

THE ABSURD CHARACTER- “THE STRANGER” AND “THE LOST ONE” - ALBERT CAMUS AND FATOS KONGOLI



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Abstract

This paper addresses the concept of the absurd in Albert Camus's *The Stranger* and Fatos Kongoli's *The Lost One*, works that come from different temporal and regional realities. Through a comparative method, it aims to reveal how the absurd is experienced and presented in two distinct literary worlds. In this context, similarities and differences are highlighted in the ways the characters confront the absurd: Meursault accepts it without resistance, while Thesar accepts it in an imposed manner because there is no other choice.

This concept is viewed from different perspectives, also taking into account social factors, as social and political conditions play an important role in Kongoli's absurd, whereas Camus's absurd is deeply existential. It is understood that this comparative analysis emphasizes the universality of the theme of the absurd in literature, where the challenges faced by the individual in different cultures are also evident.

1. Introduction

"In 1927, the great German writer Goethe, in a conversation with Eckermann, said: 'In our times, national literature does not mean much: the era of world literature is beginning, and everyone should contribute to its arrival'." (Hamiti, 2016, f. 28)

National literature alone is not sufficient to fulfill a nation's needs; it must engage in dialogue with the literatures and cultures of other countries in order to build a shared literature beyond specific national boundaries.

In the field of literary studies, comparative analysis plays a crucial role in understanding literary works and their varied cultural contexts. This paper aims to present absurdity as a philosophical concept, but above all as a literary one. The works being compared *The Stranger* by Albert Camus and *The Lost One* by Fatos Kongoli, reflect different cultural contexts and offer distinct perspectives on the themes they address.

This study discusses the impact of absurdism on literature and how this theme challenges readers to reflect on the nature of existence and the individual's struggle to adapt in a world that

often appears absurd. It focuses in particular on two representative absurdist characters: Meursault and Thesar.

The study adopts a comparative approach. Its main objective is to bring to light the manifestation of absurdity in the selected literary works and to examine how each author presents it, identifying both similarities and differences, especially given that the authors come from distinct and unique cultural and literary backgrounds. The concept of the absurd remains ever appealing to readers, especially to those who are deeply engaged with literature. The authors analyzed belong to different times, places, and historical periods, and such circumstances undoubtedly influence the creation of their literary works making their literary confrontation all the more interesting. Literary concepts have no boundaries; time has proven this, and this paper seeks to highlight this universal literary phenomenon.

Comparison, as the dominant method, will aid in achieving the aims of this paper.

The treatment of universal themes is also of special importance, as it demonstrates the cultural dialogue that exists throughout the world.

Absurdity is an eternally intriguing theme, due to its complexity and the fact that it has not been fully exhausted to the point of losing the reader's interest. Complex matters are often appreciated even when they cannot be fully resolved or addressed. The treatment of the absurd is important because it provides insight into the human dilemmas of every era. Therefore, when this theme is presented in a comparative dimension, its value becomes even greater.

2. The Concept of Absurdity in Philosophy and Literature

Camus states that before a person acquires the habit of thinking, they first acquire the habit of living. In other words, man is initially enthusiastic about life and all that it might offer. This lasts until a moment when, faced with life's challenges or the suffocating grip of daily routine, the human being begins to think, consciousness gradually replaces unconsciousness. It is man who gives meaning to his life through his choices and way of living. As Camus says: "I do not know whether this world has a meaning that transcends it. But I know that I do not know that meaning and that it is impossible for me just now to know it." (Camus, 2016)

No one is immune to this exhausting feeling called the absurd. Every person, at some point be it bitter or sweet has questioned the very reasons for human existence. They have delved deep into the hidden corners of the mind and soul seeking answers, only to find that the deeper they go, the foggier the view becomes. When one asks themselves "why?" in the face of life's monotonous routine, that is the first moment of conflict with oneself. As Esslin puts it:

"Man asks himself: why is he alive? This inner turmoil in the face of his own dehumanization, this immeasurable disappointment when confronting the image of what one truly is, this "nausea" as a contemporary writer calls it, is also the Absurd." (Esslin, 1961,) The individual attempts to make sense of life, to impose order, to take control. But once they realize this is impossible, they are shaken and left wavering between rejection and acceptance.

