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Research Paper

Staging the Absurd: Camus's Myth of Sisyphus in Kiarostami's Taste of Cherry

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Abstract

Abbas Kiarostami's 1997 film, *Taste of Cherry*, presents a profound philosophical problem through its famously controversial ending. By abruptly shifting from the protagonist's existential crisis to behind-the-scenes footage of the film's own production, Kiarostami shatters the narrative illusion, forcing the audience to confront questions about artifice, reality, and meaning. This paper undertakes a comparative analysis of Kiarostami's cinematic work and Albert Camus's philosophical essay, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, to argue that this ending is more than a stylistic choice. Using Camus's specific formulation of the absurd—particularly his concepts of revolt and the absurd creator—as its primary theoretical lens, this study examines how both works grapple with the human condition in a world devoid of inherent meaning. The analysis concludes that *Taste of Cherry* performs a complete staging of Camus's philosophy. It first dramatizes the core responses to the absurd through its character encounters and then, through its meta-ending, embodies the ultimate act of the absurd creator: the repudiation of the artwork itself. In doing so, Kiarostami's film becomes not just a depiction of the absurd, but a direct, cinematic confrontation with it.

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مقاله پژوهشی

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چکیده

فیلم «طعم گیلاس» (۱۳۷۶) ساختۀ عباس کیارستمی، با بهره‌گیری از پایانی جنجال‌برانگیز، مسئله‌ای فلسفی و بنیادین را پیش می‌کشد. کیارستمی با گذار ناگهانی از بحران وجودی شخصیت اصلی به تصاویر پشت‌صحنۀ فرآیند فیلم‌سازی، ساختار روایی را فرو می‌ریزد و مخاطب را ناگزیر می‌سازد تا با پرسش‌هایی دربارۀ تصنّع، واقعیت و معنا رویارو شود. این مقاله با رویکردی تطبیقی میان سینمای کیارستمی و مقالۀ فلسفی «افسانۀ سیزیف» اثر آلبر کامو، استدلال می‌کند که پایان فیلم صرفاً یک انتخاب فرمی یا زیبایی‌شناختی نیست؛ بلکه کنشی فلسفی و اندیشیده است. با تکیه بر خوانشی از نظریۀ پوچی کامو – به‌ویژه مفاهیم «شورش» و «آفرینش‌گر پوچ» – این پژوهش بررسی می‌کند که چگونه هر دو اثر، با زیستن در جهانی عاری از معنا، دست‌وپنجه نرم می‌کنند. این تحلیل نشان می‌دهد که «طعم گیلاس» نه‌تنها بازنمایی‌ای از اندیشۀ کاموست، بلکه به‌گونه‌ای جامع، آن را مجسم می‌سازد: فیلم، نخست از رهگذر مواجهه‌های شخصیت اصلی با دیگران، واکنش‌های انسان به پوچی را به تصویر می‌کشد؛ سپس، با عبور ناگهانی به متا-روایت، کنش نهایی «خالق پوچ» را محقّق می‌سازد: نفی خود اثر هنری. در این مسیر، فیلم کیارستمی نه صرفاً تصویری از پوچی، بلکه یک مواجهۀ مستقیم، آگاهانه و سینمایی با آن است.

واژه‌های کلیدی: *گفتمان پوچی، آلبر کامو، عباس کیارستمی، افسانه سیزیف، طعم گیلاس.*

