepts or binaries, such as presence/absence, evil/good, male/female, or self/other. These binaries are not fixed or stable, but are instead constantly shifting and changing. (Derrida, "Of Grammatology" 3). Deconstruction seeks to destabilize these binary oppositions by revealing and exposing the ways in which they are constructed as well as the inherent meanings and assumptions that underlie them (Rivkin and Ryan 221).

By challenging the concept of a single and absolute truth in texts and discourses, Derrida contends that all texts exhibit diverse meanings and interpretations and that there is no single, ascertained meaning. Instead, meaning is developed through the reader's interaction with the text and is constantly open to revision (Positions 29).

Another objective of deconstruction is to challenge dominant power structures and ideologies. Derrida argues that all discourse is distinguished by a hierarchy of meaning, in which some notions and ideas are given more weight than others. Deconstruction aims to topple these

hierarchies and expose the ways in which prevailing meanings and values are created and upheld (Of Grammatology 158).

Some key techniques of deconstruction include exploring the ambiguities of language through double reading in which an ambiguous term is examined in two irreconcilable senses (Culler, “Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism” 92), as well as privileging writing over speech since writing reveals the ambiguities and dissemination of meaning (Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” 308).

One way that Derrida employs his deconstructive techniques can be seen in his exploration of logocentrism, an idea that highlights how Western philosophy values speech more than it values writing, which is exemplified in his essay “Signature Event Context”. Derrida argues that the opposition between speech and writing is not a natural or objective distinction but rather a cultural and historical construct. This means that the distinction between speech and writing is not inherent in language itself, but rather is created by cultural and social factors. According to Derrida, writing is often seen as a secondary form of communication, subservient to speech, because it is seen as being less immediate and less able to convey the speaker’s intent. However, Derrida argues that this distinction is arbitrary and that writing can be just as powerful and meaningful as speech. Derrida argues that speech and writing are interdependent and mutually-constitutive. In other words, they are both important and necessary for communication and meaning-making. Furthermore, Derrida shows how the privileging of speech over writing has been used to marginalize and subjugate certain groups within society. For example, those who cannot speak due to physical disabilities or language barriers are often excluded from dominant discourses that prioritize speech over writing. By questioning and destabilizing this binary opposition between speech and writing, Derrida’s deconstructive approach opens up new

possibilities for communication and understanding that are more inclusive and respectful of diverse forms of expression.

In summary, Jacques Derrida's objective of deconstruction is to question the notion of fixed meanings and unified interpretations, emphasizing the play of differences and the absence of a definitive center in texts (Norris 29). Arguing that texts are not stable or self-contained entities with singular meanings, Derrida's theory of deconstruction questions conventional understandings of language, meaning, and power. This means that there is no one 'correct' interpretation of a text, and that the power dynamics of society can influence how we understand what we read. In other words, Derrida argues that we should not just accept what we read at face value, but should instead be critical readers who think carefully about the different meanings that a text could have. Deconstruction aims to uncover the implicit assumptions and inconsistencies in language with the sole purpose of revealing the complex and often hidden ways in which power relations operate in society. This is done by analyzing the fundamental structures of meaning via breaking down the basic building blocks of meaning, such as words, concepts, and ideas, and questioning how they are upheld and put together. It undermines the dichotomies between opposing concepts and highlights the inherent fluidity and uncertainty of language, encouraging receptiveness to alternative viewpoints and questioning established and hierarchical ways of thinking.

1.2 Fragmentation and the Destabilization of Meaning

In his essay "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" (1970), Derrida argues that all language is inherently unstable and subject to multiple interpretations (278). To achieve this fragmentation of meaning, Derrida developed a method called

“deconstruction”, as he once opined that deconstruction never had any meaning or interest, at least according to its own intentions which must also be deconstructed, except in relation to the strategic field of a certain understanding of Being and Truth. Referring to the philosophical concepts of ontology and epistemology, “Being” refers to the nature of existence, while “Truth” refers to what it means for a statement to be true.

That is to say, these concepts are central to the deconstructive method, and that the method itself needs to be understood in relation to these concepts. Its first acts are therefore attempts at determinations more rigorous than those we have inherited from tradition. By being more rigorous, deconstruction aims to reveal the complexities and contradictions in language and culture that are often overlooked or taken for granted. This means questioning long-held assumptions and beliefs, and being willing to consider alternative interpretations and perspectives. By doing this, deconstruction helps us to move beyond the limitations of tradition and to develop a more critical understanding of the world around us (Derrida 283).

Moreover, he believed that language’s instability stems from its reliance on these dichotomies which creates hierarchies between concepts. He famously coined the term “différance” to describe this constant deferral of meaning within language.

Derrida believed that language is not a stable tool for communication but rather inherently unstable. In his book *Of Grammatology* (1976), he examined the relationship between speech and writing, arguing that writing, which lacks the presence of the author or speaker, is always deferred in relation to speech (20). This means that writing relies on an absent signified to convey meaning, making it subject to multiple interpretations.

Furthermore, Derrida emphasized the importance of context in understanding language. He argued that words derive their meanings from their relationships with other words within a particular context. Therefore, he rejected any notion of fixed or absolute meanings attached to words since they are constantly changing based on new contexts and interpretations (Derrida 11-12).

The French philosopher challenged the notion that texts have stable and determinate meanings, as he developed the theory of deconstruction which holds that the meaning of words and signs depends on a chain of references to other words and signs. According to Derrida, “there is no transcendental signified” or ultimate meaning, only “a fabric of traces” (Of Grammatology 44). In Derrida’s view, meaning is endlessly deferred and dispersed in a play of references he called “différance” (Margins of Philosophy 11).

Derrida argued that “the text has no stable identity, no stable origin, no stable end” (Of Grammatology 44). Rather, meaning is produced through “the play of differences or traces of differences” between words and concepts (Margins of Philosophy 12). As Derrida wrote, “Différance is the systematic play of differences, of the traces of differences, of the spacing by which elements are related to each other” (11). This process of endless referral shatters the notion that meanings are fixed or determinate.

Derrida’s theory of deconstruction involves close readings of texts to tease out their contradictions and instabilities. By deconstructing texts, Derrida aimed to show how they “subvert or render suspect their own rhetorical claims to coherence and unity” (Of Grammatology 44). Derrida aims to show that “there are only contexts without any beginning” and that we should continually question the “metaphysics of presence” that presumes a definitive

meaning (Limited Inc 129). Ultimately, for Derrida, fragmentation and the endless play of meaning is unavoidable due to the intrinsic instability of language itself (Structure, Sign, and Play 11). Overall, Derrida's work reveals how meaning is endlessly fragmented, dispersed, and destabilized through the process of "différance".

2. Michel Foucault's Power/Knowledge Dichotomy

Michel Foucault theorized a mutually constitutive relationship between power and knowledge, arguing that "power and knowledge directly imply one another" (Power/Knowledge 32). Knowledge, rather than being objective truth, is inexorably linked to systems of power that produce it; it serves the interests of those in power and is shaped by the "rules of right" that they establish (Power/Knowledge 27). Those who control discourse control what "counts" as knowledge and thus wield power over others, portraying knowledge as "truth." Conversely, discourses that claim the status of knowledge reinforce power structures by legitimizing them.

2.1 The Relationship Between Power, Discourse, and Truth

Foucault was a French philosopher who believed that power is not just something possessed by individuals or groups but rather it permeates all aspects of society. In his book *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1*, Foucault examines the history of sexuality and argues that our understanding of sex and sexuality is closely tied to power relations. He contends that discourse plays a key role in constructing our understanding of sexuality, and that the power to define and regulate sexuality is distributed throughout society. Plus, he argues that power operates through discourses or systems of knowledge and language that shape how we understand the world around us (Discipline and Punish 92).

According to Foucault, discourses are not neutral but rather they reflect the interests and values of those in positions of power. He argued that discourses create what he called “regimes of truth” which determine what is accepted as true within a particular society at a given time (Foucault 131). In this way, power operates through language and knowledge production. Those in positions of authority use their control over discourse to shape our understanding of reality while marginalizing alternative perspectives. Moreover, Foucault emphasized the importance of examining the ways in which individuals internalize these dominant discourses and participate in their own subjugation. He coined the ‘power-knowledge’ nexus to describe how both knowledge production and distribution are shaped by relations of power (Foucault, “Power/Knowledge” 27).

In his article “The Subject and Power” (1982), Foucault provides a yet groundbreaking analysis of the nature of power, arguing that it is not merely a possession of individuals or groups but rather a force that permeates all aspects of society. He also suggests that power is not just repressive but productive, in the sense that it serves in creating and shaping the subjectivities of individuals.

Additionally, he explores the relationship between power and discourse, contending that discourse itself is a site of power relations (Foucault, “The Archaeology of Knowledge” 92). Overall, Michel Foucault’s theory regarding the relationship between power, discourse, and truth highlights how social structures operate beyond individual actors while emphasizing the role played by language in shaping our understanding of reality.