To accept, according to Camus, means to rebel. To live with the absurd is to be courageous, for sometimes to resist means to accept.

When man asks questions and is met with nothingness, that is the first encounter with absurdity. The mind is an endless ocean of

thoughts, full of questions demanding answers, but what comes back is only a loud silence, as if the universe were indifferent to our suffering. Between the question and this silence stands the absurd.- "the absurd is born of this confrontation between the human need and the unreasonable silence of the world." (Camus, 2016)

The absurd is one of the most significant themes in existential philosophy, central to Albert Camus's work. However, it also plays a crucial role in Albanian literature, particularly in the works of Fatos Kongoli. Kongoli addresses absurdity within a completely different reality and context during and after communist Albania.

3. "The Stranger" and Meursault as an Absurd Character

"Mother died today. Or maybe yesterday, I don't know." (Camus, I huaji, 1986, f. 31)- thus begins *The Stranger*, one of the most unusual and unforgettable openings in literary history. The novel's introduction centers on death, the death of the protagonist's mother, but what strikes the reader is not the loss itself, but the fact that Meursault is more concerned about not knowing the exact time of her death than about the news of the death itself. This opening sets the tone for the entire novel, which continues to reinforce its theme through similarly disorienting situations.

Meursault accepts the reality of death with a frightening, almost admirable ease. This is the essence of the absurd, accepting reality as it is, without trying to justify why things happen, and above all, doing so without hypocrisy but with emotional honesty.

At no point does Meursault express his reasons with shame or guilt, because he sees no need to pretend; for him, pretending would require unnecessary energy and, more importantly, would be pointless. Since life is short and fleeting, ending inevitably in death, maintaining emotional distance is Meursault's strategy to protect himself from pain that, for many, is unbearable.

He is able to notice every detail, even what the director of the home is wearing, but he does not perceive pain because pain is emotional. Meursault is an observer of visible, tangible things, but not of feelings. When Marie, his girlfriend, asks if he loves her, he replies that doesn't mean anything, but he thinks no. For him, love holds no special significance; it is not something worth overthinking or agonizing over. He is honest with Marie, refusing to lie about his feelings. Emotions, especially love, cannot be forced and yet his response also shows his general disinterest in emotional involvement.

To Meursault, life flows the same no matter where you are. Routine dominates existence. He has no ambitions, no aspirations, and no desire for change; he has surrendered to the monotony of life. Life is an unchanging, meaningless reality, no matter how hard the individual tries to improve or transcend it. True freedom, for Camus, comes when one accepts the absurdity of life. "The absurd man will not commit suicide. He wants to live without renouncing any of his certainties, without a future, without hope, without illusions and without any despair. He observes death with passionate attention, and this fascination sets him free. He lives the 'divine irresponsibility' of the innocent man." (Sartre, 1989).

Even after killing a man, Meursault expresses neither remorse nor regret. He simply acknowledges that he disrupted the equilibrium of life with his act. He processes his action with logic rather than emotion. He is aware that he had opened "the door to misfortune" not because he feels guilty, but because the consequence was rational under those circumstances. "I realized that I'd destroyed the balance of the day, the exceptional silence of the beach on which I'd been happy." (Camus, 1986)

Meursault does not try to deceive or justify himself, because this is who he is, he cannot deny his nature. Truth takes precedence over social expectation. He refuses to fake grief to meet societal standards, and for that reason, he becomes unacceptable to others. "The stranger he portrays is precisely one of those innocent beings who disturb society by refusing to play by its rules. He lives among strangers, but even to them, he remains a stranger." (Sartre, 1989)

Meursault is not suited to society, and society is not suited to Meursault. He lives by his own inner logic, where physical sensation carries more weight than moral codes. His refusal to pretend renders him an outsider. Society cannot comprehend someone who doesn't cry at his mother's funeral, who doesn't say "I love you," who refuses to lie to look good in public. As a result, society condemns him, not for the crime he committed, but for what he is and what he represents. He is seen as a danger, someone who violates all its values.

