AN ANALYSIS OF THE MAIN CHARACTER’S APATHY AS SEEN IN 
THE STRANGER BY ALBERT CAMUS

Nafdi Irawan¹, FemmyDahlan², Vilia Yusraini Ashfar²
¹ Student of English Department, Faculty of Humanities, Bung Hatta University
E-mail: nafanakoeya_182@yahoo.com
² Lecturer of English Department, Faculty of Humanities, Bung Hatta University

Abstract

The purpose of this research is to describe the main character’s apathy and the effect of the apathy as seen in The Stranger by Albert Camus. The data were analyzed by using Abrams’ objective theory and applied content analysis by doing close reading technique. Based on the analysis, there are five absences of feelings found. They are absence of guilt, regret, concern, love, and enthusiasm. Then, the writer found some effects of the main character’s apathy. The effects are the main character being hated by the people around, disappointment of his girlfriend, and disappointment of his mother.

Keywords: absence of guilt, regret, concern, love, enthusiasm

Introduction

People are social creatures who need to interact with other people. While interacting, people tend to show their feelings. On the contrary, there are also people who do not show their feeling at all when interacting with others.

The condition of the people who do not show their feeling like mentioned above is called apathy. Narramore (1981) explains that “apathy refers to the condition of an individual which is marked by the absence of feeling and emotion”. In addition Baron (1997) states that “they show no reaction to events which most people respond strongly, such as the news that a close relative has died or been involved in serious accident.” Therefore, apathetic persons do not show feelings or even strong feelings which other people respond to.

An apathetic person is also found in literary works presented by the author in characters. Abrams states “An objective work is one in which the author presents the invented situation or the fictional characters and their thoughts, feelings, and actions…” (197). From this statement, it is known that the author presents a particular condition within the character of the works of literature used in constructing the story.

The novel entitled The Stranger by Albert Camus is a story which presents the main character in a condition of not showing his feelings toward the things around him.

By being apathetic stimulates him to treat some people around him like his mother and his girlfriend with the certain ways. He does not show his deep affection to his girlfriend and his own mother as a son should have. He also does not show his feelings in
responding to other things like a job that he does every day, the death of his mother in the ageing home, and his relationship.

By showing no feelings to particular things around him, makes him different with other people. He is more like someone who never thinks to what other people feel about and also like someone who never thinks to other things around him. His apathy affects his life and others people around him.

The depiction of apathy within the main character above is an interesting issue to be analyzed. The way of the main character in facing his life is different with other character stimulating the writer to analyze the main character of The Stranger deeper.

Method of Research

The research applies content analysis which is a tool used to decide or determine the meaning of words within the novel’s text. The research also uses close reading technique. It asks the writer reads the novel again and again seriously to get good understanding about the story. To support the data, the research applies suggestion from Robert (1972), saying that to know the details about the character through action, appearance, speeches, comment from other character, and statement of the author.

Result and Discussion

The Main Character’s Apathy

The main character’s apathy is the absence of feelings within the main character. There are some feelings which the main character does not show in action and reaction.

Absence of Guilt

The first absence of feeling of the main character is guilt. Guilt is defined as “the unhappy feelings caused by knowing or thinking that you have done something wrong 1, and it is blame or responsibility for doing something wrong or for something bad that has happened 2.” (Oxford 667)

Based on the definition above, the writer sees that the main character does not feel blame or responsible to the action which he does to his mother. His action is by sending her to the ageing home. “When we lived together, mother was always watching me but we hardly ever talked. During her first few weeks at the home she used to cry a good deal.” (5)

The quotation above shows his reaction to his mother’s cry. He does not change his decision to bring his mother back. He does not consider to how his mother feels about it. The sadness of his mother which is expressed into a cry in the ageing home does not make him feel blamed and responsible to it.

Marsoult’s action in sending his mother to the ageing home and lets her lives in the ageing home until she dies is an action contrasting with the people’s opinion around him. “…Some of the people in the street said
nasty things about me because I’d sent my mother to the home.” (31)

This statement proves how the people around disagree to the action he has done to his mother. His action clearly contrasts with the people around him.