2.2 Challenging Traditional Narratives and Dominant Ideologies

One of Foucault’s key strategies for challenging traditional narratives and dominant ideologies was to engage in what he called “genealogical” analysis (The Use of Pleasure 139-

64). According to Foucault, genealogy involves tracing the historical development of a particular discourse or practice in order to uncover the ways in which power operates within it. By using genealogy to expose the contingency and construction of dominant narratives, Foucault believed that it was possible to open up new possibilities for resistance and transformation.

In his essay “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” (1978), Foucault discusses the concept of genealogy and its relationship to Nietzsche’s philosophy. By problematizing ‘the present’, what seems natural and necessary, genealogy opens up space for alternatives. Foucault argues that genealogy involves “a historical ontology of ourselves” that seeks to uncover the “conditions of possibility” for our present beliefs and practices. It enables a move from ‘what says’ to ‘who does the speaking’. Plus, genealogy questions who has the power to shape discourse and define truth, i.e. dominant narratives, beliefs, and ideas that are accepted as objective and universal (Foucault 142)

In his book *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975), Foucault traces the development of the modern prison system and argues that it is a product of larger shifts in power relations and modes of governance (*Discipline and Punish* 9). By exposing the ways in which the prison operates to maintain social control, Foucault aims to challenge dominant discourses about crime, punishment, and justice.

In his essay “The Subject and Power”, Foucault explores the relationship between power and subjectivity. He argues that power operates not only through explicit forms of coercion, but also through the production of subjectivity and the shaping of individual identities. This allowed Foucault to question taken-for-granted aspects of systems like psychiatry, medicine, the penal system and sexuality. His genealogies sought to enable intellectual and political resistance to

dominant forms of power. By uncovering the ways in which power operates at the level of subjectivity, Foucault seeks to challenge dominant ideologies and open up new possibilities for resistance and transformation (Foucault 777-795).

3. Jean Baudrillard's Metafiction and Intertextuality

Jean Baudrillard was a French philosopher and cultural critic who explored the relationship between language, reality, and representation. He developed the concept of “hyperreality”, which refers to a state in which our experiences are mediated by simulations or representations rather than direct encounters with reality. Baudrillard’s theory of hyperreality is closely tied to his ideas about metafiction and intertextuality. Metafiction refers to fiction that critically reflects on the relationship between fiction and reality (Waugh 4). In his book *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981), he argues that in contemporary society, we have lost touch with any sense of an original referent or truth (Baudrillard 6). Instead, he suggests that all meaning is constructed through layers of references and signs that refer only to other signs. Furthermore, Baudrillard believed that this process of signification creates a self-referential loop in which fiction becomes indistinguishable from reality. He called this phenomenon “simulacra” and argued that it leads to a breakdown in our ability to distinguish between what is real and what is merely a representation (Baudrillard 12).

Overall, Jean Baudrillard’s theory regarding metafiction explores how meaning can be constructed through multiple layers of references while intertextuality highlights how texts draw on each other for their meanings. Both concepts contribute significantly to understanding his broader work on hyperreality.

3.1 Baudrillard's Perspective on Intertextuality

Baudrillard's conceptualization of intertextuality reflects his postmodern and post-structuralist perspective, highlighting the socially constructed nature of meaning and the fluid boundaries between texts. For Baudrillard, intertextuality is "not a relation between texts, but a relation among simulacra" (*The Ecstasy of Communication* 67). He views texts as circulating signs embedded in wider systems of cultural, social, and economic relations rather than as self-contained objects (*Simulacra and Simulation* 21). According to Baudrillard, meaning arises not from intrinsic connections between texts, which are the connections between different parts of a text that are based on their internal qualities, but rather from their operations within systems of signs and simulations, which is the relationship to other texts or to external factors (*The Ecstasy of Communication* 76).

Baudrillard argues the "intertext" does not exist, and that there are only textual simulacra differentially relating within hyperreal systems. For instance, Baudrillard argues that when we watch a film or television show, we are not connecting with reality but with a simulated reality that has detached from its original meaning. This simulated reality is part of a larger hyperreal system of media images and representations that has become dominant in contemporary society. As a result, it has become difficult to distinguish between what is real and what is simulated (*Simulacra and Simulation* 34). For Baudrillard, intertextuality ultimately reveals the arbitrary nature of symbolic meaning and reference, with no "transcendental signified" grounding networks of signs and just the play of simulacra and difference (*The Ecstasy of Communication* 89; 98). Intertextuality thus calls into question concepts like "text" and "author", opening onto a realm of pure simulation.

In other words, Baudrillard's postmodern perspective deconstructs traditional notions of texts, meaning and authorship. He theorizes intertextuality in terms of circulation, simulation and hyperreality in order to critically interrogate conventional humanistic assumptions about language and literature.

3.2 Baudrillard's Hyperreality

Baudrillard's notion of hyperreality is a highly intricate and significant concept in modern philosophy and cultural theory. It describes a state where reality and simulation merge, making it difficult to differentiate between them. In simpler terms, our perception of the world is now heavily influenced by images, media, and other forms of representation which blur the line between what exists in reality and what has been artificially created, such that distinguishing between authentic experiences from manufactured ones is no longer easy or straightforward. As Baudrillard writes, "Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal" (Baudrillard 1).

One of the key examples that Baudrillard uses to illustrate this concept is Disneyland. He argues that Disneyland is not just a theme park, but a total simulation of reality that creates an idealized version of the world in which everything is sanitized, commodified, and packaged for consumption. As Baudrillard puts it, "Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, whereas all of Los Angeles and the America that surrounds it are no longer real, but belong to the hyperreal order and to the order of simulation" (Simulacra and Simulation 12).

According to media theorist Douglas Kellner (2009), Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality has had a significant impact on various fields such as cultural theory, media studies, and philosophy. Kellner suggests that Baudrillard's analysis of the hyperreal and simulation reveals how modern culture and media technologies create novel forms of representation that challenge our perception of reality by blurring the boundary between what is real and what is not (Kellner 98).

Conclusion

The combination of Derrida's deconstruction, Foucault's power/knowledge framework, and Baudrillard's theory of simulacra formed a powerful trinity that influenced postmodern thought and writing. Their ideas challenged traditional notions of truth, meaning, and authority, pushing writers to experiment with language, narrative structure, and the representation of reality. Together, Derrida, Foucault, and Baudrillard laid the groundwork for a literary landscape that embraced fragmentation, intertextuality, and the decentering of meaning, to ultimately shape the postmodern literary movement.

Chapter Two:

The Reception of *The Stranger* as a Postmodern

Work

Introduction

The Stranger (1942) by Albert Camus is often analyzed and discussed as a seminal work of existentialism rather than postmodernism. However, it is possible to interpret the novel through a postmodern lens by examining its themes and narrative techniques in relation to the postmodernist movement. While there is no consensus among scholars regarding the classification of *The Stranger* as a postmodern work, *The Stranger* has been greeted with both positive and negative critical responses when first published in 1942. While some praise Camus's portrayal of the absurdity of the human condition, others criticize the novel for lacking emotional depth and moral significance.

Camus's *The Stranger* has been widely considered a significant work of existentialist literature, yet there are differing opinions regarding its classification as postmodernist. The initial responses to *The Stranger* are divergent, with some celebrating it as a pioneering work on absurdism that transcends traditional moral binaries, while others criticizing it for portraying human life as an unfulfilling, nihilistic experience.

1. Scholarly Perspectives on *The Stranger* as a Postmodern Novel

The novel is predominantly analyzed within the existentialist framework due to Camus's association with the movement. Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980), a prominent existentialist philosopher and contemporary of Camus, argues that the protagonist, Meursault, embodies the absurdity and meaninglessness of human existence. According to Sartre's perspective, the story focuses on the individual's struggle to find meaning in an indifferent and absurd world (Essays in Existentialism 32-33).

The critical reception of *The Stranger* has been varied. Some critics have praised the novel for its rejection of traditional narrative conventions and its exploration of existential themes. For instance, according to literary critic Roland Barthes, *The Stranger* breaks up conventional novelistic language, destroys the novel's architecture and invalidates its psychological and logical premises of discourse (From Work to Text 67). However, other critics have faulted *The Stranger* for its perceived lack of emotional depth and its promotion of a nihilistic worldview. For instance, François Mauriac has criticized the novel for what he sees as its protagonist's lack of humanity and soul, arguing that Meursault's emotional detachment and indifference to social conventions renders him a figure of moral ambiguity and that the novel's emphasis on the meaninglessness and indifference of the universe risks promoting a nihilistic worldview that offers no possibility for positive change. (Le Romancier et Ses Personnages 54)

In her book *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative* (2002), literary scholar H. Porter Abbott discusses *The Stranger* as a postmodern work that challenges traditional narrative structures. Abbott suggests that the novel's fragmented narrative, as well as the protagonist's lack of clear motivation, reflect a postmodern interest in undermining the authority of the author and the coherence of the narrative (The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative 85-86). Abbott further states that *The Stranger* can be considered a postmodernist work because it challenges traditional notions of meaning and truth. Abbott argues that the novel's protagonist, Meursault, is a "total stranger to the idea of meaning" and that his sense of detachment and indifference reflects a postmodernist skepticism towards the possibility of objective truth (Abbott, "*The Stranger*" 132).

