



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

In the strike of the gavel: The tension between law and individual as depicted in Albert Camus' 'Létranger'

Agopyan, Christian

Citation

Agopyan, C. (2025). *In the strike of the gavel: The tension between law and individual as depicted in Albert Camus' 'Létranger'*.

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

License: [License to inclusion and publication of a Bachelor or Master Thesis, 2023](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4280902>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

In the strike of the gavel: The tension between law and the individual as
depicted in Albert Camus' *'L'étranger'*

By Christian Agopyan

s2925583

Philosophy MA: Moral and Political Philosophy

Supervised by Frank Chouraqui

Date of submission: 27/05/2025

Contents

Foreword:.....	3
Chapter I) On the friction between law and the subject	4
Chapter II) On Literature and Law.....	9
II.I) Author, presence and narratives	10
II.II) How to read Camus.....	13
III) On the road to reconciliation.....	15
III.I) Law's truth	18
III.II) The authority of law	20
III.III) The stranger.....	21
III.IV) From office clerk to criminal	24
III.V) On the judgement of Meursault.....	26
Chapter IV) On Death.....	28
IV.I) The final dance: law and death.....	29
IV.II) Where death walks the pages: Death throughout the novel.....	32
Conclusion	39
Bibliography.....	45

There's a special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, 'tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come. The readiness is all.

~Shakespeare

Foreword:

Since the publication of Albert Camus' *'Létranger'* in 1942, the theme of law has not been explored in sufficient detail, a theme which dominates part II of the novel. The aim of this inquiry is to delve into this question. The question that I will be aiming towards is: how is the relationship between law and the individual depicted in *'Létranger'*. The conclusion will be that at the moment of death, there is the possibility of a reconciliation of law and the individual freedom; a reconciliation through the irreconcilability of both elements. In death, which will be the instrument toward this paradoxical conclusion, both law and individual cease to be. The conclusion is paradoxical in nature for through death, in one sense, there is no defeat of law, and in another sense, there is defeat. Law defeats the subject insofar as the subject of our novel in question dies and law is defeated insofar as the subject sentenced to death transforms the legality of death into an existential form of death which consequently allows him to exercise his radical freedom and assert himself above the law by not viewing its consequence as punishment.

The following text shall be divided into the following sections: Chapter I will be a brief introduction behind my assumption that there is a tension between law and individuality by dealing with the problem found within the general concept of law. This methodological choice is a necessary one for Camus himself did not erect a philosophy of law but is rather working upon the intuitive assumption of what law is. His depiction of the very ordinary court case reflects this. To merely analyse the representation of law in his work would miss the broader scope of this inquiry which is partly aimed at showing the tension between law and the individual both in his work and without. This is because a text aims at the outer world, the world from which it springs but nevertheless wants to return to. A literary text is analysable in itself and in its implications in the world at large. Chapter II focuses on the novel as a piece of literature and aims to establish a nexus between the philosophy of the novel and the narration of the novel itself; namely, that the assumed incompatibility between the universality of law

and the particularity of man is seen also in the structure of the novel. Chapter III deals with the novel in particular and aims at showing how Camus gradually paves the way to a reconciliation of some kind through his novel. Chapter IV ends with the ‘conclusion’ which aims to describe how there is no reconciliation found except in the attitude of the one dying. The solution is to meet death with a smile, something different from accepting it. Law in its ultimate enactment through the guillotine proves its own weakness and gives space for an attitude change. Chapter IV shows how death as the solution is present before we even reach the end of the novel by looking back to chapter II where we are met with ‘the death of the author’. I will argue that the dramatization of law into fiction leads to a solution that is found both within the novel’s ideas and narrative structure. By exploring the topic of death in Camus’ ‘Létranger’, we will gain further insight into what exactly is it about death that allows for a reconciliation; as it turns out, it is less about death than the absurd affirmation of it. It is the psychological stance of Meursault that allows the reconciliation to happen through his Being-toward-death.

Chapter I) On the friction between law and the subject

The type of law our inquiry is interested in is the judicial system for that is the type of law which Meursault faces during the courtroom scene. Law with the universality of its prescriptive ‘ought’, its codes and conclusions are built upon an equality ethic. Law as the great equaliser, is blind to wealth, indifferent to power or status and in a sterilising swipe of its hand it speaks in universals. The Kantian categorical imperative seems to be deeply imbedded in a law which seems to operate under the pretence that each of its codes and rules appear as if they can be willed to become a universal law. (Kant, 1785/1998, p. 15) The universality of law as argued from a Kantian perspective comes from the fact that the maxims of law do not appear as if they can rationally be argued against. This is the first source of our universal law. The second is that the universality comes from a certain lack of historicity in a very specific sense. The most famous philosopher who talked about the issue of the historicity of law is Derrida who in his work *‘Before the Law: The Complete Text of Préjugés’* (1985/2018) writes that

[...] precisely when the authority of law seems to exclude any historicity and any empirical narrativity, at the moment when its rationality seems alien to fiction and imagination of any kind, it seems a priori to still offer its hospitality to these parasites.
(p. 34).

In the absence of any objectivity, subjectivity takes place and disrupts this illusion into fragments of fiction. Law is nothing more than fiction, and the imagination which Derrida speak of is the subjective interpretation of law. To have relations with law is therefore, also in Derrida's words 'to behave as if law had no history or at least did not depend on its historical presentation; and it is not at the same time to be fascinated, provoked, addressed by the historicity of this non-history.' (Derrida, 1985/2018, p. 36) The history of law is its non-history insofar as the history is an ambiguous system of divided, unrelated and separate interpretations of law which rely upon other interpretations including the social and cultural milieu at the time of the reading of law. Law therefore presents itself 'whilst withholding itself, acknowledging neither its origin nor its location.' (Derrida, 1985/2018, p. 36). Foucault had a similar conception of law when he said that 'the presence of the law is its concealment.' (1986/1987, p.33)

Following from this, if law thus described has become literature prone to radically different interpretations and therefore leads to different instantiations of law then 'it is understandable that 'das Gesetz' should remain inaccessible even when it, the law, presents itself or promises itself.' (Derrida, 1985/2018, p. 47). Stemming from the lack of objective historicity of law and its strong ties to literature, law by necessity must speak in general terms. It must find a way through which law can affirm itself and this affirmation can only be done in the pretence of objectivity which is translated into the universal maxims we spoke of. Working under this façade, Derrida notes:

How are we to reconcile the act of justice that must always concern singularity, individuals, irreplaceable groups and lives, the other or myself as other, in a unique situation with rule, norm, value, or the imperative of justice which necessarily have a general form, even if this generality prescribes a singular application in each case? (1989/1992, p.17)

The conclusion, to repeat, which discloses itself to us is that because of its non-historicity, law, if to be seen as the guardian of justice and the powerful sentinel of society, which is the primary and most essential self-prescribed goal of law, must assert itself in some way. The way it does this is through an illusion of objectivity which is again noted by Derrida when he argues that 'in order to be investigated with its categorical authority, the law should have no history, no genesis, no derivation whatsoever.' (Derrida, 1985/2018, p. 35) Unable to point to a set of objective, historical criteria which are used to uphold justice and proper judgement, law as

fiction, must necessarily speak universally if it is to achieve its goal and this speaking is also creating: 'The absence of a criterion is, one might say, the law.' (Derrida, 1985/2018, p. 15) Derrida's remarks illuminate the way in which the literary nature of law accompanied by the essential interpretation renders the somethingness of law, its codes, its texts and authority as a nothingness with no concrete, but a very abstract, vague and indefinite existence. It remains the aesopic abstraction of both judge and judged for each translates law into their own language, a language of subjectivity. In light of Derrida's interpretation of law as text and its relationship with fiction, later on we will see how the reconciliation of law and the individual is first given as a possibility through an analysis of '*Létranger*' as fiction. For now, it suffices to say that drawing on the Derridean notion of law as fiction, just as much as Camus lies in a quasi Barthesian state of authorial death, Meursault resists the authorship of his narrative through the lack of motivations for his moral conduct. With no motivations there is an equal lack of objectivity, a lack of a certain object to be written about. Sartre in his essay on '*Létranger*' makes a similar remark when he says that

Glass seems to let everything through. It blocks only one thing: the meaning of their gestures. The glass still needs to be chosen: it will be the Stranger's consciousness, which is really transparent, since we see everything it sees. However, it is designed in such a way that things are transparent and meanings opaque. (1946/2007, p. 91)

The legal system creates meaning when there is none and it is only in the moment of death where there is a paradoxical resolution. In the execution of Meursault, the narrative of law ends and so does its interpretation. Just as much as there is an impossible demand for Camus to write his novel, for the absurd novel cannot truly exist, there is that same demand found in Meursault to give a story which makes sense. More on this will be discussed later.

The assertion of power which law aims at is done through judgements. It is in the act of judging someone that the law enforces itself. The resounding strike of the gavel upon the sound block signifies the end of the trial, the conclusion of the judgement and the now closed future of the judged. This moment marks the objective at which law aimed at before the trial even took place, the self-proclaimed goal of justice. Law equivalates judgement and justice. In normal circumstances, it is assumed that the judgement of the court means that justice has been reached. The mighty sword of law strikes and in that very moment, when the sword reaches the

unfortunate, law and justice become twins. Inseparable and indistinguishable twins. From a different angle, justice has always been there within the interiors of law. In etymological terms, we see that to 'justify' has its roots in the 13th century where it meant 'to administer justice' and later in the 14th century it took a slightly different meaning of 'showing something to be just or right.' Law, insofar as it is an instrument of power and authority, justifies itself. It is a self-justificatory system. It shows itself to be right by appealing to its action of judging. In the *'Force of Law: The Mystical Foundation of Authority'*, Derrida speaks of what we mean through the common idiomatic expression of enforcing law. It 'reminds us that law is always an authorising force, a force that justifies itself or is justified in applying itself, even if this justification may be judged from elsewhere to be unjust or unjustifiable.' (Derrida, 1989/1992, p. 10). To 'enforce', which in the late 14th century had connotations of exerting force, compelling and becoming violent, comes from the Old French 'enforcier' which partly meant to offer violence to, oppress, violate and rape. To enforce law is then an expression which demonstrates that in the very framework of law, within its infrastructure, the oppression of the subject being judged is inherent. Consequently, in the proceedings of a trial, the enforcement of law means nothing more than the violent usurpation of the subject's selfhood. The justice present in the moment of law's enactment is at the same time an injustice done toward the subject. Being unfounded, law must find a way to found itself. Since it cannot do this outside itself, it does this within itself. The judgement of law is not something that we can thereby analyse and abstract away from law. The judgement is an extension and not a secondary characteristic of law. As Jean-Francois Lyotard said in an interview with Elizabeth Weber, 'it doesn't contain, it announces! We hear nothing other than that something has been announced.' (1999, p. 42) The contents of law are inaccessible, the only access granted to us is the final utterance of the verdict only to be followed up by the judge's 'court is adjourned.' Judgement itself remains there and nowhere. The voice of law is the one that the prosecutor gives it, the voice of law itself can only be described as an inaudible breath; one with the stench of injustice. We must not confuse this argument with the argument for the illegitimacy of law for law is in fact legitimate. It is a necessary for law to exist in order for society to exist; there are no lawless societies. The cornerstone of a society is stability. In order to exist within society and to reap the benefits of a stable system void of chaos which would impede our own individual lives, we legitimately give up our freedom; an idea already talked about by Rousseau in his *'The Social Contract'*: 'What man loses by the social contract is his natural liberty and an unrestricted right to anything he wants and can get. What he gains is civil liberty and the ownership of everything he possesses.' (1762/2017, p. 8)

It is only that the legitimacy of law is at odds with the existential legitimacy of the individual which cannot be overshadowed by anything else.