Although the people disagree with Marsoult’s action, yet his reaction to the people’s opinion upon his action does not show his guilty feeling which is seen in his own statement “…I said nothing” (31)

His statement describes that he does not show his guilty feeling. He does not say anything although the people around say to him with unpleasant words or very bad words.

The absence of the main character’s guilty feeling is also reflected in his reaction to his mother’s death. “Your poor mother, “and was afraid I must be feeling her death terribly. When I said nothing he added hastily and with a rather embarrassed air that some of the people in the street said nasty things about me because I’d sent my mother to the home.” (31)

When someone says “Your poor mother…” to him, the writer sees that according to everyone who knows his mother feels that his mother deserves to get sympathy and pity because of his action in sending his mother to the ageing home ending with the death of his mother.

The writer also sees that someone who talks with him thinks he feels grief to his mother’s death “and was afraid I must be feeling her death terribly”.

However, Marsoult’s reaction to what the people think and feel about him show that the absence of his guilty feeling. He does not feel grief and blamed or responsible to his mother’s death when someone says “your poor mother” and the people say nasty things to him.

His reaction just does not say anything “when I said nothing he added hastily”. It means that his reaction truly reflects the absence of his guilty feeling to his mother’s death. He does not feel as regarded by the people think and feels.

Marsoult’s absence of guilt also can be seen through his dialogue with Marie, his girlfriend. It can be seen from his reaction to Marie’s action who is disappointed after she hears about his mother’s death when he informs her about his mother’s death. “I explained that my mother had died. When ? she asked and I said yesterday. She made no remark, though I thought she shrank away a little. I was just going to explain to her that it wasn’t my fault.” (14)

From his statement “I was just going to explain to her that it wasn’t my fault” shows his absence of guilty feeling. He shows no emotion or no feeling of responsibility toward his mother who died of sadness being send to the ageing home.

Other form of the main character’s action which shows the absence of his guilty
feeling is when he involved himself in a murder without having the reasons to why he does it. It happens not so long after Marsoult comes back from Morengo to Algires. “But I fired four shots more into the inert body, on which they left no visible trace. And each successive shot was another loud, fateful rap on the door of my undoing….On my way out, I was even going to shake his hand, but just in time, I remembered that I had killed a man” (39-40).

The quotation above describes, Marsoult’s action shooting an Arab four shots into an “inert body” shows how cold he is. He does not show his strong feeling or emotion and he even want to shake hand with the victim. All these actions prove his irresponsibility toward his wrong doing.

Another proof of his absence of guilt is seen when he refuses to accept his sin of killing a person. “He said he felt convinced my appeal would succeed, but I was saddled with a lot of guilt, of which I must get rid. In his view man’s justice was a vain thing; only God’s justice mattered. I pointed out that the former had condemned me. Yes, he agreed, but it hadn’t absolved me from my sin. I told him that I wasn’t conscious of any sin…. Well I was paying the penalty of that offense, and no one had the right to expect anything more of me”. (73)

In his conversation with his lawyer, Marsoult defends himself from his sin or his wrong doing. He kills an Arab, an action which the people and God strongly disapprove of it. He admits that he “wasn’t conscious of any sin”. This means that he does not feel blamed and responsible for doing something wrong by making someone dies.

**Absence of Regret**

The second absence of feeling in the main character is regret. Regret means “a feeling of sadness at the loss of or disappointment that you have because of something that has happened or something that you have done or not done” (Oxford 1236).

The writer sees that Marsoult is in the situation of losing his mother. “Mother died today, or maybe yesterday, I can’t be sure. The telegram from the home says: your mother passed away. Funeral tomorrow deep sympathy” (4). This statement shows that Marsoult gets news which informs about the death of his mother in the ageing home meaning that he has lost someone who is important or a figure of a mother forever.

Though, Marsoult has been left in death by his mother, but his reaction does not show like someone who has lost a figure of a mother to make him feel sad. “I felt the first waves of heat lapping my back, and my dark suit made things worse. I couldn’t imagine why we waited so long for getting under way” (11). This statement shows to the writer that there are no expressions showing his sadness during the funeral of his mother. He
just thinks about the heat and also bored by the funeral process which according to him is so long. He wants the process to be over soon.