Although Abbott's analysis of *The Stranger* is insightful, there may be more to the novel than just its postmodern elements according to the best of the researcher's knowledge. While the

fragmented narrative and Meursault's lack of motivation may be considered postmodern techniques, they also reflect the central existentialist theme of the absurdity of human existence.

Meursault's detachment and indifference can be seen as a response to this existential crisis, rather than a mere reflection of postmodern skepticism. Moreover, Abbott's analysis seems to oversimplify the complexity of the novel. While the narrative fragmentation challenges traditional narrative structure, it also reflects Meursault's subjective experience of time and memory, and highlights the fragmentation of society and the breakdown of communication. Finally, Abbott's analysis overlooks the political and historical context in which the novel was written. *The Stranger* was published in the aftermath of World War II, and can be seen as a response to the trauma and disillusionment of the war. It also addresses issues of colonialism and racism, which are significant to consider when interpreting its themes and messages. To sum up, while Abbott's analysis provides a valuable perspective on *The Stranger* as a postmodern work, it is important to consider a more nuanced and contextualized interpretation to appreciate its complexity and significance.

Similarly, in her analysis of *The Stranger* as a postmodernist work, Julia Kristeva argues that the novel can be seen as an "experiment in meaninglessness" that challenges the notion of rationality and coherence. Kristeva suggests that Meursault's lack of emotional response to his mother's death and his subsequent murder of an Arab reflect a postmodernist rejection of traditional values and morality (Kristeva 41).

Philosopher Jean-Francois Lyotard discusses *The Stranger* in his book *The Postmodern Condition* (1984), using it as an example of what he referred to as postmodernism's "incredulity toward metanarratives" (24). He argues that the novel subverts traditional narrative forms and

character development, which reflects a rejection of grand narratives that have historically provided meaning and coherence to human experience (24).

Linda Hutcheon's *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (2012), offers a detailed analysis of how postmodern literature challenges traditional literary forms and conventions. In the book, Hutcheon examines various postmodern novels and argues that they reflect a cultural and historical shift towards a fragmented, unstable, and uncertain world, as she states that, "*The Stranger* by Albert Camus is a prime example of postmodern literature because it subverts traditional narrative structures and character development" (40). Furthermore, the novel's protagonist, Meursault, is portrayed as an apathetic and detached outsider who lacks emotional depth and a sense of moral responsibility. Camus's use of Meursault as a character who is outside of traditional moral and social norms, Hutcheon argues, reflects the postmodern interest in challenging established literary forms and conventions (41).

Similarly, in her book *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and Philosophy*, Donna Lecourt notes that *The Stranger* poses questions about the nature of reality and our ability to know it (105). She suggests that Camus's use of narrative techniques such as repetition, fragmentation, and unreliable narration highlight the limitations inherent in language when attempting to represent reality accurately.

From an existential lens, Todd Oliver argues in his book *Albert Camus: A Life* that during World War II, Camus participates in the French Resistance and witnesses first-hand the atrocities committed by both sides. This experience leads him to question traditional moral values and embrace a philosophy of existentialism that emphasizes individual freedom and responsibility (Todd 206). According to Todd, these themes are reflected in *The Stranger* particularly through

Meursault's rejection of societal conventions. The novel also explores themes such as alienation, absurdity, and the search for meaning, which are all central ideas in Camus's philosophical thought (Todd 207). That is to say, Todd notes that Camus has created Meursault as a reflection of his own experiences of feeling like an outsider and not belonging to any particular group or community.

Todd Oliver's interpretation of *The Stranger* from an existentialist perspective is compelling, but some insightful critiques can be made out of his analysis. For instance, one could argue that Todd focuses too much on the autobiographical elements of the novel and how Meursault reflects Camus's personal experiences, which risks oversimplifying the novel's artistic and thematic concerns.

Additionally, it could also be argued that his emphasis on individual freedom and responsibility overlooks the societal and cultural constraints that shape Meursault's actions. Despite these critiques, Todd's interpretation highlights the novel's exploration of themes such as alienation, absurdity, and the search for meaning, which are central ideas in Camus's philosophical thought. Ultimately, approaching *The Stranger* from multiple perspectives can help us appreciate the novel's complexity and significance.

The positive reviews for *The Stranger* emphasized its philosophical inquiry and existential themes. Gertrude Stein praises Camus's work as "a great work which asks serenely and violently the great philosophical questions which are at the root of human thought" (qtd. in Lottman 135). Similarly, Quilliot describes it as a perfect representation of absurd humanity that powerfully evoked the meaninglessness and indifference of the universe (*La Mer et les Prisons* 45).

While this interpretation is indeed insightful, it opens room for fruitful criticism. It could be argued that focusing too much on *The Stranger*'s philosophical themes risks overlooking its artistic merits, such as its narrative structure, character development, and language. While the novel does explore philosophical questions, it's important to appreciate it as a work of art that engages with the complexities of human experience. Additionally, it could also be argued that the novel's emphasis on the meaninglessness of the universe can promote a nihilistic worldview that offers no hope or possibility for positive change. However, a more nuanced reading of the novel can reveal moments of human connection and empathy that offer hope in the midst of existential despair. Therefore, while positive reviews of *The Stranger* emphasize its philosophical depth and significance, it is important to approach the novel from multiple perspectives and consider its various layers of meaning and significance.

On the other hand, some critics, such as François Mauriac, fault Camus for what they perceive to be Meursault's lack of humanity. He accuses *The Stranger* of being "emotionally null" and criticizes Meursault as "an automaton, deprived of soul" (*Le Romancier et Ses Personnages* 54). One critique that could be drawn from Mauriac's analysis is that Meursault's apparent lack of emotion may not necessarily be an absence of feeling, but could rather be a rejection of the false emotions and social conventions that dictate how one should feel and behave. Meursault's refusal to conform to these expectations can be seen as a radical act of individual freedom and authenticity, rather than a lack of humanity.

2. An Ambiguous Novel Inviting a Multiplicity of Readings

The Stranger has been subject to multiple readings and interpretations due to its ambiguous nature. In his influential essay "The Death of the Author" (1967), Roland Barthes argues that the meaning of a text is not determined by the author's intentions but by the reader's interpretation.

Barthes uses *The Stranger* as an example of a text that can be read in multiple ways and argues that the reader's interpretation is just as valid as the author's intention (142-148).

A unique way of interpreting the novel would be James Baldwin's discussion of his experience as a black man in a small Swiss village, where he draws parallels between his experience and the existential themes in *The Stranger*. According to Baldwin, *The Stranger* is not just about the absurdity of existence, but also about the absurdity of racism and colonialism (45).

The Stranger's enigmatic plot and ambiguous characters have led to multiple interpretations over the years. For example, some scholars argue that Meursault's lack of emotion at his mother's funeral reveals his inability to connect with others on an emotional level, while some others see him as a symbol for individualism or rebellion against societal norms (Girard 27).

Similarly, the novel's ending has been subject to much debate among scholars. Some have interpreted Meursault's acceptance of his fate and realization of his own mortality as a moment of transcendence or enlightenment, and others see it as evidence for Camus's nihilism¹ and absurdism where life is ultimately meaningless (Lottman 186). This shows that literature can be open to multiple meanings based on individual perspectives and worldviews, which contributes to its richness and complexity.

In her book *Subversive Intent: Gender, Politics, and the Avant-Garde* (1990), Susan Rubin Suleiman argues that *The Stranger* (1942) can also be read as a critique of patriarchal society, which values conformity and punishes those who do not fit in (67). Meursault's outsider

¹ **Nihilism:** the belief that life is without objective meaning, purpose, or intrinsic value.

status and eventual execution can be seen as a commentary on the oppressive nature of societal norms.

In conclusion, *The Stranger* is a complex novel that can be interpreted in many different postmodern ways, as it offers readers a powerful insight into the feelings of detachment and disillusionment that characterized the postwar era. The novel's depiction of moral relativism, self-awareness, irony and meaninglessness are all hallmarks of postmodern thinking, reflecting a broader cultural shift away from traditional beliefs in grand narratives or objective truths.

3. Influence and Legacy

The Stranger has had a significant impact on literature, philosophy, and popular culture since its publication in 1942. The novel's exploration of existential themes such as freedom, alienation, and absurdity has inspired numerous works across different literary traditions, and its legacy continues to be felt today.

3.1 Influence on Existentialism

One example is the influence that *The Stranger* has on Jean-Paul Sartre's philosophy of existentialism. In his essay "An Explanation of *The Stranger*" (1947), Sartre praises Camus's work for its rejection of traditional moral values and its emphasis on individual freedom (45). Sartre sees Meursault's character as embodying existentialist themes such as authenticity and personal responsibility. He admires how Camus portrays Meursault's rejection of societal expectations as an expression of human freedom rather than nihilism or amorality. For Sartre, this represents a powerful affirmation of individual agency in a world that often seem to deny it. Moreover, he appreciates how Camus uses language to convey complex ideas about the nature of

existence through Meursault's narrative voice. He sees this technique as exemplifying the power of literature to explore fundamental questions about human experience (47).

