CZU: 821.133.1.09(092)
ORCID: 0000-0001-7598-1323

Cristina ROBU
Indiana University Bloomington
(Bloomington)

ENCOUNTERING OTHERNESS: A DERRIDEAN READING OF MEURSAULT'S AND HAROUN'S *ROBINSONADE*

Lectura ridiculizată a *Robinsonadei* lui Meursault și Haroun

Rezumat: Procesul de descoperire de către „eu" a celuilalt și confruntarea cu eterogenitatea acestui străin conține un paradox fundamental: marei forțe de alienare și detașare i se asociază posibilitatea reapropriерii spațiului comun al unei existențe impetuoase. *Străinul* (1942) lui Albert Camus reprezintă această întâlnire în forma sa exemplară ce descrie impasibilitatea totală iar contra-narațiunea lui Kamel Daoud, *Meursault, contre-enquête* (2013) deconstruiește și reinvestește aceste periplu printr-o dislocare de perspectivă. Limbajul, ca mecanism primar de articulare a trăirilor, este unealta care, în contextul post-colonial al textului lui Daoud, aparține celuilalt și necesită un proces complex de reapropriere.

Utilizând elemente de analiză proprii lui Jacques Derrida, acest eseu își propune o examinare a transformării discursului lui Meursault în cel al lui Haroun și poziționarea acestuia în paradigma *Robinsonadei*.

Cuvinte-cheie: alteritate, limbaj, post-colonial, contra-narațiune, deconstruire.

Abstract: The processes of discovering the other and confronting the heterogeneity of this foreignnessenclose a fundamental paradox: the emerging force of alienation and detachment is associated with the possibility of reappropriating the common space of an impetuous existence. Albert Camus's *Stranger* (1942) represents the exemplary form of this impassive encounter,while Kamel Daoud's counter-narrative, *Meursault, contre-enquête* (2013) deconstructs and reinvests this journey through a dislocation of perspective. Language, as a primary mechanism for articulating feelings, is the tool which, in the post-colonial context of Daoud's text, belongs to the other and requires a complex process of reappropriation.

Using elements of Jacques Derrida's analysis, this essay aims to examine the transformation of Meursault's discourse into that of Haroun and his positioning in the *Robinsonade* paradigm.

Keywords: otherness, language, post-colonial, counter-narrative, deconstruction.

BDD-A31583 © 2020 Academia de Științe a Moldovei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.15 (2026-09-14 15:13:09 UTC)

Introduction

The discovery of the other, as an unknown footrace on a shore or an unclear sign made in one's book, both different from the traces made by the "I" and similar to them, is a topos inhabiting and animating philosophers and writers throughout the centuries. Taking the perspective of the "I", some literary texts present this uncanny encounter with otherness, while clearly staging the disparities between the two entities residing in social, political, ideological or gender differences. Subsequent to the encounter is the response to this difference enclosed in an action of either accepting or, a more frequent scenario, discarding the other. Encountering otherness is thus a response to the way "I" perceives the difference throughhis/herrelation to alterity and to the world.

In 1942, Albert Camus published *The Stranger* (also translated in an insightful way by Stuart Gilbertas *The Outsider* in 1946). In this now canonical novel,the encounter with the other, the stranger, the outsider, is situated between Meursault, the protagonist, and the "Arab" - his anonymous victim, on a beach in Algiers. This brief meeting on the shore, bathed by the sun, the sweat and the tears, induce a state inMeursault which lead to his killing of the "Arab". Followed by a trial and a sentence, this confrontation can be seen as the outset of Meursault both becoming and encountering otherness, a fact caused by and inducing further estrangement. The question then arises as to who (or what) is the strangerwhich gives the title of the novel? Is it Meursault or is it what the "Arab"represent to him? Is it the encounter with the other or his ontologicalinaccessibility that generates the strangeness?Is it the "I", the other, the encounter, or the essence of the being?

