

Week 2 Writing Exercise: Of the Strangeness

“That denseness and that strangeness of the world is the absurd.”

In this week’s writing prompt, I encourage you to write into the strangeness of the world. Based on what we discussed on different nuances of the absurd, pick one or a few and really write into the experience of being in the strangeness. The strangeness could manifest in a character’s action, a narrator’s psychological condition, or a description of the strange senses. If you need more specific prompts, I have three suggestions for three genres of writing below.

Fiction:

In the section we read, Camus gives a quick but absurd scene on page 23. “A man is talking on the telephone behind a glass partition; you cannot hear him, but you see his incomprehensible dumb show: you wonder why he is alive.” Take this scene literally or create a similar scene where your character encounters this strong sense of dissonance. What are they doing? Where are they? What has prompted this dissonance? What are they going to do with it? Be raw, specific, and honest. Really investigate the psyche of your character in relation to the environment they are in.

Nonfiction:

Write about a time when the world became *dense*. Think of different times where you have experienced denseness. Write into your immediate experience within this denseness; write into your psyche and your senses. Think about what this experience yielded. Was it clarity after denseness, was it continued confusion, was it relief? Having read *Notes on Nothing*, I also encourage you to try to write in a form that you haven’t previously experimented with. This could be in the form of notes, a stream of consciousness, or anything else.

Poetry:

Find a keyword on the board and sink your teeth into it. Bite into it until it cracks. Take apart the word until it yields insights. Question the word, be baffled by it. Toss the word around your head and see what comes out. Take it apart, reconstruct it. Test it with your emotion, in your experience, in your narration. Experiment with the word with a free hand and see what comes out.

Week 5: The Absurd Man

“You have already grasped that Sisyphus is the absurd hero. He is, as much through his passion as through his torture. His scorn of the gods, his hatred of death, and his passion for life won him that unspeakable penalty in which the whole being is exerted towards accomplishing nothing.”

- *The Myth of Sisyphus*

For this week, you have a few options for either nonfiction or fiction writing.

Option 1: Think of another absurd man/woman/hero/heroine. Reflect on the qualities that make them the symbol of the absurd. How does this figure resonate or contrast with the four figures of Camus? This can be in either fiction or nonfiction.

Option 2: Similar to Camus’s mode of investigating the concept of conquest, I invite you to create a figure of the absurd man/absurd hero through pure description of an internal monologue. Think about at what point does the character engage in this internal existential monologue with themselves, what events they have just encountered. Tell a story through interiority.

Option 3: Create an alternative narrative for Sisyphus. Given what we have discussed about the actual background of Sisyphus, I invite you to think of other meanings that the figure of Sisyphus can take on. This can be in fiction or nonfiction. You are welcome to investigate an alternative life principle that Sisyphus might take on in the underworld, or you can write reflectively in the form of literary criticism, using real-world examples, personal narrative, or intellectual trains of thought (ideally all these combined!) to reflect alternative modes of living for Sisyphus. Where do your thoughts converge with Camus’s imagination of Sisyphus's life philosophy, where do your thoughts diverge?