During the judgement however, insofar as law is working with a subject, we can say that the ability of law to be law lies solely in the one who faces law, and that law by itself is no law. Without the subject to stand before law, a sign of respect, the law holds no power. The relevance of law is therefore relational. This relevancy is at the same time the power of law. For without the nexus between law and subject, the power of law is also gone since it relies upon a subject upon which it can be exercised. This interaction is the primal condition for law. A condition which Lefebvre named 'encounter' in the sense that: 'if jurisprudence is to proceed case by case and heed singular demands, it must necessarily find its support and inspiration in the specificity of a problem or an encounter before it.' (Lefebvre, 2005, p. 106).

Considering this, we see that something new happens in regard to the subject. Law does not simply erase the subject before it by fully negating it. The erasure takes place through a transformation of the subject into something new and wholly different. Laws being *principles universalis*, take care of singular cases and in their taking-care-of, they drive a change from singularity to particularity; a change in which particularity imposes itself upon singularity. (Deleuze, 1968/1994, p. 2). Law does not immediately eradicate the singular case from existence, there is a gradual transformation through which the singular ultimately becomes a particular; a particular 'exemplification of a general law in relation to other particulars that also exemplify laws.' (Lefebvre, 2005, p. 106). This is also related to law as text where the writer is situated in a historical context which he absorbs and reiterates within his discourse. This concurrence between writing and history makes the author's work both individual and particular. Individual in its singularity and particular in its reference to the external world; it is a particular example of what that world affords. The way in which law asserts itself through imposing a change upon the subject before it is the same as the author and his relatedness to the outside world which imposes an equal change upon the text. The relationship between law and literature will be analysed in greater detail later.

This change makes it possible for law to pass a judgement onto an individual, which, through his individuality escapes the universality of law; the individual in a way becomes a universal instantiation of law. Law becomes the brute mechanism whereby its constant encounters, encounters which are treated infelicitously, become a necessary aspect of it. These encounters,

by coming before the law, in a way present themselves as within law. There are no externalities in law and when followed to its logical conclusion, the paradox that law both affirms itself, and at times, can, and does, undermine itself, reaches us. In death, if viewed from a Foucauldian perspective developed in his essay '*Society must be defended*', one escapes law. In the swishing swoop of the guillotine, law enforces itself in its most powerful modality, and, at the same time, disappears. In that moment, when one's head is about to fall down to the ground in a loud thump, one can regain his singularity. Later we shall see exactly how this notion is portrayed through Meursault.

Chapter II) On Literature and Law

Our first encounter with the novel is not with the ideas within the pages. It is with the presentation of these ideas. The ideas are written in the genre of literature and our first encounter with 'L'étranger' is a confrontation with fiction, with text. This section explores how, already in the narrative framework of the novel, the concept of death is introduced and argues that there is a parallelism between the narrative style and the ideas present. The death of the author allows for textual autonomy and in relation to Meursault's death, both instances of death are harmonised by a release from authority. The text is no longer bound by the author and Meursault, through his acceptance of the absurd, no longer bound by law. Both deaths align with Camus' absurd philosophy for through them, imposed meaning is rejected. Death is seen as the reconciling force not by the submitting to the meaning creating mechanisms of law and literature, but, through the stripping away of their interpretive powers. Death becomes a vanishing point, a black hole where both authorial and legal authority recede to give space for existential clarity which finds meaning beyond the scope of law and literature. As this chapter develops however, we see that this introductory remark rests uneasily besides different, equally compelling and plausible interpretations which divulge themselves. The focus on a literary analysis draws from Lorena Martoni's remark about the nexus between the two:

A good starting point to understand the deep connections between Law and Literature is to think of the former as a field of logos that goes beyond the Positivist limits of legal norm. As both spheres result of human reflection on existence – one organizes it, the other questions it – Law and Literature feed each other in a mirrored dialogue: while the former produces a formalized content of human action on the world, the latter,

abstracting this result, gives back to the human being the reaction produced in the world.
(2015, p. 139)

II.I) Author, presence and narratives

Author and text harmonised through the process of writing differentiate in Being. The text, when read, disperses into all kinds of different interpretations. Author or no author, the meaning of a text lies primarily in the reader. Note how this relates to our Derridean reading of law as constant interpretation and reinterpretation. Hence the first commonality between law and literature.

CErgo, writing and reading are two forces which need each other for the life of the other. What remains on the pages before they are read is a 'waiting for a reader to approach' (Blanchot, 1949/1995, p. 300) In a similar fashion to this gradual disappearance of the author, Meursault is seen as gradually fading away from his own trial: 'in my opinion, it was to distance me even further from my case, to reduce me to nothing and, in a certain way, to take my place.' (Camus, 1942/2012, p. 94). In the courtroom, the writer is Meursault and the reader is law. I am not saying that law is the same as reading but in using literary terms to describe the judicial system, law would appropriately be the reader since we believe that law listens to the narrative of the defense and then creates a meaning out of this, it interprets it. Law then is not simply a reader, but at the same time a writer. Law becomes an interpretive scheme as well as being in constant interpretation itself, yet, as aforementioned, this interpretation is unjust. In Meursault's death, there is no writing nor reading and thus, meaning is transferred to a third reader. That being us. We are the third narrator who imposes his own system of meaning upon Camus and his novel. Bakhtin's polyphony in his 1929 work titled 'Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics' describes this:

The essence of polyphony lies precisely in the fact that the voices remain independent and, as such, are combined in a unity of a higher order than in homophony. If one is to talk about individual will, then it is precisely in polyphony that a combination of several individual wills takes place, that the boundaries of the individual will can be in principle exceeded. One could put it this way: the artistic will of polyphony is a will to combine many wills, a will to the event.' (Bakhtin, 1929/1948, p. 21)

The literary polyphone is reflected in the presentation of law by Camus. The second part of the novel introduces not only legal but also religious and societal voices through the characters of the chaplain and the prosecutor's statement that 'when the lack of a soul in a man such as this becomes an abyss in which all of society can be engulfed and destroyed.' (Camus, 1942/2012, p. 92). Polyphony is also present in the judgement of Meursault. Which voice do we trust, and which voice is appropriate for the judgement? If we are to look at death through a Bakhtinian polyphony we can see that death is the resistance to a monological interpretation where one voice reigns supreme over the others, rather, Meursault's acceptance of his inevitable end signifies a vacant space where both the voices of law and the individual can retain themselves through cohabitation. Seen in this way, death is the Bakhtinian event towards which all narratives combine.

In a turn that mirrors yet reverses this interpretation, it is equally as plausible to argue that by ending the novel in the death of Meursault, Camus is staying loyal to his absurdist philosophy since, by shutting off any possible new meanings created by the novel itself and transferring this power to the hands of the reader, he is exempting his work to be guided by any singular meaning. With no resolution offered, no real meaning presented to us in the end, we can comfortably create our own ending and conclude that in the moment of death, reconciliation between law and individual is the escape from any imposed structure of meaning. With the law killing Meursault and Meursault in turn killing the law through his attitude, both elements strip each other of existence. Their reconcilability is paradoxically found in their irreconcilability which is marked by death tying the knot between law and literature.

Through his engagement with his own text, the opposite idea of what has just been described also occurs, namely, that the author cannot help but somewhat remain in his text. In the transformation undergone from Albert Camus to *Albert Camus* the author, his name changes from that signifying his person to that signifying his relation to a text. In light of this, we reach Foucault's conclusion

[...] that an author's name is not simply an element in discourse (capable of being subject or object, of being replaced by a pronoun, and the like); it performs a certain role with regard to narrative discourse, assuring a classificatory function.' (1969/1998, p. 210)

The author of a text becomes the mode of being expressed in his work for his work defines him just as much as he defines his work. This bilateral relation means that the language of the author 'is a speech that must be received in a certain mode and that, in a given situation, must receive

a certain status.’ (Foucault, 1969/1998, p. 211) Unlike Blanchot’s idea of the death of the author, Foucault propagates the notion that the author’s name ‘seems always to be present, marking off the edges of the text, revealing, or at least characterising, its mode of being. (Foucault, 1969/1998, p. 211)

So far, we have two views of the role of the author. One which denies any ideological role of the author in his works and one which, despite of admitting the absence of the author, nonetheless concedes that his absence is only a hiding. A hiding which nonetheless shows itself through the discourse being one way rather than another. I maintain that both Blanchot’s view ‘that the work exists only when it has become this public, alien reality, made and unmade by colliding with other realities’ (1949/1995, p. 306) and the Foucauldian view have a place alongside each other. The author is there and is not there in different ways. Mimicking the Barthesian ‘death of the author’, Meursault, by not appealing to self-defence and by refusing to create a narrative that would appear coherent to those judging him, drives towards death and the significance of the insouciance to his own judgement is noted by Lorena Martoni: ‘The very fact that the main character does not agree to build a defence based in false statements shows his disregard, which represents his self-affirmation in refusing the external modeling they try to inflict on him.’ (2015, p. 147) His death is necessary to the extent that it makes possible for meaning to open up and blossom beyond enduring interpretation. In fact, in the whole of section II, Meursault dies before he is dead. The erasure of his subjecthood by law also means that Meursault’s own meaning, own interpretation of his life also peters out. Unable to hide his annoyance with the moralising storytelling of law, however, Meursault nonetheless remains within his narrative. His death is not yet fully complete. His remarks and judgements about the judgement itself point towards his presence as narrator. Only in his execution which is his final and most deciding death, do we find law and individual reconciled. In death as a legal death, Meursault is rendered a criminal and justice is reached. By executing him, law’s power over Meursault ceases for nothing has power over the dead. In death as an existential death, Meursault affirms the absurd and revolts. The up-to-now external legal system becomes internal to Meursault through his viewing it as his fate, as that which belongs to the world and also to him; there is no longer resistance to it but calm and lucid welcoming. He no longer denies the system that so harshly condemned him but reclaims its final gesture as a mode of Being that he fully owns. In death as a literary death, Meursault escapes the judicial system’s power to define him. Along with this, his resistance to definition also dies. The ending of the legal narrative suspends the reader between two poles: the scientific logics of a moralising fictional law and

the existential clarity of Meursault. Now we are the only judges left. Reconciliation through death in all these different instances of death is not found within either law or individual; not within the justice of law or the triumphant existential acceptance of law which places the individual above it but in the space left behind when both are gone. With the final mark of law's pen, Meursault is accidentally given the key that liberates him from the perpetual burden of meaning which he faces in life. In death, condemnation and resistance both dissolve.

