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## IMAGE AND SYMBOL IN THE WORKS OF ALBERT CAMUS

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### ABSTRACT

A great majority of essays and articles devoted to Camus have concentrated on the philosophical value or the political relevance of his ideas. In his novels also Camus gives expression to his philosophy of the absurd and existentialism. However, the imaginative aspect of Camus's literary talent may be traced in the process by which the two images 'sun' and 'sea' recur in the author's work that achieves symbolic force and significance. The range of Camus's imagery is narrow and derives almost entirely from the central experience of his life, his encounter with nature along the North African littoral. This experience is described directly and personally in his formal essays. The use of imagery in Camus's writing is symptomatic of the way in which he exploits his verbal resources in order to convey how powerful the impact of natural phenomena has in human life. The present research paper is an attempt to examine aspects of Camus's literary talents: his creation of symbols. The two images- sun and sea- recur in Camus's work and achieve symbolical force. The range of Camus's imagery is fairly narrow and derives almost entirely from the central experience of his life, his encounter with nature and surroundings. Images are concerned with the blinding sun. Algerian landscape is the main character and it is the main surroundings. It is within the context of this particular experience of nature that Camus's references to the sun and the sea need to be set. These images figure prominently in Camus's work because they are obviously the representative images of the type of landscape in which he was born and spent the formative years of his life.

**Key words:** Camus's literary, philosophical value magery, life.

### INTRODUCTION

A symbol is an object that represents, stands for, or implies a concept, visual picture, belief, action, or material substance. Symbols are words, noises, gestures, or visual representations that are used to communicate ideas and beliefs. Symbolism occurs when an author utilizes an object or reference to add depth to a story. Symbolism in literature can be subtle or blatant, utilized sparingly or heavily. Albert Camus here utilizes the same thing multiple times to express deeper meaning, or he may employ variations of the same object to create an overall atmosphere or sensation. Symbolism is frequently employed to underpin a literary idea in a subtle way.

In literature, one of the most powerful tactics is imagery, which involves the author using words and phrases to generate "mental images" for the reader. Imagery helps the reader imagine and so more realistically experience the author's writings. Imagery refers to the use of metaphors, allusions, descriptive words, and similes, among other literary forms, to "tickle" and awaken readers' sensory experiences. In literature, imagery refers to an author's use of vivid and descriptive language to provide depth to his or her work. It uses the human senses to enhance the reader's understanding of the work.

The current paper attempts to critically evaluate a single and limited facet of Camus' literary talent: the production of symbols. The chapter focuses on the process by which two images, Sun and Sea, appear in this author's work and attain symbolic force. Camus' imagery is quite limited, derived almost entirely from the core experience of his life, his connection with nature in the North African region.

This event is expressed clearly and personally in his formal essays, "Between and Between" and "Nuptials." These articles reveal a particular sensibility, born on an inherently pagan experience with Natural Surroundings. It is not necessary to await an older Camus' confession of feelings "recollected in tranquility" to become conscious of this paganism. The Algerian child was undoubtedly the father of the successful man of letters who was politely approached by review editors:

**..... I am not a Christian I was born poor beneath a happy sky in to a nature which inspires a feeling of harmony not hostility I did not begin. Later..... But I feel I have a Greek heart.**

The ancient divinities inspire the youthful Camus' nature. He captures the fact with an intriguing, if slightly self-conscious, directness when he speaks to the "gods that speak in the sun" This paganism is distinguished by its vivid sensory life. If the frequency of his imagery is any indication, Camus' most acute senses are sight and scent. He portrays forcefully the caustic taste of wild herbs that catches at the throat and differentiates the cargos of visiting ships by their smell: lumber in Norwegian vessels, oil in German vessels, and wine in coasters. Auditory imagery are scarce and mostly focused with bird cries and wind sighs. These sounds typically emphasize the surrounding quiet and loneliness. However, visual images prevail, particularly those associated with the blinding light. In this Algerian environment, light is crude and expensive. Camus collects pictures of light, and in some parts, the result is a shimmering surface reminiscent of Impressionist artwork. Camus portrays brilliantly the minor distortion of eyesight that strong light can cause in severely hot and dry climates. He accomplishes this by incorporating one image into a series of visual images that includes both light reflection and the sensation of motion, as shown in the following passage: the silver-plated sea, the raw blue sky, the flower-covered streams, and the enormous swirls of light upon the heaps of stone. This device exemplifies Camus's use of word resources to depict the power of natural happenings. This is simply an exact depiction of his own reaction, as he feels a vertiginous kinship with nature. He describes how he feels himself being assimilated into nature, annihilated by the elements whose vibrating life is everywhere present in Nuptials: "The violent bath of sun and wind exhausted my life-strength now spread out to the four corners of the world forgetful, having forgotten myself, I have become the wind and within the wind the columns and arch here the stone slab smelling of the sun and the pale mountains set around the deserted city."