The Stranger is often cited as a seminal work of existentialist literature, which emphasizes individual freedom and the search for meaning in an indifferent universe. According to author Robert C. Solomon, in his book *Existentialism*, Camus's portrayal of Meursault's struggle to find meaning in a meaningless world is a classic example of the existentialist approach (60). The novel's depiction of the absurdity of human existence and the difficulty of finding purpose has influenced many other writers and thinkers in the existentialist tradition.

3.2 Influence on Absurdism

Camus's philosophy of the absurd, which posits that human beings live in a meaningless and irrational world, is a central theme of *The Stranger*. This philosophy has had a profound influence on the development of absurdism; a literary and philosophical movement that emphasizes the absurdity of the human condition. According to author Martin Esslin, in his book *The Theatre of the Absurd* (2004), *The Stranger* is one of the defining works of absurdism (19).

The novel's exploration of the absurdity of human existence continues to be a source of inspiration for writers and thinkers in the absurdism tradition. Absurdist works often focus on characters who struggle to find meaning in a world that seems devoid of it, and who are faced with the absurdity of their own existence. This emphasis on the absurdity of the human condition can be traced back to Camus's philosophy and his portrayal of Meursault in *The Stranger* (19).

Despite the novel's bleak themes, *The Stranger* uses absurdist and ironic writing to create a unique sense of humor that is typical of postmodernism. The trial scenes, in particular, highlight the absurdity of human rationality and the justice system with darkly comedic effect.

As critic Linda Hutcheon argues, postmodern art is often “ironically self-reflexive and parodic” (Hutcheon, “The Politics of Postmodernism” 2).

3.3 Influence on Postmodernism

The Stranger has also been cited as an important precursor to postmodernism, a literary and philosophical movement that emphasizes the fragmentation and instability of meaning. According to author Brian McHale, in his book *Postmodernist Fiction* (1987), Camus’s use of an unreliable narrator in the novel is a characteristic of postmodernist literature. The novel’s exploration of the limits of knowledge and the instability of meaning has influenced many postmodernist writers and thinkers. McHale suggests that Meursault’s narrative voice destabilizes traditional notions of truth and reality by presenting events through his subjective perspective. This technique challenges readers’ assumptions about objective truth and highlights how language can be used to manipulate reality (11).

Moreover, McHale sees *The Stranger* as embodying postmodernist themes such as skepticism towards grand narratives or metanarratives, like religion, and an emphasis on individual subjectivity over collective values. By portraying Meursault in this way, Camus introduces a new kind of protagonist who rejects established norms in favor of personal freedom (11).

The Stranger is a novel that draws attention to itself as a work of fiction, which is known as metafiction and self-reflexivity. Meursault’s character is aware that he exists within the pages of a book being written, which challenges traditional literary styles in favor of postmodernism. This unique feature has led critic Patricia Waugh to describe it as a “pioneering work of postmodern metafiction” (Waugh 52).

In addition to influencing other literary works within the postmodern tradition, *The Stranger* has also helped establish existentialism as a significant philosophical movement. Through its portrayal of Meursault's struggle with absurdity, search for meaning, as well as his relationship with society, the novel raises questions about human existence that have become central to both philosophy and literature. To sum up, Camus's themes of fragmentation, uncertainty, and rejection of traditional norms have had a lasting impact on postmodernist literature and philosophy.

Conclusion

Although *The Stranger* by Albert Camus is often viewed through an existentialist lens, it can also be analyzed from a postmodern perspective by examining its themes and narrative techniques. Upon its initial publication, scholars have debated whether *The Stranger* can be considered a postmodern work, as it had been met with mixed reactions, with some praising its portrayal of the absurdity of human existence and others criticizing it for lacking emotional depth and moral significance. Regardless of all this, *The Stranger* continues to be a significant work in literary and philosophical discourse due to its postmodern themes and multiple interpretations. It challenges traditional notions of morality and explores the limits of knowledge while inspiring new scholarly perspectives on existentialism, absurdism, postcolonial studies, and more. Its enduring legacy demonstrates its ongoing relevance to contemporary debates about individual freedom, morality, and social norms through its depiction of a non-conformist protagonist who challenges dominant cultural norms.

Chapter Three:

**Using a Philosophical Triad to Understand Camus's
Postmodernist Thinking in *The Stranger* (1942)**

Introduction

A major concern of the postmodern literature is the deconstruction of meaning and identity. This theme revolves around shaking up the conventional thoughts and beliefs regarding stable meanings and fixed ideas and revealing their unstable, volatile nature. Numerous literary works explore this theme, such as *The Stranger* (1942) by Albert Camus; offering readers a lens through which they can query, reconsider and reevaluate these notions.

1. Deconstruction of Meaning and Identity

The deconstruction of meaning and identity is a central theme in *The Stranger*, which challenges traditional notions of identity and meaning, and highlights the absurdity of human existence. Through the fragmented identity of the protagonist Meursault and the meaningless nature of his actions and decisions, the novel raises important questions about the search for meaning, the nature of existence, and the relationship between the individual and society.

1.1 The Fragmented Nature of Meursault's Identity

The theme of fragmentation of identity is central to Albert Camus's novel, *The Stranger*. Throughout the book, the protagonist, Meursault, seems to lack a stable sense of self or identity, which reflects the postmodern concern with the instability and fragmentation of identity. In the novel, Meursault is depicted as an outsider in society, detached from his own emotions and lacking a sense of purpose or direction in life. This fragmentation is evident in the way Meursault experiences the world around him, as he often seems to hold a disjointed view of the world and observes events from a distance rather than fully engaging with them.

Chapter 3: Using a Philosophical Triad to Understand Camus's Postmodernist Thinking in *The Stranger* (1942)

One way in which Meursault's fragmented identity is highlighted is through his detached and disconnected demeanor towards events and people around him. For instance, when he receives news of his mother's death, Meursault seems to lack any emotional engagement with the event by saying, matter-of-factly, "Mother died today. Or yesterday maybe, I don't know" (Camus 3). This lack of emotional reaction to the passing of his own mother suggests that Meursault's sense of self is estranged from the world around him, and that he is unable to establish deep ties with other people. Meursault's fragmented identity reflects the postmodern concern with the instability and fragmentation of identity. He is depicted as a stranger in society who lacks a stable sense of self or direction in life, which echoes Derrida's idea that "there is no such thing as a centered self" (Derrida, "Of Grammatology" 23). Furthermore, Meursault's detachment from societal norms highlights how he resists categorization by traditional structures or frameworks.

Meursault's attitude towards relationships is another illustration of his fragmented personality. He makes physical contact with women but does not develop emotional bonds with them. He seems unaware of the emotional facets of his relationship with Marie and just perceives it as a sexual one. The image of Meursault's disjointed identity is further reinforced by the way he is detached from his own feelings and connections.

Meursault's inability to engage with the world around him is further reflected in his lack of introspection and his focus on sensory experiences. As the novel progresses, it becomes more obvious that Meursault's mind is nothing but a largely blank slate that is filled only by immediate sensory perceptions. Meursault seems to be solely concentrated on the physical sensations he experiences, such as the heat of the sun or the texture of the sand, rather than thinking about his own thoughts and feelings. Furthermore, Meursault does not reflect on why he

Chapter 3: Using a Philosophical Triad to Understand Camus's Postmodernist Thinking in *The Stranger* (1942)

shot the Arab man or what it might mean to him and others, as he states “It was then I realized that you could either shoot or not shoot” (59). Instead, he simply evaluates the situation as a choice between two options.

This nature of Meursault's meaningless actions also resonates with Derridean ideas about language, in the sense that these acts could be seen as an example where “meaning” has been stripped away. Furthermore, Meursault's detachment and fragmentation highlights how he resists categorization by traditional structures or frameworks.

In addition, Meursault's lack of purpose or direction in life also contributes to his fragmented identity. He seems to aimlessly drift through life without any real ambitions or goals. Meursault's lack of direction is exemplified in his job as a clerk, which he describes as “meaningless” (6). His lack of a clear path in life further reinforces the idea of his fragmented identity.

1.2 The Absurdity and Meaningless of Meursault's Actions and Decisions

Meursault, the protagonist in *The Stranger*, is often described as an absurdist character whose actions and decisions lack any inherent meaning or purpose. His detachment from societal norms and emotions leads him to act in ways that are difficult to understand or justify. For example, when his neighbor Raymond asks for his help in writing a letter to lure back his mistress who had been unfaithful with another man, Meursault agrees without much thought (27). This decision seems illogical given that he barely knows Raymond or his mistress.

Similarly, later on when Meursault kills an Arab man on the beach without any apparent motive other than being blinded by sunlight (59), it further underscores the senselessness of his actions. Meursault does not have any real motive for committing the murder, nor does he seem to

Chapter 3: Using a Philosophical Triad to Understand Camus's Postmodernist Thinking in *The Stranger* (1942)

feel any remorse or guilt afterwards. Despite being arrested and put on trial for murder, he shows little concern about what will happen to him; instead, he focuses on more immediate concerns like wanting a cigarette or feeling too hot in court (90). This focus on more immediate concerns can be seen as a rejection of the constructed norms and structures of society around justice and punishment.