II.II) How to read Camus

Camus' style refuses to play the game of traditional literature in the same way that Meursault refuses to play the game of society. The former resists interpretation whilst the latter confesses; he admits the facts but offers not confession of guilt or remorse. Moreover, Camus' style becomes a direct attack on the legal system since it is a formal resistance to insistence on meaning. The negation of motive, causality and judgement are three aspects shared by the style of Camus and the trial of Meursault; beautifully woven together to capture the antagonistic relationship between the absurd style and juridical structure. As Foucault said:

It is not enough to keep repeating the absence, instead, we must locate the space left empty by the author's disappearance, follow the distribution of gaps and breaches, and watch for the openings this disappearance uncovers. (1969/1998, p. 209).

Following from this, as support of this interpretation, we note that the dry, dispassionate, uninteresting and modest style of narration which Camus refuses to embellish with the ink of his subjecthood is referred to by Camus himself in his *Notebooks* in a note to J.T that 'I wanted my character to be led to the single great problem by way of the daily and the natural.' (Notebooks, 1942-1945/1965, p. 19). In fact, by referencing Camus, we see how we negate our earlier sentence; the bland writing style is indeed the injection of Camus's subjecthood. The short, fragmented sentences void of any conjunctions allow for a world where Camus is not writing but is simply stating, describing the shattered image of the world he sees. He cannot but help present himself within his work and in this sense, the author is very much present. His presence marked by a deafening negation. In his basic writing, Camus achieves what Barthes titles one of his works: *Writing Degree Zero*. A technique which takes place within the values and judgements found in the novel yet without 'becoming involved in any of them; it consists precisely in their absence.' (Barthes, 1953/1968, p. 77) The innocence of Camus' style of

writing is the precise honesty that it depicts in Meursault, an honesty aimed at pure depiction without storytelling, without any hint of the morality of the author within his work. Read in this way and following on from our Derridean reading, Camus' work presents itself as a critique of the judicial system which imposes meaning. Chouraqui notes that Meursault 'is a man who refuses to have his story told.' (2021, p. 99) Meursault's reluctance to narrate suggests a similar reluctance to engage with a system of meaning. Juxtaposed with Camus' duty of narration as an author, there is a new interpretation open to us. This being that by relating Meursault and Camus' relationships to narration we can postulate Camus' message to us. In writing about someone who refuses to be written about, Camus may as well be saying that no matter the willingness or not to participate in a system of imposed meaning, there is no other plausible alternative. If we are to live in a society, we must engage with law. Meursault, whether he likes it or not, and irrespective of how much he engages with law, in the end, his lack of participation is itself a form of participation and just like all other would-be criminals, he is sentenced to death. Camus himself inoculates meaning in Meursault by simply writing the story. Meursault is thrust into a world of meaning, yet in his dealings with the world, he attempts to escape meaning. Although from an absurdist point of view, Camus created the absurd man, he nonetheless criticised the absurd man. He introduces an ethics to his system which does not permit every and any action under the sun despite the meaninglessness of all things. Just as Meursault completes Camus' narrative through his forsaking of meaning, he completes the law in the same way. He allows the law to superimpose itself. Meursault's equates law and literature through his equally distant attitude from both.

McCarthy remarks that the past historic 'conveys to the reader the sense that events narrated could not have unfolded in another manner, that their sequence possesses a certain legitimacy...' (McCarthy, 2004, p. 20). Consequently, causality vanishes in Camus' writing. The perfect tense implies a sense of immediacy which reflects not only the absurd world void of meaning, but also Meursault's dealing with the world which is most of the time recorded in the present tense. The use of prose void of grammatical causation means that Camus offers to us the idea of the absurd through both form and content. The use of the perfect aspect also reflects the problem of the law and its approach to human life with an accepted notion of causality; that there is a meaning, a cause to all acts. Here we are reminded of our previous statement that in the style of writing, Camus' is revolting against the meaning-making structure of the judicial system, a remark which now becomes clear through the grammatical analysis of the novel.

III) On the road to reconciliation

So far, the discussion surrounding the tension between law and the individual has been expressed through a general idea. The purpose of this chapter is twofold: firstly, it aims at providing a concrete example of where this tension can be seen. In analysing the turning point of Meursault's act of killing ontically, we expose the irony of a moralising law which is unable to morally judge Meursault in that one act. Secondly, if the action of law is judgement itself, it suffices to say judgement in general without going into the details of what kind of judgement law is concerned with, then, it appears that an analysis of the killing reveals that the novel works by encapsulating judgements within further judgements which follows on from the previous section explaining Bakhtin's polyphony. There is the judgement of Camus, the judgement of law, the judgement of Meursault himself and the judgement of the reader. Thirdly, in the act we find the first moment of reconciliation. That being that through Meursault's foreknown punishment, the incompatibility between law and individual is seen. In the moment of the Arab's death, the reconciliation between the two antagonistic elements is seen through their coming together in a crystallised way. By shooting and shooting again, Meursault accepts his responsibility, and this is something that law demands. That one is held responsible. By not defending himself in the later trial, Meursault enacts the legal principle of accountability. This type of reconciliation is radically different from the one he himself undergoes since it submits Meursault to law. This responsibility is an ethical one, not a causal or ontic one which the following discussion aims at elucidating.

For the law to function it must assume the responsibility of the agent concerning his crime. In what sense is Meursault responsible? Meursault's killing of the Arab is a unique case, not because of its facticity but because of the agent's temperament. It is clear from the staccato style of writing, a writing that we assume to be Meursault's, that for him there is no causality but only fragmented islands of speech and sensation separated with oceans stretching far beyond the eyes can see; each sentence exists within its own vacuum and does not presuppose something anterior nor something posterior. It is there, in the infinite space of its own meaning. During the questioning by the judge before the trial when Meursault is asked to go over the events again, this idea is presented: Raymond, the beach, swimming, the fight, the beach again, the little spring, the sun and the five shots I'd fired. (Camus, 1942/2012, p. 60) Each comma representing the infinite space, the abyss, and eternal void between each clause, the lack of interconnectedness signifies the immediacy of Meursault's experience. In enacting the absurd,

where causality does not exist, or rather, where the meaning of causality is lost within the sea of the absurd, can we really say that Meursault is responsible? We certainly can say that it was him, the agent, who committed the act, but even then, we run into the problem of physical causality for we are told that it was the sun and its heat which led to the killing. In this case, responsibility is not absolute because of the factors which affect the agent in such a manner as to nudge him toward a definite act. This would mean that 'ontic responsibility requires that the being of the agent and the being of the act should be inseparable: the agent must be the source of the act and must become permanently qualified by it.' (Pols, 1981, p. 299) In order to avoid infinite regress which becomes implausible when thinking in terms of causality we must by necessity stop at the agent and conclude that the act originates from him although it may be influenced without him.

By killing the Arab, Meursault is acting, and this act carries its own being; a Being-as-event as Bakhtin described it and this act 'is an actual living participant in the ongoing event of Being.' (Bakhtin, 1920 /1993, p. 2) Meursault's own Being is changed when he performs the act. In his killing, he not only changes the state of affairs around him but these changes transmogrify his own Being. Meursault is no longer innocent and even before appearing before the judges, we condemn him. The law appears in the absence of any court or representative.

It is hard to fully judge Meursault because of his absurd attitude toward the world and the fact that his killing cannot be causally related to anything else except the power of the sun. The assumption I am making is that the difficulty arises if we consider all judgements moral but it is obvious that law is divorce from morality. However, even if this may be the case in general, the type of law as portrayed by Camus is a moralising law. A law which frames his absurd dealings with the world as moral failings; hence the focus by the prosecutor on the character of Meursault rather than the acts and the defence attorney's bewilderment and umbrage: 'Really now, I ask you, is this man on trial for having buried his mother or for having killed a man.' (Camus, 1942/2012, p. 87) The indifference to death is seen as a risk to the societal values which are upheld by the prosecutor. In this sense, law in Camus' novel is presented as a moralising system and as a consequence, if this moralising system is to steward the delicate equilibrium of right and wrong and safeguard the scales of justice, this must be done in reference to morality.

Even if his killing was perfect, even if his killing was indeed factually and technically killing, we cannot condemn him automatically, even if we do so by nature. Bakhtin says that 'the irreproachable technical correctness of a performed act does not yet decide the matter of its

moral value.’ (Bakhtin, 1920/1993, p.4) Meursault retains his innocence insofar as there is no premeditation, no intention to kill. The technicality of his killing cannot rush our judgement, yet we find it rushed. The problem that we are presented here in relation to law is that a) law is an eternal presence in one’s life with no escape route and b) it judges by looking at the mere execution of the task. Yet as we go on, there is a feeling deep down that Meursault is in fact responsible. The novel leaves us no other choice as of yet. We are thus thrown into the question of how to judge and as Lincoln rightly mentions, ‘the reader is not only presented to judgement as a theme but is subjected to it, we become the judge in the novel.’ (Lincoln, 2020) Without any criteria, like law, we feel ourselves having a certain attitude toward Meursault. Yet our judgement is an impossible judgement because ‘objective judgement of Meursault is impossible for it is his own discourse which creates the impression within the reader.’ as Lissa Lincoln remarked in an interview in 2020. There is no truth or falsity outside the discourse of Meursault which we can judge. Rather, we, like law, create the truth of the action ‘through the imposition of his interpretation of reality in order to affirm and perpetuate the importance of his own value system.’ (Lincoln, 2020)

There are two clashing characterisations of his act then: one that states that insofar as he acts and the act becomes a part of his Being he is responsible and another that argues for the fuzziness of our judging him due to the lack of historical information. By historical I mean any information regarding what informs the act. The ontic responsibility of which we castigate Meursault means that he is not found before the act. This is supported by the fact that he did not premeditate the killing. Lacking proper intention, Meursault’s killing is not a mere continuation of a previous desire, an act that lay there potentially, but rather, his current act is one of a sudden outburst in a gesture of creation and in this creation, Meursault is the ever sustaining force during ‘its beginning, at its middle, and at its end-simultaneously with the whole act rather than before it, and persisting, though not unchanged, after the end of the act’ (Pols, 1981, p. 301) The extra four shots fired into the corpse of the Arab reflect this for they point toward Meursault’s sustaining of the act even after the act’s end. The act was killing, Meursault killed and continued to act as if he were killing. Meursault caused the killing insofar as his cause is a ‘transmitted cause’ in the words of Pols, a cause which ‘exercises no authentic causal power; and that authentic causal power is in some measure an originaive cause.’ (1981, p. 303). It makes little sense, however, to say that Meursault is not a real cause and to semantically downplay the coming-to-be of the act since the reader knows that in the shoes of Meursault, even if the extraneous circumstances remained the same, one would most likely not

have shot the gun. There appears to be a difference that finds its origin within Meursault himself. Pols remarks that ‘in the exercise of its causal power the rational agent must exercise a power of a different sort over these contributory powers, a power that makes them genuinely contributory to it rather than in their assemblage so identical with it that any reference to its power would be superfluous.’ (1981, p. 304) There must be something that differs in Meursault as opposed to the reader which explains why we might not have pressed the trigger whilst he may have; that something is precisely the absurd. Lacking awareness of consequences, living fully in the presence of the glaring sun, he lets the physical sensations dominate. We find him ontically responsible, but can we find him morally so? Being portrayed as a moralising system, the irony is evident for unable to morally reprehend Meursault, or unable to approach his act of killing from a moral standpoint, law reverts to lies. It aims at creating a moralised version of the act by viewing it in relation to details of Meursault’s life which do not seem even partially applicable to the case at hand. Martoni makes a similar comment that a ‘system that considers itself objective, removed from existential contingencies and that does not admit these kinds of moral deviance, is guided during the narrative almost exclusively by exceptional subjective aspects.’ (2015, p. 149). In a way, law presents itself something which it itself cannot absolutely sustain. In its inability to judge according to its own moralised account of judgement, law must transform this inability into ability; this is done through the power of fiction.