Camus' comments to the sun and the sea must be placed in the context of this specific experience with nature. These images are essential in Camus' writing because they clearly portray the area in where he was born and lived his formative years. Furthermore, in Camus' autobiographical essay, the words "sun" and "sea" are frequently used in circumstances that give them emotional undertones that foretell the symbolic meaning they get later in his imaginative work.

For example, allusions to the sun are frequently associated with a violent tone. The sun assaults and dazes Camus, leaving him bewildered. He is saturated by it, like a porous vessel susceptible to its heat. Camus' use of the phrase "swirls of sun" suggests the same sense of violence, evoking the characteristic whirling suns that dominate many of van Gogh's paintings and reflecting something of the intensity of that artist's vision. Again, the author writes of "his head reverberating from the symbol of the sun" and thus fuses the idea of a blinding reflection of light with the same sense of a violent physical reaction, such as the pounding of blood in the ears, implied by the notion of 'cymbals' as percussion instruments. Camus's comment in one of his essays, Nuptials, expands on the scope and significance of such an experience: "But to be pure was to find once more that homeland of the soul where one link with the world becomes perceptible, where the beating of the blood overtakes the violent pulsations of the two o'clock sun." The pictures that define the sun are not limited to those that convey mere aggression, but also express a sense of destruction. As a result, when the sun rains down its rays on the stony fields surrounding Oran, it is portrayed in a devastating manner: the incendiary sun causes blinding fires. However, the sun is frequently associated with quiet, which is the absence or rejection of certain human activity. This is evident in Camus' depictions of the deserted sea off Algiers at midday and the ruins at Djemila, where the presence of the

sun and the brooding calm of nature are emphasized. The sun and quiet, in a sort of elemental union, preside over the empire of things, with man appearing almost by accident.

The sea appears in these personal records as a continual source of comfort and refreshment in a hot atmosphere. It is the arena of youth, and thus of life, in the sense that life is synonymous with youthful vigor and the beginning of the sexual cycle. Every summer, the sea brings "a fresh harvest of flower-like girls"; it is a scene of effortless, wild ecstasy, and arrogant muscle play. Even the fall of waves on the shore conjures up an erotic image: "the first rocks that the sea sucks with a kissing sound". The waters of the sea, visible at each bend of the street in Algiers, serve as a reminder of reprieve from the dust and scorching stone. The mineral landscape in Oran conveys a sense of natural permanence by its enormous inertness, but this permanence implies death. The sea (an unchanging sea) offers the concept of permanence, yet in the setting of constant regeneration.

In his personal memoirs of his life in Algeria, Albert Camus gives 'sun' and 'sea' unique tonalities. If we now look at his imaginative writing, we can see how they gain a symbolical significance; in other words, they achieve another dimension while maintaining strong affinities with the emotional experience with which they are related in the essays. The significance of "sun" and "sea" in this fashion is best measured not by a mechanical tally of their frequency of occurrence, but by the context in which they appear. Indeed, these images tend to emerge fully as symbols only in highly significant portions of novels and plays. In such passages, they serve as the focal point of a metaphorical event or circumstance. In some cases, the author's overarching metaphysical goal may provide a meaningful criterion for assessing the force of his imagery. In general, physical rest and mental serenity are associated with dusk and moonlight in Camus' work, but violent sensation and the desire to destroy are associated with the extreme heat and light of a Mediterranean day.

