Order In Sartre And Camus Essay, Research Paper

Order in Sartre and CamusNausea, by Jean-Paul Sartre, and The Stranger, by Albert Camus, refuse to impose order on their events by not using psychology, hierarchies, coherent narratives, or cause and effect. Nausea refuses to order its events by not inscribing them with psychology or a cause for existence, and it contrasts itself with a text by Balzac that explains its events. Nausea resists the traditional strategy of including the past to predict a character’s future. It instead focuses on the succession of presents, which troubles social constructions such as “stories” and “adventure.” The Stranger resists traditional categories of order by not dividing Meursault’s body and soul, or body and mind. It denies the order of cause and effect by providing no motive for the murder of the Arab, and resists a reductive reading of itself as a case history of a “monster.” The novel contrasts its refusal to interpret with the coherent narrative that the prosecutors create. The Stranger and Nausea explore similar strategies as they interrogate ways to view the world without a system of interpretative illusions. Nausea refuses to assign order to its events by choosing not to justify them with psychology or cause. Roquentin finds himself unable to pick up a piece of paper, for no apparent physical reason. However, he refuses to psychoanalyze the event. He writes that he will not traffic in “secrets or soul states,” or to “play with the inner life” (9). When he cannot pick up the paper, he decides that no explanation is necessary: he simply decides “I was unable” (10). By not assigning psychology, Roquentin allows the event to have a gratuitous existence. Similarly, when Roquentin overhears a couple talking, the conversation only appears in fragments: “‘You know, you’re mistaken, Suzanne is more . . .’ ‘That may well be, my dear, that may well be’” (48). The conversation is a disordered succession of statements, each lacking a clear justification for its content. Roquentin senses this same gratuitous existence when he holds a pebble a the seashore. He feels “a sort of sweetish sickness . . . a sort of Nausea in the hands” (10-11). The pebble exists without a function or justification, and the “nausea” is Roquentin’s sense of its raw existence. Nausea chooses not to incorporate its events into a system of cause and effect by allowing their gratuitous existence. Nausea refuses to use the traditional narrative strategy of describing the past in order to predict a character’s future actions. The text includes few details about the past, refusing to discuss why Anny left Roquentin or what his adventures were. By not describing the past, it avoids the traditional strategy of using past events to predict a character’s future. Roquentin recalls an evening with Anny because “we were desperate, she as much as I . . . [to] feel the minutes passing” (57). He thinks of the night in context of the “irreversibility of time,” as an experience linked to his exploration of adventure (57). It does not enter because Roquentin feels guilt: he believes that leaving her that night “was a good job” (57). It does not probe why he “got up and left without saying a word to her” (57). Similarly, Roquentin’s adventures enter only in terms of his interrogation of adventure. Nausea describes the moment in Indochina where Roquentin first senses that adventure are social constructions: “My passion was dead. For years it had rolled over and submerged me; now I felt empty” (5). The novel only narrates the details which have influenced Roquentin’s thoughts in the present, and it does not provide instances that interpret or clarify Roquentin’s character. Nausea contrasts itself with a section from Eugenie Grandet, by Balzac, in terms of the section’s use of psychological order and bourgeois categories. The Balzac text differs from Nausea by using omniscient narration to describe the mother and ascribe traits to her. She speaks because she “wanted to justify her daughter’s madness by sharing it” (47). Balzac’s narrator ascribes psychological motivation to the mother, making her action seem to spring from a cause. The mother has a “maternal old face, worn with long suffering” (47). The omniscient voice constructs the bourgeois category of “maternal” in the mother, as well as the bourgeois value of “long suffering.” This contrasts with Nausea’s refusal to provide actions from the past that would help characterize Roquentin . The Balzac text also includes moral advice: “‘Could you love him already? It would be wrong’” (47). Balzac’s use of advice contrasts with Roquentin’s refusal to reflect on the past with guilt, or to subscribe to any moral system which would make the moments of his life “follow and order themselves” (40). Nausea differs from Balzac’s traditional narrative by denying the order that psychology and traditional categories impose on the moments of life. Nausea also refuses to assign a coherent narrative structure to events, to create stories and “adventure”, denying the succession of instants any such order. Roquentin denies that there “could possibly be true stories” (40), for these would require “real beginnings” (37). Beginnings and endings are social constructs that make instants stop “piling themselves in a lighthearted way on top of each other” (41), and try to assign “rhyme or reason” to the flow of time (40). Adventure is one construction of beginnings and endings: the “mirage” (162) of adventure is created by the way “moments are linked together” (56). The narrative form links events in order to create an adventure, imposing order where there was only an pileup of instants before. Stories reverse the disorder of the succession of events, for “things happen one way and we tell about them in the opposite sense” (39). In a story, instants “are snapped up by the end of the story” so that each “piece of information [has a] value we shall subsequently appreciate” (40). The traditional narrative form assigns a value, in terms of plot, to each of its elements, while Nausea argues that time consists of more disorderly “[days] tacked on to days” (37). Nausea argues that the apparent order of “stories” and “adventure” exists only so far as the narrative form constructs it. The Stranger refuses to impose traditional categories of order on Meursault by not dividing him between an inner and outer life, or between a body and soul. In one section, Meursault reports that he shut his windows, glanced at the mirror, saw a few pieces of bread, and thought “that another Sunday was over, that Maman was buried now, that I was going back to work, and that, really, nothing had changed” (24). The text does not separate or privilege “inner” thoughts or “outer” events, mingling the two on the same level. When the magistrate questions Meursault about the pause between the shots he fires at the Arab, he decides that the magistrate “was wrong to dwell on it, because it really didn’t matter” (69). Meursault disagrees that the delay reveals any inner life, and refuses to account for it by constructing one. Meursault similarly does not believe that he has a “hardened . . . soul” (69), because he does not believe in the traditional Christian dichotomy between body and soul. He simply answers “Yes” when the chaplain asks whether “you really live with the thought that when you die, you die, and nothing remains” (117). The Stranger does not incorporate the traditional Christian and psychological categories for ordering the individual.

