

Symbolism and Significance of Space in Albert Camus' *L'Étranger*

Symbolisme et signification de l'espace dans *L'Étranger* d'Albert Camus

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Abstract:

Space is a fundamental structural component of narrative fiction, extending beyond its geographical confines to become an operative concept laden with profound symbolic and ideological meanings. The novelist transforms space into a dynamic entity that enriches the narrative's depth and amplifies its impact on the reader through descriptive construction and imaginative language. This study examines *L'Étranger* by Albert Camus, highlighting the key spatial settings within the novel and analyzing their symbolic and implicit meanings.

Keywords: Space -narrative fiction- symbolism- reader- *L'Étranger*- Albert Camus.

Résumé :

L'espace constitue un élément structurel fondamental de la fiction narrative, dépassant largement sa dimension géographique pour devenir un concept opératoire chargé de significations symboliques et idéologiques profondes. Le romancier transforme l'espace en une entité dynamique qui enrichit la profondeur du récit et intensifie son effet sur le lecteur à travers une construction descriptive et un langage imagé. La présente étude se penche sur *L'Étranger* d'Albert Camus, en mettant en lumière les principaux cadres spatiaux du roman et en analysant leurs significations symboliques et implicites.

Mots- clés : espace – fiction narrative – symbolisme – lecteur – *L'Étranger* – Albert Camus.

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Introduction

The notion of space in literary fiction has long occupied a central space in narrative theory, evolving from a passive setting to a vital structural and thematic component. Far from being a mere geographical container for events, space interacts with characters and plot dynamics, exerting a formative influence on narrative meaning. Space reinforces the realism of the fictional world, influencing the reader's perception of events and characters. Moreover, it functions in conjunction with time to establish the narrative's framework, as every event is inherently linked to specific characters and unfolds within a defined spatial and temporal setting.

Hassan Bahrawi's exploration in *The Structure of the Novel: Space, Time, and Character* highlights the interlocking relationship among space, time, and the human element. According to Bahrawi, space does not exist in isolation; rather, it engages in continuous dialogue with characters, events, and narrative perspective. Modern fiction—particularly since the era of Honoré de Balzac—has underscored this synergy by elevating space to a fully operational narrative feature (Bahrawi, 1990, pp. 26–27). The spatial dimension thus functions on two interwoven levels: it can serve as a psychological mirror for characters, reflecting their emotional states, while simultaneously operating on the structural level to influence, and occasionally resolve, plot developments (Hammadi & Kortobi, 2018, p. 95). Indeed, there are novels in which space emerges as a decisive factor that shapes the denouement, crystallizing the narrative's vision and thematic message.

No novel can dispense entirely with spatial framing; however, the extent to which space is foregrounded varies from one work to another, depending on genre, narrative style, and thematic goals. Reflecting this critical dimension, philosophers and literary theorists—both classical and contemporary—have devoted significant attention to understanding how space operates within the fabric of narrative texts. This study similarly concentrates on the strategic deployment of space in Camus's *L'Étranger*, which employs a range of locales—from the protagonist's cramped domestic surroundings to the sun-drenched coastal expanse—thereby creating a stage on which the emotional and ideological currents of the novel play out.

Building on this premise, the present article investigates the major spatial configurations in *L'Étranger* and strives to elucidate their multifaceted functions—semantic, psychological, and ideological—and their interrelationships with other components of the narrative. In so doing, two central questions guide the inquiry: How does the spatial dimension contribute to shaping the novel's thematic framework? and What symbolic and semantic values does space carry in Camus's text?

The methodological requirements of this study necessitate the adoption of a descriptive approach and analytical technique to examine the presence and significance of space in Albert Camus' *L'Étranger*. Within this framework, it is essential to define and clarify the conceptual scope of this narrative term to ensure a precise and rigorous analysis.

1. The Epistemological Conception of Space

1.1. Linguistic Perspective

The concept of *place* has been deeply embedded in linguistic traditions, reflecting both its physical and abstract dimensions. In English, the term *place* refers to a specific location or position occupied by a person, object, or event. It denotes a defined space within which actions unfold and experiences are situated. The word itself derives from the Latin *platea*, meaning an open space or

broad street, which later evolved in Old French as *place*, signifying a position or setting (Ibn-Manzur, 1414, p. 414).