Albert Camus' first novel, *The Stranger* (1942), clarifies this tendency in a series of related events and provides a stunning illustration of how the sun is transformed into a symbol. The novel's pivotal events begin when the principal character, Meursault, goes for a walk on a beach near Algiers with two acquaintances, Raymond and Masson, after an early lunch. It is not even lunchtime, yet the glare of the sun off the sea is described as intolerable. The three men walk steadily until they see two Arabs in the distance, with whom Raymond has previously been connected due to his mistreatment of a prior Arab woman. Raymond informs his two buddies on what roles they should play in the case of an altercation. Meursault remarks "the overheated sand now seems red to me" as the Arabs approach. In this phrase, a clear physical reference to the sun's strong light on the sand foreshadows, figuratively, the violence that will occur. The tint of the sun under the sun's rays represents the shedding of blood. A fight breaks out with the Arabs, in which Raymond and Masson are implicated. Blows are exchanged before Raymond's opponent draws a knife, injuring him in the arm and mouth. Both Arabs then retreated warily behind the brandished knife, eventually taking to their heels. While they retreat, the three Frenchmen stand motionless. Masson and Meursault help Raymond in returning to the hut, and Meursault promises to explain what happened to Masson's wife and his own mistress, Marie, who were both abandoned in the hut. Meanwhile, Masson takes Raymond to a nearby doctor for treatment before returning to the hut. Raymond insists on "taking the air" upon his return, and when Masson and Meursault, concerned by the likelihood of another battle, offer to accompany him, he erupts in wrath. Despite his rants, Meursault ultimately joins him. They stroll along the beach for a while, Meursault becoming increasingly aware of the bright sun that reflects off the sand in dazzling splinters of light. When the two men arrive at a tiny stream at the beach's edge, they discover two Arabs sleeping there, one of whom is playing a monotonous tune on a reed pipe. The sun and silence convey the oppressiveness and fatality of the surroundings, yet the faint sound of the stream and pipe notes appear to express the possibilities of life. Raymond, eager to confront his Arab, flees abruptly, and a conflict is avoided. Raymond and Meursault return to the hut, but Meursault, as reluctant as ever to communicate with other humans and bewildered by the sun, does not enter and instead heads to the beach for a solo walk. During this stroll, the sun is portrayed as a malevolent presence. The heat that exudes from it causes his body to stiffen forcefully, as if he were fighting a tremendous opponent. Camus used visuals to depict light reflections. The photographs accurately convey the sun's aggressive

nature. Meursault longs for shelter and sees the rock behind which the Arabs have vanished. As he approaches, he finds to his surprise that Raymond's attacker is lying alone. The encounter between these two guys has now become the focal point of a complex vision of light, with the sun and the drive to violence inextricably linked. The destructive act occurs under the umbrella of the sun and appears to be a simple extension of its effect. The shape of the Arab dances before Meursault's eyes in the burning air, and the sea is as molten metal. At this time, the prospect of human initiative is proposed, but the sun overwhelms the human will.

**I realized that I only had to turn round and it would all be over. But the whole beach was reverberating in the sun and pressing against me from behind. I took a few steps towards the spring. The Arab didn't move. Even now he was still some distance away. Perhaps because of the shadow on his face, he seemed to be laughing. I waited. The sun was beginning to scorch my cheeks and I felt drops of sweat were gathering in my eyebrows. It was the same sun as on the day of my mother's funeral, and again it was my forehead that was hurting me most and all the veins were throbbing at once beneath the skin. And because I couldn't stand this burning feeling any longer, I moved forward. I knew it was stupid and I wouldn't get out of the sun with one step. But I took that step, just one step, forward. And this time, without sitting up, the Arab drew his knife and held it out towards me in the sun. The light leapt up off the steel and it was like a long, flashing sword lunging at my forehead. At the same time all the sweat that had gathered in my eyebrows suddenly ran down over my eyelids, covering them with a dense layer of warm moisture. My eyes were blinded by this veil of salty tears. All I could feel were the cymbals the sun was clashing against my forehead and, indistinctly, the dazzling spear still leaping up off the knife in front of me. It was like a red hot blade gnawing at my eyelashes and gouging out my stinging eye. That was when everything shook. The sea swept ashore a great breath of fire. The sky seemed to be splitting from end to end and raining down sheets of flame. My whole being went tense and I tightened my grip on the gun. The trigger gave, I felt the underside of the polished butt and it was there, in that sharp but deafening noise, that it all started. I shook off the sweat and the sun. I realized that I'd destroyed the balance of the day and the perfect silence of the beach where I'd been happy. And I fired four more times at a lifeless body and the bullets sank in without leaving a mark. And it was like giving four sharp knocks at the door of unhappiness.**

