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THE ABSURD HEROES IN CAMUS'S FICTION

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Abstract: *Absurd heroes in literature perceive the world as meaningless and irrational and thereby revolt against the dynamics of power which are pervasive within societal institutions. This research is based on a study of the absurd and revolt of the protagonists in selected fiction of Albert Camus (1913-1960). The objective of this study is to scrutinize the ways in which the characters in Camus's fiction resist the absurdity of modern existence, ideological expectations and the dialectics of power in social institutions. The problem statement is based on exploring to what extent the characters' struggle, revolt and resistance can be considered as subversive in terms of how they are realized in the narratives. The methodology is a textual analysis of fiction which includes Camus's novel *The Outsider* (1942) and his short fiction —*The Guest* (1957), —*The Growing Stone* (1957) and —*The Renegade or A Confused Mind* (1957). This study conceptualizes the absurd and revolt in Camus's selected fiction via theoretical frameworks predominantly based on ideology and power. It concludes that, Camus engages in a powerful sociopolitical critique by engaging with the diverse ways in which the resistance of his absurd heroes can be realized. These are explored in fictional contexts where such characters are surrounded by societal institutions which seek to discipline, regulate and control them.*

Keywords: Albert Camus, Absurd, Revolt, Ideology, Power

Açar sözlər: Albert Kamyu, Absurd, Üsyan, İdeologiya, Güc

Ключевые слова: Альбер Камю, Абсурд, Бунт, Идеология, Власть

In literature, absurd heroes perceive the world as meaningless and irrational and thereby revolt, struggle and raise their voice of resistance against the dynamics of power which are pervasive within societal institutions. According to Foucault (1998) power is in a constant state of flux as it is —everywhere, —comes from everywhere (p. 63) and operates as means of disciplining individuals. Foucault (1979) says that, these dialectics of power function within the structures and institutions of administration, authority and bureaucracy within the society. Such institutional structures can be identified as the government, prison, school, church, factory, office and hospital etc.

Literary work based on the philosophy of the absurd engage in a critical analysis of the dialectics of power within societal institutions to examine how they operate in absurd, meaningless and irrational manners.

The characters of such texts revolt and raise their voice of resistance against a totalitarian regime, overwhelming dictatorship or overbearing authority which exercises power and control over them in diverse ways. This research is based on a study of the absurd and revolt of protagonists of selected fictional work by Albert Camus (1913-1960). Camus was a French author and journalist as well as an influential philosopher. He was one of the significant writers

who contributed immeasurably to the philosophical doctrine of absurdism and developing the absurd hero in literature.

The objective of this study is to scrutinize the ways and means in which the characters in Camus's selected fiction revolt against the absurdity of modern existence, ideological expectations and the dialectics of power in social institutions. The problem statement is based on exploring to what extent the characters' struggle, revolt and resistance can be considered as subversive in terms of how they are realized in the narratives. The state of being subversive can be identified as —positioning against the order imposed in a state, putting it in danger, undermining it through a strategy that is also risky for the power of the dominant group (Oprescu, 2016, p. 106). This research engages with determining the subversive potential of absurd heroes in terms of identifying how they attempt to revolt and resist the overwhelming dialectics of power which are pervasive within social institutions in Camus's selected fiction.

Absurdism refers to —a philosophy based on the belief that the universe is irrational and meaningless and that the search for order brings the individual into conflict with the universe (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2020).

The devastation, massive destruction and loss of lives in Europe during the 20th century such as the two world wars, led to a shattering of faith, religion and belief on God. People started questioning the innate goodness of humans who were capable of such overwhelming violence, terror and bloodshed. At such a chaotic time people started problematizing essentialist views on humans being offered a predestined fate by God. It was during these times that, absurdism started getting more popularity as a philosophical doctrine. It enabled people to embrace the —complexity [of the] human condition [in an absurd world] to confront [themselves] with the bitter truth that most human endeavor is irrational and senseless (Esslin, 1960, p. 13). Thus, absurdism offered individuals means of coming into terms with their absurd reality in life.