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1. Introduction

To understand Camus's secular concept of the absurd, one must first engage with its theological roots in the work of Søren Kierkegaard. In his dense and psychological treatise, *The Sickness unto Death*, Kierkegaard introduces despair not as a fleeting emotion, but as a fundamental sickness of the self—a spiritual illness so universal that perhaps "there lives not one single man who after all is not to some extent in despair" (20). This despair arises from the very nature of the human self, which Kierkegaard defines as a "synthesis of the infinite and the finite, of the temporal and the eternal" (9). The torment of the human condition is that this self, which "must either have constituted itself or have been constituted by another," can only find peace and balance "by relating itself to that Power which constituted the whole relation" (10). For Kierkegaard, the only cure for this "sickness unto death" is a "leap of faith." True faith is the state where, "by relating itself to its own self and by willing to be itself the self is grounded transparently in the Power which posited it" (11). It is precisely at this point, Kierkegaard's insistence on a theological solution, that Albert Camus's own philosophy finds its departure. This highlights the fundamental divergence between existentialism and absurdism. While both confront a meaningless world, existentialism seeks to resolve the crisis by creating a new meaning, whether through faith or authentic choice. Absurdism, in contrast, insists on living within the crisis, calling for a rebellion against our condition without the comfort of illusions. While Camus inherited the Kierkegaardian focus on the individual's agonizing struggle, he fundamentally rejected the leap of faith as a valid response, instead of framing it as a form of philosophical suicide. *In The Myth of Sisyphus*, He famously begins by asserting that "there is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide" (11), emphasizing that the fundamental question of existence is whether life is worth living in the face of its inherent absurdity. He defines this as the "divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting" (6), a confrontation born "between the human need and the unreasonable silence of the world" (20). From this starting point, he systematically rejects what he considers to be inauthentic escapes from this condition. He dismisses physical suicide as a form of surrender, arguing that it "settles the absurd" rather than

confronts it, and is ultimately "acceptance at its extreme" (36). Similarly, he critiques the leap of faith into religion as a philosophical suicide. For Camus, this is an intellectual evasion that "negates itself and tends to transcend itself in its very negation" (15), fabricating hope by deifying the very irrationality that crushes the human spirit. In place of these escapes, Camus champions a defiant revolt. This is the "constant confrontation between man and his own obscurity" (36), a struggle embodied by his ultimate hero, Sisyphus. This revolt involves a lucid acceptance of the absurd, lived out with a passion that finds meaning in the struggle itself, for "The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart" (78).

Applying this defiant philosophy to Abbas Kiarostami's *Taste of Cherry* requires navigating a rich body of criticism focused on the film's unique form and cultural context. Critical approaches to the film often highlight the philosophical implications of its cinematic style. Matthew Abbott, for instance, in his work *Abbas Kiarostami and Film-Philosophy*, offers a vital entry point into the philosophical questions that animate Kiarostami's films, particularly *Taste of Cherry* and *Close-Up*. Abbott explores the themes of reality, authenticity, and the nature of film as a medium that both reflects and shapes our perception of the world (8). Mentioning the controversial ending, he examines how Kiarostami's work challenges traditional notions of storytelling by blurring the lines between fiction and documentary, creating a space where viewers are compelled to question the nature of truth and fiction:

> In such moments, ones claims to knowledge – to tell the difference between the real and the fake, the authentic and the artificial; to claim a basic level of insight into a films characters, their motivations and eventual destiny; to understand the meaning and dramatic stakes of what one is watching – are paralyzed by the emergence of a disorienting reflexivity. Yet this disorientation is not simply a distancing: in certain important respects – and this is part of what is remarkable about it – it draws the viewer more deeply into the films (2).

Abbott further illuminates the influence of philosopher Stanley Cavell on Kiarostami's work. He highlights Cavell's perspective of philosophy as a "therapeutic one" (5) rather than a theoretical one, particularly in relation to skepticism and the human condition. Ultimately, he puts forward the central claim that for the unique capacity of Kiarostami's films, as a medium for philosophical thought

that shows his "interest in the philosophical enigmas" (22) in an Iranian context. Shifting from Abbott's wider philosophical scope, Hamish Ford offers a more granular analysis of Kiarostami's cinematic techniques. His analysis highlights Kiarostami's deviation from Western cinematic norms through the director's distinctive formal techniques, notably the use of cars as a cinematic device that simultaneously destabilizes perception and acts as an ethically ambiguous mechanism. This fascination with the cinematic application of automobiles is not merely an inventive workaround to authentically portray human interaction between male and female characters within a perceived private space. Instead, it transcends these boundaries, adhering to the post-revolutionary censorship regulations of Iranian cinema regarding the representation of women (11), thereby adding another layer of complexity to Kiarostami's unique cinematic approach. He suggests that Kiarostami's work, by refusing to provide a clear subjective perspective, invites a more active viewer engagement, leading to a diverse array of personal interpretations and "co-authorship" (6) of the film's meaning. Taking a uniquely literary approach, Khatereh Sheibani investigates the influence of modern Persian poetry on the cinematic works of Abbas Kiarostami, highlighting the aesthetic parallels between Kiarostami's films and the poetry of Forough Farrokhzad and Sohrab Sepehri[1]. Sheibani examines the concept of "de-experiencing" reality, where Kiarostami's films, such as *Through the Olive Trees* and *Where Is the Friend's House?*, employ minimalist techniques and non-professional actors to evoke Sepehri's philosophy of a novel outlook, creating a humanist approach to cinema that blurs the lines between documentary and fiction (509). In this tradition, Kiarostami directs his lens towards the essence of reality, therefore challenging the viewer and their preconceived notions. This approach, Sheibani argues, echoes a segment from Sohrab's *The Sound of Water Steps*:

> The eyes should get cleansed, we should see in a different way
> Words should be washed
> Words should be the same as wind, words should be the same as rain (515)

She further discusses the evolution of Persian poetry, which sought to reflect contemporary social and political realities, and how this shift influenced Kiarostami's film language (510). In the end, she

concludes by considering the universal appeal of art that transcends cultural and political boundaries, as exemplified by both Farrokhzad's bold, controversial poetry and Kiarostami's cinema, which eschews immediate political issues in favor of exploring existential questions that resonate on a global scale (537). In this regard, one could posit that Sheibani's perspective aligns closely with the viewpoints of Hamid Dabashi who upholds "The cosmopolitan worldliness embedded in Persian literary humanism" (305).

Scholarly engagement with Camus's concept of the absurd has long pushed beyond a monolithic view of nihilism to explore its ethical and life-affirming dimensions. This focus was evident as early as 1956, when Perry Alva Bialor, in a direct rebuttal to critics who saw only "horror and hopelessness" (92) in Camus's work, argued that the philosophy is fundamentally a profound assertion of life's value. Bialor contended that for Camus, "life is man's prime assertion to which he is bound by ties of love and necessity" (92). The key to this interpretation lies in a crucial distinction: for Camus, "A total absence of hope is certainly not despair" (93). More recently, Craig DeLancey has shown the evolution of Camus's concept of absurdity. While acknowledging a "significant change in his views on the consequences of the absurd" (1), DeLancey reveals this consistency by clarifying Camus's multiple uses of the term absurd, identifying at least three distinct meanings: a world that is "lacking a purpose"; a world that is "lacking an explanation"; and, most foundationally, the "tension between purpose and purposelessness" (1) that defines the human condition. He posits that Camus's thought evolved significantly, particularly due to his "experience during the Nazi occupation" (9). This led Camus to refine his views and construct a new, robust argument against suicide. He moved from an early embrace of maximizing the "quantity of experiences for the quality" (8) to a later conviction that there is inherent meaning in humanity itself. As Camus wrote in his *Letter to a German Friend*, "I continue to believe that this world has no ultimate meaning. But I know that something in it has a meaning and that is man, because he is the only creature to insist on having one" (9). However, we must resist a purely biographical reading. To do so risks flattening his philosophy

into a mere reaction to historical events, overlooking the timeless, existential concerns that preoccupied him from his earliest writings.

Yet, while existing scholarship has expertly analyzed the film's formal reflexivity and its poetic lineage, it has not fully connected these insights to the film's deliberate, philosophical structure. Mr. Badii's dramatic journey is often treated separately from the radical implications of the film's final moments. Also, rigorous and sustained analysis of the film through the specific framework of Camus's *The Myth of Sisyphus* remains surprisingly underexplored. This paper will bridge that divide. We will argue that *Taste of Cherry* performs a complete staging of Camus's philosophy in two distinct movements. First, it uses the encounters with the soldier, the seminarist, and the taxidermist to dramatize the core responses to the absurd—avoidance, philosophical suicide, and revolt. Then, having fully explored the problem through its characters, the film moves beyond mere depiction to embody the ultimate act of the absurd creator: the repudiation of its own work through its self-aware ending. By analyzing this interplay between the character-driven narrative and the final meta-cinematic gesture, this paper will demonstrate how Kiarostami forces his audience into a state of lucid, defiant uncertainty, which is the very essence of the absurd condition.