The sun reminds Meursault of the heat on the day of his mother's funeral, reinforcing the link between death and the sun. The blood rushes through Meursault's veins. The foci of light multiply; first, a flash from the blade of the knife drawn by the Arab, [The light splashed out on the steel, and it was like a long glittering blade striking me on the forehead]; then, a shadow of light through the beads of sweat that tremble on Meursault's eyelashes and fall across his vision like a mist; and finally, the glitter of the blade, the reflection of which painfully probes the eyes. The flames appears to shower from the sky. Meursault aims the fatal shots.

The sun's direct and indirect manifestations serve as a baleful focus for three related occurrences, with the image of light becoming more prevalent as the events reach their catastrophic culmination. The sun, which was experienced with such pagan receptivity in the early essays, returns to dominate these passages of "The Stranger" and connects them in the sense that it represents violence and destruction. The key to this symbolic usage of the sun is the metaphysical goal that drives Camus' work. The entire novel is a philosophical allegory for the ludicrous universe depicted by Camus in his other work, The Myth of Sisyphus. Meursault represents man's perpetual estrangement from the world, and this conception is reinforced when Camus, lending the sun this destructive influence, absolves man of responsibility--and thus guilt--by reducing him to the status of an irresponsible element

in nature. In this way, the notion of the absurdity of life, which is the primary and ruling irony of so much of Camus' writing, is highlighted and given dramatic color.

Camus' play *The Misunderstanding* (1944) also uses the sun as a metaphor of destruction. The play is another extended allegory about the ludicrous cosmos, and the dramatic tension stems from the same irony. A mother and daughter (Martha) who run an inn in a rural part of Czechoslovakia murder wealthy guests who stay with them. The son of the house (Jan), who left home to seek his fortune, returns many years later as a prosperous man, accompanied by his wife (Maria) and child. He arrives at the inn without revealing his motionless body, which was dragged to the river and dumped in at night. When his wife comes looking for him the next day, she reveals his name; Martha describes the events of the night but does not provide contrition or sympathy to the heartbroken lady. She expresses the tragic irony of the situation. This is a clear metaphysical irony, but the cause driving the two ladies to murder is strangely mundane. It is the yearning to collect enough money from their victims' pockets in order to move to a simpler and more carefree life by the sea in a warmer environment. The sun emerges as a metaphor of fate and destruction in relation to Martha's desires, because the land to which she wishes to escape is symbolized exclusively by the sun and water. These two symbols appear repeatedly in her thoughts, tempting her to commit additional murders. It is worth noting, however, that the objective of Martha's dreams is symbolized by the sea in the sense that it provides emancipation (from toil and the ravages of her native climate), but by the sun in the sense that it provides black oblivion for her previous activities. As a result, when the mother refers to this distant haven, she implies that "the sun devoured everything." The sun flares in Martha's consciousness, laughing her way to ruin. It is damaging in two ways: first, it can only be enjoyed over the corpses of Martha's victims; second, the sought power it emanates annihilates conscience and thought, depriving man of his humanity. Camus' work has a mismatch, or at least an unsolved tension, between his literary sensibility and his philosophical objectives, particularly as exemplified in *The Rebel* (1951), a study that unifies and develops a number of previously introduced topics. *The Rebel* strives to establish a classical point of equilibrium to which contemporary concerns of action and change might be referred. It appears to be dedicated to an aphorism found in the drama "State of Siege": "There is no justice, but there are limits". In fact, the mood of *The Rebel* contradicts Camus' regular manner of feeling, which is passionate and deeply subjective, by emphasizing constraint, limitation, and moderation. Camus' most natural mode of communication is lyrical, which means very personal and expressive, and this feeling permeates his prose method, resulting in poetic overtones that stem from the richness of his imagery as well as his sense of rhythm and music in a phrase. It is true that what is perceived as Camus' authentic way is sometimes purposefully veiled. Thus, the prose style of "The Stranger" reveals Camus' conscious subordination of his innate poetry to the demands of his theme, namely, portraying a sense of absurdity. Similarly, "The Plague" is written in a somewhat dry and methodical manner, which is well suited to the author's satirical objective. Nonetheless, a peculiar poetry pervades both novels, frequently erupting in periods of great lyrical force, particularly when Camus introduces an elegiac note. In contrast, the language used in the plays is frequently lyrical. Indeed, there are occasions in "State of Siege" and "The Just Assassins" when lyricism devolves into overblown rhetoric, undermining the author's achievement. If I've gone into detail about this, it's to emphasize the Neo-Romanticism that exists in Camus' writing, as evidenced by the recurring figure of the Romantic rebel in his plays--"Caligula" and "Ivan Kaliayev," for example--and his tendency to exalt the life of the senses. Camus' use of sea symbolism must be viewed via this literary lens. At this juncture, it may be instructive to recall what a famous contemporary poet recently remarked regarding the images of the sea and desert in Romantic literature.