Meursault's lack of interest in the future is another facet of his actions that could be considered as absurd. Meursault appears to be entirely present-oriented throughout the entire book, showing little concern for what might occur in the future. His choice to wed Marie, which appears to be motivated more by a desire for instant pleasure than by any long-term commitment or planning, serves as a stark illustration of this.

Furthermore, when he is asked by his boss if he would like to move to Paris, Meursault opines, "I said it didn't make any difference to me and that we could take it or leave it" (5). This lack of enthusiasm towards an opportunity that many people would consider desirable highlights Meursault's meaningless actions and decisions.

Meursault's lack of concern for the future is also reflected in his attitude towards death. He does not fear death or see it as a tragic event, but rather as a natural and inevitable part of life. This is exemplified by his statement, "I realized then that a man who had lived only one day could easily live for a hundred years in prison. He would have enough memories to keep him from being bored" (77). This attitude towards death and imprisonment seems to suggest that life itself is meaningless, and that one can find contentment and fulfillment even in the face of extreme adversity. This act of violence seems to highlight the absurdity of human behavior, and the arbitrary nature of violence and aggression.

Chapter 3: Using a Philosophical Triad to Understand Camus's Postmodernist Thinking in *The Stranger* (1942)

In conclusion, there are many ways to interpret Meursault's actions and choices in *The Stranger* as ludicrous and pointless. Camus questions conventional ideas of morality, purpose, and meaning by examining the effects of living in a society that is indifferent to human existence through the lens of Meursault's character. The disingenuousness of human existence and the randomness of human behavior are all highlighted by Meursault's disengagement from the world around him, lack of care for the future, and impulsive action.

1.3 Meursault's Detachment from Societal Norms

Meursault is portrayed as an individual who is detached from societal norms and expectations. For instance, not only does he not display any signs of grief (10), but he also falls asleep during her funeral. This behavior is considered unacceptable by society since it goes against the expected norm of mourning for one's loved ones.

Meursault's detachment from societal norms is heavily portrayed in his rejection of conventional morality. Meursault has just shot an Arab man multiple times on a beach, and instead of feeling remorse or guilt for his actions, he openly states, "I knew that I had shattered the harmony of the day, the exceptional silence of a beach where I'd been happy. Then I fired four more times at the motionless body where the bullets lodged without leaving a trace. And it was like knocking four quick times on the door of unhappiness" (59). He reflects on the impact that his actions have had on his own happiness. He acknowledges that his actions have "shattered the harmony of the day" (59) and disrupted the peacefulness of the beach where he once felt content. However, he does not seem to feel any sense of responsibility for what he has done, and instead of stopping after the first shot, he continues to shoot the motionless body four more times, indicating a lack of moral restraint and a disregard for human life. Through a Derridean lens, Meursault's lack of motive or remorse for the murder can be seen as a rejection of the

Chapter 3: Using a Philosophical Triad to Understand Camus's Postmodernist Thinking in *The Stranger* (1942)

constructed notions of guilt and responsibility. The phrase “knocking four quick times on the door of unhappiness” (59) implies that Meursault is conscious of the seriousness of his behavior but is not entirely concerned with the repercussions and ramifications of his actions. The phrase “door of unhappiness” (59) could be interpreted as a metaphor for the consequences of his deeds coming back to haunt him. Yet, Meursault’s lack of regard for the future and his disregard for social customs enable him to act hastily without taking into account the long-term repercussions of his choices.

Meursault’s trial and sentencing further demonstrates his detachment from societal norms. He is not so much punished for the murder he has committed as he is for his perceived lack of remorse and failure to conform to societal expectations. Instead of expressing sorrow or contrition for what has happened, he simply states that “it was still pretty much the same thing” (89). This statement emphasizes his disconnection from societal expectations surrounding guilt and responsibility. The trial becomes more about the character of Meursault than the crime he has committed, and his eventual execution seems to be more about fulfilling the demands of justice than any rational response to his actions.

Meursault’s indifference to his own fate further highlights his detachment from societal norms and. Meursault has been sentenced to death for the murder of the Arab man, and he reflects on his impending execution with a sense of detachment and resignation, as he states, “I had only a little time left and I didn’t want to waste it on God” (69). Meursault’s statement “I had only a little time left” (69) implies that Meursault is conscious of his own mortality and the limited time he has remaining. However, he does not appear to be very concerned with trying to prolong his life or change his destiny. Instead, he shows little interest in spirituality or religion, demonstrating that he does not take solace in the concept of a greater power or an afterlife. The

Chapter 3: Using a Philosophical Triad to Understand Camus's Postmodernist Thinking in *The Stranger* (1942)

statement “I didn't want to waste it on God” (69) implies that Meursault does not believe that it is worthwhile to use his limited time on earth to think about spiritual or religious issues. This might be interpreted as a rejection of society norms that frequently place a high value on faith and the belief in a higher power.

Through his statement “I wasn't thinking about anything, because I didn't want to think”, Meursault expresses a disregard for the societal norms that dictate how one should behave in certain situations. In this particular instance, he is referring to helping his neighbor Raymond write a letter designed to lure back his unfaithful mistress. The statement “I wasn't thinking about anything” illustrates Meursault's unwillingness to engage with the situation shows an indifference towards conventional morality and values, which can be seen as absurd or even nihilistic. Not only that, but the second half of his statement “because I didn't want to think” (27) demonstrates his lack of interest in participating in what others would consider important even more, as Meursault is indicating that he is actively choosing to ignore or reject the conventional rules and expectations of society. Overall, these quotes reflect on Meursault's character arc throughout the novel where it becomes clear that he has no inherent desire to conform to societal norms thereby making him stand out as different amongst other characters present within *The Stranger*.

2. Language, Discourse and Power

In *The Stranger* language, discourse, and power are intertwined in a way that reflects Michel Foucault's ideas about the relationship between knowledge and power. According to Foucault, knowledge is not neutral but rather embedded in relations of power that shape how we think about ourselves and others (Foucault, “The History of Sexuality” 93). The novel explores how language is used as a tool to exert power over others, with certain characters using it to

manipulate or control those around them. Additionally, the narrative examines how societal norms and expectations can be enforced through language and discourse. Through this exploration of language's role in shaping reality within society, the novel challenges readers to question their own assumptions about the way we communicate with one another.

2.1 Examining Instances of Linguistic Play and Word Games in the Novel

The Stranger by Albert Camus features several instances of linguistic play and word games that reflect the novel's exploration of language. One example of linguistic play can be found in the repeated use of the expression "the sun" throughout the novel. On the surface, the sun serves as a simple motif of heat and brightness, but it also has deeper symbolic meanings.

In the first chapter, Meursault describes the sun as "blinding" and "merciless", which foreshadows his eventual realization of the absurdity and indifference of the universe. Later in the novel, when Meursault is awaiting his execution, he feels the heat of the sun on his face and realizes that, despite his impending death, the sun will continue to shine and life will go on without him. This realization highlights the absurdity of existence and the lack of meaning in life.

Within the same scope, another instance of linguistic play in *The Stranger* can be seen in Meursault's use of language to describe his physical environment. Meursault often provides detailed and poetic descriptions of the sun, sea, and sand, which emphasize his focus on immediate experience rather than abstract thought. For example, when Meursault describes the heat of the sun, he says that it "blazed on my forehead and made the sweat stream down my face" (9). This description not only evokes a vivid image of the sun's heat but also suggests that Meursault is fully engaged with his surroundings through his sensory experiences.

Chapter 3: Using a Philosophical Triad to Understand Camus's Postmodernist Thinking in *The Stranger* (1942)

Another instance of linguistic play in *The Stranger* is found in Meursault's interactions with other characters, particularly during his trial. Meursault's language becomes increasingly disjointed and disconnected as he is questioned by the prosecutor, with his responses often being reduced to simple repetitions of the prosecutor's questions. For example, when asked whether he had "held back the truth" about his mother's death, Meursault responds, "Yes. I had" (67). This repetition of the prosecutor's question highlights Meursault's lack of agency and autonomy in the legal proceedings, and suggests the breakdown of language and communication in the face of institutional power.

As another illustration, consider Meursault's account of the prosecutor's statement during his trial: "He was like a man talking to himself, about himself. And he was the only one listening." (93). In this instance, Meursault emphasizes the ability of language to alter meaning and produce a sense of unreality through the use of repetition and pronoun inversion.

Meursault's interactions with Raymond, his neighbor and friend, also serves as a good example of linguistic play in the novel. Raymond often uses slang and colloquial language that Meursault struggles to understand, highlighting the distance between them despite their supposed friendship. For example, when Raymond asks Meursault to write a letter for him, he tells Meursault to "let [him] have it straight" (26). Meursault's confusion over the meaning of this phrase emphasizes the different linguistic worlds in which the two characters exist. Furthermore, Raymond's language when he talks about his relationship with his girlfriend further embodies it. He uses crude and vulgar language to describe her, which highlights his power over her and reinforces gender stereotypes.

