

On the Camus-style Philosophical Dimension in the Image of "Sunlight" in The Stranger

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Abstract. The Stranger is a novella. It was written by Albert Camus, a French writer. He published it in 1942. The novel creates the image of Meursault. He is a "stranger". His acts are shocking. His words go against the rules. Through this image, the novel fully shows the absurdity of the world. It also shows the opposition between people and society. Most critics pay attention to Meursault's image in the work. They also focus on the author's philosophical ideas of absurdity and resistance behind the image. Or they only analyze the image of sunlight in the work. But they lack the connected research on the philosophical ideas of absurdity, resistance and passion. These ideas are carried by the image of sunlight. Based on the analysis of the image of sunlight in The Stranger, this paper discusses the author's philosophical ideas behind it. The ideas are absurdity, resistance and passion.

Keywords: The Stranger, sunlight, absurdity, resistance, passion

1. Introduction

Camus once listed the words he loved most in his life: world, pain, earth, mother, human beings, desert, honor, suffering, summer, sea. Among them, "sunlight" runs through almost all his works. It is one of the most representative themes. For this, Emmanuel Robles, a French novelist who had the same origin as Camus (born in Algeria), commented: "In all of Camus' works, there is sunlight that crushes all shadows without mercy." [1] This reveals the ideological weight behind the frequent appearance of sunlight — sunlight is often a sensory entrance to present Camus' philosophy.

In The Myth of Sisyphus, Camus put forward a well-structured philosophical process: "absurdity — resistance — passion". But this philosophy did not form out of nothing. It is deeply rooted in concrete and strong life experiences. Absurdity comes from the perceptual rift that people feel when facing the world: the desire for meaning and the silence of the world cannot be reconciled. Resistance is not a fierce posture in grand narratives. It is a persistent attitude to stay awake to this rift and not let oneself be anesthetized by false meaning. The so-called passion is the intensity of life that people gain when they no longer seek ultimate answers and focus all their attention on the existence of the here and now.

If these concepts are explained in an abstract way in philosophical texts, The Stranger provides a more original and concrete way for them to happen. In the novel, the character's consciousness does not understand absurdity, resistance and passion through reflection or reasoning. Instead, it is forced to enter through the recurring natural force of sunlight. The stinging, dizziness and oppression of

sunlight make absurdity first experienced as a physical shock. The persistence in real senses makes resistance a way of life for Meursault that does not depend on the meaning system. At the limit of life, sunlight becomes the last way for him to confirm his own existence and connection with the world, making "passion" present as a clear and transparent experience.

In other words, if we return to the context of Camus' literary works, we will find that these philosophical concepts are not generated abstractly. They are based on concrete sensory experiences. Unfortunately, when expounding Camus' three core concepts of "absurdity, resistance and passion", traditional research only takes philosophical works as the research object and does not attach importance to Camus' literary texts. Specifically, in *The Stranger*, the intensity, stinging and temperature of sunlight constantly shape the character's experience structure, making philosophical concepts gain a perceptible and tangible form for the first time in literary narration.

Taking "sunlight" as the starting point can not only rereunderstand the narrative structure of *The Stranger*, but also see the process of the formation of Camus' thoughts: absurdity appears in the oppression of sunlight, resistance sprouts in the persistence of real senses, and passion gradually takes shape in the sobriety of facing light at the end of life. Therefore, based on the fact that "sunlight" is the perceptual entrance for Camus' philosophy to happen, this paper explores how this image gradually forms the ideological chain of absurdity, resistance and passion in the narration by closely reading the multiple forms of the sunlight image in *The Stranger*.

2. Stinging light — the physical experience of absurdity

In *The Stranger*, sunlight first appears as a strong sensory force. It is not the "light of reason" in a symbolic sense. It is a bare physical reality: stinging, burning hot, oppressive. It makes people's body and consciousness dislocated.

In the funeral scene, Meursault repeatedly mentions the dazzling light and burning air: "The sun rose a little higher in the sky and began to burn my feet." [2] "The sun hung high and shone all over the earth, its heat rising fast and its power pressing down on the earth." [2] A funeral ceremony is solemn. But sunlight makes Meursault fall into a simple physical discomfort. Because of this, the ceremony no longer provides emotional meaning. Instead, it becomes absurd and ridiculous because of the too strong light. The sunlight here destroys the solemn meaning that society gives to a "funeral". It makes Meursault unable to "mourn" in the way that society expects. This loss of control from physical experience is exactly the source of absurdity. Absurdity does not come from a certain philosophical judgment. It comes from a physical feeling of "disconnection between meaning and experience".