2. Three Dialogues with Death

Abbas Kiarostami (1940-2016) was an Iranian filmmaker and a leading figure in the Iranian New Wave. His cinema is celebrated for its profound humanism, philosophical depth, and innovative, minimalist style. Kiarostami often fused scripted narrative with documentary-like realism, using non-professional actors and real locations to create an authentic, unvarnished feel. His films frequently draw attention to their own construction. He might show the camera, the crew, or the process of filming, breaking the illusion to make the audience contemplate the nature of art and reality. Many of his films are structured as physical and spiritual journeys (often by car through the Iranian landscape), which become metaphors for a search for meaning, truth, or connection. He rarely provides easy answers or closed endings. His films invite active participation from the viewer to interpret, question, and find their own meaning. At their core, his films are deeply

compassionate studies of human nature, focusing on the struggles, resilience, and dignity of ordinary people, often children.

Taste of Cherry is the quintessential Kiarostami film and won the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival. It perfectly embodies all the themes of his filmography. The film follows Mr. Badii (Homayoun Ershadi), a man who drives through the hilly, arid outskirts of Tehran. He is searching for someone—anyone—to assist him with a solemn task. He picks up various passengers (a young Kurdish soldier, an Afghan security guard, and an old Turkish taxidermist), each from different social and ethnic backgrounds, and propositions them. His request is simple: he has already chosen a grave and plans to commit suicide by taking pills and lying in it that night. He needs someone to come to the grave the next morning. If Mr. Badii is alive, they should help him out; if he is dead, they should shovel twenty spadefuls of earth to bury him. He offers a significant sum of money for this service.

In the *Taste of Cherry*, Kiarostami employs the barren, desolate landscapes of Tehran's rural terrain in a palette of muted yellows and oranges as a visual metaphor for Badii's inner void, emphasizing the desolation and absurdity of his life (see Fig. 1). Interestingly enough, this depiction is seen "as a visual equivalent of T. S. Eliot's long and difficult poem *The Waste Land*, which coincidentally opens with a section titled *The Burial of the Dead*" (Behnam, 2024). One could even stretch this notion further and interpret this lifeless landscape as a visual echo of the poignant lines in Forough Farrokhzad's *Window*: "Don't you see? This trembling ground - underneath your bare feet - is lonelier than you" (47-50). This affinity with Farrokhzad is not coincidental; Kiarostami's deep engagement with her work is made explicit in another of his films, *The Wind Will Carry Us*, which takes its very title from her poetry. The arid terrain that Badii traverses in his car is more than just a backdrop; it becomes a character in itself. In light of these observations, we need to inquire: how do these elements relate to Camus's philosophy? The significance of understanding nature stems not from Camus's explicit discussion of nature in the traditional sense, such as flora, fauna, or landscapes, but rather from his exploration of the nature of human existence.

Fig. 1. The barren, orange-hued landscape serves as a visual metaphor for Mr. Badii's inner state of despair. Taste of Cherry (dir. Abbas Kiarostami, 1997).

As we transition from one art form, particularly text, to a visually-driven medium, it becomes crucial for the diegetic space (the inner world of the character) to correspond with the mimetic space (the outer world). Paradoxically, to truly grasp the similarities between the philosophies of Camus and Kiarostami, we must first acknowledge and understand their differences. Kiarostami's work is characterized by a minimalist and contemplative style. The film's slow pace, long takes, and sparse dialogue create a meditative atmosphere that invites viewers to engage deeply with Badii's existential journey. This is when the similarities come into play, amplified is the absurdity of Mr. Badii's situation, drawing Kiarostami closer to Camus's assertion that absurd art must be content to describe and not to explain. Throughout the movie, Mr. Badii's interactions with various characters - the soldier, the seminarist, and the taxidermist - each reflect different responses to the absurd. The soldier is a young, shy Kurdish man, new to his military service and far from his home where he was a farmer. He represents a raw, instinctual response to Mr. Badii's proposition. His life is governed by the simple and strict order of the barracks, and his primary concern is getting back on time. When confronted with the reality of death, he does not engage in a philosophical or moral debate. Instead, his reaction is one of physical fear, symbolizing innocence and the body's natural, pre-rational revolt against the horror of the grave:

> Mr. Badii: You can't throw earth in a hole?
> Soldier: Yes, but not on top of someone. Not on someone's head. (00:26:04)

The soldier's fear is palpable (see Fig. 2); he avoids fully facing what death means, particularly in the context of actively participating in it. This avoidance reflects a common human reaction to the absurd: the reluctance to face the ultimate meaninglessness of existence and the discomfort with acknowledging death head-on. This mirrors Camus's discussion of physical suicide, where individuals might choose death to escape the absurd but, unlike the soldier, here fear prevents even this escape, leading instead to a refusal to engage with the existential crisis.

Fig. 2. The soldier's flight from the car visualizes his instinctual, bodily revolt against Mr. Badii's request. Taste of Cherry (dir. Abbas Kiarostami, 1997).

The second encounter is with an Afghan[2] man who is in Iran studying to be a theologian. He represents organized religion and metaphysical systems that provide ready-made answers to life's most difficult questions, but which may fail to address individual suffering. The seminarist embodies philosophical suicide, offering religious faith as a solution to existential despair, much like the leap of faith critiqued by Camus:

> Seminarist: The Koran says you shall not kill yourself. What's the difference between killing someone and killing yourself? Killing yourself is killing. (00:54:23)

He tries to reason with Mr. Badii, but his arguments are based on an impersonal, theological framework rather than personal experience. When Mr. Badii proposes his plan, the seminarist counters with arguments grounded in faith and the sanctity of life, asserting that suicide is a sin and that Mr. Badii should seek solace in religious belief. The seminarist's objections offer comfort and a semblance of meaning, but according to Camus, this is an evasion of the true nature of the

absurd. The seminarist's reliance on religious doctrine to counter Mr. Badii's existential despair illustrates the tendency to deny the reality of the absurd by resorting to an illusory framework of meaning provided by faith. However, prior to the seminarian's argument, it's worth noting that the protagonist's dialogue aptly embodies the concept of the absurd. This dialogue also could show the underlying parallels between the philosophies of Camus and Kiarostami's character. Mr. Badii assertion, "But there comes a time when a man can't go on. He's exhausted and can't wait for God to act. So he decides to act himself" (00:48:30), echoes the crux of Camus's dilemma when he posits that "judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy" (11). This highlights the pivotal moment when an individual must confront the inherent meaninglessness of existence. Camus describes this confrontation as the realization of the absurd, a recognition that life is devoid of inherent purpose, which places individuals in a state of tension. Mr. Badii, exhausted and unable to continue in his current state, embodies this realization. His decision to act on his despair by contemplating suicide directly aligns with Camus's notion that facing the absurd often leads one to question whether to continue living despite the lack of ultimate meaning. Furthermore, Mr. Badii's reflection, "But being unhappy is a great sin too. When you're unhappy, you hurt other people. Isn't that a sin too? When you hurt others, isn't that a sin?" (00:51:20) unpacks the ethical ramifications of living in perpetual misery. Camus argues that the absurd hero is "as much through his passions as through his torture" (108), acknowledging the meaningless nature of life yet chooses to live with defiance and without false hope. Third and the most important encounter, the taxidermist is an elderly man who works stuffing animals at the Natural History Museum. He represents a form of wisdom grounded not in instinct or dogma, but in a long life of lived experience. Because his profession involves working with death every day, he is the only one who is not frightened by Badii's request. Instead of offering abstract rules, he shares a deeply personal story of his own past suicide attempt, which was thwarted by finding unexpected solace in the simplicity of eating mulberries and witnessing the sunrise (see Fig. 3):

> Taxidermist: I had left to kill myself, and I came back with mulberries. A mulberry saved my life. (01:06:28)