In conclusion, the language in *The Stranger* by Albert Camus is often described as sparse and straightforward, but there are instances where the author uses linguistic play and word games to convey deeper meaning.

2.2 The Limitations of Language in Expressing Truth and Meaning

Foucault is critical of the idea that language could fully capture the truth and meaning of our experiences. He argues that language is not a transparent medium for expressing truth, but rather a system of signs and symbols that is shaped by the power relations and discourses of a given society (Foucault, "The History of Sexuality" 52). In *The Stranger*, Meursault's language and discourse reflect his detachment from societal norms and his rejection of the constructed meanings and values imposed by society. However, this detachment also highlights the limitations of language in fully expressing the truth and meaning of Meursault's experiences.

Meursault, who struggles to convey his feelings and thoughts in a way that is understood by others, serves as the vehicle through which Albert Camus investigates the limitations of language in communicating truth and meaning in *The Stranger*. Due to Meursault's failure to fit in with societal and cultural norms, he eventually becomes alienated and is found guilty of murder. The novel suggests that the complexity of the human experience cannot always be adequately expressed in language, and that the pursuit of meaning and truth frequently necessitates a rejection of linguistic and cultural norms.

One example of Meursault's struggle with language can be seen in his interactions with the prison chaplain. Meursault becomes frustrated with the chaplain's attempts to impose religious meaning onto his experiences, so he rejects his approach and instead suggests that even a person who has only lived for a day could create enough memories to keep themselves

Chapter 3: Using a Philosophical Triad to Understand Camus's Postmodernist Thinking in *The Stranger* (1942)

occupied for a hundred years in prison (119). Meursault's rejection of the chaplain's attempt to impose meaning onto his life suggests that language and cultural frameworks are not always capable of accurately capturing the depth and complexity of human experience.

Meursault's difficulty with language is further exemplified in his description of his experience at his mother's funeral. Meursault finds it challenging to express his emotions regarding the event and states, "I couldn't understand what they were waiting for. And I wasn't sure I wanted to see my mother" (3). Meursault's struggle to articulate his emotional response highlights the limitations of words in conveying the depth and complexity of human experiences. This suggests that language can be inadequate when it comes to expressing the full range of human emotions and experiences, and that there may be an inherent gap between language and the reality it seeks to describe.

Furthermore, the novel shows how words can be manipulated and distorted to serve different agendas. During Meursault's trial, witnesses are coached on what they should say in order to make him appear more guilty than he actually is, and this manipulation of language ultimately leads him down an unjust path towards execution. Moreover, *The Stranger* also shows how language can be used as a tool for manipulation by those in power. For instance, the prosecutor at Meursault's trial twists Meursault's simple statement about shooting the Arab into a premeditated murder fueled by hatred and rage. This demonstrates how language can be distorted or misused for personal or political gain.

Lastly, the novel suggests that some truths are beyond expression through language altogether - such as existential questions regarding human existence and purpose, leading individuals like Meursault towards nihilism or absurdism instead of providing definitive answers.

Chapter 3: Using a Philosophical Triad to Understand Camus's Postmodernist Thinking in *The Stranger* (1942)

Overall, in the novel, language is shown to have limitations in expressing truth and meaning. Meursault's simple and straightforward speech style reflects his inability to fully articulate his emotions or connect with others on an emotional level. Additionally, the novel emphasizes how societal expectations can shape language use and limit individual expression. This highlights the idea that language is not always sufficient for conveying complex ideas or experiences, leading to a sense of alienation and existential angst for characters like Meursault who struggle with this limitation.

2.3 Camus's Use of Language & Narration Structure to Subvert Traditional Narratives

The Stranger is distinguished by Camus's purposeful subversion of conventional narratives and meanings in both language and storytelling form. The narrative framework of the novel challenges conventional storytelling norms. *The Stranger* bounces back and forth in time without an apparent reason or justification, as opposed to having a linear plot trajectory with obvious cause-and-effect linkages between events. This fragmentation highlights the sense of disorientation felt by Meursault throughout the story while also underscoring themes related to existentialism and absurdity. This detached style contrasts with the emotionally charged events of the story such as the death of Meursault's mother, the murder he commits, etc. This detachment challenges the expectation of emotionally expressive language typically associated with such events (3).

Throughout the novel, we get very little insight into Meursault's internal thoughts and emotions. This lack of introspection and psychological depth subverts the traditional style of

Chapter 3: Using a Philosophical Triad to Understand Camus's Postmodernist Thinking in *The Stranger* (1942)

narration where we come to understand the protagonist's inner world. Meursault remains a cipher, challenging the reader's expectations of a relatable protagonist.

Another way that Camus uses language to subvert traditional narratives is through his portrayal of violence. He presents violent acts like murder as mundane occurrences rather than sensationalized events meant to shock readers. This banalization underscores the idea that human life has no inherent value beyond what we choose to assign it.

In *The Stranger*, societal expectations are shown to shape language use, as seen in the character of Raymond. For example, Raymond employs coarse language to assert his power over women while reinforcing gender stereotypes. When describing his violent behavior towards his girlfriend, Raymond uses language that suggests he views her as a possession and justifies his actions by saying, "I taught her a good lesson. I said to myself, she'll remember it next time" (26). This use of language suggests that Raymond's actions are influenced not only by his personal desires and motivations, but also by the societal norms and values around gender roles.

Overall, through his use of language & unique narration structure which disrupts our assumptions about what constitutes an effective story-telling technique, Camus succeeds at creating an absurdist world where traditional narratives are challenged and meaning becomes elusive; ultimately inviting readers to question their own beliefs regarding human existence and purpose.

2.4 The Power Dynamics Between Characters

One of the central power dynamics explored in *The Stranger* involves Meursault's relationship with the justice system. After being arrested and put on trial for the murder of an Arab man on the beach, Meursault finds himself vulnerable to the authority of the prosecutor and the judge. Throughout the trial, the prosecutor uses language designed to stir emotions and manipulate the jury's perception of Meursault. This manipulation is evident in the prosecutor's statement, "The day of the murder, this man had the sun in his eyes and a heart filled with darkness" (71), which portrays Meursault as a heartless and callous killer. This use of language serves to assert the prosecutor's power over Meursault and the outcome of the trial. That is to say, the prosecutor's use of language and rhetoric is aimed at constructing a narrative of Meursault as a cold-blooded killer, while the defense lawyer attempts to construct a different narrative of Meursault as a victim of circumstance. All of which feed into Foucault's ideas on how language and discourse can be used to construct and shape knowledge and truth, and how power is inscribed in the very act of constructing these narratives.

Furthermore, Foucault proposed that power operates through institutional structures such as schools or prisons where individuals are subjected to disciplinary mechanisms designed to control their behavior according to set rules and norms (Foucault, "Discipline and Punish" 135). This is reflected in *The Stranger* during Meursault's imprisonment after his murder conviction, as he becomes subject to both physical confinement and psychological manipulation by guards attempting to force a confession out of him even though there is no evidence supporting the guilty verdict (Camus 103-4).

One example of power dynamics in *The Stranger* involves Meursault's relationship with his girlfriend, Marie. Despite his lack of strong emotions towards Marie, Meursault holds the reins

Chapter 3: Using a Philosophical Triad to Understand Camus's Postmodernist Thinking in *The Stranger* (1942)

of their relationship. When Marie questions Meursault's feelings towards her, he dismisses her concerns with a flippant response, "I told her it didn't mean anything but that I didn't think so" (37). Meursault's disregard for Marie's emotions highlights his control over their relationship and his ability to manipulate their interactions. Similarly, Marie's attraction to Meursault highlights another kind of power imbalance; one rooted in emotional dependence. She desires him despite knowing very little about him as an individual, suggesting that she seeks security or validation from their relationship rather than true connection (25).

Meursault's interactions with his boss at work serves as a good illustration of power dynamics as well. Meursault's boss has the power to fire him and is therefore able to exert a certain level of control over him. This dynamic is highlighted when Meursault agrees to write a letter for his boss even though he does not want to, as he feels compelled by his subordinate position (7).

To sum up, *The Stranger* delves into the power dynamics that exist between characters through Meursault's interactions with different individuals such as Marie, his boss and the justice system. These relationships highlight various struggles for control and dominance while also exposing how power can be used to manipulate and oppress others.

3. Metafiction, Hyperreality and Intertextuality

In *The Stranger*, Albert Camus employs metafiction, hyperreality and intertextuality to explore postmodern and existential themes in a unique way. These techniques challenge traditional narrative structures by drawing attention to the text as a work of fiction while blurring the lines between reality and imagination. Through these literary devices, Camus conveys

complex philosophical ideas related to absurdity and existentialism while also questioning readers' assumptions about narrative structure and meaning-making processes.