Using the plot of *The Stranger*, Algerian writer Kamel Daoud reopened these interrogations and built a Camusian counter-narrative in his novel *Meursault, contre-enquête* (2013). In this text, Daoud inserts Meursault in what he calls the "Robinsonian Mythology" where the narrator, Haroun, the "Arab"'s brother, perceives Meursault as a "Robinson qui croit changer de destin en tuant son Vendredi, mais découvre qu'il est piégé sur une île et se met à pérorer avec génie comme un perroquet complaisant envers lui-même" (p. 14). The insularity, the solitude and the encounter of the other, with all the risks and the excitement it may instigate, are all points of convergence in these narratives. Questioning the relation between the self and the non-self, *Meursault, contre-enquête* is shaped through the individual's perception or (re)presentation of the "I", the other and the world. This perspective is strongly materialized in the language used by Haroun: the French which he borrowed from Meursault/Camus. The relation between one's language and the language of the other transcribes the power dynamics, as it has been thoroughly theorized byJacques Derrida in several of his texts.

Pondering on several of these elements, this essay analyses the connections, contingencies, and gaps between the Camusian narrative and thecounternarrative as it was operated by Daoud. This readingintends to articulate the representations of otherness inlanguage through a deconstructive perspective using Jacques Derrida's view on the *Robinsonade*as he exposed it in his lecture series *The Beast & the Sovereign*[1].

[1] Derrida, Jacques, et al. *The Beast & the Sovereign*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011.

BDD-A31583 © 2020 Academia de Științe a Moldovei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.15 (2026-09-14 15:13:09 UTC)

While using Derridean key concepts and paradigms, this paper interrogates the symbolic dislocation of constitutive cultural elements, the reshaping of the main characters, and the reappropriation of the diegetic space as well as the connectors which are the building blocks of the literary Francophone network. We shall see how, using the language and the narrative of the other while questioning and reinventing the past, Daoud gives it a name, a voice, and a story but keeps the uncanny presence of otherness as a reminder of an essential element ofthe human condition: itsinsurmountable ontological alienation.

The language of Meursault andHaroun

From the incipit, which containsan explicit intertextual reference to Camus, Daoud establishes an analogousrelationship between the protagonist and the mother: "Aujourd'hui, M'maest encore vivante." (p. 11) versus the Camusian "Aujourd'hui, mamanestmorte" (1963, p. 9). This incursion on the well-known path ofMeursault is the outset of an impetuous display of both feeling and fact, generated by the actions of Camus' novel and developed by Daoud in order to decipher a different perspective on the same "case". While is portrays another mother, another murder, another solitude, it is nevertheless located in the same country – Algeria – and it takes place on the same beach; it usesthe same language – French – and depictsan identical type of isolation. Set as a fictional dialog with a literary scholar interested in Camus, *Meursault, contre-enquête*is narrated by Haroun[2] in an Algerian bar. The text can be perceived as a quasi-soliloquy or an address to all the *others* situated at the borderline of the text: the reader, Camus, Meursault – all addressees which are deliberately confused and blended. The locus of what starts as a violent diatribe isthe Titanic bar, as a sinking island, inhabited by all of Haroun's memories of his brother Moussa, "a name that delicately echoes Meursault" (p. 206) in Alice Kaplan's opinion.It is also populated by recollectionsof his life, of Camus' text, of everything that exists outside but can't be reached because his story is, as a (foot)print, enclosed in the discourse.

In order towalk the Camusian path, Haroun has to take hold of its main material, its language – French. At first, this language is the territory of the other: "C'étaitsa langue à lui." (p. 12) and by seizing the language, the protagonist gains access to the original text.He wished to get closer to the narrative, to the storyline and to the link between the two protagonists, thus connecting himselfto the two "strangers". French becomes, as KatebYacineputs it, "un butin de guerre"[3] that Algerians kept after the 1962 independence. Or, in Derrida'swords: "Je n'ai qu'une langue, ce n'est pas la mienne" (1996, p. 13). By possessing it, Haroun becomes the owner of a new language, an asset that is not his own, but which allows him to re-establish the unsaid stories of Moussa, Meursault's other, Haroun's brother, the forgotten other.

[2] John Cullen, the English translator of *The Meursault Investigation*, chose to modify the names of the characters. Thus, Haroun became Harun and Moussa became Musa. In this paper, I will use the French character names.

[3] *"Le françaisestnotrebutin de guerre"* is a well-known quote from Algerian poet KatebYacine (1929-1989) concerning the choice made by several Algerian writers to use French.