Marsoult’s reactions which show the absence of his regret to his mother’s death during the funeral are also reflected in the statement stated by other characters in the novel. His sadness to his mother’s death is not seen as said by the warden and the door keeper. “Asked to explain what he meant by my calmness. The warden lowered his eyes…then he explained that I hadn’t wanted to see my mother’s body, or shed a single tear and that I’d left immediately the funeral ended without lingering at her grave….“he said that I’d declined to see Mother’s body, I’d smoked cigarettes and slept and drunk café au lait.” (56)

From the statement above, the writer sees that all of Marsoult’s reactions during funeral do not describe the reactions showing his sadness at the loss of his mother.

None of them who testify in the court says that he is mourning or grieving over his mother’s death. It proves that all of his reactions as said by the warden and the door keeper do not show his sadness at all. His reactions also show that his mother’s death does not bring him to his sadness.

Other character saying about the absence of regret in the main character is the prosecutor of the court. “Until I heard him exclaim indignantly: and has he uttered a word of regret for his most odious crime? Not one word gentlemen.”(63). From this statement proves that the prosecutor states, Marsoult never says his regret toward his crime. There is no word said by him which shows his regret toward his crime. His action which damages, hurts and even makes someone else dead, does not make him feel his regret.

The police who investigates him try to find the information about him from the people in Morengo. He is informed to the police as someone who does not show his feelings during funeral. “They had learned that my mother died recently in a home. Inquiries had been conducted at Morengo and the police informed that I’d shown great callousness” (41). This statement proves that the people in Morengo say Marsoult has shown “great callousness” to his mother’s death. This means, he does not show his feelings, moreover his feeling of regret during his mother’s funeral.

Furthermore, the main character’s absence of regret is not only said by other characters, but the main character himself also admits about it. “That I’d have liked to have a chance of explaining to him, in a quite friendly, almost affectionate way, that I have never been able really to regret anything in my life.”(63)

This statement obviously shows that Marsoult never regret anything in his life. It means that there is nothing to make him to
feel regret or nothing to be regretted for anything has been done and happened to him in life. Therefore, the writer assumes that the death of his mother and a crime action leading him to get his head cut off are not the things to make him feel regret.

**Absence of Concern**

Concern is the third feeling which is absence within the main character. Concern is defined as “desire to protect and help somebody 1, something that is important to a person, an organization 2, something that is your responsibility or that you have a right to know about” 3. (Oxford 298)

In a family, mother is a figure that every son or daughter wants to stay close with and wants to protect forever, because mother is the closest family for them. For him the desire or strong wish he has to protect his mother to show that his mother is his closest family does not exist. He has no wish to protect his own mother, although he and the people around know that his mother relies herself on him. Moreover, he is the only son and he should protect and help her. “Madam Marsoult entered the home, three years ago. She had no private means and depended entirely on you.” (4)

The previous statement shows, the head of the ageing home says that Marsoult’s mother needs and depends herself on him. He sends his mother to a home for elder people for 3 years while she still needs someone to be with her. “You weren’t in the position to see that she was properly cared for. She needed someone to be with her all the time” (5).

It is clear that he sends away his mother to the ageing home instead of keeping and protecting her safe nearby him because of the absence of his concern, a desire to protect and help his mother.

The writer also sees that Marsoult never see and pays his attention to his mother’s needs. It means that he does not take his responsibility as a son does to protect a mother. By ignoring his own mother who need and depend on him means that he does not regard his mother as an important figure for him. He is not responsible to his mother.

During his mother’s funeral process at Morengo, the reflection of the absence of concern to his mother is seen again from his reaction. Marsoult takes two hours trip by bus to attend his mother’s funeral at the ageing home. Yet, he does not want to see his mother’s dead body. “We put the lid on, but I was told to unscrew it when you came, so that you could see her. While he was going up to the coffin I told him not to trouble. Eh ? what’s that? He exclaimed. You don’t want me to…? No I said.” (6)

The quotation above describes that Marsoult does not want to see her dead body. It proves that the dead body of his mother is not important to be seen by him which means
he really does not consider his mother as someone important to him.