1.2. terminological Conceptualization of Space

The notion of space has been a subject of intellectual inquiry across disciplines, evolving alongside human thought and the development of fields such as philosophy, physics, and literature. Each of these domains has offered distinct perspectives on space, contributing to a richer, more nuanced understanding of its function and significance.

One of the earliest theoretical formulations of space can be traced back to Plato (c. 470–347 BCE), who conceived of it as a universal receptacle—a container capable of holding all things, both tangible and abstract (al-Abidi, 1987, p. 19). Far from being an empty void, space, in Plato's view, constitutes a primordial structure, a foundational vessel that enables existence itself. His conception positioned space as an inherent and necessary dimension of reality, one that does not exist in isolation but serves as the matrix within which all forms emerge and interact.

Aristotle (384–322 BCE) advanced a more structured and empirical understanding of space, defining it through three fundamental dimensions: length, width, and depth. For Aristotle, these dimensions serve as the defining parameters of physical entities, delineating their boundaries and granting them form. Crucially, he linked space to the nature of being itself, arguing that to exist is to occupy a space. He further asserted that movement—the transition of objects from one location to another—provides empirical evidence of space's existence (Zarari & Jaïdani, 2023, pp. 7–8). Aristotle's framework, which integrates space with motion, transformation, and physical reality, laid the groundwork for later scientific conceptions of spatiality.

A similar ontological perspective emerges in the work of Al-Farabi (c. 872–950), one of the most influential Arab philosophers of the medieval period. Rejecting any denial of space's existence, he defined it as "*the limiting boundary that surrounds bodies*". (al-Abidi, 1987, p. 34.) Space, in his interpretation, is not merely an abstract concept but a structural condition that determines the size, shape, and position of objects.

By the twentieth century, the conceptualization of space had undergone a profound transformation, particularly within the domains of literary and critical theory. With the rise of structuralist and poststructuralist methodologies, space was no longer viewed as a static setting but rather as a textual and narrative construct, an element dynamically produced through discourse. The term *space* in English and *espace* in French came to denote an operative concept—one that emerges through the descriptive structures of fiction and the imaginative capacities of language.

In contemporary literary studies, space is no longer perceived as a neutral backdrop against which events unfold; instead, it is an active force that shapes the structure, rhythm, and thematic fabric of the narrative. Fictional space materializes through a network of signifiers, embedding itself within the very language of storytelling. It functions as a site of meaning production, where the interplay between description, symbolism, and narrative movement constructs a multidimensional reading experience (al-Abidi, 1987, p. 10). The modern conception of space, therefore, departs from classical definitions that viewed it as a fixed, material entity, instead framing it as an inherently fluid, interpretative, and ideologically charged construct.

The French philosopher Gaston Bachelard (1884–1962) stands as one of the most influential theorists in the study of space, significantly shaping its conceptualization through his seminal work, *La Poétique de l'Espace* (1957). This book, later translated into Arabic from its English version by

Ghalib Halasa in 1980 under the title *Jamalīyāt al-Makān* (*The Aesthetics of Space*), played a pivotal role in popularizing this evolved understanding of space and solidifying its presence in modern and contemporary Arabic literary criticism (Abu-Haif, 2005, p. 124).

Bachelard's approach begins with the notion of intimate space, which he sees as the core of human experience. He argues that the childhood home represents the most profound site of familiarity, shaping the imagination and forming a psychological refuge that lingers in memory. He articulates this idea by stating:

"The old house, the childhood home, is a place of intimacy, a center where the imagination is conditioned. When we move away from it, we constantly recall its presence, projecting onto many aspects of material life the sense of protection and security that it once provided us." (Bachelard, 1984, p. 9)

Through this perspective, Bachelard reveals the deep bond between humans and space, as well as the interplay between memory and imagination, making space an integral part of personal identity. It embodies both sensory and intellectual dimensions, filled with emotions and recollections that play a crucial role in shaping the self. The intimate space, in particular, fosters a sense of belonging, security, and stability – essential elements in the formation of human subjectivity.

However, Bachelard does not disregard the material and tangible structure of space. He acknowledges that a house, first and foremost, is a physical and architectural reality, built from solid materials that define its structural integrity. Yet, his vision extends beyond this concrete dimension, exploring the sensory and spiritual layers that space acquires through artistic representation and the imagery it evokes in the human imagination.