BDD-A31583 © 2020 Academia de Științe a Moldovei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.15 (2026-09-14 15:13:09 UTC)

Haroun need this language because he desires to be able to speak on behalf of Moussa; he wishes to be the voice he believes was absent from *TheStranger*: "C'est d'ailleurs pour cette raison que j'ai appris à parler cette langue et à l'écrire; pour parler à la place d'un mort, continuer un peu ses phrases." (p. 11-12). Heuses language as prosthesis,andit is possible to detectseveral different modes of using it in the text. The first one is the construction of the counternarrative, which includes the telling of his own story and the story of his brother as opposed to Meursault's story told by Albert Camus. Filled with anger and anxiety in the first part of the novel, Haroun retells the narrative of Moussa including his life before the murder, his name and his family, his habits and his behaviour, the way he remembered them, disproportionately, hyperbolically: "Moussa était mon aîné, sa tête heurtait les nuages. Il était de grande taille, oui, il avait un corps maigre et noueux à cause de la faim et de la force que donne la colère" (p. 17). The altered image of his brother,who was killed when Haroun was seven,can represent a metaphor for Algeria before the independence, at a time where the character was too young to remember it thus, the only remains of what the social structures consisted of were borrowed ideas and memories.

Additionally, language allows Haroun to both describe Moussa and give him an identity in order to forge his image and extract him from what Haroun believes to be unjust anonymity: "un anonyme qui n'a même pas eu le temps d'avoir un prénom" (p. 11). This battle against namelessness is fought by the means of language and by giving a name to the unnamed, the isolated, the other whose identity Haroun is trying to reconstruct. In *Le monolinguisme de l'autre, ou, la prothèse d'origine*, Jacques Derrida invokes the power of naming while discussing colonialism and language policy: "(l)a maîtrise, on le sait, commence par le pouvoir de nommer, d'imposer et de légitimer les appellations" (1996, p. 36). By this token, for Haroun,naming representsthe seizing back of power, aagency taken from him and his brother. By identifyingthe "Arab", by giving him an identity and by doing it in French, he performs an act of re-establishing hisown perspective on what was presented as otherness and makes it familiar.Thus, the appropriation and use of a language in order to name (or rename) can be seen as an act of sovereignty and can have, as Marc Crépon puts it, a political value (p. 27).

The act of naming has asimilar value in *Robinson Crusoe* as, upon meeting the "savage", Robinson"made him know his Name should be *Friday*" (p. 174). It can also be equalled to the appropriation of an entity, the sovereign action of taking possession of the other and calling him "my". Robinson transforms "the Savage" into "my Savage, *for so I call him now*" (p. 172) and take possession of him. This act of ownership is present in Haroun's discourse as a constant repetition of the fact that Moussa was *his* brother: "Je te le dis d'emblée: le second mort, celui qui a étéassassiné, est mon frère" (p. 11). The emphasis on the possession of the memory of the brother is intense since "mon frère" appears 64 times in the novel and is contrasted by a constant attribution of Meursault/Camus to his addressee using the expression "ton héros" 46 times. This distinction dominates the text and situates otherness as an attribute opposed to the "mine".

BDD-A31583 © 2020 Academia de Științe a Moldovei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.15 (2026-09-14 15:13:09 UTC)

The use of language as extensionof the beings or its alienation resonates with the total lack of possession in Camus. Meursault never owns or is connected to the "Arab" unless by expressions which reflect his action upon himself as "mon crime" (p. 140) or "mon acte" (p. 142). Detached from the "Arab", Meursault perceives him as a stranger and this is exactly what Haroun wants to reverse by the use of the possessive adjectives "mon"/ "ton", by their distinction and opposition. He takes possession of his brother as he takes possession of the language of Camus, that use by Meursault. But language is transformative, and it will, throughout the narration, start to possess him as he will slowly perceive himself as the simulacrum of both Meursault and Camus.