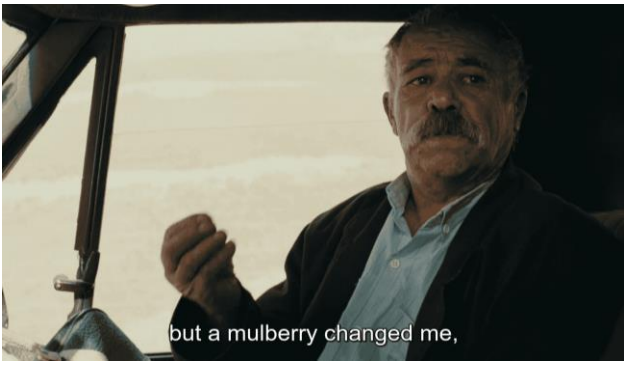

Fig. 3. The taxidermist, Mr. Bagheri, recounts how the sensory experience of a mulberry provided an argument for life, embodying the Camusian concept of revolt. Taste of Cherry (dir. Abbas Kiarostami, 1997).

This type of humorous epiphany could be taking its cue from works of Samuel Beckett, especially *Waiting for Godot,* where the interplay between tragedy and comic absurdity is taken to its extreme in order to emphasize the inherent contradiction in human efforts to impose meaning on an indifferent reality. In that play, the potential act of suicide is turned into an crude joke:

Estragon: What do we do now?
Vladimir: Wait.
Estragon: Yes, but while waiting?
Vladimir: What about hanging ourselves?
Estragon: Hmm. It'd give us an erection.

Here the humor does not diminish the weight of their despair, instead the endless waiting for a figure (Godot) who never arrives is not a state of inaction but a deliberate, if unconscious, rejection of the finality of suicide. Estragon and Vladimir's waiting is suggestive of the human condition as Camus sees it: even when confronted with an unresponsive universe, the struggle to find meaning continues. In this regard, Badii's journey is also one of waiting—the waiting for an answer, a response from the world regarding his fate. However there is a key difference in Kiarostami's approach. He is more moderate and optimistic towards human nature. He allows moments of empathy, connection, and quiet beauty to shine through the narrative. For example, even as Badii encounters rejection and indifference, there are subtle hints that human interactions are not entirely without compassion. Thus, Taxidermist's important speech aligns with Camus's idea that even within the absurd, moments of

beauty and simple pleasures can provide temporary reprieves that justify continued existence. He argues that the absurd hero finds meaning through rebellion and by embracing the fleeting joys life offers, rather than through the pursuit of ultimate answers or escape from suffering. Furthermore, the taxidermist's emphasis on changing one's perspective, "You have to change your outlook and change the world. Be optimistic. Look at things positively" (01:08:38), underscores Camus's concept of revolt. In the face of the absurd, Camus advocates for an internal transformation where one accepts the absurd condition without resorting to nihilism. The absurd hero, like Sisyphus, must continuously confront the absurd and find personal significance through the very act of living. This scene culminates in an appeal from the taxidermist to embrace life's simple pleasures and natural wonders, "Have you ever looked at the sky when you wake in the morning? At dawn, don't you want to see the sun rise? The red and yellow of the sun at sunset, don't you want to see that anymore?" (01:10:57). For Camus, this appreciation of beauty in the mundane is a form of rebellion against the absurd.

3. The Weight of Two Stones: Kiarostami as Absurd Creator

While it appears that the taxidermist has successfully triumphed over the absurdity, Mr. Badii's situation remains unclear. Nevertheless, Mr. Badii's plea, "When you come in the morning, bring two small stones and throw them at me. I might just be asleep and still alive" (01:23:38), reveals a yearning for some form of certainty, a definitive answer to whether he should continue living or if death has taken him. Drawing a parallel with Camus' Sisyphus, these two stones can be seen as symbolic fragments of the boulder that Sisyphus is eternally condemned to roll up the mountain. They represent the weight of the existential questions that both Sisyphus and Mr. Badii carry with them. From Camus' perspective, the act of Sisyphus pushing the boulder up the mountain, despite knowing it will roll back down, signifies a form of hope. Similarly, Mr. Badii's request for the stones to be thrown at him can be seen as his own form of hope - a final plea for a sign that might sway his decision between life and death. Moreover, Mr. Badii's statement, "Shake my shoulders too. Maybe I'll be alive" (01:23:51), discloses a hint of hope, which starkly contrasts his earlier surrender to death. This faint optimism, as Camus interprets, indicates a reluctance to wholly accept