In the scene where Raymond invites Meursault to his friend's home, Meursault repeatedly feels the influence of sunlight on his blurred consciousness. "The sun shone almost straight down on the beach, and its strong reflection on the sea made people unable to open their eyes." [2] "The sun made me sleepy." [2] Because of the light and heat, sunlight controls Meursault to a certain extent. It makes him feel dizzy uncontrollably and lose his real will of self. "My head was buzzing from the sun." "The dazzling sunlight poured down from the sky like heavy rain. Even standing still, I felt very uncomfortable." [2] As the sunlight becomes stronger and stronger, this dizziness even makes Meursault feel painful. It further controls Meursault's nerves. Right after this, there are six sentences in the text describing the burning sunlight on the beach. For example, "I felt my head swelling under the sun." [2] "The intense heat around me all focused on my body, making it hard for me to take a step." [2] "I wanted to overcome the sun and the dazed, confused feeling it poured on me." [2] At this time, sunlight shows a repressive and aggressive posture. It gradually takes control of Meursault's nerves — it destroys the rational will that Meursault thought he had to control himself.

It makes him gradually fall into a state of losing control. This irrational state is exactly one form of absurdity.

The same sensory imbalance reaches its extreme in the beach murder scene. There are six descriptions of sunlight here. They include "The whole beach trembled under the scorching sun and pressed in on me from behind." [2] "The sun burned my cheeks, and I felt sweat gathering on my eyebrows." [2] "The burning heat was too much for me to bear, so I took another step forward." [2] The dazzling sunlight and burning high temperature make Meursault's vision blurred and his movements stiff. He knows that "taking one more step is stupid." [2] But he is still forced by the heat wave to walk towards the Arab man. What is shown here is not simply that sunlight leads to a crime. It is a deep rift between consciousness and body: rational judgment still exists, but the body loses control because of the violent power of light. This disconnection between consciousness and behavior is exactly the absurdity that Camus talks about in *The Myth of Sisyphus*: the conflict between irrationality and the desire to figure everything out [3]. That is, the physical power of the world is no longer consistent with human understanding.

Therefore, at this stage, the dazzling and burning sunlight numbs Meursault's nerves. It makes Meursault unable to control his own actions. The contrast between people's desire to control themselves and the inability to control reality creates a split. And this split leads to absurdity. The meaning of sunlight here is not to symbolize absurdity. Instead, by destroying the meaning of the situation and disturbing the balance of the body, it makes absurdity happen as a concrete sensory experience. Absurdity is not a conclusion. It is a moment of consciousness failure created by sunlight.

3. Bright light — the source of the power to resist

In the narrative of *The Stranger*, sunlight is not a symbol with an unchanging meaning. It changes as Meursault's situation changes. Meursault gains the power to confirm things from feeling the natural sunlight. He becomes aware of nature because he can feel the sunlight. So when he faces the framework of false meanings in society, he can firmly see the problems of society. And he can break free from the shackles of meaning in the existing social framework. Camus clearly defined what resistance is in *The Myth of Sisyphus*. Resistance is the permanent struggle between a person and their own dark side [3]. What sunlight gives Meursault — the feeling and confirmation of nature — is exactly the source of his permanent struggle against the shackles of false meanings made up by society.

Before the accidental killing, sunlight was the core of the real feeling of life for Meursault. When he was with Marie by the sea, he "only wanted to enjoy the comfort of the sunlight on his body." [2] When he chased the truck with Emmanuel, the truck was wrapped "in the bright sunlight and flying dust." [2] In these moments, sunlight was not a conscious "symbol". It was a direct, physical pleasure. This is closely connected with Camus' own understanding of life.