Finding new ways to access otherness

The "Arab's" anonymity in Camus and, by contrast, the constant reminder of his name in Daoud, strongly resonates with Algeria's colonial background and the impact French (language and culture) had on the country. From Haroun's perspective, the gaze of the other created this nameless identity his brother was restricted to: "Il a donc fallu le regard de ton héros pour que mon frère devienne un "Arabe" et en meure" (p. 71). It is then the perception of the "I" which creates the identity of the other and when this relation is not an equal one (as is generallythe case in the colonial space); the gaze of the one who has (or is believed to have)the power is the one constructing or depriving the other of his identity. Just as Robinson created the identity of Friday by renaming him and converting him, Haroun perceives Meursault as the holder of the gaze and the language,elements that give him power. In Davis Carroll's opinion: It is as if Camus' poor Algerians in general all shared the anonymity imposed on colonized Algerians by the colonial system, as if all had anonymity as their origin and their destiny, whatever the political and cultural differences that separated them from one another (p. 162).

As a gesture of retribution, Haroun inflicts the same fatal destiny that Meursault administered his brother Moussa to a Frenchman: "Car figure-toi que j'ai tué le Français vers deux heures du matin" (p. 89). But, contrary to Meursault, Haroun names his victim: "Oui, j'ai tué Joseph parce qu'il fallait faire contrepoids à l'absurde de notre situation" (p. 132). Joseph Larquais, a random victim chosen to be killed in order to be a redeemer of balance in Haroun's family, is here the *roumi*, the stranger executed at 2am in a dark barn, as to be the negative version of Moussa's 2pm murder on the beach. Through symbolic, antipodal actions, Haroun takes hold of the colonial space and language and enacts Meursault's behaviour in order to establish himself as equal in the political, social, linguistic and the diegetic space. Facing a trial for killing the *roumi*after July 4, 1962, the day of Algerian national independence, Haroun, just like Meursault, is charged with murder mostly because he didn't do it at the right moment, just as Meursault's error was his detachment more than his criminal deed.

Furthermore, it is the mastering of the language that allows Haroun access to his own memories in the language of the other, that of the outsider. He retraces the past of his brother alongside his own by regularly borrowing structures or phrases from the originaltext, as mentioned previously. Twisting the focus of Camus' novel, Daoud is renewing the narrative itself and introduces a protagonist able andwilling to retrace Meursault's

BDD-A31583 © 2020 Academia de Științe a Moldovei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.15 (2026-09-14 15:13:09 UTC)

path in order to understand and reconstruct his own. Haroun wishes to disclose his story, just as Meursault did in the Camusian narrative, but he also desires to exhibit the magnitude of his passions and questionings, without the "flat narrative voice" (Kaplan, p. 208) present in Camus.In doing so, he identifies Meursault with Robinson and his victim,Moussa, as Friday, thus establishing a power relationship between the two: "Que faire d'un homme que vous rencontrez sur une île déserte et qui vous dit qu'il a tué, la veille, un Vendredi? Rien" (p. 59). In order to dislocate and invert this blandness, Haroun enacts Meursault's and Moussa's day on the beach and makes the "Arab's" story into a "Frenchman's" night, a mirror effect that creates a circular movement of violence and makes Moussa's killing less abstract and devoid of consequences or meaning. In Daoud's novel, Meursault's solitude is explained and exacerbated by him not knowing the other, by the impossibility to communicate with him or to name him.On the other hand, Haroun is the possessor of knowledge and he uses it throughout the text by (de/re) constructing, analysing, (re)formulating, (re)tracing the Camusian path and finding new ways to access otherness.

Language as a tool

Moreover, Haroun uses language is as a bridge he has to cross in order to have access to the world (of the other), to connect to it, and to be able to tell it: La langue française me fascinait comme une énigme au-delà de laquelle résidait la solution aux dissonances de mon monde. Je voulais le traduire à M'ma, mon monde, et le rendre moins injuste en quelque sorte" (p. 129-130).

The world, his world and the world of the other, merging in language, create a vast space of encounter. By knowing the language, he can follow the footsteps and take the path of Meursault in order to become himself a protagonist and, thus, a storyteller. This allows the *mise en abyme* of Haroun in Meursault but also in Camus, creating multiple layers of reference and interpretation. United in language, protagonists and authors become inhabitants of the same world, the literary space, the realm of the narrative. They become co-habitants, co-narrators, co-protagonists and co-killers. This allows a dialog to emerge between centuries, texts, and cultures. Itsituates the characters and authors as reflections and projections of each other in the borderless space of the text. The fact that Haroun is accused of a delayed killing and of not being a *moudjahid* resonates somewhat with the accusations which Camus faced for not supporting Algerian National Liberation Front (the FLN). Thus, otherness can be found in a lack of alliance and subscription to the political, social or religious movements of the time or an alienation of what is considered to be the "right thing to do". Hence, gestures, actions, thoughts and coalitions are situated in a language which brings people together but can also oppose and separate them. In Daoud's novel,language is described as the tool used for transcending ontological, social and literary borders and accessing the universal:

J'ai brièvement connu le génie de ton héros : déchirer la langue commune de tous les jours pour émerger dans l'envers du royaume, là où une langue plus bouleversante attend de raconter le monde autrement. C'est cela ! Si ton héros raconte si bien l'assassinat de mon frère, c'est qu'il avait atteint le territoire d'une langue inconnue, plus puissante dans son étreinte, (…) (p. 109-110).

BDD-A31583 © 2020 Academia de Științe a Moldovei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.15 (2026-09-14 15:13:09 UTC)

As mentioned earlier, language is the one allowing Haroun to be identified (and to identify himself) as a teller/writer and to become part of the literary tradition. Learned from others and for others, language is the building material for (re)creating and inhabiting his story:

C'est pourquoi je vais faire ce qu'on a fait dans ce pays après son indépendance: prendre une à une les pierres des anciennes maisons des colons et en faire une maison à moi, une langue à moi" (p. 12).

Language can thus be used as anapparatus allowing him to glimpse deeper in the story of the encounter between Meursault and Moussa and tounderstand and supplement it. The wordsborrowed from Camus' novel become footprints Haroun follows and comments on. They establish his authority as narrator and as creator of a different storyline, thus situating himself as a pursuer of the tradition of recounting the encounter of otherness. He sees this process as an investigation and language as a device allowing him to engage in it: "La langue française est ainsi devenue l'instrument d'une enquête pointilleuse et maniaque" (p. 99-100). Acquiring the language of the other in order to understand him and reveal him to oneself proves to be the path Haroun takes. And the footsteps he follows are the ones Camus left in his novel, as relics of a not so distant but unknown, inaccessible past.

Retracing the lost

The footprint on the beach, atopos common to both *Robinson Crusoe* and *Meursault, contre-enquête*, can be interpreted in this context as the sign of the other or of the self, the failed encounter, the uncanny proof of the presence and/or absence of its creator. Seeing "the Print of a Man's naked Foot on the Shore, which was very plain to be seen in the Sand" Robinson Crusoe "stood like one Thunder-struck"or as one who "had seen an Apparition" (Defoe, p. 121). This apparition is the one Haroun is looking for while searching for his brother Moussa on the beach "Mais je n'ai jamais rien retrouvé, ni douilles ni traces de pas, ni témoins, ni sang séché sur le rocher" (p. 65-66). The absence of the trace, as the absence of Moussa's body and, accordingly, the absence of a burial, which would put an ending to this chapter of Haroun's life, is the onset of this narrative. This is a story about an absence, the absence of closure, of the other and of the ways in which he can be found in discourse by the use of the other's language. For Haroun, the absence of his brother is the one creating the need to acquire a language in order to rediscover, recreate, and recount him. But this is not the case for Meursault or Robinson who are possessors of the language and who only transcribe otherness by use of their owntongue, without the need to borrow a new voice. As a literary and cultural device, language, particularly in a colonial and post-colonial context, is "mine" or "yours" and it redefines and reorganizes the telling of the story as much as its reading.

Adopted or held as its own, language not only describes the other and the world but also the self and one's alienationfrom otherness. The solitude experienced by the protagonists is a motif present in each discourse. What Robinson calls his "State of Solitude" (Defoe, p. 255) is a position shared by the three protagonists, each of them confined

BDD-A31583 © 2020 Academia de Științe a Moldovei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.15 (2026-09-14 15:13:09 UTC)

in a space isolating them from the world. Be that an island for Robinson, a shore for Meursault or a bar for Haroun, insularity is an existence expressed and emerged from their discourse and can be summarized by the first phrase of Jacques Derrida's *Séminaire la bête et le souverain: Volume II*: "Je suis seul(e)" (2009, p. 21). Perceiving solitude as a compound of *Dasein*, of the Being questioning his existence and his relation to otherness, it is represented in the three novels as an ontological difference between the protagonists and their respective "others". Encountering otherness is hence disturbing the solitude of the protagonists, if only for a brief moment. It is changing their paths and impregnating their existence. Meursault only mentions solitude explicitly once, in the last phrase of the novel: Pour que tout soit consommé, pour que je me sente moins seul, il me restait à souhaiter qu'il y ait beaucoup de spectateurs le jour de mon exécution et qu'ils m'accueillent avec des cris de haine" (p. 171-172).