**As places of freedom and solitude the sea and the desert are symbolically same. In other respects, however, they are opposites, for example , the desert is the dried up place, i.e. the place where life has ended, the Omega of temporal; existence....The sea, on the other hand is the Alpha of existences, the symbol of potentiality.**

Camus thus approaches traditional Romantic usage of the sea through the symbolism of freedom that he associated with it, but he differs from many other romantic writers who utilized it as a literary metaphor disconnected from

their own experience. Camus chooses the sea as a symbol because it represents a deeply personal experience for him.

Sea-bathing is one of the clerk's greatest pleasures in 'The Stranger'. His first hesitant touches of Marie take place near the water, which provides him with immense physical pleasure. However, as the narrative progresses, the water becomes more than just a place where physical restraints evaporate. To Meursault, who is awaiting trial in prison, the sea represents his desire for escape. He links the state of being free with the sea and the pleasures it provides—the action of sprinting down to the sea, the sound of the waves, the sense of his body slipping into the water. The sea thus becomes a metaphor of liberation, in contrast to the limiting walls of his prison cell. In *The Plague*, one of the effects of the epidemic is the closure of Oran's beaches and swimming facilities. Maritime operations end entirely, and the port is desolate, blocked off by military pickets. As a result, while the sea is present, it exists in the background, and as *The Plague* worsens, the sea's presence becomes less genuine in the imaginations of the town's residents. In the early weeks, the sea remains a real presence for them. Because it offers as a tangible memory of a connection with the outside world, they feel sure of renewing contact in the near future. But, when *The Plague* takes hold in all its horrifying permanence, the sea fades from the imaginations of those who no longer dare to dream of freedom and are only concerned with survival within the town's imprisoning walls. The sea, as a metaphor of freedom, becomes less real as the narrative progresses. That's why one of the later episodes of *The Plague* appears unusually meaningful. Dr. Rieux, accompanied by one of his volunteer aides, Tarrou, caps off an exhausting day with a visit to one of his regular patients, an elderly man suffering from severe asthma. They make their way from the sick room to a rooftop terrace. It's November, and the nighttime air is pleasant, the sky clear and starry. In this serene setting, Tarrou is moved to explain his motivations for joining the voluntary organization formed to combat the epidemic, as well as to reveal something about his personality, principal, and aspirations, which he defines as an attempt to become a saint without God. This lengthy personal confession forges new links of closeness, mutual sympathy, and respect between the two men, and Tarrou recommends that a dip in the sea would be an appropriate vow of their relationship. Rieux immediately agrees, and they head toward the harbor, obtaining access to the quayside thanks to their special permits. For the first time in months, they become acutely aware of the changing presence of the water. They plunge into the water and strike out with steady, synchronized strokes. They feel they are finally "alone, far from the world, at last free of the city and the plague." After the swim, they return to town, full of a weird and secret happiness and ready to begin the struggle against the epidemic. It's tough not to feel like this episode is a symbolic ritual. The leap into the water is simultaneously an act of purification from the plague (in the sense that the epidemic represents suffering, evil, and death), a rite of friendship, and a method of regaining or being recalled to freedom. In this manner, the water may be said to reestablish itself as a metaphor of freedom for these two guys, instilling them with a renewed desire to be free. The sea, which had previously been hidden, remote, and ineffective, has suddenly become actual and effective as a symbol of freedom in the center of a city subjugated to the plague's arbitrariness and brutal determinism.