"I had lived in this way, and I could have lived otherwise. I had done this and not done something else. And so what? It was as if all my life I'd been waiting for this moment, and this pale dawn when I was to be executed. Nothing, nothing mattered, and I knew why" (Camus, 1986). At the end of his life, Meursault realizes that the life he lived with all its choices and coincidences could have been different, but that this fact ultimately holds no weight. He is not troubled by what he did or didn't do; what matters is that everything ends in death. The idea of choice is futile there is

no right or wrong path, because death is the destination of both. Just like Sisyphus, whom Camus asks us to imagine as happy, Meursault finds freedom in accepting the absurdity of life. He, too, is happy because to accept the absurd is to be free.

4. "The Lost One" and Thesari as an Absurd Character

Introductions to novels are often striking, intriguing, and serve as invitations to further reading. Kongoli opens his novel *The Lost One* with: "There comes a day when a man feels he has settled his accounts with the world, his cycle has closed, and there is no point in re-chewing the past" (Kongoli, 2005). There comes a moment when a person becomes spiritually exhausted because he has given enough of himself to the world. Usually, such a feeling arises from disappointment or painful experience. The cycle of life ends, nothing new happens, time brings no change or hope, and the past becomes a burden without value to revisit. Right from the start, the taste of absurdity is felt, expressing the futility and incomprehensibility of life, where the individual stands suspended before existence. At this point, he simply seeks a narrative, says the author.

Thesari is aware of his fate, which he silently accepts. "In every way, I was and am a worthless man, lost" (Kongoli, 2005). By saying "everyone," he expresses that he has never had value in the eyes of others: in family, society, or love. He feels unaccepted, unseen, and never needed or important. He is excluded and aware of this lack of belonging. Calling himself a worthless man is a harsh self-judgment and a conviction that his existence has no weight, meaning, or purpose. This feeling is not momentary but a long-term observation, presenting himself as lost both in the past and present. His past is not glorious, nor is his future hopeful. "The Lost One is a pessimistic novel reflecting the modern man, immersed in the problems and "chaos" of life" (Totaj, 2013).

Thesari's identity was formed traumatically; he experienced violence, humiliation, and silence in the face of it. The violence came from the institution that was supposed to educate him, and the silence from the home that was supposed to protect him. From childhood, he was deformed by injustice and collective indifference. Thus, his personality is constructed as "lost."

He was raised with violence and knew from childhood there was no escape. His childhood turns into a labyrinth where violence is ever-present, with no exit. Even the most beloved and safe figure for children, the father, dissolves before his eyes with the approval of violence, failing to be a protector and becoming instead a silent accomplice. We do not know who harms Thesari

more, the beatings or the loss of trust in family and familial security.

Thesari is stripped of identity and ambition; he exists without truly living and accepts this in silence, without drama. "Because my life has been mediocre, the life of a man who was nobody and never became somebody, an anonymous life melted into the anonymity of a lost neighborhood, in a lost small town, no matter how close to the capital." (Kongoli, 2005). His life was bleak, colorless, but above all invisible. He never managed to build his personal or social identity because the happy children, but he doubted it. At home, he heard his parents' quarrels and realized there was no happiness. His parents were actors like everyone else; for example, they spoke with disgust about the neighbor Hulusi, but whenever he came into the house, they smiled and honored him, behavior Thesari found humiliating. He understands that all the teachers, the director, the parents wore masks and played different social roles without being themselves.

Kongoli's characters, especially Thesari, are individuals lost in the path of life who do not take initiatives to change their lives but silently suffer and survive. "They are unambitious, weak types who choose indifference and passivity, but deep down they are troubled by existence due to traumatic experiences they endure and have endured. Thus, they are individuals with a fragile inner world, impotent in the face of violence and confrontation with the absurdity of existence" (Prendi, 2015).

