

Truth Kills: A Cry of Honest Meursault, in Albert Camus's Novel "The Stranger"

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Abstract

Our Upanisad says, "*Satyameva Jayate*" which means "Truth alone triumphs." Every religion, every sacred book, every philosophy and every philosopher teach us to speak truth. When a child starts learning we teach him "Don't be afraid to speak truth, even you die speaking truth." To be truthful is a godly nature. Our society always teaches and expects truthfulness from every individual. Truth always comforts our life.

Keywords: Truth, Honest, Victim, Kill

According to Jiddu Krishnamurti:

The general rule is that Truth should never be violated, because it is of the utmost importance to the comfort of life. We have been told that all paths lead to truth — you have your path as a Hindu and someone else has his path as a Christian and another as a Muslim, and they all meet at the same door — which is, when you look at it, so obviously absurd. Truth has no path, and that is the beauty of truth, it is living. A dead thing has a path to it because it is static, but when you see that truth is something living, moving, which has no resting place, which is in no temple, mosque or church, which no religion, no teacher, no philosopher, nobody can lead you to — then you will also see that this living thing is what you actually are — your anger, your brutality, your violence, your despair, the agony and sorrow you live in. In the understanding of all this is the truth, and you can understand it only if you know how to look at those things in your life. And you cannot look through an ideology, through a screen of words, through hopes and fears.

Freedom From The Known (1969).

But in this world, there are so many people who are the victim of being truthful. They have suffered for truth even truth has killed them. One among the victims is Meursault.

What characterizes Meursault throughout the novel is his desire to represent a truthful personality. He doesn't want to lie and so the society perceives him as a stranger. Camus portrays a human being who shocks society by simply refusing to play the game. In the true sense, it is society which is a stranger to people who do not lie or fake. The people reading the novel for the first time are themselves strangers to the notion of the absurd and vainly try to judge Meursault according to the typical standards set so far. For the readers too, Meursault is "a stranger".

1. Introduction

Albert Camus's most enticing work "The Stranger" (1945) has been regarded as a consequential novel in the canon of English literature and has been praised as a marvelous literary creation of all time. The story is about a person called Meursault the protagonist who believes and lives in his own philosophy. The novel highlights the struggle of the main character Meursault, and the trouble he gets himself into being brutally honest and truthful to everyone and every situation that he encounters.

Camus wrote: "A long time ago, I summed up *The Outsider* in a sentence which I realise is extremely paradoxical. In our society, any man who doesn't cry at his mother's funeral is liable to be condemned to death. I simply meant that the hero of the book is condemned because he doesn't play the game. He refuses to lie. Lying is not only saying what isn't true. It is also, in fact especially, saying more than is true and, in the case of the human heart, saying more than one feels. We all do it, every day, to make life simpler. But Meursault, contrary to appearances, doesn't want to make life simpler. He says what he is, he refuses to hide his feelings and society immediately feels threatened. For example, he is asked to say that he regrets his crime, in time-honoured fashion. He replies that he feels more annoyance about it than true regret. And it is this nuance that condemns him." (Carroll 27). The hero doesn't play the game means that he refuses to lie. Lying is not only saying which is not true, it is also showing more than is true as far as the human heart is concerned.

To simplify life, one lies, just like Goneril and Regan had done to please their father, King Lear for the sake of wealth and power. Meursault doesn't want to simplify life, he refuses to disguise his feelings and immediately the society feels threatened just like Lear showed his anger towards Cordelia. Far from being true, he lacks all sensibility, a deep compassion animates him, a passion for the absolute and the truth for which he has to pay a heavy price.

2. Character of Meursault

Meursault, the protagonist is an honest man who refuses to lie for the sake of truth and honesty. Meursault is psychologically detached from the world around him. Events that would be very significant for most people, such as a marriage proposal or a parent's death, do not matter to him, at least not on a sentimental level. He simply does not care that his mother is dead, or that Marie loves him.

Meursault is honest, for which he does not think of hiding his lack of feeling by shedding false tears over his mother's death. In displaying his indifference, Meursault implicitly challenges society's accepted moral standards, which forces that one should grieve over death. Because Meursault does not grieve, society sees him as an outsider, a threat, even a monster. At his trial, the fact that he had no reaction to his mother's death damages his reputation far more than his taking of another person's life. Both religion and the judicial system misunderstand him and take Meursault as an evil. Both religion and the court system lead to blinding the truth rather than the path to provide truth and justice. Both the court and religion condemn Meursault not only because he is indifferent but because he is different. Meursault at last realizes that the universe is indifferent to him as he is indifferent to the universe. He realizes that laws and order, and truth and honesty are meaningless in this meaningless world. So he does not want to make his life meaningful but he wants to make his life simple, as simple as possible.