Camus' play "State of Siege" (1948) emphasizes the symbolic role of the sea more than any other of his works. This drama shares apparent and startling similarities with the novel *The Plague*, and, like the novel, it can be read on multiple levels. It is a metaphysical play in which the symbol represents man's unending plight in the face of evil and death. It can be seen as a symbolic account of an enemy occupation during a war, or as a broader protest against authoritarian institutions. The onset of the plague in Cadiz is foreshadowed by the startling passage of a comet, which temporarily disrupts a society plagued by habit and lethargy, and is portrayed by a Chorus. The occupants rapidly regain their calm, and the Chorus expresses its enthusiasm for the physical pleasures of life and the abundance of the planet. In this pleasant ambiance, Diego and Victoria are revealed to be having a moment of joyful contentment. To cap off the festivities, a troop of performers begins performing a farce in a large square. The Governor of the City enters and addresses the inhabitants in terms that denounce the spirit of change while eloquently defending the principle of utter stagnation. It is at this point that the epidemic takes its first victim, one

of the performers. Doctors identify the plague, causing alarm in all classes. The Governor made a poor attempt to hide the realities of the situation. The pestilence issues his edicts with the help of a terrifying female Secretary and some existing order members. This imposes a succession of dictatorial measures on the inhabitants of Cadiz, and their scope becomes apparent to the citizens. They seek to leave the city before all of the gates are closed. At this important point in the action, the chorus expresses the people's yearning desire for independence in lines that clearly envision the sea as the source and symbol of freedom: "We are the sons of the sea." We must run to meet the wind. To the sea! Finally, the sea, the open sea, the water that cleanses, the breeze that liberates!"

This symbolism reappears in the second half of "State of Siege". This section of the play is dominated by a mordant satire on totalitarian bureaucracy, followed by the fate of Diego, who is crushed by fear in his first challenge to the power of the plague but later returns to the fight. In the second confrontation, Diego realizes that the epidemic is useless against those who have abandoned their fear and accepted their "sacred duty" to revolt. He turns to one of the town's residents, who has been gagged as part of the plague policy, and removes his gag. There is a period of uncomfortable tension before the released man speaks, turning his head skywards in an interrogation posture. The sky gradually lightens, and a breath of breeze rustles the curtains of a windless metropolis. It is the wind from the sea because it comes from the sea, and it is the harbinger of liberty. This symbolic action provides the dramatic conclusion for the play's second act. The final portion of "State of Siege" details the Plague's desperate attempts to undermine Diego's early win. The subject is debatable for a while, but when Diego resolves to give up his own life in order to resurrect the Stricken Victoria, his act of sacrifice results in The Plague's ultimate defeat. Even the ironic arrival of the Governor and his coterie, symbolizing the return of a corrupt and reactionary authority, does not completely undermine Diego's sacrifice. Their reappearance, however, elicits a final outburst of anger and scorn from Nada, a strange creature who represents, as implied by his punning Spanish name, the spirit of nihilism. In a final act of defiance, he throws himself into the sea, and a fisherman reports on his dying struggle in the play's final scene. It is undoubtedly significant that in these final lines, the sea is depicted as a sort of living, raging creature devouring an enemy of human freedom, and that it is apostrophized as the symbol of men in revolt-"Oh tide, oh sea, home of rebels, these are your people who never yield"-men exercising their liberty.

## CONCLUSION

Finally, we may remark that when Camus particularizes, when he fixes his gaze on the object with an innocent expression, his images are new and telling. When he goes beyond the level of sense experience, he has less success in achieving the union of "disparate elements" that characterizes innovative and unforgettable picture. There is nothing unique about the use of "sun" and "sea" as symbols of destruction and liberation.

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