Marsoult’s absence of concern toward himself can be seen in the following quotation. “He began by asking my name, address, and occupation, the date and place of my birth. Then he inquired if I had chosen a lawyer to defend me. I answered, no I hadn’t thought about it, and asked him if it was really necessary for me to have one.”

From this statement “I answered no…if it necessary to have one” shows that he is in the position of pointing how he does not concern with his life which probably ends in jail. It proves that the possibility of his life will end in jail is not a big deal for him to be solved and protect him from it.

Absence of Love

The fourth feeling is love. Love is also absence in the main character. Love is defined as “a strong feeling of deep affection for somebody or something, especially member of your family or a friend 1, and a strong feeling of deep affection for somebody that you are sexually attracted 2, or love is something/somebody you like: a person, a thing, or an activity that you like very much.” (Oxford 884)

Here, the writer finds that Marsoult does not have a deep affection for Marie. Although Marsoult and Marie are in a relationship, but Marsoult actually does not love her. “When she laughed I wanted her again. A moment later she asked me if I loved her. I said that short question had no meaning, really but I supposed I didn’t.”

From the statement above, the writer sees that his answer to Marie’s question by saying ”I said that short question had no meaning, really but I supposed I didn’t” is his confession about how he does not have affection for Marie. He does not love Marie at all as admitted by himself.

Having no deep affection toward Marie is reflected from Marsoult’s statements which strengthens the proof about the absence of his love for Marie.

“Then she asked me again if I love her. I replied much as before, that her question meant nothing or next to nothing – but I supposed I didn’t. if that’s how you feel,” she said “why marry me? I explained that it had no importance really, but if it would give her pleasure, we could get married right way. I pointed out that, anyhow, the suggestion came from her for me, I’d merely said, “yes”. Then she remarked that marriage was a serious matter. To which I answered “no”.

From the quotation above, it can be seen that Marsoult does not show a strong feeling of deep affection toward Marie. He still gives the same answer to Marie’s question by saying that her question means “nothing or next to nothing” and regards that he does not love her. His answer obviously proves the absence of a deep affection to her.
The quotation above also shows his relationship with Marie is without a deep feeling of affection. When he says it is not really important and he will marry her if it gives a “pleasure” for her, proves that a relationship which they will bring into a marriage is not because he has a feeling of deep affection to her. It is just because he follows Marie’s desire to be married by him.

On the other hand, Marsoult has thought about women caused by natural strong wish toward women. “For instance, I was plagued by the desire for a woman which was natural enough, considering my age, I never thought of Marie especially.” (49)

From his statement “I never thought of Marie especially”, it can be seen how absence of Marsoult’s affection toward Marie. He never considers Marie as the special girl although they are in a relationship. Marie is not someone he loves.

**Absence of Enthusiasm**

Enthusiasm means “a strong feeling of excitement and interest in something and a desire to become involved in it (for something / for doing something) I, and it is something that you are interested in and spent a lot of time doing.” (Oxford 489). The illustration can be seen in the quotation below.

“I sniffed the smells of the cool earth and found I wasn’t sleepy any more. Then I thought of the other fellows in the office. At this hour they’d be getting up. Preparing to go to work; for me this was always the worst hour of the day.” (9)

From his statement “preparing to go to work; for me this was always the worst hour of the day”, shows Marsoult as someone who is not interested in something or there is no enthusiasm in him for his job. He does not feel interest to do his daily activities like waking up and preparing to work although it is his duty as a worker. It can be said, there is no strong feeling of excitement and interest in doing his job and his job is not something which he is interested to.

When Marsoult gets an opportunity to work in France, his boss tries to persuade him by saying “You are a young man”, he said “and I am pretty sure you’d enjoy living in Paris. And of course, you could travel about France for some month in the year” (28). This statement shows that he gets a chance for a new position in his career and the reflection of the absence of Marsoult’s enthusiasm appears through his reaction to respond it which can be seen from the quotation below.