the inevitability of death, thus resonating with the absurd hero's resistance to nihilism. It is essential to identify the specific kind of hope that Camus critiques. In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, he lauds the intellectual brilliance of Kafka and Dostoevsky, but criticizes their reliance on fate and divine hope, viewing their works as imperfect manifestations of the absurd creation. Kiarostami seems to follow a similar trajectory, yet his commitment to the absurd is embedded in his very method of filmmaking. As A. S. Hamrah has noted, it was often "Kiarostami himself, sitting in the Range Rover, to whom the actors were responding during filming." Knowing this, reveals an artist who constantly blurs the line between the film's reality and its own artifice. This technique culminates in the film's clever ending, where it seems he goes a step further than the authors Camus critiqued. Camus posits that an absurd writer must acknowledge the vanity of their work, which will never provide clarity or transcendence to either themselves or their audience (123). As Mr. Badii lies in his grave, his last gaze at the full moon before the screen darkens, only the sound of rain lingers for a moment. Then, the cinematic illusion is shattered. In a deeply ironic way, the final images are not of death, but of life. The audience is presented with handheld footage of Kiarostami and his crew filming *Taste of Cherry*, with Homayoun Ershadi, the actor portraying Mr. Badii, casually offering Kiarostami a cigarette, leaving the character's fate uncertain (see Fig. 4). Kiarostami concludes the film with a radical gesture that repudiates the entire narrative illusion. It is a sentiment better expressed by Camus, who wrote that "The absurd creator does not prize his work. He could repudiate it" (90). If Camus could have seen Kiarostami's work fifty years after his own explorations of the absurd, he would likely have appreciated this cinematic act of self-destruction.

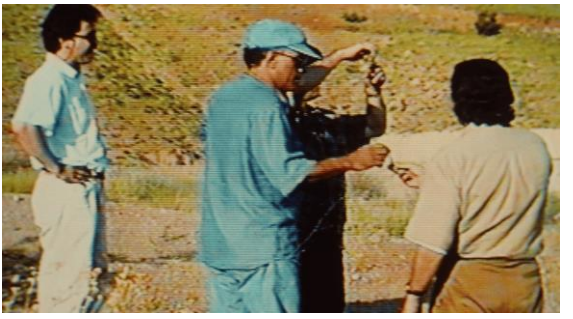

Fig. 4. The meta-ending shatters the narrative illusion by revealing the film crew, an act of "absurd creation" that repudiates the film's own artifice. Taste of Cherry (dir. Abbas Kiarostami, 1997).

This transition is also a profound visual one, as the barren, orange palette of Badii's despair (negation) is replaced by the vibrant green of a living landscape (creation). This subtly echoes the taxidermist's argument: life, in its simple tangible reality, persists. By revealing the machinery of his own creation, Kiarostami forces the audience out of passive consumption and into a state of active questioning of the nature of reality, fiction, and their own relationship to the existential problems posed. The film's subtext is also brought into sharp focus by another of Kiarostami's jarring choices: the use of Louis Armstrong's "St. James Infirmary" over the end credits. In a film defined by its minimalism and near absence of music, the sudden introduction of an expressive American jazz standard creates a deliberate contrast that forces the audience to consider the song's meaning. "St. James Infirmary" uses the story of a lover's death as a springboard for the narrator to make a powerful statement about his own mortality. It is a declaration of how he intends to face death: not with fear but with pride: "So the boys'll know that I died standin' pat." This defiant attitude provides a final, soulful voice to Mr. Badii's quiet journey, suggesting his quest was not one of simple despair, but a search for a dignified end in a world without easy answers. Here we should note that while Kiarostami's later film, *The Wind Will Carry Us*, also revolves around the anticipation of death, *Taste of Cherry* is a far bleaker and more focused counterpart. *The Wind Will Carry Us* concludes with a gentle affirmation of life's continuity, but *Taste of Cherry* remains stark in its subjective focus on suicide, culminating in its famously ambiguous meta-ending. In this grim focus, a thematic lineage can be traced to Sadegh Hedayat's short story, *Buried Alive*. Though both works share the subject of a man planning his own death, Kiarostami's approach is fundamentally different. Hedayat portrays suicide as a grim, inescapable fate, an internal condition from which his narrator cannot escape as he concludes, "No, suicide is not a thing you decide to do. It is just in some people. It is part of their nature and temperament. They can't get away from it" (146). Kiarostami, in contrast, uses the quest for suicide as a contemplative vehicle, staging a philosophical debate that ultimately explores the possibility of choosing life in the face of the absurd.