It appears as if throughout the recounting of his experience, Meursault's solitude was perceived by everyone except himself. As Haroun puts it: "tous ont déclaré leur empathie pour la solitude du meurtrier en lui présentant les condoléances les plus savantes" (p. 14). His estrangementand detachment may be regarded as ontological condition common to all human beings and deployed by Camus to accentuate the impact of the encounter of the other as a crucial moment for the narration.

For Haroun, the identification with the other takes placein thediegetic space and, gradually, this otherness ceases to concernexclusively Meursault or Camus:

Au fond, j'ai vécu plus tragiquement que ton héros. J'ai, tour à tour, interprété l'un ou l'autre de ces rôles. Tantôt Moussa, tantôt l'étranger, tantôt le juge, tantôt l'homme au chien malade, Raymond le fourbe, et même l'insolent joueur de flûte qui se moquait de l'assassin" (p. 98).

Endorsing several types of otherness, Haroun progressively resembles the character he apprehended the most. After holding, in the first part of the novel,a violent positionagainst Meursault/Camus, Haroun reads several of Camusian books and concludes that" (Camus) c'était une sorte d'orphelin qui avait reconnu dans le monde une sorte de jumeau sans père et qui, du coup, avait acquis le don de la fraternité, à cause, précisément, de sa solitude" (p. 142). Expanding his view from the character of Meursault to the entire Camusian philosophy, Haroun acquires a different perspective on *The Stranger* and on himself. He tries to find Moussa's tracein Camus, in his language and, instead, finds himself: "J'y cherchais des traces de mon frère, j'y retrouvais mon reflet, me découvrant presque sosie du meurtrier" (p. 141). This, both traumatizing and liberating discovery, allows Haroun a transfer and a transformation of emotions and experiences. At this point, otherness becomes part of the "I", a reflection of the distant, inaccessible, intimidating aspect of the self. But what is otherness? For Haroun it is a measurement that is lost when blood is shed: "L'Autre est une mesure que l'on perd quand on tue" (p. 100). This perception of otherness alienates the "I" from the stranger or, possibly, by the token of this alienation, makes them one.

BDD-A31583 © 2020 Academia de Științe a Moldovei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.15 (2026-09-14 15:13:09 UTC)

The other of religion

Simone de Beauvoir believed that: "Otherness is a fundamental category of human thought" (p. 44) and, for the protagonists of the three novels, the other is represented by the difference of language, identity, but also belief. Religion and its language areportrayed in *Robinson Crusoe* as the reappropriation, relearning, reinvention. According to Jacques Derrida: "Everything happens as though, on this fictional island, were reinventing sovereignty, technology, tools, the machine, the becoming-machine of the tool, and prayer, God, true religion" (2011, p. 79). Robinson rediscovers and reinvents religion as his way of coping with insularity andalienation. Because the conveyer of religion is missing, Robinson endorses this role and becomes the voice carrying this language.

In both Camus and Daoud, a specific character is presented asthe messenger and the religious authority. The figure of the priest in *The Strange* and that of the imam in *Meursault, contre-enquête* represents the voice of the otherness which is religion for the two narrators: a belief that is estranged for both protagonists. For Meursault, the encounter with the priest is described as a confrontation with a stranger who wants to talk to him about insignificant matters: "Il voulait encore me parler de Dieu, mais je me suis avancé vers lui et j'ai tenté de lui expliquer une dernière fois qu'il me restait peu de temps" (p. 168). Using the same language, the same exterior, unauthoritative, unwanted manifestation of the religious figure, Daoud's rewriting of this passage only modifies the name of the authority figure: *Un jour, l'imam a essayé de me parler de Dieu en me disant que j'étais vieux et que je devais au moins prier comme les autres, mais je me suis avancé vers lui et j'ai tenté de lui expliquer qu'il me restait si peu de temps que je ne voulais pas le perdre avec Dieu* (p. 150).