In contemporary Arabic literary criticism, the Algerian scholar Abdelmalek Mortad offers a distinctive perspective on the conceptualization of space. Rejecting the conventional translations of *space* as "faḍā'" (expanse) or "makān" (place), he advocates for the term "ḥayyiz" (spatial dimension) as a more precise equivalent. He elaborates on this distinction, stating:

"While place (makān) is defined by physical boundaries and a finite scope, ḥayyiz is boundless and unrestricted. It constitutes an expansive field where novelists maneuver freely, shaping its contours according to their narrative design. As such, ḥayyiz emerges as a fundamental structuring force within the novel, akin to time, character, and language, with which it forms an organic and interdependent whole." (Mortad, 1998, pp. 122, 125)

Mortad's distinction between place (*makān*) and space (*ḥayyiz*) underscores a critical conceptual shift. *Makān* refers to a concrete, geographically bounded entity, whereas *ḥayyiz* operates as an open, fluid construct that transcends spatial and temporal limitations. As an essential narrative element, *ḥayyiz* interacts dynamically with other components—characters, events, time, and language—imbuing the text with structural depth and thematic complexity.

A parallel argument appears in the work of Ahmad Tahir Hassanein, who was among the first to adopt *ḥayyiz* as a critical term. In his study *The Circumstances of Place in Arabic Syntax and Its Employment in Poetry*, co-authored with a collective of scholars, he posits that *ḥayyiz* is a subset of place, explaining:

"The spatial dimension (ḥayyiz) of a person varies in scope and scale, making it difficult to systematize, as it shifts in length, width, enclosure, openness, elevation, and depth." (Said-Aissa, 2024, p. 327)

Hassanein's framework maps human experience onto a continuum of spatial configurations, ranging from enclosed, intimate spaces (a room, a house) to expansive, external environments (a street, a city, the sea), each defined by varying degrees of containment, permeability, and fluidity.

The terminological diversity among Arab critics reflects the broader challenge of conceptualizing space within Arabic literary discourse. Terms such as "al-ḥāwī" (container), "al-muḥīṭ" (encompassing environment), "al-wi'ā" (vessel), "al-ḥayyiz" (spatial dimension), and "al-faḍā'" (expanse) have all been proposed, each attempting to capture the nuances of space within narrative structure. This plurality of definitions underscores the ongoing effort to refine a critical vocabulary for spatial poetics in Arabic literary theory, whether through translation or independent scholarly engagement.

Despite these variations, contemporary Arab critics increasingly favor "faḍā'" as the most comprehensive term, arguing that it transcends the specificity of *makān*. While *makān* designates a particular, localized setting, *faḍā'* encompasses the entire spatial field within which events unfold, characters move, and relationships form (Thaer, 2011, p. 115). It is, in essence, the narrative stage in its totality, whereas space constitutes only a fragment of this broader expanse.

This ongoing debate reflects not only the evolving discourse on spatiality in Arabic literary studies but also the broader imperative to develop precise critical terminology. However, amid these theoretical distinctions, one point remains uncontested: space—irrespective of how it is labeled—plays an essential, dynamic role in shaping narrative structure and meaning.

2. The Symbolism and Significance of Space in Albert Camus' *L'Étranger*

Space in Albert Camus' *L'Étranger* (*The Stranger*), first published in 1942 by Gallimard, is not merely a backdrop for the unfolding events but a structuring force that shapes the protagonist Meursault's psychological landscape and the novel's temporal framework. As one of the defining works of absurdist literature, the novel interrogates the fundamental indifference of existence, where life unfolds without inherent meaning. Within this existential void, space becomes a manifestation of alienation, reinforcing Meursault's estrangement from both society and his own emotions. Notably, the novel both opens and closes with spatial imagery.

A key theoretical lens through which space is analyzed in narrative fiction is the closed/open space dichotomy, an opposition central to Gaston Bachelard's exploration of the poetics of space. Bachelard argues that spaces—whether enclosed, intimate interiors such as homes and rooms, or expansive, open landscapes—carry profound symbolic weight. These spatial contrasts are not merely descriptive elements but narrative constructs that shape the reader's perception of the protagonist's existential state. Spaces can be visible or hidden, central or peripheral, confining or liberating, each operating as a site of psychological and philosophical reflection. These oppositions function as narrative pathways, shaping both the author's vision and the reader's interpretive engagement (Bahrawi, 1990, p. 25).