3.1 The Novel's Metafictional Elements

The Stranger contains several examples of metafiction, which are evident in the way that the novel self-consciously draws attention to the act of storytelling and the nature of narrative itself. For example, Camus opens the novel with the line, "Mother died today" (3). This opening line immediately sets the tone for the novel, and draws attention to the artificiality of the narrative form. By beginning with the word "today", the narrator Meursault implies that the story he is about to tell is a constructed, artificial representation of the events that took place.

One of the primary metafictional elements in *The Stranger* is the use of a first-person narrator who is not fully reliable. Meursault, the protagonist and narrator, admits to lying on several occasions throughout the novel, which draws attention to the fact that he is telling his story from a subjective perspective. This creates an interesting tension between what Meursault says happened and what may have actually occurred. One instance of Meursault's unreliable narration can be seen in his account of the events leading up to his confrontation with the Arab on the beach. Meursault describes the scorching heat and his increasing discomfort, which contributes to his disoriented state of mind. He says:

I couldn't stand it any longer, and took a few steps off towards the spring. I knew it was stupid, but I couldn't help it; I felt I had to go there. I took another step, just one step, and found myself face to face with the Arab. I knew it was silly, but I slammed the door shut on him as if it were my own folly that was trying to crush me (59).

Chapter 3: Using a Philosophical Triad to Understand Camus's Postmodernist Thinking in *The Stranger* (1942)

According to Meursault's account, his altercation with the Arab was brought on by his own rash acts and the extreme heat clouding his judgment. The reader is left to speculate as to whether there is more to the narrative or whether Meursault is leaving out information that would offer an alternative viewpoint. As Meursault's genuine objectives and the amount of his agency in the unfolding events are questioned throughout the narrative, the unreliable narrator takes on greater significance. Readers are prompted to question the veracity of Meursault's testimony and are thus encouraged to actively engage with the narrative by this aspect of uncertainty and subjectivity, which also contributes to the metafictional nature of the novel.

A further illustration of metafictional elements can be observed in Camus's use of language itself. For instance, when Meursault describes events or emotions using seemingly contradictory phrases like "the heat was pressing down with a weight that seemed to increase moment by moment" (29), it highlights how language can obscure meaning rather than clarify it. These linguistic games emphasize that both storytelling and reality are constructed through language.

In addition to questioning the act of storytelling, Meursault also reflects on the purpose of writing itself. For example, he says, "I felt that I had been happy and that I was happy again. For everything to be consummated, for me to feel less alone, I had only to wish that there be a large crowd of spectators the day of my execution and that they greet me with cries of hate" (77). This suggests that Meursault sees his own story as a kind of performance, and that he desires an audience in order to feel validated or understood.

Furthermore, Camus employs irony throughout the novel to draw attention to the artificiality of the narrative form. For instance, Meursault is sentenced to death not for the

Chapter 3: Using a Philosophical Triad to Understand Camus's Postmodernist Thinking in *The Stranger* (1942)

murder he committed, but for his perceived lack of emotion and morality. This irony suggests that the legal system and the narrative conventions of the novel are both constructed and arbitrary.

Finally, we see hints at metafiction during the trial scenes where characters begin to reference their roles within the narrative itself, such as when Raymond suggests they act out his altercation with his ex-girlfriend or when Marie testifies about her relationship with Meursault before ultimately admitting she does not remember specific details about their time together.

Overall, *The Stranger* employs metafiction to emphasize the artificiality of the story and to encourage readers to critically examine the connection between literature and reality. The novel prompts readers to question their assumptions and biases, leading to a deeper understanding of its themes and ideas.

3.2 Hyperreality in *The Stranger*

Hyperreality, as a concept, refers to a state where the boundaries between reality and simulation become blurred, often resulting in a heightened sense of the artificial or constructed nature of the world. While *The Stranger* does not explicitly explore hyperreality as a central theme, certain elements within the novel can be interpreted in light of this concept. In the novel, this very concept is often linked to Meursault's detachment from reality. One example of hyperreality can be seen in the novel's descriptions of weather. Throughout the book, Camus uses vivid imagery to describe the heat, which creates an almost surreal atmosphere that blurs the line between what is real and what is imagined. For instance, at one point, Meursault describes feeling as though he was "Walking on hot coals" due to the extreme heat (3). This description

Chapter 3: Using a Philosophical Triad to Understand Camus's Postmodernist Thinking in *The Stranger* (1942)

emphasizes his physical discomfort and highlights how oppressive and all-consuming the environment feels.

Meursault's trial, which is presented as a performance rather than a legitimate legal proceeding, further embodies hyperreality. The courtroom is described as having a theatrical atmosphere, with the spectators behaving like an audience and the lawyers performing their roles like actors. Meursault himself even comments on the artificiality of the proceedings, stating, "All I could hear were the whispers of a few spectators and the voice of the presiding judge. It was like being in a play" (94).

The beach scene in *The Stranger*, in which Meursault murders the Arab, is another instance of hyperreality. The account of the scene is fragmentary, with Meursault's perceptions and actions growing increasingly improbable and strange. A hallucinogenic impression is produced by the heat and the sun's reflection on the sand, and Meursault appears to be more influenced by his surroundings than by his own will. The fact that Meursault does not appear to completely appreciate the gravity of his acts until after the fact emphasizes this feeling of hyperreality.

3.3 The Novel's Intertextuality to Other Works of Literature

The Stranger contains several references to other works of literature, which is known as intertextuality. These references serve to deepen the novel's themes, add layers of meaning and situate the story within a broader literary and cultural context.

An instance of intertextuality in *The Stranger* can be seen in Meursault's reading habits. He mentions that he has been reading a book by an author named Immanuel Kant (24). This is a reference to the German philosopher Immanuel Kant, whose work on morality and reason was

Chapter 3: Using a Philosophical Triad to Understand Camus's Postmodernist Thinking in *The Stranger* (1942)

highly influential during the Enlightenment period. Moreover, Meursault's description of his trial experience as resembling a scene from Franz Kafka's *The Trial* (99) is another illustration of intertextuality. This reference highlights how absurd and surreal Meursault's trial feels much like Josef K.'s experiences in Kafka's work.

Additionally, there are religious references throughout the novel that draw on Biblical stories or motifs such as Christ's crucifixion when 'the Arab' is shot three times, once at each temple and once between his eyes, which symbolizes both Meursault's rejection of religion while also suggesting that society will ultimately punish him for not conforming to their expectations.

The Stranger's allusion to the legend of Sisyphus, a Greek mythological character doomed to perpetually push a rock up a hill, further embodies intertextuality in action. A major subject in the novel is the idea of Sisyphus² as a representation of the folly and futility of existence, and Meursault is frequently compared to Sisyphus throughout the narrative. For instance, Sisyphus' interminable and fruitless labor is compared to Meursault's repeated and meaningless behaviors, such as his daily commute and his work as a shipping clerk.

Another example of intertextuality in *The Stranger* can be seen in Meursault's description of his mother's funeral, where he observes that the caretaker of the nursing home "looked like an Arab" (4). This brief reference to the caretaker's ethnicity serves as a subtle allusion to the colonial context in which the novel is set, and to the broader historical and political issues that were present in Algeria during the time in which the novel was written. The use of intertextuality in this case serves to deepen the novel's themes of alienation and otherness, by highlighting the ways in which race, ethnicity, and colonialism shape the experiences of the characters in the story.

² **Sisyphus:** a figure in Greek mythology who was punished by the gods to push a boulder up a hill for eternity symbolizing futile labor.

Chapter 3: Using a Philosophical Triad to Understand Camus's Postmodernist Thinking in *The Stranger* (1942)

Finally, there is a clear allusion to Fyodor Dostoevsky's novel *Crime and Punishment* (1866) in *The Stranger*. In the novel, Meursault describes his trial experience as feeling like something out of "a detective novel" (99). This reference is significant because *Crime and Punishment* is often considered one of the most influential works in the detective fiction genre. In this sense, Camus appears to be drawing on Dostoevsky's exploration of crime and justice through a narrative that emphasizes psychological depth while also exploring larger philosophical themes related to freedom and determinism. Furthermore, both novels share similarities in their portrayal of characters who commit murder without an apparent motive or justification for their actions. Raskolnikov from *Crime and Punishment* kills an old woman whom he sees as a burden on society but ultimately confesses his guilt after grappling with feelings of remorse and redemption while Meursault kills "the Arab" seemingly without any reason other than he felt uncomfortable due to heat at that moment.

In conclusion, the use of intertextuality in *The Stranger* helps to place the novel within a larger cultural and historical context, while also enriching its themes and ideas. Through references to other literary works and historical events, Camus encourages readers to reflect on the novel's concepts in relation to broader cultural trends. This invites readers to view the story as part of a bigger discussion about human existence.

Conclusion

In summary, by employing metafictional devices, depicting a hyperreal worldview and engaging in intertextual conversations, Camus questions the very foundations of storytelling, society and human nature through *The Stranger*. The novel presents a nuanced, multilayered

Chapter 3: Using a Philosophical Triad to Understand Camus's Postmodernist Thinking in *The Stranger* (1942)

critique of reality, truth, religion, ethics and the quest for meaning that resonates beyond the boundaries of the story itself.