Two of the three Abrahamic religions are reflected upon and confronted in this Camus/Daoud dialog which presents the same distance from the language of theother who declares himself amessenger of religion, which Daoud calls: "un transport collectif que je ne prends pas" (p. 76). The disregard for organized religion is perceived in both Meursault and Haroun and it transcribes in objecting the language of the other: "Il a essayé de changer de sujet en me demandant pourquoi je l'appelais «monsieur» et non pas «mon père». Cela m'a énervé je lui ai répondu qu'il n'était pas mon père: il était avec les autres" (p. 168). This passage is rewritten by Kamel Daoud as Haroun rebels against the language of the other, no longer the other as Meursault/Camus but against the authority residing in the religious figure which he, just as Meursault, considers as foreign: *"Il a essayé de changer de sujet en me demandant pourquoi je l'appelais "Monsieur" et non pas "El-Cheikh". Cela m'a énervé, je lui ai répondu qu'il n'était pas mon guide, qu'il était avec les autres"* (p. 150-151). Otherness is dislocated for both protagonists and transferred from a person to a belief system and it illustrates their impossibility to share the same language with the authority figure representing this religion. If Derrida imagines the possibility of reading "the whole of *Robinson Crusoe* as a book of prayer, as an experience of "learning how to pray" (2011, p. 78), one can imagine *The Stranger* and *Meursault, contre-enquête*as booksmoving away from prayer and from the voice which prays. Language does matter, as I hope to have established already, but

BDD-A31583 © 2020 Academia de Științe a Moldovei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.15 (2026-09-14 15:13:09 UTC)

the language of the other, which represents belief, is dismissed in both cases. Picking up Meursault's attitude, Haroun resists and opposes the language of the imam, which is the language of power, and embraces the language of the Camusian stranger,borrowsit, and makes it the fabric of his experience. Language becomes more than a "butin de guerre" and a political or religious attribute. Recognizing the words of the other and his language as an apparatus with its potential to portray his own life, Haroun endorses it. Alice Kaplan believes that "(b)y the end of the novel, Harun's rage against Meursault has transformed itself into empathy and a nearbrotherly identification" (p. 209) and, as I hope to have demonstrated, it is done by the means of language and its acquisition that Haroun accomplishes it.

Becoming the other

By using the language of the other, by taking the path of the other, by killing like the other, Haroun gradually becomes part of the other, using his utterances, reappropriating his identity and reconstructing his book as he would walk on Meursault's footsteps on that beach. From a search for truth, for revenge and for reappropriation of the "Arab's" anonymity, Haroun discovers him as residing in literary expression and, thus, in language: "Nous venions de découvrir, en vrac, les dernières traces de pas de Moussa, le nom jamais connu de son meurtrier et son destin exceptionnel" (p. 138). Following his path andusing his language, Haroun eventually becomes a/the stranger himself, a different version of Meursault.Estranged from the search for truth, he becomes interested in narrating his life using Meursault's framework and diegesis, his words, his expression, his utterance, his footsteps.But "Que veut dire Meursault ? "Meurt seul" ? " (p. 16).

Denouement

Published in the midst of the Second World War, *The Stranger* was perceived as a novel revealing the absurdity of life and the ineluctable death of all beings. The form and the content of Meursault's existence are opposed to the conventional morality of society and his alienation from it is transcribed both in his action and his language. Even though the political context in which *Meursault,contre-enquête*was written is different, I believe it adopts the same attitude and, by the end of the novel, Haroun demonstrates that he is a Meursault-like figure, out of tune with the religious and political requirements of his society. Borrowing Camus' language is thus an act of affiliation to a literary heritage and break away from the conventions that are imposed by societal morality. Disparate in the beginning and similar in the second half of *Meursault, contre-enquête*, Meursault and Haroun are more than half a century away from each other, but they share the same literary and geographical space and, as the narrative develops, they both merge into the figure of the stranger.Haroun identifies himself with this detachment from collectiveness and becomes himself a stranger: "Un étranger ne possède rien – j'en étais un" (p. 126). Cited by Derrida, the prolific Moroccan philosopher and literary critic, Abdelkebir Khatibi extrapolated this view on the language used by Arab writerin his essay "Incipits" back in 1985: J'ai suggéré (...) que l'écrivain arabe de langue française *est* saisi dans un chiasme, un chiasme entre l'aliénation et l'inaliénation (dans toutes les orientations de ces deux termes): cet auteur n'écrit pas sa langue propre, il transcrit son nom propre transformé, il ne peut rien posséder (…) (1996, p. 120).