4. Conclusion

Ultimately, for both Albert Camus and Abbas Kiarostami, the characters of Sisyphus and Mr. Badii serve as profound metaphors for human labor and existence. Their ceaseless struggles, devoid of any promise of success or resolution, vividly embody the essence of the Absurd: the clash between humanity's innate quest for meaning and the silent, indifferent universe. While separated by millennia and medium, these two figures are kin, bound by the futility of their tasks and the profound dignity found in their persistence.

In his seminal essay, Camus reimagines Sisyphus not as a pitiable figure but as the ultimate Absurd hero. His eternal punishment—rolling a boulder up a mountain only for it to roll back down each time—is a perfect allegory for the human condition. We are all, in our own ways, pushing boulders. We invest immense labor in our careers, relationships, and personal goals, all while aware of our ultimate mortality, which renders all worldly gains temporary. The gods, representing a universe devoid of divine purpose or justice, have condemned Sisyphus to this fate. His crime was a defiance of their order, a human attempt to cheat death, which makes his punishment all the more poignant: an infinite, fruitless labor that mirrors our own search for meaning in a vacuum.

Abbas Kiarostami's film *Taste of Cherry* translates this ancient myth into a modern, existential road movie. Mr. Badii, driving through the arid, sun-bleached landscapes on the outskirts of Tehran, is engaged in a Sisyphean task of his own: a perpetual search for someone willing to bury him after he commits suicide. His labor is not physical but existential and conversational. He traverses the same loops of road, picking up passengers and engaging in the same circular, futile debate, each encounter ending in a metaphorical roll back down the hill. The promise of payment is his tool, just as the boulder is Sisyphus's, but the outcome is perpetually out of reach. He seeks not just an assistant but validation for his despair, a meaning to his intended act, which the world consistently refuses to provide.

Kiarostami's cinematic language masterfully reinforces this connection. The recurring long shots of Badii's jeep traversing the same dusty, winding paths are the visual equivalent of Sisyphus's ascent. The camera often holds at a distance, observing the tiny vehicle against the vast, imposing landscape, emphasizing the individual's insignificance against an indifferent natural world. This relentless repetition of motion without progress is a direct evocation of Sisyphean labor. Each journey up the hill is filled with the potential for a "yes," a resolution, and each journey back down represents the failure of that potential, a return to the futile beginning.

Yet, the true power in both narratives lies not in the futility itself, but in the characters' consciousness of it. Camus concludes that we must imagine Sisyphus happy, for "the struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart." His dignity is born from his acknowledgment of the absurdity and his unwavering engagement with it. Similarly, Mr. Badii's journey, though born of despair, is a form of engagement. By confronting the taxi driver, the soldier, the seminarian, and the taxidermist, he is not passively accepting his fate but actively, relentlessly questioning it. The film's ambiguous ending does not negate this struggle; it underscores it. The final, meta-cinematic shot of the film crew reminds us that the act of creation—be it art, labor, or simply the act of living another day—is itself a form of defiance. In their endless, repetitive toil, both Sisyphus and Mr. Badii demonstrate that the only meaning to be found is not at the summit, but in the courage required to make the climb, again and again.

پی‌نوشت‌ها

1. Forough Farrokhzad and Sohrab Sepehri were pivotal figures in the modernist She'r-e No (New Poetry) movement started by Nima Youshij, distinguished by their break from classical form and their infusion of Persian poetry with personal, philosophical, and contemporary themes.
2. A problematic degree of "othering" is evident in the portrayal of the seminarist, established from his very first lines of dialogue with Mr. Badii. After a brief greeting, Badii's questioning immediately shifts to the seminarist's foreign identity, asking not just what he is doing, but specifically what he is doing "in Iran" and following up with the pointed question, "Aren't there any seminaries in Afghanistan?"

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