III.I) Law’s truth

Following our Derridean reading of law as something that is neither here nor there, as something whose precise location is unknown but appearing in some form through its representative figures, we can view the trial scene and everyone within it as representing law. This does not mean that by focusing on one character we gain access to the essence of the law but rather that each character is a fragmented shard of glass reflecting a distinct facet of law such that when viewed from all together, they coalesce into a rough portrait of law’s face. Ergo, the laughter of the spectators during the trial reflects that law and its representatives do not care for much except the finding guilty of the man in the dock. Accused before them, he is also condemned. They laugh because they see it as unimportant, trivial information, one which does not matter.

The judgement which proclaims a truth; that it is true that Meursault is responsible for the killing and that it is true that his sentence is appropriate is the ‘affirmation of a judgement as a

true judgement is an assigning of it a certain theoretical unity, and this unity is not at all the unique historical unity of my life' (Bakhtin, 1920/1993, p. 4) refers to the law enshrouding veil thrown over the complexities, contingencies and abstract truths of the subjective experience.

This veil allows the law to construct its own truth-paradigm away from any comparison to the truth of the lived person who lives in it enveloped and swathed. A truth which is theoretically coherent in the system of law, and which does not correspond to the agent outside the law. A truth which is nonetheless deemed as universal and true in all circumstances and contexts, a truth which, by extension, cannot account for the embodiment of one's existence in one act.

Throughout the trial we get a glimpse at how Meursault wants to say something but then withdraws, how the court misrepresents things, how law creates its own believable narration of events. We are told that Meursault, 'was sometimes tempted to intervene' but that his lawyer 'kept saying: 'The best thing you can do is to keep quiet.' (Camus, 1942/2012, p. 89) As the trial develops, although expressed nowhere but present everywhere, is the feeling of an 'ought' statement of the law. The law is a system of 'oughts and ought-nots', it is prescriptive. However, the oughts of the law are the underived substratum of the law. They are the ground without a ground. Insofar as law cannot be studied phenomenologically for it does not appear in concrete existence but its existence is marked by its withdrawal and absence, the law in the novel is abstractly related to society, especially in the prosecutor's statement that 'the lack of a soul in a man such as this becomes an abyss in which all of society can be engulfed and destroyed' (Camus, 1942/2012, p. 92) The law is the guardian of society, it is there to shield it from the incoming threat of the Other. The Other being the one who does not abide by the law. It is in the same vein of thought that Meursault notes: 'I had no place in a society whose most essential principles I disregarded.' (Camus, 1942/2012, p. 93) It is therefore the society's 'oughts' which are translated by the law and which Meursault does not abide by. However, as Bakhtin notes, 'there is no aesthetic ought, scientific ought, and - beside them - an ethical ought; there is only that which is aesthetically, theoretically, socially valid...' (1920/1993, p. 5) These 'oughts' are determined within the bounds of the law and within its high walls. The norms which Meursault rejects are norms created, justified by the law itself. Insofar as there is no external being which can ground the norms of law, these norms forever remain a violent charge against the individual subject facing the law who does not find himself within it. It is these norms that we will turn to now.

It ought to be clear by now that this chapter has focused on the tension between law and the singularity of the act. This is because it provides a gateway to understanding the antagonism

through a concrete and relevant example found in the novel. This was one of the guises of singularity which is at odds with law. Through its confrontation with the singularity of Meursault's act, law realises that it must universalise Meursault into a category allowing judgement. It thus creates fiction which translates Meursault's act from an anti-lingua, speech opposed to meaning to a legal lingua imbued with legal jargon. In a study of his act related to law, I conclude this section by stating that law reduces him from an individual to a token of law. A token of mistrust, a token of danger and a token of universality. He becomes *a* criminal, a universal characterisation.

III.II) The authority of law

If we are going to agree with Bakhtin in his assertion that

[...] a norm is a special form of the free volition of one person in relation to others, and, as such, it is essentially peculiar only to law (laws) and religion (commandments), where its actual obligatoriness-as a norm-is evaluated not from the standpoint of its sense-content, but from the standpoint of the actual authoritativeness of its source (free volition) or the authenticity and exactness of transmission... (1920/1933, p. 24)

we are going to argue that law as presented in 'L'étranger' functions not as a system on the quest for truth and justice but as an embodiment of Bakhtin's 'free volition' of norms dictated by law. Unjustified and unexplained, Camus' portrayal of law hangs in the clouds above us. During the trial, the immediate sense of the power of law is clear through the short and innocent appearing remarks of law's representatives. The first striking example we find is in the words of the judge overseeing the investigation: 'But the law is clear' (Camus, 1942/2012, p. 57). Later on, we are told that 'they're taking away your freedom.' (Camus, 1942/2012, p. 70) and we are faced with the question 'otherwise what would be the punishment?' (Camus, 1942/2012, p. 70). When the director is confused during the questioning he is told 'It's the law.' (Camus, 1942/2012, p. 81). Law's constant power is maintained through each little unquestioned announcements; announcements behind which there lurks a threat, a threat that if one does not abide by the law, one must face penalties. Relating this to Bakhtin's point, we reach a conclusion that was written a long time ago by Montaigne in his essay '*On Experience*' (1580/1958, p.

353): ‘Now the laws maintain their credit, not because they are just, but because they are laws. This is the mystical basis of their authority, they have no other.’ We are offered no justification for the ways in which law makes its presence known to us, all we are aware of is this cold, evaluative, sceptical gaze upon ourselves, penetrating us and instilling a cold shudder; a shudder which throughout the novel reminds us that even if we have our back turned to law, as one may figuratively describe the instance Meursault kills the Arab, the law is watching, watching and judging. The quoted examples show how the law exists insofar as one abides by it, yet even in its non-existence, since not abiding by it renders it meaningless and therefore non-existent, its effects are felt. As noted earlier, law appears in the short quips of the characters long before the court scene takes place.

Relating this section to the first one then, the problem of law as expressed in its general form and in the form as expressed through a feeling in ‘L’*étranger*’ is how it can judge when it cannot justify itself. By choosing the fictional form of inquiry and sidestepping descriptions and analyses, Camus seems to be telling us that there is no descriptive ground to law, nothing to which one can inquire into and philosophically treat. There is only the feeling. This question of judgement is what Camus seems to want to bring to the front of the second part of the novel. Lissa Lincoln notes that it is ‘not important whether Meursault is innocent or guilty, but rather, how is innocence or guilt decided.’ (Lincoln, 2020) Through the injustices served during the second part of the novel the reader seems much more invested in the process of judgement for I am left with the impression that if the process were, in some counterfactual world, just; then the verdict would be more acceptable. In other words, the verdict takes secondary place in terms of our disapproval of what occurs in part II.

III.III) The stranger

From the onset of the trial, we are reminded why the novel bears the English name ‘The Stranger’ for it is evident that Meursault is indeed an outsider, but, within the scope of law, the word takes on yet a new meaning. Meursault is also a stranger to law and the law-abiding citizens since it’s clear he ‘never had any dealings with the judicial system.’ (Camus, 1942/2012, p. 59). His strangeness comes from his constant assertion of his own individuality rather than an appeal to universal, abstract ideals. Sartre duly notes that ‘the stranger is also a man among men.’ (1946/2007, p. 77) Although the absurd man finds himself amongst men, he is situated between them, in their very midst; he distances himself from them by his cursed mark of

honesty, a mark which both signifies the authenticity of Meursault and curses him to death. Meursault tries to express this idea when he states that 'I wanted to tell him that I was just like everybody else, exactly like everybody else.' (Camus, 1942/2012, p. 59) As much as Meursault wants to be like the rest and does not want to be judged, he is not like everyone else. The only commonality is the Being-of-man. His undying loyalty to himself as an individual existence results in his distancing from law and the citizens.

A brief interlude is needed to clarify some implications I may be making. Meursault's authenticity expressed through the negation of the societal codes upon him does not mean that he is to be held as a hero. Although the Meursault as the Rousseauian noble savage in Part I is dominated by his aloofness to life and lives a pre-conscious life, in Part II we are met with the first instance of Meursault saying 'no', of rejecting, defying and spurning the chaplain's God and of his help. This is the moment in which his Being experiences a change toward revolt. At this moment, the deep slumber of his awakens in a fiery rant expressed through his shouting at the Chaplain. His 'no' is a loud and defiant moment of epiphany; he now decides to live the absurd according to his own terms. In rejecting illusion and false hope, he affirms and announces loud and clear the absurdity of his life and his deliberate embrace of it. The apatheia characterising his Being is no longer present; he is now waging a passionate protest. We should then see Meursault as the absurd man toward the end but one which lay in waiting at the beginning; from a state of quasi-consciousness to full awareness. In the end he does become the absurd hero through his act of revolt but it is too late. It is through death that he achieves this, but Camus' philosophy is a philosophy of life seemingly encouraging us to achieve this through life.