Camus himself had said that Meursault was a “poor and naked man”. He did not hide anything. With Meursault what we see is what we get. He confesses everything as he feels and as it is and does not hide anything. All these qualities prove that Meursault is a man of truth and honesty but they lead his ending, which was, the death penalty. Still he was happy because he knows that we die, the universe still goes on. Nothing fundamental gets change. Thus honest Meursault understands the truth of human life and the truth of the universe and dies as a martyr of the truth.

3. Honest Meursault pays a heavy price

The Stranger tells the story of Meursault, who lives for the sensual pleasures of the present moment, free of any system of values. Rather than behaving in accordance with social norms, Meursault tries to live as honestly as he can, doing what he wants to do and befriending those whom he likes. He also refuses to simulate feelings that he does not possess, and thus he does not force himself to cry at his mother's funeral or to mourn her death too deeply. A series of events leads to the climactic moment when Meursault haphazardly murders an Arab on the beach. The subsequent trial condemns him not so much for the murder as for his lack of commitment to the unspoken rules of society.

Most of the philosophical content of the novel comes near the end, where Meursault sits in his cell awaiting his execution, and particularly in a heated exchange between Meursault and the prison chaplain who tries to convert him to Christianity. Meursault rejects the chaplain's entreaties, telling him that he has no interest in God or anything otherworldly. He wants to live with the certainties of this life, even if his only certainty is the death that awaits him.

Meursault refuses to accord himself with custom, and asserts his freedom by doing what strikes him as appropriate at any given moment. This includes smoking and showing indifference at the vigil for his dead mother, going to the beach and sleeping with a woman the day after his mother's funeral, and forging a letter for his friend Raymond, who is a thug and a pimp. This exercise of freedom also represents a revolt against any attempt to place restrictions on his life. His passion is evident in his enthusiastic pursuit of new pleasures and new experiences: he loves being alive.

Meursault also maintains the kind of ironic detachment we would expect from an absurd hero. He prefers observing events to getting directly involved; one memorable chapter describes Meursault spending an entire day sitting on his balcony watching passers-by in the street. Even when he is directly involved in events, he is unable to get too caught up in them. When his lover, Marie, asks him to marry her, he tells her that he doesn't love her but that it makes no difference to him if they get married or not. Even when he kills the Arab, there is a sense that he is not really there, not really doing what he is doing. It seems almost as if he is observing himself shooting the Arab rather than actually doing the shooting.

In his final outburst to the chaplain in prison, Meursault sums up a great deal of his absurd worldview, forcefully asserting that nothing really matters, that we all live and we all die, and what we do before we die is ultimately irrelevant. After the chaplain leaves, Meursault enjoys a final, revelatory moment: "And I felt ready to live it all again too. As if that blind rage had washed me clean, rid me of hope; for the first time, in that night alive with signs and stars, I opened myself to the gentle indifference of the world. Finding it so much like myself—so like a brother, really—I felt that I had been happy and that I was

happy again." Free from hope, Meursault recognizes himself in a universe without meaning and without hope. At the end of the novel, he comes to a full acceptance of his absurd position in the universe and cannot but concludes that he is happy.

4. Conclusion

Meursault, the protagonist of the novel, is a remarkable character in literature. He is a simple clerk who greatly enjoys life's physical pleasure, and does not care about social norms. The misfortunes into which Meursault pushed, is for his lazy desire to please other and for his stubborn truthfulness. He is sent to the valley of death because of his refusal to dance with the tunes of the society. It is the actions of Meursault that makes the novel and define existentialism. He sees the world as a meaningless string of events that give no purpose to life and existence. Meursault has the passion for the truth. He is an outcast, an outsider, a stranger for this reason, and is detached from others because they cannot face the truths of the world as he (Meursault) perceives them. Both the religion and the judicial system misunderstand him and try to hide the truth, and condemn Meursault not only because he is indifferent but because he is different.

For me Meursault is an honest man as he stays true to his-self at all times. He does not consider other people's feelings before he says anything. He does not say what other people want from him, to suit them, but he says what he feels, not more, not less. He does not pretend. His life is an open book. We find the same what we see in him. He does not lie to save his life because he knows a lie is a lie even thousand people say and a truth is a truth even a single person says. He also knows that to say less than truth is not only a lie but to say more than truth is also a lie. He knows the truth of life that is death. Life is meaningless to him simply because death is unavoidable. One day or other one has to face death and that is why he refuses to find/give the world a meaning even after the multiple attempts of the judge and the Chaplain to make him find one.

For me Meursault is an extremely truthful and honest man. As he tells his story, Meursault describes phenomena purely and simply. Honesty and truthfulness are carried to such an extremity that instead of saving, it brings devastation to Meursault and kills him. Meursault pays his best for the sake of truth. I completely agree with critic like O'Brien who considers Meursault "as a hero and martyr for the truth" (O'Brien 21).

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