Thesari grows up in a sick society that teaches children to lie and be servile, otherwise they are excluded. This hypocrisy destroys true identity and paves the way for what later will be called "the lost". World was never a place for him. "I was and am a man of the last resort..." (Kongoli, 2005). The town and neighborhood themselves were lost and characterless, not only him, but also the place where he lives lacks meaning.

He did not learn hypocrisy in lessons but through the two-faced behavior of teachers who twisted words in front of the director and spoke differently behind his back. Even the director himself became suddenly polite and calm in the presence of inspectors. In this environment, he and others grew up believing they were

5. Comparison Between Meursault and Thesari - two Ways of Living the Absurd

Thesari and Meursault describe life with a cold tone, lacking enthusiasm and great emotions; both see themselves as part of a life without major or significant events. They suffer because they are invisible, strangers to themselves, and lost in the routine of life. They have lived a life without purpose, lived for nothing, yet they have still lived, this is the absurdity of life without reason.

Thesari has low self-esteem and considers himself a person without weight, role, or ever standing in the front line of anything. He does not feed himself illusions about his importance in society but brutally expresses his invisibility with awareness. He is conscious of his meaningless position in the world. Thesari narrates with a feeling of personal failure, whereas Meursault does not suffer from his condition and tells his story with a neutral tone, without emotional charge. Kongoli's character calls himself worthless, and his condition results from contempt and exclusion by family and society. Meursault does not see himself as inferior to others; rather, he simply does not feel any importance for himself. His state stems from refusal to play society's game, not from being ignored.

The absurdity in *The Lost One* lies in senseless violence, unjust authorities, parents' submission, and society's acceptance of evil, as well as the anticipation of punishment (the beating) without guilt. Meursault is punished not for what he does but for what he does not feel; Thesari is punished not for guilt but because he was the next, perhaps preferred, victim. The lack of emotions is related to the unjust reality seen through the eyes of both characters.

Kongoli localizes absurdity in an oppressive Albanian society where authority crushes the individual from childhood. Meursault is naturally a loner and does not expect support from anyone, whereas Thesari had expected support and was hurt when he did not receive it. The absurdity for Camus is a general existential condition, while for Kongoli it is a concrete, painful social experience embodying violence, fear, and silence.

The false world built on lies is the core of absurdity, a world that is not true and forces one to play a role in order to survive. Both protagonists reject hypocrisy. Meursault refuses to play the role society demands, such as crying for his mother, while the other one feels disgust for this social theater but lacks the strength to openly refuse it. Thesari is hurt by this falseness, while Meursault is unaffected by hypocrisy.

Thesari wants to believe in change but receives no response from the world. He expresses sarcasm about the social and political reality, while Meursault does not ironize but remains cold and stoic. Kongoli, through his character, expresses deep criticism of his post-communist country, while Camus deals with existential states of man facing death without stopping to analyze political systems.

Thesari is required to feel hatred for his uncle and Meursault to feel pain for his mother because these are social norms and they are expected to feel accordingly. The first one is forced to pretend

and play the hypocrisy game, while the second one absolutely refuses to pretend and feign false feelings. For Meursault, it is not important to feel accepted; he remains loyal to himself until the very last moment of his life.

Both individuals are withdrawn and closed off but for different reasons. Thesari's invisibility is imposed on him because of a family stigma (the fugitive uncle). This concealment causes him mixed feelings: sometimes he likes it because he can observe and protect himself, other times he hates it because he feels unnecessary and worthless. Camus's protagonist does not try to avoid being noticed; he simply feels that way. He likes being invisible because he needs neither attention nor approval; he is self-sufficient.

Thesari's alienation is painful and emotional, while Meursault's is cold and normal, even acceptable. The first one feels inferior and excluded from society due to cultural and class circumstances, whereas the second one never feels inferior, also does not care about belonging to any social group, not because he feels superior but because he does not belong to any group.

The feeling of estrangement appears in Thesari himself when, despite his efforts to be part of another world, he could never become like it. This difference is also felt by those closest to him, such as the woman he loved. His life was not a series of planned events but mostly random. This situation creates deep loneliness in the character and alienation. According to him, he was born that way, incapable of understanding others, unable to emotionally bond with anyone; it was a predetermined fate that he could not escape no matter how hard he tried. He had not thought life would be this way; he was not born to be alone and therefore suffers from exclusion, unlike Meursault who does not experience it and remains indifferent.