General Conclusion

In conclusion, our study of *The Stranger* by Albert Camus from a postmodern perspective using the philosophical triad of Jacques Derrida's deconstruction, Michel Foucault's power/knowledge nexus, and Jean Baudrillard's metafiction and intertextuality has revealed the ways in which these three philosophies intersect with one another to challenge traditional narratives and dominant ideologies within the novel. Chapter 1 provides an overview of these influential philosophies in postmodern literature as they relate to *The Stranger*. Deconstruction is used to fragment fixed meanings, while power/knowledge dichotomy emphasizes the relationship between power structures and knowledge production. Lastly, metafiction explores language use in challenging traditional narratives while intertextuality references other works of literature to further destabilize meaning. Chapter 2 delves into the reception history of *The Stranger* as a postmodern work with its multiple readings/ambiguity; exploring various scholarly perspectives since its publication until today while investigating its influence on other writers or artists after Camus's death. Finally, Chapter 3 applies our philosophical triad's analysis techniques specifically towards understanding Sartrean Postmodern themes within *The Stranger* such as fragmentation, detachment from societal norms, language limitations, challenging traditional narratives etc.

Overall, this dissertation attempts to provide a valuable contribution and insight towards existing scholarship on both Camus's work and postmodernist literary criticism more broadly speaking; inviting future scholars who would like expand upon their own research interests in either area through adopting similar methodologies employed herein, all with the aim of enriching our collective appreciation for these literary works and their significance in shaping the cultural landscape of our time.

There are several limitations that should be acknowledged. Firstly, the study is limited by its reliance on the English translation of the novel, which may not fully capture the nuances of the original French text. Secondly, given the extensive literature on *The Stranger* and postmodernism, the study may not have been able to provide an exhaustive analysis of all relevant material within the given time constraints.

Moreover, the study's application of a philosophical triad approach may also have limited the analysis to the theories of Derrida, Foucault, and Baudrillard, potentially overlooking other relevant philosophical frameworks. These limitations highlight the need for future research to build on this study and explore the novel's themes and motifs from a broader range of perspectives, including those beyond the realm of postmodernism. Despite these limitations, this study contributes to the ongoing scholarly discourse on *The Stranger* and its significance as a work of postmodern literature.

“I may not have been sure about what really did interest me, but I was absolutely sure about what didn't”

- Albert Camus, The Stranger

Works Cited

- Abbott, H. Porter. *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*. Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulacra And Simulation*. Translated by Sheila Faria Glaser, University of Michigan Press, 1994.
- Baudrillard, Jean. "The Ecstasy of Communication." *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, Bay Press, 2001, pp. 126-34.
- Barthes, Roland. "From Work to Text." *The Rustle of Language*, translated by Richard Howard, Hill and Wang, 1986.
- Barthes, Roland. "The Death of the Author." *Image-Music-Text*, edited by Stephen Heath, translated by Stephen Heath, Hill and Wang, 1977, pp. 142-48.
- Baldwin, James. "Stranger in the Village." *Notes of a Native Son*, Beacon Press, 1955, pp. 39-58.
- Bamane, Sujata. Faith in Man's Dignity: A Study of Albert Camus' *The Outsider*. *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, vol. 19, no. 12, 2014, pp. 23-27.
www.iosrjournals.org/iosr-jhss/papers/Vol19-issue12/Version-4/E0191242327.pdf
- Camus, Albert. *The Stranger*. Translated by Matthew Ward, Vintage, 1989.
- Culler, Jonathan. *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press, 1997.
- Culler, Jonathan. *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism*. Routledge, 2006.

Derrida, Jacques. *Limited Inc.* Glyph, vol. 2, 1977, pp. 158, 129.

Derrida, Jacques. "Signature Event Context." Glyph, no. 1, 1977, pp. 172-197.

Derrida, Jacques. *Margins of Philosophy*. Translated by Alan Bass, U of Chicago P, 1982.

Derrida, Jacques. *Of Grammatology*. Translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997.

Derrida, Jacques. "Structure Sign and Play in The Discourse of The Human Sciences." *Writing And Difference*, Routledge, 1978, pp.278-294.

Detmer, David. *Sartre Explained: From Bad Faith to Authenticity*. Open Court, 2008.

Derrida, Jacques. *Positions*. Translated and annotated by Alan Bass, University of Chicago Press, 1981.

Esslin, Martin. *The Theatre of the Absurd*. Penguin 2004.

Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Translated by Alan Sheridan, Vintage Books, 1995.

Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1*. Translated by Robert Hurley, Vintage Books Editions, 1990.

Foucault, Michel. *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality, Volume 2*. Translated by Robert Hurley, Vintage Books, 1990.

Foucault, Michel. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-79*, (Ed. Colin Gordon). New York: Pantheon, 1980.

Foucault, Michel. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. Translated by A. M. Sheridan Smith, Vintage Books, 2010.

Foucault, Michel. "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History." *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, edited by Donald F. Bouchard, Cornell University Press, 1980, pp. 139-64.

Foucault, Michel. "The Subject and Power." *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 8, no. 4, 1982, pp. 777-795.

Girard, René. *Deceit, Desire, and The Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*. Johns Hopkins UP, 1965.

Hutcheon, Linda. *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History Theory Fiction*. Routledge 2012.

Hutcheon, Linda. *The Politics of Postmodernism*. London: Routledge, 1989.

Kristeva, Julia. "Albert Camus and the Stoicism of the Absurd." *The Columbia History of Twentieth-Century French Thought*, edited by Lawrence D. Kritzman, Columbia University Press, 2006, pp. 38-43.

Kaplan, Alice. *Looking for The Stranger: Albert Camus and the Life of a Literary Classic*. University of Chicago Press, 2016.

Kellner, Douglas. *Media Culture: Cultural Studies, Identity, and Politics Between the Modern and the Postmodern*. Routledge, 2009.

Lyotard, Jean-François. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Translated by Geoff Bennington and Brian Masumi, University of Minnesota Press, 1984.

Lyotard, Jean-Francois. "Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?" *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, translated by Geoff Bennington and Brian Masumi, University of Minnesota Press, 1984, pp. 71-82.

Lecourt Donna. *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and Philosophy*. Cambridge UP, 2010.

Lottman, H.R. *Albert Camus: A Biography*. Grove Press 1979.

Mauriac, François. "Le Romancier et ses personnages." *Nouvelle Revue Française*, 1944, pp. 25-56.

McHale, Brian. *Postmodernist Fiction*. Routledge 1987.

Norris, Christopher. *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice*. Routledge, 2002.

Quilliot, Roger. "La Mer et les Prisons." Paris: Gallimard, 1956.

Rivkin, Julie and Michael Ryan, editors. *Literary Theory: An Anthology. 2nd edition*, Blackwell Publishing, 2004.

Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*. Translated by Hazel E. Barnes, Washington Square Press, 1993.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, edited by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, University of Illinois Press, 1988, pp. 271-313.

Sartre, Jean-Paul. "Explanation of *The Stranger*." *Situations I*, Gallimard 1947:245–264.

Solomon, Robert C. *Existentialism*. Oxford UP, 2005.

Suleiman, Susan Rubin. *Subversive Intent: Gender, Politics, and the Avant-Garde*. Harvard UP, 1990.

Todd, Olivier. *Albert Camus: A Life*. Translated by Benjamin Ivry, Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2000.

Waugh, Patricia. *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-conscious Fiction*. Routledge, 1984.

Waugh, Patricia. *Postmodernism: A Reader*. Routledge, 1992.

Zaretsky, Robert. *Albert Camus: Elements of a Life*. Cornell University Press, 2010

الملخص:

تتناول هذه الأطروحة رواية ألبرت كامو *الغريب* (1942) من منظور ما بعد الحداثة. من خلال عدسة الثلاثي الفلسفي ديريدا وفوكو وبودريار، استكشفت هذه الأطروحة كيف يستخدم ألبرت كامو تقنيات أدب ما بعد الحداثة في *الغريب* لتفكيك المعنى، وتحدي الديناميات السلطوية، وتشويش حدود الخيال والواقع. على الرغم من أن فلسفة كامو غالباً ما تعرف بأنها تنتمي إلى الحداثة، فإن *الغريب* تتمتع بصفات عديدة من الحداثة المابعدية والتي تشير إلى رؤيته البارعة ككاتب على حافة عصر جديد في الأدب. من خلال جمع هذه العدسات الفلسفية الثلاثة من المابعد الحداثة وقراءة متأنية *للغريب*، ألقت هذه الأطروحة الضوء على كامو كمفكر ما بعد حداثي. فقد ثور تمزيجه للفلسفة الوجودية مع تقنيات السرد المابعدية بشكل خفي ولكن بشكل عميق في شكل السرد، وأشار إلى الأدب الشديد الاستقطابية والذاتية الذي سيظهر في نهاية القرن العشرين.

كلمات مفتاحية: كامو؛ الغريب؛ منظور ما بعد الحداثة؛ تفكيك؛ ديناميات السلطة؛ ثورة السرد.