In *L'Étranger*, these spatial formations take on profound symbolic significance, reflecting Meursault's existential estrangement and his disconnection from social conventions. Some key spatial motifs include:

2.1. Enclosed Space

Enclosed space refers to a dwelling or shelter where one lives for prolonged periods, whether by personal choice or external imposition. This space is circumscribed by architectural and geographical limits, reflecting a latent tension between the artistic representation of space and the human subject who inhabits it (Abidi, 2011, p. 44). Such confinement may arise from the physical nature of the locale itself, from a perceived emotional response to it, or from the ways in which

characters move and interact within it (Hantabli, 2002, p. 518). In *L'Étranger*, several enclosed settings illustrate these dynamics:

2.1.1. The Old Age Home:

Located on the outskirts of daily life, the old age home is a hermetic environment where Meursault's mother—and other elderly residents—spend their remaining years. It is an isolated sphere that confines both movement and sociability. Camus vividly captures its physical and psychological boundaries through passages such as:

"The old age home is in Marengo, eighty kilometers from Algiers. I will take the bus at two o'clock and arrive in the afternoon. That way, I can keep vigil beside my mother's body for her last night and come back home tomorrow evening." (Camus, 2014, p. 7)

"The home is two kilometers from the village." (Camus, 2014, p. 9)

"When my mother lived with me, she spent her days quietly watching me. In her first weeks at the home, she cried a great deal, but that was simply a matter of habit. After a few months, she would have cried if we had taken her out of the home. That was also because of habit." (Camus, 2014, pp. 9-10)

By embedding these descriptive snapshots, Camus portrays the old age home both as a tangible, circumscribed location and as a multilayered metaphor, reflecting an absurdist worldview that centers on isolation, death, and emotional indifference. Placing Meursault's mother in such a remote locale spotlights her separation from society and from her son, while also suggesting humanity's capacity to adapt—even to distressing circumstances—through sheer repetition, without fully understanding the reasons. This dynamic foreshadows Meursault's own emotional detachment, revealing the complexity of his bond with his mother and his broader estrangement from social norms.

Moreover, the old age home resonates closely with the theme of death, as it is the place where many elderly individuals spend their final days. Meursault's mother's passing here provokes reflections on the meaning of life and mortality, captured in Meursault's well-known, dispassionate declaration:

"Today, mother died. Or maybe yesterday, I don't know. I received a telegram from the home: 'Mother deceased. Funeral tomorrow. Regards.' That doesn't mean anything. Perhaps it was yesterday." (Camus, 2014, p. 7)

Meursault's apparent indifference highlights his existential outlook, suggesting that time holds no inherent value in his life. This ambiguity surrounding his mother's death highlights the novel's absurdist framework, wherein human attempts to impose order or derive meaning from life appear futile, and reality remains governed by contingency, randomness, and the inscrutable passage of time.

2.1.2. The House

The house holds a central space in human experience, serving not only as a physical shelter but as a psychological and emotional refuge. It is where individuals seek comfort, security, and stability, a space that both anchors daily existence and shapes personal identity. More than a mere dwelling, the house is a repository of memories and emotions, and its significance is influenced by its size, structure, and the relationships it harbors. (Abidi, 2011, p. 48)

Gaston Bachelard explores this idea in his theory of intimate space, arguing that *"all truly inhabited spaces bear the essence of the house."* (Bachelard, 1984, p. 36). For Bachelard, the house is not just an

architectural structure but a deeply symbolic space, shaping the individual's experience of the world and their interaction with their surroundings.