“I told him I was quite prepared to go, but really, I didn’t care much one way or the other. He then asked if a change of life as he called it didn’t appeal to me, and I answered that one never changed his way of life, one life was as good as another and my present one suited me quite well. At this he looked rather hurt, and told me that I always shilly-
shallied, and that I lacked ambition - a grave defect, to his mind, when one was in business”. (28)

The quotation above proves that his response “I didn’t care much one way or the other”, does not show his feeling of excitement or interest to the career opportunity offered by his boss to him. His reaction to an opportunity for his career is just responded without showing his enthusiasm. There is no desire to involve himself in the opportunity.

From his boss’s statement “…I lacked ambition” proves that Marsoult is not an enthusiast person who shows enthusiasm for something. He does not put a career as something that he wants to do or achieve very much. It means, he does not have a desire or determination to be successful in his career and he does not have an excitement and interest to a career or a job.

Marsoult with the absence of his enthusiasm is also reflected in the quotation below.

“I returned to my work. I’d have preferred not to vex him, but I saw no reason for changing my life. By and large it wasn’t an unpleasant one. As a student I’d had plenty of ambition of the kind he meant....... I very soon realized all that was pretty futile.” (28)

From his statement “…I saw no reason for changing my life”, and “…it wasn’t an unpleasant one… I very soon realized all that was pretty futile” describes that Marsoult does not show his enthusiasm to change his life to be better than he has now. He believes that there is nothing going to change his life. To change the life to be better is just a useless thing. So, it can be said that to get better life is not something which he is interested in.

Then, a reflection of the absence of enthusiasm in Marsoult is described when the chaplain asks him about his wish on his life as reflected from the following statement.

“…life would lose all meaning. Do you wish, he asked indignantly, my life to have no meaning? Really I couldn’t see how my wishes came in to it, and I told him as much.” (43)

The statement above shows that there is no enthusiasm reflected in his answer “…couldn’t see how my wishes came in to it”. It means that his answer describes how he never has a strong feeling of excitement and interest to his life which makes him does not find the real wish or the real expectation in his life.

The Effects of the Main Character’s Apathy

The main character’s apathy has affected his life and other people around him. Hate means “to have a strong feeling of dislike for
dislike is defined as “to not like somebody/something,” or a feeling of not liking somebody/something.” 2 (420)

Being hated by the people around is seen from what are the people around or other characters said to him. From what is said by Salamano to Masoult "He added hastily and with a rather embarrassed air that some of the people in the street said nasty things about me because I’d sent my mother to the home” (31), proves that an action in sending a mother to the home for older people gives an effect to Marsoult. The unpleasant words addressed to him by the people around shows how he is hated by other people meaning that they have a strong dislike for his action.

The main character is hated by the people around him as said by other characters who testify for him. In the court session of Marsoult’s case after killing the Arab, the prosecutor brings some witnesses to the court. The warden who is the head officer of the ageing home and the door keeper are the witnesses who testify in there. They tell to the court all the things done by Marsoult during funeral time.

“The warden lowered his eyes…then he explained that I hadn’t wanted to see my mother’s body, or shed a single tear and that I’d left immediately the funeral ended without lingering at her grave….he said that I’d declined to see Mother’s body, I’d smoked cigarettes and slept and drunk café au lait.” (56)

All the things that the warden and the door keeper said in quotation above prove that the actions of Marsoult do not show his feelings toward his mother’s death during funeral.

All of those actions have made the people around hate or dislike him which is described in the following statement. “…how much all these people hated me” (51). From this statement, it can be known clearly that the people around do not like Marsoult.

The dislike or hatred of the people to the main character is also reflected from the prosecutor’s statement while he leads the session. “…the whole background of the crime was of the most squalid description. And what made it even more odious was the personality of the prisoner, an inhuman monster wholly without a moral sense. I accuse the prisoner of behaving at his mother’s funeral in a way that showed he was already a criminal at heart” (60).

From the statement above, it can be seen what the prosecutor said about Marsoult as the personality without “moral sense” and “a criminal at heart” prove how the prosecutor has a strong of dislike for Marsoult.

Then still in the court, the prosecutor once again says about him describing how he hates Marsoult. “This man, who is morally guilty of his mother’s death is no less unfit to
have a place in the community……this man has I repeat, no place in a community whose basic principles he flouts without compunction.” (64)

Based on the prosecutor’s statement above “…this man has I repeat, no place in a community”, shows his expressions showing how he does not like Marsoult. It means the words from the prosecutor addressed to Marsult describes that he has a strong feeling of dislike toward him.