BDD-A31583 © 2020 Academia de Științe a Moldovei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.15 (2026-09-14 15:13:09 UTC)

But it seems that Daoud may have challenged Khatibi's perception of the Arab writer and his relationship with French. The language of Camus/Meursault allows Daoud/ Haroun to negotiate the colonial space and to have agency in the narrative. It giveshim the possibility to expose his point of view on the past of his country and on the current state of events. In doing so, he exposes the uncanny way in which the post-colonial narrative reflects and parrots the colonial story.Haroun'sintention was to rewrite the story and to do it backwards: "C'est simple: cette histoire devrait donc être réécrite, dans la même langue, mais de droite à gauche." (p. 16) but instead, he gradually becomes a stranger himself. The frontier between oppressor and oppressed becomes permeable; the identities of the sovereign and the beast seem to merge; the perpetuation of violence as the perpetuation of literature is reoccurring, continuous, alterable and susceptible to change but relentless.

Both *The Stranger* and *Robinson Crusoe* are present to a great extend in Daoud's novel as Haroun oscillates between the two texts and shapes his identity while drawing from the two narratives. The myth of the encounter of the other dominates the three narratives but, in Haroun's case, I believe it is situated in the language. Far from the island or the beach, it inhabits the realm of the discourse and what Derrida calls "écriture" which he considers to be "uncertain mode d'appropriation aimante et désespérée de la langue" (1996, p. 59). Haroun discovers the other by the trauma of death but encounters otherness in language, in the word of the other, which becomes his own utterance.

After being awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1957, Camus said, what has now become a famous quote: "Ma patrie, c'est la langue française." This is the space Kamel Daoud decided to explore from the perspective of the other and the path he traced in *Meursault, contre-enquête*is a compelling one: starting with Camus' storyline and preparing the reader for a riposte-like counternarrative in which the brother of the "Arab" will settle his old scores with Meursault, Daoud makes a statement on the universality of literature, on writing as a common and as a continuum, on the presence of other as a constant reminder of who one is. Without avoiding the past and its burden, Daoudre inscribes the stranger in the universal, porous, and fragile network of the world. While using the image of the other, he manages to create the subtle and complex depiction ofan intricate self.

Referințe bibliografice:

1. BEAUVOIR, Simone. The Second Sex, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971.

2. CAMUS, Albert. L'Étranger. New York: Pantheon Books, 1963.

3. CARROLL, David. Albert Camus the Algerian: Colonialism, Terrorism, Justice. New York: Columbia University Press, 2008.

4. CRÉPON, Marc, «Ce qu'on demande aux langues (autour du Monolinguisme de l'autre)», Raisons politiques, 2/2001 (no 2), pp. 27-40.

5. DAOUD, Kamel. Meursault, contre-enquête: Roman, Arles: Actes sud, 2014.

BDD-A31583 © 2020 Academia de Științe a Moldovei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.15 (2026-09-14 15:13:09 UTC)

6. DEFOE, Daniel. Robinson Crusoe. New York: Norton, 1975.

7. Derrida, Jacques. Le monolinguisme de l'autre, ou, la prothèse d'origine. Paris: Galilée, 1996.

8. DERRIDA, Jacques, et al. The Beast & the Sovereign. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011.

9. DERRIDA, Jacques, Michel Lisse, Marie-Louise Mallet, and Ginette Michaud. Séminaire la bête et le souverain: Volume II. Paris: Galilée, 2009.

10. KAPLAN, Alice. Looking for The Stranger: Albert Camus and the Life of a Literary Classic. Chicago, US: University of Chicago Press, 2016.

BDD-A31583 © 2020 Academia de Științe a Moldovei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.15 (2026-09-14 15:13:09 UTC)