Camus himself seems to be saying that Meursault is misresponding to the absurd. In his *'Resistance, Rebellion, and Death'*, Camus often speaks of the need of solidarity among men, of compassion and of understanding. Meursault in his act of killing not only disregards societal norms but also blatantly rejects any relationality with his fellow humans. An impromptu killing, Meursault severs any ties he has; not with society but with Man. Rather than saying that Meursault is to be viewed as the absurd hero amongst the herd of sheep, he criticises him. Although the tension between law and individual is axiomatic, Camus is not suggesting that Meursault is met with an illegitimate system which should be jettisoned with, rather, he is saying that despite law's inability of proper judgement in relation to the individual, that judgement is nevertheless necessary. Meursault deserves imprisonment but not death. In fact, the criticism aimed at Meursault for his lack of solidarity with his victim, a lack of empathy and

relationality, is also a criticism of law's verdict for execution. A lack of compassion in Meursault's behaviour does not warrant law's equal lack of compassion and empathy. In a lengthy passage Camus discusses this:

Can the jury decently say: "If I kill you by mistake, you will forgive me when you consider the weaknesses of our common nature. But I am condemning you to death without considering those weaknesses or that nature"? There is a solidarity of all men in error and aberration. Must that solidarity operate for the tribunal and be denied the accused? No, and if justice has any meaning in this world, it means nothing but the recognition of that solidarity; it cannot, by its very essence, divorce itself from compassion. Compassion, of course, can in this instance be but awareness of a common suffering and not a frivolous indulgence paying no attention to the sufferings and rights of the victim. Compassion does not exclude punishment, but it suspends the final condemnation. (1960/1961, p. 217)

Moving on, the constant descriptions of the sun's presence whenever Meursault does something to affirm himself signify, in a rather paradoxical manner that, up until his last moments, his affirmation of himself has been a negation of the Other. This other being not only the implicit societal standards imposed on him by the cultured Man but also, in its most explicit form, the Arab. The sun represents in its most superficial reading Meursault's authenticity and loyalty to his own existence, needs, desires and moods. This authenticity is nothing but pure inauthenticity as seen through Camusian philosophy which, without further elaboration for the need of brevity, equates authenticity with rebellion in the face of the absurd. Though this may be the case, it is also the case that Meursault is acting in accord with his own authenticity expressed through his honesty. With the sun being there we are reminded of this coming-together between Meursault's own subjective expression of 'authenticity' and the Camusian 'authenticity'. Both when the Arab is killed and during the day of the trial, perhaps two instances which are the hallmark of his character, the sun is present. It is described that 'the proceedings opened with the sun blazing outside the courtroom.' (Camus, 1942/2012, p. 74) The recurrence of the sun throughout the novel represents Meursault's *déshabillé* and the importance of the sun's brilliance at the day of the hearing foreshadows not only Meursault's complete and self-annihilating honesty during the trial but strips him down and makes his appearance before the

court as concrete as possible. Unable to hide in the lurking shadows of his subjectivity, the rays of truth shine upon him, a truth with a double meaning: his own and that of the law. In both cases, Meursault remains himself. Chouraqui writes of this: ‘Such moments of unity are always sunny moments.’ (2021, p. 107) On the day of the hearing the sun is out and at this moment, just as in the moment of the killing, Meursault refuses to split away from himself. Yet it is in the dual nature of the sun which we find Camus as portraying Meursault as an antihero. The incompatibility of Meursault and law is found under the sun which casts a light over the ‘authenticity’ of Meursault. An ‘authenticity’ which separates him from the rest but also, ultimately from himself.

III.IV) From office clerk to criminal

The gap between Meursault’s perspective and society’s perspective is immediately portrayed by Camus in the following quote of the investigating judge: ‘He smiled and said: ‘That’s one way of looking at it. But the law is clear.’ (1942/2012, p. 57) Far from clear in anything except its formal existence, the investigating judge, a representative of the law and society implicitly points to the fact that the law, prior to any questioning, has a different perspective. Why? How can it look at something different before that something is even analysed? The answer is because the universality of the law is inherently incompatible with the particularity of the man facing it. To be able to judge, the law must ‘wipe away’ the subjective existence of man and transform his subjectivity into particularity. This difference is whilst the subjectivity of Meursault is his very own form of existing, his particularity is the form his Being takes when facing the law. This form is one which paints over the previous canvas. His particularity thus means that Meursault is transformed into something that can be understood, analysed and judged by the law; he becomes a particular type of being, one which can be subsumed within the law. He is no longer a subjectivity of itself but a particularity of the law. To look at the legally relevant side is to assume, prior to this legal gaze, that all other facts of an individual are irrelevant. Their irrelevancy however is not argued for, not justified. The legality of a subject is contained in a vacuum and solely considered because of its appropriateness. How can we postulate that all other angles from which an individual can be seen and from which an individual exists do not inform the legal standing of that subject to the extent that they are taken out of the picture. This is simply in regard to law’s behaviour towards its subjects, which, irregardless of whether the law knows or not whether the subject is reducible to their legal standing, acts so. Alexandre Lefebvre (2005) talks about this Deleuzian notion in his quote that: ‘singularities are made to

resemble one another as particularities subsumed by an identical law.’ (p. 106) and: his quote that ‘the legal form imprisons the singularity in constituting it as a regular legal particular.’ (p. 107) This is the way in which the law can bridge the gap between itself and the subject, an artificial and unjust way yet a necessary one if we are to maintain that law should not be discarded. Law makes the subject a stranger to himself, and this is explicitly seen when Meursault has a difficulty accepting that he is a criminal: ‘I was about to reply that that was because they were criminals. But then I realise I was also a criminal; it was an idea I was having trouble coming to terms with.’ (Camus 1942/2012, p. 63) Meursault has difficulty incorporating the Being of a criminal within his own Being because his criminality is forced upon him. Here it may appear that I am arguing for his sameness with other criminals through his criminality. Although this is in fact what it appears to be the case, my argument is more focused on the enforcement of his legal standing of a criminal on him. This enforcement is quite different from the enforcement upon others for Meursault’s life philosophy is belligerent towards labels. Insofar as man abides by labels in his everyday life, the enforcement of the label ‘criminal’ upon his Being is quite different from the absurd man who lives life in a constant repudiation of these ideals. Using Benjamin Walter’s lexicon, there is a ‘violence’ from the side of law toward Meursault which is not the same as the imposition of the category of a criminal upon others. Through his criminality he no longer bears the title ‘stranger’ to us for he is included in our society through his criminality; a lens which enables us to view him, understand and approach him yet at the same time, his criminality distances him from us. We do not look kindly upon criminals; he is at the same time within society and without. He does not view himself within that category because due to his absurd outlook, he is neither immoral nor moral. Unable to escape the moral narrative of a fictitious entity, Meursault finds himself uprooted and unable to reject his criminality; hence his acceptance of it. An acceptance of the inevitable which foreshadows his later acceptance of the most conclusive ending to our human story: death.

Through his not regarding himself as a criminal and his having to announce to himself consciously, ‘I was the one who was the criminal’ (Camus, 1942/2012, p. 62), we see the exact mechanism through which the law transforms singularity into particularity. Through categorisation. Lefebvre remarks that legal ‘judgement divides and proportions the concept into the terms of which it is affirmed; it distributes Being into categorical differences and proceeds to subsume specific differences under these categories.’ (2005, p. 108) Law cannot judge Meursault for he does not belong to a category that belongs to the *lingua* of law. Judgement is only possible when Meursault is understood and he is best understood when, under the light of

the sun, he is stripped away of his singularity and remade into a model of a criminal which law can now judge according to a 'criteria' appropriate for criminals. Criminals can be judged, people not. The law does not care for understanding the language of the other and 'the violence of an injustice has begun when all members of a community do not share the same idiom throughout.' (Derrida, 1990/1992, p. 18). We get a glimpse of how natural this is to the law in the beginning pages of part II where we are told that 'it seemed as if the judge were no longer interested in me and saw my case as more or less closed.' (Camus, 1942/2012, p. 63) The case being closed before the trial took place signifies the way in which law turns a blind eye toward the language of the subject; it shifts its gaze and covers its ears, muting the subject. As long as there is some kind of understanding of that subject, that is all that matters. The words may come out, but they leave the mouth in silence rendering their meaning meaningless.

The way the subjecthood of Meursault vanishes through the disregarding attitude of law is constantly provided. On page 63 we are told that 'to tell the truth, they never took any notice of me during these meetings.' Later on, page 74 we learn that 'the jury will hurry because your case isn't the most important one of the session.' On page 79 still 'the prosecutor half turned his back on me and, without looking at me...'. Later, during the hearing of the witnesses who had good words to say about Meursault we read that 'They barely listened to Masson, who stated that I was an honest man 'and I'd even say, a good man.'" On page 89 Meursault narrates how he felt 'as if my case was being tried without me. Everything happened without my involvement.' The erasure of the actual Meursault fits the purpose of the law to replace him by a Meursault they can understand. It is due to this that law deals with lying. Fitch (1982, p.52) comments how 'the legal system wilfully, or at least of necessity, distorts reality to its own ends, thereby indulging in a form of inauthentic interpretation of the lives of its victims that facilitates their condemnation.' The reason for having written this section as separate to the beginning pertains to the thesis aim which is to show not how law is presented in general but in its depiction in Camus' novel. The need to separate these very similar yet distinct sections comes from the fact that with no philosophy of law offered by Camus we can only apply a philosophy of law to his work and to do that the general outline needs to be introduced. It is this section however that explicitly deals with the thesis at hand.

III.V) On the judgement of Meursault

It is in reference to this that we note the similarity between the positions of author and judge; it is their act of creation that renders ‘the activity of the lawyers wholly analogous to the work of the novelist as he creates his characters according to laws of a certain plausibility...’ (Fitch, 1982, p. 54) In creating, both figures also reconstruct; both are concerned with the deconstruction of and reconstruction of reality through the choice in details which give their narratives some verisimilitude. Meursault’s case, as described by law, does in fact appear true, appear to abide by what really happened. This is all but appearance for the Being of Meursault, the very Being which created those acts is dispensed with in the narrative of law. In listening to the prosecutor’s recount of the murder, Meursault seemingly understands the analysis provided: ‘I found that his way of seeing things was actual logical; what he was saying was entirely plausible.’ (Camus, 1942/2012, p. 90) It is plausible, but the reiteration of the third person pronouns, stresses that this plausibility is only his, the prosecutors. Not Meursault’s. Meursault does not understand the causal connections the prosecutor makes between his character and his killing. On page 91 we read: ‘But I didn’t understand how the natural qualities of an ordinary man could be turned into overwhelming proof of his guilt.’ (Camus, 1942/ 2012). Law must create a causal chain for this is needed to condemn, and if it cannot condemn it cannot punish and without punishment it is weak and when it is weak it is non-existent. The narrative is not false, so to say, rather, it is weak. We should not take my argument to imply that Meursault is an authority and his rejection of the legal narrative makes that narrative false. Rather the aim is, as has been, to show that Camus, in portraying Meursault as the antagonist to law, aims at bringing forth the tension between the individual and law.

The need to create a narrative which fits under the theory of law, is expressed when we are met with the tenacity of the judge on page 61: ‘Why, why did you fire at a man who was already dead? The judge wiped his forehead and repeated his question in a slightly different tone of voice: Why? I insist that you tell me. Why?’ (Camus, 1942/2012). The constant iteration of the interrogative verb ‘why’ in conjunction with it written in italics to reflect the exasperation of the judge points to the demand for explanation. This resolve on behalf of law to ‘understand’ comes out in its inability to comprehend.