In his —The Myth of Sisyphus Camus elucidates on the absurd hero by reinterpreting the Greek Mythological tale of Sisyphus. Sisyphus was the King of Ephyra and was condemned by Zeus for his deception to roll an immense boulder up a hill, only to watch it come back to hit him, repeating this action for eternity. Camus reflects on the return journey of Sisyphus and instead focusing on the futility of the laborious task of Sisyphus, identifies him as an absurd hero who carries a tragic fate but still struggles against it. It is this struggle which gives him his dignity. —His fate belongs to him (Camus, 1991, p. 76).

According to Camus, it is not only the struggle which gives the absurd hero his dignity, it is the revolt as well. Camus says that the revolt is —the certainty of a crushing fate, without the resignation that ought to accompany it (Camus, 1991, p. 31). He further deliberates upon the notion of the revolt to state that, —[t]he struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy (Camus, 1991, p. 78).

Thus, the absurd hero according to Camus resists by struggling and revolting against a tragic fate before succumbing to it, instead of despairing with resignation when faced with it.

In engaging with his absurd crisis Meursault confronts and revolts against the social expectations imposed upon him by the overwhelming power wielded by the governing authorities within social institutions in an overt and direct manner. He asks, —[w]hy should the death of other people or a mother's love matter so much? Why should I care about his god, the lives, the destinies we choose when one unique destiny had chosen me? (Camus, 2013, p. 109)

To interpret this, this research refers to Camus's theoretical concept of the absurd hero's revolt. For Camus, the absurd man is the one who accepts the challenge lucidly as the basis for his revolt is to struggle against the absurd fate which is imposed upon him. Camus believes that

this revolt and resistance will give the absurd hero dignity. This is the reason why he does not identify Sisyphus from Greek

Mythology as a tragic character who has been subjected to damnation. He says that, —[o]ne must imagine Sisyphus happy (Camus, 1991, p.78) despite the eternal punishment he is made to undergo by Zeus.

The implication of imagining Sisyphus as happy despite his tragic fate can be likened to the absurd crisis which Meursault undergoes as well. This is due to the fact that, it is actually Meursault's assurance of himself and how he abides by his own principles that give him dignity as an absurd hero. He says, —I may look as if I had nothing but I was sure of myself, sure of everything, sure of my life, sure of my impending death. Yes that was all I had. But at least I had a hold on that truth as much as it had a hold on me (Camus, 2013, p. 109). Camus is thus able to emphasize on the subversive potential of this novel against social institutions by demonstrating Meursault's strong individual streak and passionate outburst of his own individuality after realizing the absurdity of his world and his existence. Like the absurd hero Sisyphus whom Camus imagines to be happy in his essay, Meursault knows that his struggle is hopeless but still continues to do so. This gives him dignity.

In the short story —The Guest by Camus the school teacher Daru is ordered by the government to take a prisoner, an Arab to the police headquarters in Tingit. However, Daru frees the prisoner and gives him a choice to escape his fate or turn himself to the police. As a result of Daru's dilemma in his inability to take a decision, he seals his own fate as a warning is written on his blackboard which says, —[y]ou turned in our brother. You will pay.' (Camus, 2006, p. 55). Daru, though he is given a direct order by the state, which governs predominantly by violence as a RSA, makes his own choice to free the prisoner. He overtly struggles and revolts against the order given to him and ultimately this resistance gives him dignity as he makes his own individual choice though it goes against the state. However, despite the choice he makes he is still condemned to a tragic fate.

Furthermore, despite his individual decision to free the prisoner, he achingly discovers that the Arab (the prisoner) was —slowly making his way along the road to the prison (Camus, 2006, p. 55). Though, Daru makes his own choice after undergoing an absurd dilemma or existential crisis, his decision is revealed to be absurd, meaningless and purposeless at the latter part of the story. This is because the prisoner refuses the opportunity of pursuing his freedom which Daru gives him. However, the subversive potential of his decision is evident, as he undergoes the dilemma of resisting against the overwhelming and overarching rules, regulations, norms and expectations of the RSAs and the ISAs. Moreover, despite the meaningless aftermath of his choice, the fact that he made his own individual decision gives him dignity as an absurd hero in literature.[5,98]