Albert Camus employs the motif of the house throughout *L'Étranger*, weaving it into the novel's existential and psychological framework. He describes it in several key passages:

"He was right. When my mother lived with me, she spent her days quietly watching me. In her first weeks at the home, she cried a great deal, but that was simply a matter of habit. After a few months, she would have cried if we had taken her out of the home. That was also because of habit." (Camus, 2014, pp. 9–10)

"The apartment suited us. But now, it feels too spacious for me, so I moved the dining table into my bedroom." (Camus, 2014, p. 27)

"I was happy to go straight home. I wanted to prepare some boiled potatoes for myself." (Camus, 2014, p. 34)

"He only has one room and a kitchen with no window. Above his bed hangs a white and pink plaster angel, along with pictures of some heroes..." (Camus, 2014, p. 37)

Through these descriptions, Camus presents the house as an enclosed, unembellished, and confined space, one that often evokes isolation, estrangement, and existential inertia. This is particularly evident in Meursault's reflections on his mother's experience—her sorrow upon moving to the old age home and her eventual habituation to it. The passage suggests that human beings, even in painful or alienating circumstances, adapt through sheer repetition, not necessarily through understanding or acceptance.

For Meursault, the apartment embodies both solitude and routine. Following his mother's death, it becomes an even emptier and more impersonal space, reinforcing his emotional detachment. Yet, paradoxically, it also serves as a sanctuary of simplicity and immediate gratification. His pleasure in returning home to cook boiled potatoes underscores his existential disposition—one that embraces the present moment without longing for deeper meaning or future aspirations. His home, much like his life, is reduced to essential, immediate experiences, stripped of sentimentality or expectation.

Camus also contrasts this with the depiction of Raymond's apartment, using it to reflect his friend's character and circumstances. The plaster angel, with its white hues, hints at an ironic or lost sense of innocence, while the portraits of heroes suggest unfulfilled ambitions or nostalgia for ideals never realized. The small, windowless kitchen, however, reinforces a sense of entrapment, stagnation, and inescapable routine, emphasizing Raymond's own limitations and confinement within his circumstances.

The varied responses of characters to their living spaces reveal a broader psychological dimension of space. Literary scholar Ibrahim Khalil posits that space carries an emotional resonance akin to memory and sensation, influencing both the conscious and unconscious mind. A setting can be oppressive or inviting, a site of belonging or alienation, depending on the character's internal world (Khalil, 2010, pp. 145–146).

2.1.3. The Prison

Prison has long served as a rich thematic resource for novelists, offering a vantage point from which to dissect social realities and convey impressions that elucidate its symbolic role within the narrative. Defined as a designated space where characters are forcibly confined for a set duration under stringent punitive rules, (Bahrawi, 1990, p. 55) it stands as an embodiment of compulsory residence devoid of personal choice.

Concealed from public view, prison is frequently depicted as a site that stifles or repudiates life, particularly when framed as a place of punishment and surveillance (Abidi, 2011, p. 76). Classified among “spaces of coerced residence,” it represents the most hostile environment to human dignity—an exclusive domain of the tormentor, a fortress of fear where authority exercises its most unbridled form of repression. According to Michel Foucault, prison epitomizes the most delirious iteration of power, a system ethically justifying itself by proclaiming: “I have the right to punish you.” Its portrayal in literary discourse often reflects the author’s unwavering commitment to freedom and human dignity, along with a plea for a more just and less oppressive society (Mirghani, 2008, pp. 202–203).

In *L’Étranger*, Albert Camus situates prison prominently through a series of stark descriptions, as illustrated by:

“From the day I received a letter from her (telling me they would no longer let her visit because she wasn’t my wife), from that day on, I felt at home in my cell, and that my life had stopped there.” (Camus, 2014, p. 85)

“On the first day of my detention, I was locked in a room already crowded with several detainees, most of whom were Arab. They laughed when they saw me, then asked me what I had done.” (Camus, 2014, p. 86)

In another instance, *“A few days later, I was placed in a solitary cell, where I slept on a wooden floor. I had a latrine and an iron washbasin. The prison was located at the top of the city, and through a small window, I could see the sea.”* (Camus, 2014, p. 87)

Another passage states: *“My cell was quieter and darker. It took me a few seconds to get used to it.”* (Abidi, 2011, pp. 76–77)

Such passages offer a lucid and exacting portrait of the cell housing Meursault, a potent emblem of his existential condition and the profound isolation he experiences—his life seeming to come to a standstill upon entering. The prison setting likewise underscores questions of identity and belonging: although Meursault is in Algeria, he feels profoundly disconnected from the surrounding social fabric, even within confinement. To him, his Arab cellmates epitomize the “other,” heightening his sensation of estrangement. The window facing the sea, meanwhile, may symbolize an unattainable freedom—given that the sea typically signifies limitless liberty and openness—thereby accentuating the tension Meursault endures between his inner acceptance of fate and the tangible constraints imposed by prison.