The trial contains excessive amounts of judgement: not only does Meursault get judged but he also judges, seen through the new attention to detail when describing the people of the court and on top of that we judge not only Meursault but the judicial system itself. Lacking criteria for judgement as readers, the same way as law does, reflected in Sartre’s statement that ‘we can neither understand him nor quite judge him.’ (1946/2007, p. 84), we nonetheless find ourselves

judging and in a full circular motion this brings us back to what we previously said. We cannot judge unless we speak the same tongue and when we do not understand, judgement remains a notional activity because our judgement in that case has nothing to judge and judgement by its very structure must have an object to judge. Criticising the law, we also find doubting ourselves as to whether we really can judge Meursault. Because of the need of an object of judgement, law creates a narrative and presents itself as a Shakespearean play with each representative fulfilling a role, each one reading off a script. If 'all the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players.' (Shakespeare, 1623/1997 ,p. 83), then law is the biggest of them all. A hint of the lack of seriousness which Camu prescribes to the law is seen in Meursault saying that 'everything was so natural, so well organised and so seriously played out...' (Camus, 1942/2012, p. 64) We find ourselves repeating Camus' own words that Meursault is 'condemned because he does not play the game.' (Camus, 1955), for at the end Meursault dies because he does not follow his script.

When we are told that 'the presiding judge told me in a strange official way that I would have my head cut off in a public place in the name of the French People.' (Camus 1942/2012, p. 97), we return to the beginning of the paper and to the Derridean notion of law as *droit* not being the same as justice. The laws' enforcement is legal by abiding to its own interior but justice is always *à-venir*, 'There is an *à-venir* for justice and there is no justice except to the degree that some event is possible which, as event, exceeds calculation, rules, programs, anticipations and so forth.' (Derrida, 1989/1992, p. 27). In our melancholic relation to Meursault, since we recognise in his strangeness a part of ourselves, we are aware of the separation between legality and justice. The legal justice which law actually concerns itself is quite different to the justice which is but an ideal. Legal justice meaning the karmic law of 'what goes around comes around' differs from the justice we can afford man through our experience with him and our relatedness with him. This not only relates to the aforementioned Derridean notion of justice but also to Levinasian ethics of face where 'the face speaks to me and thereby invites me to a relation...' (Levinas, 1961/1979, p. 198). The ethic responsibility of justice demands that law be guided by its ethical relation to the other and insofar as law is depersonalising through the reducing of the totality of the subjective existent before it to a mere legal reality, law is blind. From scorn our feelings toward Meursault reach empathy. We feel as if justice has not been reached and in this realisation we cast our minds back to Montesquieu who as far as 1734 wrote that 'no tyranny is more cruel than the one practiced in the shadow of the laws and under the color of justice...' (1999, p. 88)

Chapter IV) On Death

IV.I) The final dance: law and death

In the last few pages of the novel the tone shifts, and the prior incompatibility of law and individuality are orchestrated into a symphony of unison by the conductor that is only our Meursault. Maurice Blanchot notices that

A rather annoying change of tone occurs between the almost absolute objectivity of the narrative, an objectivity that is its profound truth, and the final pages in which the stranger expresses what he thinks and feels faced with death and life. (1943, 2001, p. 221)

A comment standing in juxtaposition to his earlier comment that

It is a book that causes the notion of subject to disappear. All that is revealed allows itself to be grasped in an objective form: we wander around events, around the central hero, as if we could only take an exterior view of them, as if, in order to know them truly, we always had to look at them as spectators and, moreover, imagine that there is no other way of reaching them than this estranged knowledge. (Blanchot, 1943, 2001, p. 217)

Blanchot's commentary points toward the emergence of the subject, the unveiling of his personhood and the true appearance of Meursault who, up to now, although under the glare of the sun lay sleepily under the shade. Meursault now obtains and actively affirms what he previously simply accepted; the absurd. This is in stark opposition, also, to what Chaitin, much alike Blanchot, noted: 'Under the pressure of imprisonment and legal proceedings, Meursault is progressively dispossessed of himself.' (1993, p. 173). From the objective, journalistic prose of the detached man, in page 95 we are struck with a new impression of Meursault: that of the lyrical poet who does not merely recount but evokes:

I was overwhelmed by memories of a life that I could no longer claim as mine, a life which had offered me the most subtle but persistent joys: the scent of summer, the

neighbourhood that I loved, a certain type of sky at night, Marie's laughter and her dress.

(Camus, 1942/2012)

In the emotional lyricism of Meursault during his final days where he is vividly recounting and reliving his previous life, there is a serene acceptance of death and the absurdity of life through his opening up 'for the first time to the tender indifference of the world.' (Camus, 1942/2012, p. 111). It is in this affirmation of this previous absurd life, an affirmation noted on page 109, 'I'd been right, I was still right, I had always been right.' (Camus, 1942/2012), that we also find the reconciliation between law and individuality. Meursault does not submit himself, neither does he change his beliefs, rather, the transcendent affirmation of the life the Meursault in section I led is a change of the relationship he holds to law. In his lyrical confessions, by embracing death Meursault consequently embraces law for it was law which condemned him to death. By embracing the conclusion of his life, he also embraces the means to that conclusion. By welcoming death, his relationship to law and its final act, death, has changed from him being punished to him realising his end as the natural conclusion of life. By saying no to the priest, he not only says yes to death but also to life. It is the vocalisation of this no which converts his passivity to activity. An activity which is noted on page 111 in his famous elegiac last words: 'I opened myself for the first time to the tender indifference of the world.' (Camus, 1942,2012) His act of opening himself up to absurdism rather than simply reacting to it grants him the power to reconcile law and individuality. Starting from the absurd, we see how this reconciliation of his is indirect for he does not address law directly. Rather, his acceptance of and affirmative stance toward the absurd is an indirect reconciliation with law too. His acceptance of an absurd reality marks a shift in his relation to the broader reality that law embodies. The trial exposed the cause of the conflict between law and individuality in *L'étranger*; namely, that Meursault insisted upon his own individuality as the only facet of reality which really mattered, or even existed, to him. In his encounter with his own death, Meursault expresses a tacit understanding that his individuality is not absolute. His acceptance of an absurd reality means that he accepts a new reality which abolishes any meaning, be it individual or societal. Ergo, his reconciliation with law comes through his affirmation of the absurd which renders the original cause of conflict powerless. By accepting the absurd, Meursault no longer wishes to understand his judgement, nor impose personal meaning upon an impersonal system of deception; rather, he opens himself up and transcends his previous individuality through immersing himself within the universal fate of all men.

Starting from death, rather than the absurd, the Meursault who was on trial was being punished and he felt the effects as he explicitly remarked on page 70 that prison was indeed his punishment. The Meursault who faces death transcends death and by implication debilitates the psychological terror of death. This diminishment of the power that death usually holds over us also means that he nullifies law for in treating death as the natural conclusion, law with its punitive intent for punishment crumbles. If death is no longer punishment, then law fails to assert its ultimate power.

By internalising the external he harmonises law as presented in the novel with his existential freedom: 'I opened myself for the first time to the tender indifference of the world.' (Camus, 1942/2012, p. 111). Through his existential freedom, he is able to reconfigure the philosophical landscape into one which weaves law and individuality into two forces which no longer oppose each other. In affirming his subjecthood, and in his existential freedom, Meursault is also able to reach a new conception of justice. Justice is not the one of law but the inner reshaping of the relation one bears to this final act of law. This final act, although taking the form of death is in fact the universally shared fate of all criminals, punishment. In the novel, Camus dramatizes this into the form of death for both individual and law and anything else on that matter is bound by the same ultimate truth, that of the inescapability of death's grin. Death is the fabric of our lives just as much as life is. By the lucid awareness of death as the twin of life, Meursault's inner justice is one of reconciling what appeared to be opposites in the eyes of law: life and death. In his sentiment on page 111 that 'I understood that I'd been happy, and I was still happy.' (Camus, 1942/2012), death, which the judicial system tries to impose upon him in virtue of the implicit belief that it is a punishment because it is something that opposes and clashes with life, becomes the gateway for clarity, authenticity and peace. This new existential lucidity in the newly risen Meursault-the-rebel is reflected in Chaitin's comment that 'in the final scenes of the novel, the state of doubt and dependency has given way to one of determination and certainty.' (1993, p. 163). Far from a sad resignation, Meursault now does not accept death indifferently, as opposed to his prior confrontations with death through his mother and the Arab. He affirms it. By being active in his approach to death, by wanting to be met with 'cries of hatred' (Camus, 1942/2012, p. 111) in his death, he expresses defiant solidarity with it. It is through this attitude, rather than through the mere materiality of death, that execution reconciles the demands of law and of singularity. Were he to be indifferent to it, then his singularity is flattened out into the general structure of resignation. By transforming the ineluctability of death into a singular expression of revolt, he escapes the grasp of fatalism, or rather, he shuts it down.

Calling for hate rather than compassion reinforces his solitude even in death. Law's judgement, as a consequence of Meursault's indifferent neglect of society, becomes the possibility for this inner justice. Seen from another angle, death also allows law to live on in spirit and to retain its authority to an extent. By dying, law's need for retribution according to its own standards is met.

The apparent clash is no clash at all but a choreography in which two opposites move in a quiet harmonious rhythm; a rhythm which at first glance attacks our ears with notes of dissonance but when listened to a second time reveals a lilting and elegant accord. Meursault's existential freedom transcends law without destroying it, nor escaping it and thus allows law to carry out its work. In carrying out its work however, law destroys itself and the other. On the other side of the coin, Meursault shatters the power of law dissipating it into the oblivion through his affirmation yet proceeds to die. In the end both law and the individual descend towards death bound by unity. This is the paradoxical conclusion that, on the one hand, law achieves what it aims for-punishing according to society's demands and ideals of what punishment is, and on the other hand, the attitude of Meursault which renders the intent of punishment meaningless through his embracing of it; it ceases to be what it was intended to become. The reconcilability in death follows from the irreconcilability in life. In other words, reconciliation is found in the irreconciliation of law and the individual.

It is worth stressing that Meursault's embrace of the absurd is a gateway toward his greeting with death. Death by itself does not necessarily mean that law and individual are reconciled, and neither does a resignation in the face of death mean that. It is Meursault's reaffirmation of the absurd which allows him to reconcile the two. The relevance of the absurd is that it is an absolute reality which is at odds with the reality of a meaning-imposing structure such as law. By accepting this reality and not the reality of law, or society, through his individuality and revolt, Meursault strips the meaning of law and its final judgement.

IV.II) Where death walks the pages: Death throughout the novel

The relationship between Meursault and death which the prior chapter outlines has not always been the case throughout the novel. Meursault has not been the *homo absurdus* who affirms the universal fate befalling all men. The journey from Part I of the novel to Part II is the journey of death. The parallelism and difference in both parts lies in an analysis of the significance of death. This chapter traces the instantiations of death and aims at showing how, retrospectively,

the conclusion argued for above is not absolute but is contingent on a reading of Meursault's attitude to death as a journey rather than as a final stop, a destination of some sort if you will. The further point of this chapter is to show how death is not the actuality of the solution mentioned above. It is not the case that in all cases of death, there is a paradoxical reconciliation between law and individuality. We cannot even speak of all cases of death since the very reconciliation offered by Camus is an individualistic one. This attitude is reminiscent of Heidegger who spoke of death in his *'Being and Time'*: 'Dying is something that every Dasein itself must take upon itself at the time. By its very essence, death is in every case mine, in so far as it 'is' at all.' (1927/1962, p. 284) Thusly, any harmony, should it come, must find its place of origin in the solitude of man's final moments, not bestowed upon him but forged by him. By tracing Meursault's encounters with death, we see exactly how his relationship toward death advances.