Camus was born in Mondovi, Algeria. After his father died in the war, he moved with his mother to the Belcourt slum where his grandmother lived. He suffered all the hardships of life from an early age. However, the poor material life did not make Camus fall into despair. On the contrary, the beauty of nature, sunlight and the sea added color to Camus' childhood life. The warmth of sunlight gave him the passion for life. The vast sea drove away his troubles and sorrows in poverty [4]. So the descriptions of sunlight and the sea in Camus' novels are his intentional writing. Camus never thought that the poor life was something to be ashamed of or disgusting. On the contrary, poverty made him understand the life of nature and the joy of freedom better. So he regarded that time as a treasure of his life. However, Camus, who faced life so positively and optimistically, experienced

the unfairness of life. Camus, who suddenly got tuberculosis, not only had his dream of playing football broken. He also faced the threat of death all the time. He wrote in *The Myth of Sisyphus* that on one side is the cry of human beings, and on the other side is the irrational silence of the world. It is the confrontation between the two that made him see the absurdity of the world clearly [3]. On this basis, Camus was not defeated by absurdity. He was also deeply influenced by the ancient Greek ideas of temperance and moderation. He tried to build a new value system — temperate resistance: fighting against nothingness with praise for beauty, love for nature, respect for humanity and passion for life [5]. He could not hope for uncertain things, but "he must give his own colors to nothingness." [6] Apollo, the sun god in ancient Greek mythology, is in charge of youth, medicine, animal husbandry, poetry, music, oracles and so on. He represents the vitality of life and the firmness of will. He is embodied as moving towards light and pursuing tirelessly. He urges people to pursue knowledge and wisdom, friendship and love with profound rational power [7]. Thus, Camus' sunlight is full of power. It not only represents the life philosophy that Camus believed in, but also the life philosophy that Meursault believed in: abandoning all a priori and social "meanings", and devoting oneself wholeheartedly to and being loyal to the sensory experience of the moment.

In the dark prison cell, the longing for sunlight became the only link for Meursault to keep in touch with freedom and the real world. "Through a small window, the sea could be seen. One day, I was holding the iron bars and facing the bright place." [2] At this time, sunlight rose from an unconscious enjoyment to a conscious longing. It aroused his nostalgia for life — "I thought many times whether any of the criminals sentenced to death had ever escaped that merciless guillotine." [2] This is the germination of the will to resist: not in a philosophical sense, but the direct struggle of life instinct against destruction. As a representative of the external real world, sunlight constantly reminds him of the value of his own existence. Thus it inspired his initial awareness of struggling against the unfair fate.

The arrival of the priest pushed the resistance to the peak. What the priest represented was the authority that tried to deny the real value of Meursault's life with illusory meanings such as "eternal life" and "God's forgiveness". And when Meursault had a fierce debate with him, the physical detail that "the sunlight shone on my forehead" [2] was crucial: the real, natural sunlight was shining on Meursault, who insisted on the real value of his life, not on the priest who promised the illusory light of the afterlife. This sensory confirmation gave him the final courage and strength. Meursault finally broke out — "I seemed to have nothing in my hands, but I was sure of myself, much more sure than him, sure of my life and the death that was coming to me." [2] — the source of his strength was exactly the truth of life that he insisted on and witnessed by sunlight. At this moment, sunlight rose from a sensory object and an object of longing to the power for him to resist nothingness and power. By embracing the sunlight of this real world, he completely denied the illusory divine light in the priest's mouth. This choice is like Sisyphus' resistance in Camus' writing. Just as Sisyphus clearly knew the futility of pushing the stone up the mountain, but when he walked down the mountain, he thought about his fate and pushed the stone again — this decision itself is resistance [2]. Similarly, Meursault also despised his own fate, and his pain became his victory. He refused to be crushed by absurdity, refused to let death and nothingness set the value of life, and refused any illusory hope that tried to cover up absurdity. While refusing, he chose to absolutely affirm the value of life itself.

Therefore, at this stage, the meaning of sunlight is not to "represent resistance" symbolically. Instead, through the real sensory enjoyment, it makes Meursault firmly defend the real world represented by these real senses. In the confrontation between the defense of this truth and the false meanings of society, Meursault's will to resist is gradually strengthened. Resistance is not static. It is

a dynamic confrontation between the real sensory truth guided by sunlight and the false meanings made up by society.

4. True light — conscious confirmation of passion

Camus commented on Sisyphus like this in *The Myth of Sisyphus* — "Sisyphus is the absurd hero. For his passion, and also for his suffering. His contempt for the gods, his hatred of death, and his love for life have made him suffer unspeakably. So he strove with all his might but achieved nothing. This is the price that must be paid for loving the land of this world deeply." [2] In Camus' eyes, Sisyphus is full of passion because he confirms himself and loves life. In *The Stranger*, Meursault enjoys sunlight. In his longing for sunlight and in the bath of sunlight, he can clearly confirm the life he lives and love the life he has so much. This confirmation and love are exactly Meursault's passion. In Meursault's world, the relationship between sunlight and passion shows a linear path: from the direct physical feeling, to the active reconstruction of memory, and finally to the existential self-affirmation. This path is independent of the dual framework of "absurdity-resistance". The passion it reveals is not a confrontational posture, but a complete acceptance of the infinite richness of life itself. In this process, sunlight is always the most real and direct physical witness.