The narrative also highlights a capacity to adapt in even the bleakest circumstances: the cell becomes part of Meursault’s reality in a matter of seconds, mirroring once again his existential philosophy of embracing life as it presents itself, without striving to alter or elude it.

From these descriptive passages, one discerns an external temporal standstill the moment Meursault enters his cell, as life behind bars renders time seemingly frozen: “it stifles life and rejects it, paralyzing the prisoner’s movement” (Abidi, 2011, p. 95). This inertia afflicts inmates with psychological torment and temporal disorientation, confining them to closed, repetitive loops that induce despondency and seclusion from the outside world. Yet, each prisoner’s internal, individual time—the domain of thought and introspection—continues to flow, allowing the cell to function as a contemplative arena for the past, present, and future. In Meursault’s case, it illuminates his acceptance of his destiny as an inseparable facet of the human experience.

2.2. Open Space

Open spaces stand in stark contrast to enclosed ones. They often evoke vast realms suggestive of mystery—like the sea or a river—or appear imbued with a negative aura, as the city might. They

may equally refer to medium-sized areas, such as neighborhoods that connote familiarity and warmth, or smaller settings like ships, bobbing above sea waves (Ajjouj, 2017, p. 60). Typically, these spaces are unbounded and accessible to all characters, imposing no strict barriers on movement or growth, thus enabling them to develop and interact more freely. In *L'Étranger*, this openness is prominently illustrated through these motifs:

2.2.1. The city

Alongside the countryside or village, the city forms one half of a prominent spatial duality (low/high) in fiction, prompting some critics to assert that the novel is fundamentally urban in nature (Abidi, 2011, p. 96). As an open arena, the city grants characters the liberty to move about and engage with their surroundings, providing opportunities to build social connections. Many have deemed it humanity's natural dwelling, a construct intended to serve and protect its inhabitants (Sahwaj & Arar, 2023, p. 207). However, the scholar Ahmad Jasem al-Husain goes beyond viewing the city as mere spatial setting, interpreting it as a symbol of human dislocation and alienation, reflecting authors' laments about urban life and the feelings of confinement and despair it engenders (Camus, 2014, p. 44).

Readers of *L'Étranger* will readily observe the urban landscapes of Algiers and Paris, as evidenced by the narrator's remarks:

"We boarded the bus and traveled several kilometers outside Algiers, to a rocky coastal spot bordered by reeds on the landward side." (Camus, 2014, p. 51)

"Raymond phoned me at work. He said a friend – whom he had mentioned me to – was inviting me to spend Sunday at his beach house near Algiers."

"He merely wanted my thoughts on the matter. He planned to open an office in Paris to handle cases locally, particularly those involving major firms, and asked whether I would be willing to go there. This would allow me to live in Paris part of the year, traveling occasionally. 'You're young, and I think you'd like that lifestyle.' I answered yes, but frankly, it was all the same to me." (Camus, 2014, p. 52)

"I told her about my employer's proposal, and she said she would love to visit Paris. I mentioned that I had lived there once before, so she asked for details. I replied, 'It's a dirty city with bathhouses and grimy squares, and the people there have fair skin.'" (Camus, 2014, p. 53)

Through these descriptive passages, Camus animates both Algiers and Paris, foregrounding how Meursault and other characters navigate and perceive these urban spaces in a tangible, impactful way. Within the novel, Algiers transcends its role as a simple geographical location, standing as a symbol that interweaves the natural beauty of beaches, sunlight, and the sea with the hallmarks of city life, such as office work and the quotidian routine it entails. This interplay underscores the persistent tension between innate human nature and the demands of the modern world.

By extension, Algiers emerges as a metaphor for the tedium and inertia pervading Meursault's life, resonating with the novel's central motif of absurdity – the notion that life lacks intrinsic meaning. And yet, for Meursault, Algiers remains a neutral backdrop: when offered the opportunity to relocate to Paris, famed for culture and sophistication, he dismisses it as nothing more than an ordinary, unclean city, seeing no real difference between the two. Both locales, in his view, serve merely as spaces devoid of deeper significance.