What appears to be a life guided by no meaning, following no thread, is but Camus' most elaborate artistic success. Under the lacklustre and monotony of Camus' behaviouristic journalling of events, lies a theme which starts and ends the novel. The first sentence of the first chapter of the first part is 'My mother died today.' (Camus, 1942/2012, p. 3) In the last chapter of the last part mama's death is recounted: 'Mama must have felt set free, ready to live once more.' (Camus, 1942/2012, p. 110) Death, when examined diachronically, is seen to be 'the master angle governing the two other angles, that of happiness/unhappiness and that of innocence/guilt.' (Longstaffe, 1990, p. 54) For Camus, like Heidegger, death can be experienced objectively through the Other. Meursault's first two experiences of death are exactly that. First, he experiences the death of his mother and secondly the death of the Arab. Even before delving into the matter, the first difference in attitude appears to us. Whilst the first mention of his mother's death is met with Meursault's indifference, 'That doesn't mean anything.', (Camus, 1942/2012, p. 3), the last memory of his mother's death is retold in a relationship to life, 'ready to live once more.' In his final moments, death is not seen as the suppressor of life. Death becomes the key to affirming and enhancing life in all its aspects. Meursault's constant memories which flood his mind in prison points towards this affirmative characteristic of death which John Cruickshank also noted: 'The natural impulse of man condemned to death is to desire life all the more intensely.' (1959, p. 60) Through the silence of death, life regains voice for the dialectic informing the relationship between life and death is thus so that life can only be found meaningful to live in relation to the meaninglessness of death. In this engagement with death and life not as antagonistic forces but ones which inform each other, we reach

Longstaffe's conclusion that by the end, Meursault 'knows now for certainty that to consider that life has no higher meaning is not equivalent to denying that it is worth living.' (1990, p. 65)

Life and death are not only conceptually bound but also symbolically. In each dark case, there is a light present. Visiting the mortuary, Meursault notices that 'the room was very bright' (Camus, 1942/2012, p.5). On the day of killing the Arab, 'it was the same sun as the day I'd buried Mama...' (Camus, 1942/2012, p. 53). Later during his trial, 'the proceedings opened with the sun blazing outside the courtroom.' (Camus, 1942/2012, p. 74). The sun thus represents another sort of truth - the eternal truth of death. Where the sun dares to burn bright, the shadows stretch far and wide. Up until the end however, Meursault has been in conflict with this truth. His attitude toward death is not so much indifference as it is a quasi-Heideggerian 'anxiety' which shows itself through Meursault's behaviour when light and sun are present. Death is there and Meursault does encounter it, but he does so with eyes closed, forcing death in the background. He has some experience of it, but it is not the lucid existential awareness of death which defines the Meursault of Part II of the novel. I describe Meursault's anxiety as quasi-Heideggerian because of the simple fact that Heidegger's anxiety is grounded in the liberating spirit of the Being-in-potential whilst Meursault reflects the idea of anxiety through his indifference; nothing has meaning and nothing matters. He perfectly reflects Heidegger's point that

The utter insignificance which makes itself known in the "nothing and nowhere", does not signify that the world is absent, but tells us that entities within-the-world are of so little importance in themselves that on the basis of this insignificance of what is within-the-world, the world in its worldhood is all that still obtrudes itself. (1927/1962, p. 187)

His detachment however does not seem to grant him the force of freedom which Heidegger's anxiety does. Meursault is only half-way there. In Heideggerian terms, we can describe Meursault thusly: 'This phenomenon of Dasein's fleeing in the face of itself and in the face of its authenticity...', in other words, Meursault flees from his own Being for death is part of that very Being. (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 229) As we are told by Heidegger,

On the contrary, just as Dasein is already its "not-yet", and is its "not-yet" constantly as long as it is, it is already its end too. The "ending" which we have in view when we speak of death, does not signify Dasein's Being-at-an-end [Zu-Ende-sein], but a Being-

towards-the-end [Sein zum Ende] of this entity. Death is a way to be, which Dasein takes over as soon as it is. "As soon as man comes to life, he is at once old enough to die.' (1927/1962, p. 289).

In other words, by fleeing from the reality of the world, Meursault is also fleeing from his own reality and hence lives inauthentically for he is not confronting his Being-toward-death. This interpretation of Meursault's fleeing from the face of reality is supported by Manly's remark that the encounters Meursault has with death

[...] contribute to Meursault's growing consciousness of the sheer impersonality and human negation implied in death, and all three confrontations he attempts in one way or another to elude, but ultimately fails to do so. (1964, p. 321)

His authenticity is seen through his behaviour being marked by discomfort and a willingness to escape from the light source. This is most clearly seen in the first few pages of the novel where, when conversing with the caretaker, Meursault is not only 'blinded by the sudden burst of brightness.' when the day grew old, but he also 'asked him if he could switch off one of the lights.' (Camus, 1942/2012, p. 8) When he awoke from his slumber, Meursault remarks how 'every curve stood out so sharply that it hurt my eyes.' (Camus, 1942/2012, p. 8). Manly also comments on this specific scenario as an example of Meursault's attempts to remain in the darkness of truth, unwilling to see what the light reveals: 'In the face of this stark reality, Meursault's impulse is to doze as he feels constantly fatigued in this room of death. Yet even as he tries to shut out the situation he is being made uneasy.' (1964, p. 322)

and further that Meursault's sleepiness and dozing 'imply that Meursault's failure to waken physically to his situation is symbolically associated with a more metaphysical failure to become aware of death's profound implications.' (Manly, 1964, p. 322).

During the killing of the Arab, his obvious discomfort is reflected in statements such as: 'I was being burned alive; I couldn't stand it any more so I took a step forward.' (Camus, 1942/2012, p. 53). In the courtroom, Meursault is described as 'stifling hot.' (Camus, 1942/2012, p. 75) These instances not only reflect light's symbolic quality of truth shining upon our protagonist but, in the first part of the novel reveal his unwillingness to be in the light. From symbolics to metaphysics, light is utilised by Camus to expose Meursault as the man who flees from the truth; a man who turns his back onto that truth and refuses to see it for what it is. That truth

being death. Unable to face his eternal fate head on, Meursault copes through his banal behaviour. Meursault avoids death as a thing to be even considered except in the moment of the killing and in his own death. It is the killing of the Arab which is the turning point in his attitude toward death for that moment marks his transition from feeling to knowing. He is no longer the recipient of physical stimuli but the conscious protagonist who is aware:

I realised that I had destroyed the natural balance of the day, the exceptional silence of a beach where I had once been happy. Then I fired four more times into the lifeless body, where the bullets sank without leaving a trace. And it was as if I had rapped sharply, four times, on the fatal door of destiny. (Camus ,1942/2012, p. 54)

Meursault experiences a transition from his un-involvement in life to a complete involvement and he is not only experiencing this change but is fully conscious of it, hence Viggiani's comment that 'The experience of death is the catastrophe that illuminates the human condition. From this point on, Meursault is no longer a purely sentient consciousness. He begins to understand, to reflect. He no longer feels; he also knows.' (1956, p. 882)

This transition marks his journey from Part I to Part II as one where his passivity is transformed into activity. By knocking on fate's door, he is now forced to justify, explain and defend his way of life before the court; he is forced to try and understand his way of life. The doorkeeper hears his knocks and opens the door of life, Meursault enters, and in the process of the court, he becomes fully involved in his own life. In the words of Manly:

The confusion which Camus's parable appears to present in terms of his philosophy of the absurd is clarified when we see that Meursault partakes of both absurd objectivity and absurd subjectivity, and that his adventure is a progressive journey from one state to the other. (1964, p. 323)

Through Manly's reformulation of the passive/active distinction through an absurd perspective, we see how Meursault has always been involved in the absurd life but the way in which he is involved develops. The metaphor of his rasping upon the door of fate is reminiscent of Blanchot's comment in *'Faux Pas'* that 'In social life to be the plaything of chance is not possible without crime. Chance becomes fate.' (1943/2001, p.220) The randomness of Meursault's life becomes fate as soon as he performs the killing. In a way, the killing of the

Arab was preordained. Within Meursault's absurd framework, no act is more significant than another, no more valuable than another. All is the same. The killing of the Arab is for Meursault the same as the swimming on the beach. Yet through the killing of the Arab, Meursault realises that this quantitative lifestyle which sterilises all acts as equally meaningful, or equally meaningless, has 'destroyed the natural balance of the day.' Carl Viggiani points out that

In a world in which everything and everyone is privileged and therefore equivalent, smoking a cigarette and clipping mineral salts advertisements rank with the ecstasy of love, or reading Shakespeare. In an absurd world not only all sensations, but all acts are equivalent. (1956, p. 880)

Through Meursault's realisation that something has changed, and that this change is portrayed through negative language, Camus is indirectly critiquing Meursault's prior indifference. Ethics assuming that a meaningless life renders all actions equally meaningless is doomed to be punished through the institution of power among men, law. An institution which is necessary. Kate Kirkpatrick's commentary on Levinas captures this necessity of law: 'Even though every other is incomparable some limitation or measurement must be placed on the infinite demands of infinite others.' (2011, p.226) The destined act of killing is also noted by other scholars among whom Chaitin remarks that:

And yet there is also an aura of inevitability, of compulsion, about the crime. If we are to take Meursault's account seriously when absolving him of premeditation and control of his actions, then we must also attend to that same account when he insists that, despite his better judgement, he was impelled forward by the unbearable burning of the sun, and when he exclaims that at the crucial moment his whole being tensed. (1993, p.168)