In Camus's —The Growing Stone d'Arrast takes over the task of the sailor who decides to carry a stone of 50 kilos to the church in the city of Iguape out of religious faith. Though the burden of the stone gets heavy, d'Arrast struggles but ultimately changes his route and flings the stone inside the sailor's own hut instead. d'Arrast's own choice of changing his route shows his overt revolt against what he identifies as an absurd, irrational and purposeless task. This research refers to Althusser's (1971) theoretical concept of—interpellation (p. 164) in order to explore how the absurd hero in this short story refuses to interpellate himself. Althusser (1971) says that, —ideology hails or interpellates individuals as subjects (p. 162). Thus, ideology has —always-already interpellated individuals as subjects" (p.164) to perform the roles and obligations expected by the governing dominant ideologies of social institutions.

In this short story the religious ISA governs as a social institution which expects the characters to interpellate themselves to fulfill the dominant ideological expectations of Christian faith and devotion.[11,107]

However, d'Arrast as an absurd hero resists by refusing to interpellate himself to fulfil these set roles and expectations by the religious ISA. Furthermore, his choice to abandon the task and revolt against the religious institution gives him self-dignity as an absurd hero. This becomes evident when it is revealed that he is filled with —tumultuous happiness as he —joyously honoured his own strength after making his own individual choice (Camus, 2006, p. 108). Thus, the subversive potential of the absurd hero's revolt in this story becomes evident as it comes across as a direct, overt and confrontational resistance against Christian traditions, faith and practices. At the end of the story the absurd hero opens the way for the people in the city to —find fulfilment in their present circumstances by teaching them that man must be directly responsible for his actions (Claire, 1976, p. 28).

However, in Camus's —The Renegade or A Confused Mind, the unnamed absurd hero embraces the absurdity of his existence by abandoning all reason and logic. Though he faces a tragic fate of being tortured and eventually executed, he still struggles and revolts against it before embracing it. He initially goes as a Christian missionary to convert those of the closed city of Taghaza but later on accepts this city's faith of the house of fetish and eventually disowns Christ.

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KAMYU ƏSƏRLƏRİNDƏ ABSURD QƏHRƏMANLAR*Məhərrəmovə Suqurə**Xülasə*

Kamyu fantastikasında olan absurd qəhrəmanlar öz varlıqlarının absurdluğuna müxtəlif yollarla müqavimət göstərirlər.

Kamyunun qəhrəmanları sistemə, onun dağıdıcı gücünə və hakimiyyətinə qarşı üsyan edir və mübarizə aparırlar. Müəllif bu povestlər vasitəsilə öz qəhrəmanlarının müqavimətinin təxribatçı potensialı üzərində düşünərək ictimai-siyasi tənqidlə məşğul olur. Bu, o, bu personajların RSA və İSA-ların dominant və idarəedici ideologiyalarına, normalarına, dəyərlərinə və gözləntilərinə qarşı necə üsyan etdiyini ifşa etdikdə aydın olur. Birbaşa, aşkar və qarşıdurma üsulları ilə müxtəlif zorakılıq və repressiya formaları ilə idarə olunur. Buna görə də, o, şəxsiyyəti idarə etməyə, tənzimləməyə və nizam-intizam etməyə çalışan RSA-ların və İSA-ların dominant ideoloji gözləntilərinə qarşı güclü bir tənqid etmək üçün absurd qəhrəmanlarının üsyanı ilə məşğul olur.

АБСУРДНЫЕ ГЕРОИ ПРОИЗВЕДЕНИЙ КАМЮ*Магerrəmovə Сугура**Резюме*

Абсурдные герои произведений Камю по-разному сопротивляются абсурдности своего существования.

Герои Камю восстают и борются против системы, ее разрушительной власти и власти. Посредством этих повествований автор занимается социально-политической критикой, размышляя о подрывном потенциале сопротивления своих главных героев. Это становится очевидным, когда он раскрывает, как эти персонажи восстают против доминирующих и управляющих идеологий, норм, ценностей и ожиданий RSA и ISA, которые управлять различными формами насилия и репрессий прямым, открытым и конфронтационным образом. Поэтому он участвует в восстании своих абсурдных героев, чтобы выступить с мощной критикой доминирующих идеологических ожиданий RSA и ISA, которые стремятся контролировать, регулировать и дисциплинировать человека.

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