Conversely, Paris holds a completely different resonance for Marie, who envisions it as a romantic ideal, an escape from the drudgery of daily life – a potential source of novelty and vibrancy. This

stark discrepancy in how Meursault and Marie regard Paris highlights the gulf between their characters, revealing the disparities in their outlooks and aspirations.

Ultimately, this dynamic interaction between space and character remains a defining component of Camus's narrative. Indeed, as many critics have emphasized, the constitution of a space—and its occasional alterations—significantly shapes the characters' internal and external trajectories. Moreover, detailed descriptions of settings can illuminate profound psychological truths, unraveling the inner workings and emotional states of fictional figures (Khalil, 2010, p. 131).

2.2.2. Streets and Neighborhoods

Cities—encompassing their sprawling avenues, quiet alleyways, and winding lanes in working-class districts—constitute ideal zones of transit and principal stages for human activity. Analyzing these transitional spaces and the images they project significantly aids in identifying the defining features that set these areas apart, thus allowing one to underscore the values and meanings they embody (Abidi, 2011, p. 166).

In *L'Étranger*, streets and neighborhoods appear in multiple forms and locations, each offering distinct nuances and influences on the characters. This is evident in the narrator's remarks:

"Once more, the daylight shifted slightly. Atop the roofs, the sun turned crimson. When evening began to descend, the streets stirred with activity. People on walks ambled back slowly, and I could spot the conspicuous man among them. Children were crying or being shepherded by their parents. Almost immediately, the cinema halls poured a flood of spectators into the streets." (Camus, 2014, p. 30)

"Then, all of a sudden, the streetlights flickered on, and the faintest of the emerging stars gleamed in the night sky. I realized my eyes were growing tired from watching the sidewalks, with their crowds and lights. The tiled pavement shimmered under the lamps, and the trams, traveling their routine routes, cast beams that fell on a shining head of hair, a smile, or a silver bracelet." (Camus, 2014, p. 31)

"Not long after, once the trams (tramways) eased their pace and the night thickened above the trees and lamps, the street gradually emptied—until the first cats crossed it quietly, restoring its utter desolation." (Camus, 2014, p. 31)

Through these descriptive and symbolic passages, the novelist depicts vivid scenes that capture the ambiance of Algiers, highlighting the flow of time as day transitions into night. These changes illuminate life's fleeting, mutable essence—an aspect that holds no profound significance for Meursault. He observes these shifts with a detached, indifferent gaze, reflecting his existential stance that regards life as inherently devoid of meaning.

Moreover, these streets often crystallize themes of isolation and estrangement by transforming from a bustling human landscape into a vacant, desolate realm. This stark contrast accentuates Meursault's sense of detachment from his social surroundings and underscores the void and negation that dominate his worldview. Even when a street teems with people, Meursault remains on the fringes—observing them from afar and experiencing no real sense of belonging.

At the same time, the streets convey undertones of silence and an impassive natural order. The sudden appearance of cats in these deserted thoroughfares resonates as a symbolic reflection of a universe essentially unconcerned with human affairs. The cats, in their tranquil self-sufficiency, embody a natural continuity that endures, regardless of human presence or absence.

Ultimately, the portrayal of the street in *L'Étranger* transcends mere geography; it encapsulates Meursault's psychological and philosophical core, conveying themes of alienation, indifference, absurdity, and the absence of any ultimate purpose in existence.

Conclusion

This study's conceptual and interpretive examination of the symbolism and significance of space in Albert Camus' *L'Étranger* yields several key findings, summarized as follows:

1. Space emerges with pronounced clarity and effectiveness throughout *L'Étranger*. Camus skillfully depicts the city of Algiers, illuminating its urban contrasts and spatial particularities, and harmoniously integrates these details with other narrative components.
2. The novel's spectrum of open and enclosed spaces endows the narrative with dynamism and depth. By relying on meticulous descriptive technique, the author heightens emotional resonance and realism. Each setting possesses unique symbolic dimensions and defining features that bear psychological, philosophical, and ideological implications, thereby advancing both the text's structure and the analysis of its characters.
3. Space occupies a pivotal position in shaping and evolving characters' identities, working in tandem with time to construct a cohesive, interlocking narrative. The two elements—space and time—are inseparable in defining character identity and the course of events. Through this complex interplay, Camus fashions a finely woven narrative, skillfully managing the intricate relationships among characters, temporal layers, and spatial frameworks.

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