The inevitability of the killing in an absurd world in which all acts are met with an equal apathy by Meursault, the trial pushes him toward self-reflection. A self-reflection which ends in his alienation from himself; an alienation which represents his departure from the Meursault in Part I. The cause of that departure: his act of killing. Looking at his reflection in prison, Meursault ponders over how 'it seemed as if my reflection remained grave even when I tried to smile at it.' (Camus, 1942/2012, p. 73) The trial not only ironically mirrors the violence of law toward the human subject which it judges but is also a mechanism through which Meursault is forced

to confront himself for the first time. Viggiani notes how ‘Every insignificant thing, person, and act in Part I returns with the sun and the mother’s burial to condemn Meursault.’ (1956, p. 885). In other words, Meursault was condemned prior to the court’s decision for execution. Meaningless acts do not mean insignificant acts. The metaphysical meaningless which Camus is arguing for in his absurd philosophy does not entail a practical insignificance in our ethical duty toward our fellow neighbours. Through his killing, Meursault also experiences an existential shift from innocence to responsibility. (Manly, 1964, p. 324) Hence, in Part II, Meursault realises that ‘the condemned man was obliged to collaborate morally.’ (Camus, 1942/2012, p. 101) His taking responsibility for his act is another step taken toward his existential epiphany which is finalised in his statement that ‘the guillotine was positioned at the same level as man.’ (Camus, 1942/2012, p. 101) The guillotine symbolising death is not something above or below man. Death is not beyond man’s existence but is something in it. Meursault’s reconciliation with law is that he meets death with dignity. Death and man meet at the same level. That horizontal plane on which the two are placed is life. There is no life without death and vice versa. The equality between man and guillotine, between man and death, and between life and death tells us that our Being-towards-death, in Heideggerian vocabulary, is not a spiritual reckoning, no grand action, but a mundane activity equal to our walking on pavement, hence Meursault’s casual description of walking toward death being ‘as if he were going to meet someone.’ (Camus, 1942/2012, p. 101). In his acquaintance with death, Meursault maintains the Hegelian adage that ‘the life of Spirit is not the life that shrinks from death and keeps itself untouched from devastation, but rather the life that endures it and maintains itself in it.’ (Hegel, 1807/1997, p. 19)

Meursault’s final moments mark his existential Being as one of authenticity and revolt. In his affirmation of death and consequently life, exemplified through his introspective comment: ‘I’d been right, I was still right, I had always been right.’ (Camus, 1942/2012, p. 109), Meursault affirms his Being in its totality and we have good reason to think that if the Nietzschean demon asked him the question of the eternal recurrence, Meursault would reply in the positive; he would live his life as he had. In his final moments, Meursault aligns himself with law through his existential finality. He sees his end as the natural conclusion and in his acceptance without appeal, his individual truth, found at the very end, and law’s verdict become reconciled. By actively affirming law’s verdict, he affirms the cosmic verdict of death. The court of law and the stage of life, seen only in the end of the novel, reveal their hidden relationship defined by a parallel reflection of the absurd. Viggiani notes that ‘the trial is a parable of the universal and

eternal sentence inflicted on men. It is the supreme injustice committed against men, and, like the illogic of the trial episode, it is incomprehensible.' (1956, p. 885).

Standing at the edge of death, Meursault awakens to life and claims all that is his, all miseries, all responsibilities, all consequences and all judgements.

Conclusion

Retrospectively what this inquiry has aimed at developing is the tension between law and existential freedom on a macrolevel only to focus on the microlevel later on. The necessity for this methodological step is that Camus is writing a story, creating a fictional world which goes back and forth between the non-real and the real but offers no philosophical thesis so our primary task was to erect a philosophical foundation which could appropriately be applied to his text and one which the text in fact reflects. By developing the narrative and showing the way in which the Being-of-the-criminal is forced upon Meursault by law's deceptive theory, we further elucidate the problem of the law which was presented first in the beginning chapter. Although ontically responsible, I argue that Meursault cannot nonetheless be judged in the way in which law does. Judged for his character rather than his crime, we reach what Camus himself noted in his 1942-1951 notebooks, namely, that 'society needs people who weep at their mothers' funerals; or else one is never condemned for the crime one thinks.' (Camus, p. 19) By exploring the relationship between author and work we reach the conclusion that Camus himself noted: 'Moreover, I see ten other possible conclusions.' (Camus, 1941-1952, p. 19)

By showing the way in which Camus is only half-present, I have demonstrated how the reader's first encounter with death is through the narrative form and an analysis of the narration leads us to further develop the relationship between law and literature. Camus' half death marks the incomplete ability of his to dictate meaning. This in turn, and we remember Barthes, frees the individual from authorial shackles and allows a new meaning to be asserted. Camus' death symbolises a reconciliation between the authorial authority and the individual. In a way, Camus himself represented the law as an author through the need to create meaning. The judicial law, by killing itself in the final judgement of death for Meursault, leaves space for Meursault to fill

the gap left by law and assert a 'meaning' of his. I write 'meaning' due to the irony of describing his absurdist revelations as a meaning.

All this has been the foreground to the most important part of the thesis, and surprisingly the shortest, the reconciliation. A reconciliation which could not be understood nor aimed toward without the prior sections. The attitude of death, a death before whose gates, all kneel in an equal manner and all vices and virtues, hopes and despairs, achievements and successes fold into the same silence. Death as the great equalizer allows Meursault to retain his authenticity and in fact reaffirm it by acknowledging and reasserting his previous life. In *eundem modum* that Meursault reconfigures justice into inner justice, Camus notes that 'liberty must at the same time insist upon justice' (1942-1951, p. 104). By liberating himself in the end, Meursault proves that the spirit of justice and truth are one and the same and his inner justice means that he remains the authentic absurdist hero who, in the words of the author, 'must live his lucidity in a world where dispersion is the rule.' (Camus, 1942-1951, p. 10) In this sunlit serenity with death, the lightness of the world becomes evident to him and law's punishment becomes a feather in a pile of feathers. In letting his acceptance of his fate dissolve the intent of the punishment into an equal silence thereby nullifying law itself, he reconciles it with his existential freedom. In his final act of rebellion and revolt, Meursault proves to be the passionate absurd hero who transcends law and enlivens Camus' echoing of Napoleon: 'One must will to live and know how to die.' (Camus, 1942-1951, p. 19)

Bibliography

Bakhtin, M. (1993). *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*. (V. Liapunov, Trans.). University of Texas Press Slavic Series NO.10. (Original Work Published 1920)

Bakhtin, M. M. (1948). *Problems of Dostoevsky's poetics* (C. Emerson, Trans.). University of Minnesota Press. (Original Work Published 1929)

Barthes, R. (1977). *Writing Degree Zero* (A. Lavers & C. Smith, Trans.). Beacon Press. (Original Work Published 1953)

Barthes, R. (1977). *Image, music, text: Essays* (S. Heath, Trans.; 13. [Dr.]). Fontana Press.

Bennett, P., Weber, E., & Lyotard, J.-F. (1999). *BEFORE THE LAW, AFTER THE LAW: An Interview with Jean-François Lyotard conducted by Elisabeth Weber. Qui Parle*, 11(2), 37–58.

Blanchot, M. (2001). *Faux Pas* (C. Mandell, Trans.). Stanford University Press. (Original Work Published 1943)

Blanchot, M. (1995). *The Work of Fire* (C. Mandell, Trans.). Stanford University Press. (Original Work Published 1949)

Camus, A. (2019). *Create Dangerously: The Power and Responsibility of the Artist* (S. Smith, Trans.). Vintage International (Original Work Published 1957)

Camus, A. (1955). *Preface to The Stranger*.

- Camus, A. (1961). *Resistance, Rebellion, and Death*. (J. O'Brien, Trans.). New York: Alfred A. Knopf. (Original Work Published 1948)
- Camus, A. (2012). *The Outsider*. (S. Smith, Trans.). Penguin Classics. (Original Work Published 1942)
- Camus, A. (1965). *Notebooks, 1942-1951* (J. O'Brien, Trans) New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Chaitin, G. D. (1993). *The Birth of the Subject in Camus' 'L'Etranger'*. *Romanic Review*, 84(2), 163–180.
- Chouraqui, F. (2021). *On the Lateral Readings of Fiction: Anti-Existentialism in Camus' Stranger*. *Journal of Aesthetics and Phenomenology*, 8(2), 99–117.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/20539320.2021.2083366>
- Cruikshank, J. (1959). *Albert Camus and the literature of revolt*. Oxford University Press.
- Deleuze, G. (1994). *Difference and Repetition* (P. Patton, Trans.). Routledge. (Original Work Published 1968)
- Derrida, J. (1992). *Deconstruction and the possibility of justice* (D. Cornell, M. Rosenfeld, D. Carlson, & Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law, Eds.). Routledge. (Original Work Published 1990)
- Derrida, J. (2018). *Before the Law: The Complete Text of Préjugés* (S. Van Reenen & J. De Ville, Trans.). University of Minnesota Press. (Original Work Published 1985)
- Fitch, B. (1982). *The Narcissistic Text: A Reading of Camus' Fiction*. University of Toronto
- Foucault, M. (1998). *Aesthetics, Method and Epistemology*. (R. Hurley et al.). The New Press.
- Foucault, M. (1997). *Society-must-be-defended*. (D. Macey, Trans.) Picador Books. (Original Work Published 1967)
- Foucault, M., & Blanchot, M. (1987). *Foucault—Blanchot*: (B. Massumi & J. Mehlman, Trans.). Zone Books.
- Freitas, L. M. (2015). *Law and literature: The absurd in law in "The stranger" by Albert Camus*. *ANAMORPHOSIS - Revista Internacional de Direito e Literatura*, 1(1), 139.
- Hegel, G. W. F. (1977). *Hegel-Phenomenology-of-Spirit*. (A.V. Miller, Trans.). Oxford University Press. (Original Work Published 1807)

- Heidegger, M. (1962). *Being-and-Time-Blackwell*. (J. Macquarrie & E. Robinson, Trans.). Blackwell Publishers. (Original Work Published 1927)
- Kant, I. (1998). *Groundwork of the metaphysics of morals*. (M. Gregor, Trans.) Cambridge University Press. (Original Work Published 1785)
- Lefebvre, A. (2005). *A New Image of Law: Deleuze and Jurisprudence. Telos: Critical Theory of the Contemporary* (130): 103-126
- Lévinas, E. (1979). *Totalité et infini: Essai sur l'extériorité* (4e éd). (A. Lingis, Trans.). Martinus Nijhoff Publishers. (Original Work Published 1961)
- Longstaffe, M. (1990). *A Happy Life and a Happy Death: The Quest of Camus's Etranger. The French Review*, 64(1), 54–68.
- Manly, W. M. (1964). *Journey to Consciousness: The Symbolic Pattern of Camus's L'Etranger. PMLA*, 79(3), 321–328.
- McCarthy, P. (2004). *ALBERT CAMUS: The Stranger*. Cambridge University Press.
- Montesquieu (1999). *Considerations on the Causes of the Greatness of the Romans and their Decline*. (D. Lowenthal, Trans.). (Original Work Published 1734)
- Pols, E. (1981). The Conditions of Ontic Responsibility. *The Review of Metaphysics*, 35(2), 297–319.
- Rousseau, J.-J. (2017). *The Social Contract*. (J. Bennett, Trans.). (Original Work Published 1762)
- Sarte, J.-P. (1950). *What is Literature?* (B. Frechtman, Trans.). Philosophical Library. (Original Work Published 1947)
- Sartre, J.-P. (2007). *A Commentary on The Stranger*. (C. Macomber, Trans.). *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, 73–98. Yale University Press. (Original Work Published 1946)
- Shakespeare, W. (1997). *As-You-Like-It*. Folger Shakespeare Library. (Original Work Published 1623)
- Shakespeare, W. (1992). *Hamlet*. Folger Shakespeare Library. (Original Work Published 1603)
- Viggiani, C. A. (1956). *Camus' L'Etranger. PMLA*, 71(5), 865–887.