Both characters are emotionally disconnected from their families. In Thesari's family relation, the system influenced them from childhood, dictating their lives. He does not agree with the way his parents serve others, how they beat him just to look good in front of others, how they force him to hate his uncle without knowing him. Above all, he cannot stand their hypocrisy. All these have caused him to break from his family, feeling neither security nor love. It is precisely the family that causes him to be excluded from school and forced to work in a cement factory. It is the reason he had to distance himself from friends and others. It keeps him lonely by passing on a sin he was unfortunately destined to experience. How can he feel love for this family that destroyed all his dreams and bonds? He lived with the family but was lonely under their roof. Traumas occupied a permanent place

in his life; pain and disappointment were as inevitable as the air he breathed.

Meursault shows a very large detachment from his only family member, his mother. This coldness is evident from the beginning of the novel when he learns of her death and shows no sorrow or grief. He holds no grudge against his mother, nor does he hate her; he knows her as his mother but does not feel the need to feel more than that. The individual is not prevented by family traumas from creating healthy relationships, but he himself is incapable and unwilling to have them. It is his choice to be distant from family, social, and romantic ties. Both protagonists feel detached from their families as social structures, feeling like strangers.

Thesari expresses the suspended state he was in: he was incapable of living and even less capable of ending his life. He is at the border, belonging to no life; he feels totally lost in his existence. He calls his mediocre life a punishment, considering this way of living worse than death itself. His sentence was life. His gray condition gave no expectation or hope for the future; in fact, he was not interested in it. The source of his endurance was lack of courage to leave. His life as punishment reminds of Sisyphus who, though carrying a heavy burden throughout life, does not give up because that is his fate. His life is meaningless and absurd; he lives with "a weight on his shoulders" but cannot bear it, he simply lives because he cannot die. Sisyphus responds to fate with acceptance, Camus portrays him as happy, but his confrontation with absurdity is more difficult and his end is suffering until death. He gives up in the face of injustice and cannot escape the harsh condition he is in; he lacks will and desire. "Far from the active protagonist who fights to control his fate or the unwavering positive hero of socialist realism, Thesari Lumi is incapable of action and incapable of living. He is the voice of all the 'losers' who 'see silver clouds on the horizon and know well that they will never reach them'" (Elsie, 2005). But could he fight a whole system alone, where evil came from every side?

In the philosophy of the absurd, according to Albert Camus, man realizes that the universe offers no meaning and that every effort to find a reason for existence is futile. At this point, man either gives up or accepts the absurd and lives with the awareness of emptiness. Thesari has fully accepted his status as "the lost one," just as Meursault calmly and coldly accepts the end without seeking meaning or salvation. Thesari and Meursault are people freed from the illusion of hope.

5. Conclusion

This paper analyzes the work *The Stranger* by Albert Camus and *The Lost One* by Fatos Kongoli seen in the light of the concept of the absurd as an experience of human existence. Camus and

Kongoli are authors from different times and places but who deal with similar themes related to the efforts of individuals to find meaning in a world that does not offer such a thing. The main characters of the works are those who carry the heavy fate of the absurd and through their lives they show it to the reader. They are both similar and different from each other. Meursault's absurdity stems from the questions of an individual who seeks meaning, while Thesari's absurdity comes as a result of a repressive system that instills fear in the individual. Meursault accepts it with steadfastness, while Thesari does not agree but does not have the courage to oppose it, therefore he accepts it in silence.

The paper shows that the absurd as a literary concept knows neither linguistic nor cultural boundaries but is a universal experience, and this is highlighted by comparative analysis. In this way, what Goethe had foreseen is achieved, a worldwide literature where the themes are of everyone and for everyone. It is proven that literature has no frameworks and it dialogues with the reader of all times and places. The literary confrontation of the two authors and their characters enriches thought as it offers different perspectives on man and life in the face of the experience of the absurd.

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