The Stranger refuses to impose the order of cause and effect on Meursault’s murder of the Arab by not ascribing to him racial hatred, a wish for revenge, or feelings from Maman’s death. When Meursault approaches the Arab alone, he realizes that “all I had to do was turn around and that would be the end of it” (58). His almost indifferent approach makes the text resist the notion that he was impelled by racial hatred. Meursault is also not motivated by revenge. When he sees the Arab, he realizes that “As far as I was concerned, the whole thing was over, and I’d gone there without even thinking about it” (58). Meursault also does not seem impelled by the death of his mother. She enters into the murder scene only indirectly: “[the] sun was the same as it had been the day I’d buried [her]” (58). Meursault’s attitude that the “case will be closed” after the funeral (3), and his report that “really, nothing had changed” (24), make his feelings toward Maman seem unlikely to motivate him. The novel also does not use the traditional narrative device of foreshadowing to intimate that Meursault will become a murderer. The Stranger refuses to provide or support hints that would inscribe the murder into a system of cause and effect. The Stranger also resists a psychological reading of itself as a “case history” by making Meursault’s language clear and direct, in contrast with excessively rhetorical characters who see Meursault as a “monster.” The stance of the book is that Meursault is objectively reporting his thoughts and actions. He simply narrates “images . . . that have stuck in my mind” (18). Meursault’s language consists mostly of independent clauses. He avoids subordinate clauses in order to report events without seeming to order the information, or create a hierarchy. Meursault’s language is simple and straightforward, unlike the language of a “monster.” He frequently has to remind himself that “after all, I was the criminal” (68), and he “knows the value of words” (100). In contrast, The Stranger includes characters who feel “horror” when they look at Meursault, who see only a “monster” (102). The prosecutors call Meursault as “an abyss threatening to swallow up society” (101). This hyperbolic rhetoric contrasts sharply with Meursault’s plain and direct reporting. The rhetoric of the magistrate also contrasts with Meursault’s clear style: he screams “irrationally, ‘I am a Christian. I ask Him to forgive you your sins. How can you not believe that He suffered for you?’” (69). The Stranger resists the psychological reading of “case history” by including characters who think Meursault is a monster, and making them seem untrustworthy and “irrational.”The Stranger contrasts Meursault’s refusal to interpret the murder with the order that the prosecutor assigns to its events. Meursault realizes that the prosecutor’s account is “plausible,” and even begins to believe it himself: “I had provoked Raymond’s adversaries at the beach . . . I had gone back [to shoot] the Arab as I had planned . . . And to make sure I had done the job right, I fired four more shots” (99). The prosecutor justifies each of Meursault’s actions. He assigns overall order to the murder, incorporating each piece of it through cause and effect. The coherence of his narrative makes it more persuasive than Meursault’s. Meursault’s statement that “it was because of the sun” (103) does not provide a cause that would link the events of the murder into a coherent whole. Meursault chooses not to find an orderly interpretation of the murder, for he has “lost the habit of analyzing [him]self” (65). Meursault does not assign a cause to the murder when he describes it. He simply reports that “the trigger gave,” and that the moment was “like knocking four quick times on the door of unhappiness” (59). Meursault refuses to make the gratuitous event of the murder less disturbing, despite the “unhappiness” which it has led to. He does not look back on the event as a traditional bourgeois character might, either by extracting a moral or finding an interpretation which makes the event seem less irrational. The Stranger preserves the power of the murder as an unexplained event, while the narrative of the prosecutor pacifies it by inscribing cause and effect. The Stranger and Nausea use similar strategies as they probe ways to view the world without a system of order. Both main characters decide not to apply psychology to their lives. Roquentin refuses to explore the “inner life,” and Meursault chooses not to “analyze” himself. Each text contrasts itself with an inner text that uses interpretation to assign order to the events of the world. Nausea contrasts its denial of cause and psychology with the section from Eugenie Grandet, and The Stranger contrasts its refusal to assign a cause to the murder with the prosecutor’s coherent narrative. They both incorporate gratuitous events, and refuse to supply an interpretation for them. Roquentin refuses to explain why he is unable to pick up the piece of paper in Nausea, and Meursault finds no means, or necessity, to interpret his murder of the Arab in The Stranger. Both novels explore ways to view the world without reducing it into a comforting but illusory system of order.