Therefore, the hatred of the people to Marsoult is also proven by the following statement. “Really, he said, I had no soul, there was nothing human about me, not one of those moral qualities which normal men possess had any place in my mentality” (64). This statement shows that the words addressed to Marsoult saying about him as a person who has no “soul”, no “moral qualities”, and no “moral senses” are form of hatred felt by the people around expressed in the words to describe it. Marsoult being hated by the people around like it is proven by all the quotation above is caused by all actions which do not show his feelings.

Disappointment of His Girlfriend

The main character’s apathy gives effects to other people like his girlfriend, Marie. Marie is disappointed to him. Disappointment means “sadness because something has not happened or been as good, successful, etc as you expected or hoped” (oxford 413).

The disappointment of Marie is seen when Marsoult does not show his love by telling her that he does not love her. Marie who comes to see and ask him to marry her “Marie came that evening and asked me if I’d marry her” (28), does not get the answer which she hoped for or expected when Marsoult says it is not important “it had no importance really.” (29)

The reaction of Marie being disappointed is clearly seen from what she said. “She murmured something…and I daresay that’s why I love you, she added. But maybe that’s why one day I’ll come to hate you.” (29)

From the statement above, the writer sees the reflection of Marie’s disappointment when she says “maybe that’s why one day I’ll come to hate you.” It is clear that Marie does not get something happened as good and as successful as she expected or hoped to happen. Marsoult is expected or is hoped to have affection to her, yet it did not happen as she hoped.

Then, another statement proving about Marie being disappointed is reflected from the following statement. “She hadn’t written for ages, probably, I surmised, she had grown tired of being the mistress of a man sentenced to death” (71).

The statement above shows that during Marsoult’s arrest in jail, he usually receives letters from Marie, but suddenly he does not
receive it anymore. Marie stops sending him the letters.

The writer sees that Marie’s action of not sending him a letter as said by Marsoult “She hadn’t written for ages” is a form of her disappointment to him because of his action bringing him to jail had separated them. It means something which is hoped and expected by Marie to happen, will not to happen. Marie’s hope and expectation to be married by Marsoult is something impossible to happen. It is impossible because Marsoult is under arrest after killing someone, and he gets a death sentence “tired of being the mistress of a man sentenced to death.”

Disappointment of His Mother

Another effect of the main character’s apathy is the disappointment of his mother as reflected from her reaction to Marsoult’s action when he sends her to the ageing home.

The writer sees that his mother is disappointed after they were separated from each other which they used to “lived together” (5). Separation is not a thing which his mother expected or hoped, moreover the way of them to separate is caused by her own son’s action sending her to the ageing home. His mother’s reaction reflecting her disappointment to Marsoult can be seen from the following statement. “During her first week at the home she used to cry a good deal.” (5)

From his mother’s reaction “she used to cry a good deal” can be known that after Marsoult send his mother to the ageing home at Morengo, his mother cries for a few weeks. It is clear that living in the ageing home is not a thing which is expected or hoped to happen by his mother. Crying for a few weeks is just a form of her reaction to show her disappointment to her son’s action which is done to her.

The disappointment of his mother is not only expressed in her crying but it is also expressed from her complaint during her stay at the ageing home. “When asked if my mother had complained about my conduct, he said yes but that didn’t much…” (56)

From the statement above can be seen that when the warden asked by the judge if his mother complains to Marsoult’s action sending her to the ageing home, he says “yes”. It means his mother does complain about it.

The writer sees that his mother’s complaint during her stay at the ageing home is another reaction to her son’s action which she is not expected to be done to her by her only son.

Conclusion

The result of the analysis shows that the main character described in the novel is an apathetic person who does not show the feelings through his actions and reactions toward particular objects, events or things around him.
The main character’s apathy affects himself, his girlfriend, and his mother. For him, his apathy makes him being hated by the people around. For his girlfriend Marie and his mother, his apathy makes them feel disappointment.

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