Before the accidental killing, in the beach scenes, Meursault always enjoyed sunlight. He "only wanted to enjoy the comfort of the sunlight on his body." [2] When he floated on his back in the sea, he felt the veil "lifted by the sunlight." [2] At this time, sunlight was not a symbolic sign, but a direct element that formed the real feeling of his life. Meursault did not "pursue" passion. He just lived naturally and instinctively in the physical reality made up of sunlight, sea water and his body.

In the prison scene, when the real sunlight was taken away, the lack of senses instead promoted the awakening of passion consciousness. Meursault stared at himself by the last glimmer of light, and found in his memory that there was "enough to recall, and he would never feel bored." [2] At this stage, sunlight changed from an object of present feeling to a medium to open up the senses of the past. Through memory, those moments soaked by sunlight — the smell of summer, the evening sky, Marie's skirt — were no longer a vague background, but clearly recognized as the most precious and unforgettable happiness in Meursault's life. What is shown here is not the unconscious sensory immersion brought by sunlight, but a conscious awareness of active identification — cherishing the feelings of life.

While waiting for the death sentence, in the fear of waiting for dawn, "the sunlight shining on the skylight" became the absolute confirmation that "I had lived another twenty-four hours." [2] Reflected by the absolute boundary of death, Meursault's attachment to "happiness" condensed into perseverance for "existence" itself. The value of those sensory memories involved with sunlight was infinitely magnified. They were no longer just happy past events, but all the evidence that he had lived, loved and felt. At this time, sunlight became an inner strength that supported Meursault to stay awake in despair. His love for life focused on these traces of real existence themselves.

When the priest came to see Meursault for the last time, this perseverance in confirming the real life reached its peak. What the priest represented was a system that denied the value of this life and pinned meaning on the afterlife. When asked about a possible different life, Meursault replied — "It's the kind of life where I can recall this present life." [2] Meursault refused to exchange this limited reality made up of sunlight, sea and sweat for any illusory future. All the sensory experiences witnessed by sunlight became a full and self-sufficient power against nothingness at this moment. Meursault chose not to resist God, but to fully embrace the world that belonged to him, illuminated by sunlight.

The complete conscious confirmation of life brought Meursault the final peace. After the priest left, "the starlight all over the sky fell on my face." [2] He felt that he "had been happy in the past, and was still happy now." [2] Meursault completely internalized all the life experiences enlightened by sunlight into an inalienable spiritual attribute. Death could not erase the authenticity and value of these experiences; on the contrary, it was the finiteness of life that made these passionate moments reach eternity. He embraced not death, but the complete life itself filled with his passion. Camus shaped Don Juan in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, who loved passionately in every moment without regard to consequences [3]. Similarly, Meursault also chose to devote himself to life passionately, enjoy everything warmly, embrace his true self, and face life squarely. What he cared about was not "to live for what", but "to live as much as possible" and how to "increase the weight of life".

Therefore, the logic of passion carried by sunlight is the logic of Meursault's inner awakening: it starts from the direct physical feeling, through the active cherishing of memory and the forced confirmation of death, and finally reaches the affirmation of existence. This path transcends the confrontation with absurdity and shows a more fundamental attitude towards life: not to find meaning in negation, but to confirm the abundance and value of life itself in complete acceptance and feeling. Meursault's passion lies exactly in this — he finally found that what he deeply loved was not an abstract idea, but this unique and real world with sunlight, sea and starlight.

5. Conclusion

In summary, sunlight forms a complete meaning structure in the narrative process. It systematically presents the internal logic of Camus' absurd philosophy. First, it is a sensory violence that destroys the rational order. Then, it becomes a witness to the resistance against the alienation of justice. Finally, it turns into a medium to confirm the value of this world. In the end, it is not only a physical factor that causes the sense of absurdity. It also promotes the awakening of subjective consciousness in the confrontation with justice. And it ultimately becomes the basis for the confirmation of "existence". This discovery not only deepens the understanding of the literary expression of Camus' philosophy. At the same time, through the creative use of the sunlight image, it builds a complete narrative from cognition to transcendence. In this sense, sunlight should be recognized as a key element for understanding the literary transformation of Camus' philosophical system.

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