CHAPTER IV

ABSURD AND MECHANICAL LIFE IN THE WORKS OF ALBERT CAMUS

During the Second World War under the leadership of Jean-Paul Sartre existentialism developed in France as a philosophical school. In the beginning, Albert Camus was associated with it, but gradually drifted towards a more definite philosophy—'absurdity'. There is no definite school of absurdity, but there is a number of writers—particularly novelists and dramatists who deal with the philosophy of absurd in their novels and plays. Albert Camus is the exponent of this new philosophy. He has outlined the concept and philosophy of the absurd in his essay, Le Mythe de Sisyphe (1942).

The mythological figure Sisyphus is shown as the absurd being pushing a stone uphill, a stone which grows larger the farther it goes up until finally it eludes him and bounces back downhill, after which he starts over again in his eternal futile activity. And yet he is happy to go through the absurdity of daily living rather than seeking death, when a universe so ridiculous the most sensible action would have been seeking death. But
man continually combats nihilism.

By the absurd Camus means the absence of correspondence between the mind's need for coherence and the incoherence of the world which the mind experiences.

In a preliminary note to Le Mythe de Sisyphe states that he is not elaborating a 'philosophie absurde' but describing the 'sensibilite absurde'. He claims to examine the logical basis and the intellectual justification of that sensibilite absurde. This 'sensibilite absurde' does not make any contact with absolute truths and values. Man is presented as a common contemporary figure. He instinctively wishes to be happy; the wants his life to continue indefinitely and seeks close contact with other human beings and with the natural world. But he finds that these aspirations are frustrated by the nature of existence. It is the firm belief of Camus that such desires cannot be satisfied in a human life. So the purpose of Camus is to discuss what the individual should do when he experiences anxiety, disappointment, a sense of estrangement and horror of death. At the very beginning Camus insists that a man who experiences the absurd in this way must first of all face the situation lucidly and accept the painful paradox that it entails. The absurd both makes direct knowledge of the world
impossible and cuts the individual off from the supra-rational knowledge.

Camus says that his subject is a contemporary commonplace. The absurd itself remains a contemporary manifestation of a scepticism. He approaches the absurd from an existential standpoint. He looks his subject from a practical and human angle. He generally avoids abstraction and speaks more as an involved individual than as an objective philosopher. He argues from what appears to be his personal experience.

The term absurd itself is emotional as Camus uses it. And he employs it differently from Sartre. For him, the absurd arises from the relation between man and the world, between man's rational demands and the world's irrationality. But Sartre does not recognise the absurd in the sense of disillusionment that Camus attributes to it. What he calls the absurd is something different: it is the universal contingency of being and is not the basis of its being; the absurd is the given, unjustifiable, primordial quality of existence.

Camus' concern is to find a way of living which accepts the absurd instead of veiling it. The pattern and the daily repetition which make up an ordinary life are
felt to be without meaning. Not only so; they eventually become wholly unbearable. Some kind of divorce has arisen between the individual and his day to day existence. This feeling of estrangement between a man and his life is the most elementary way of experiencing the absurd.

Malraux in La Tentation de l'Occident speaks of a metaphysical absurdity dominating the western world in the twentieth century. This concept of the absurd is prominent in Les Conquerents et La Voix Royale. Sartre gives a full account of what he means by it in Roquentin's reflections in La Nausée. Malraux, Sartre, Camus differ about the precise content which they give to the term, but all agree in relating in some way to the apparent irreducibility of the world to satisfactory rational categories. They also agree in attributing to the absurd considerable contemporary relevance and importance. Camus claims that the feelings of the absurd are found not only in literature but also in daily conversation and ordinary contacts with other people. The absurd may be experienced quite spontaneously without preparation of the mind. Generally a sense of the absurd is most likely to arise in any of the four different ways: Firstly, the mechanical nature of daily life, the deadening routine that marks it may one day cause to question the value and the purpose of his existence. Such questioning is an inti-
mation of absurdity. Awareness of the absurd finds its second possible source in an acute sense of time passing - a sense of time as the destructive element. We may link with this experience a realization of the inevitable character of death. Thirdly, the absurd arises from that sense of dereliction in an alien world which people feel in varying degrees. This sense of dereliction may be produced by a feeling for the contingency and arbitrariness of our existence. We may have an intense feeling of what Camus calls 'l'hostilité primitive du monde'. Lastly we may possibly experience the absurd through an acute sense of our fundamental isolation from other human beings. During certain moments of vision we are struck by the apparently mechanical and senseless gestures that make up the normal behaviour of people. Turning to intellectual apprehension of the absurd Camus is concerned to show the inability of the mind to give a satisfactory account of experience. The primary question of the mind is to distinguish truth from falsehood and certainty from supposition. But as soon as thought reflects on its own activity it finds itself powerless to make such distinctions really effective.

Camus approached metaphysical problems in a particular way and with particular emphasis. He arrived at general conclusions about human existence through an
instinctive distrust of abstractions and a direct concern with human beings in their individuality. Camus discussed of a dualism running through his life and reflected in his work. This dualism might be described as a contrast between the instinct for beauty, for physical plenitude, and the experience of tyranny and war. He was not prepared to accept whatever beauty and happiness a life sealed off from contemporary disquiet. On the contrary, he determined to maintain the dualism to reject all evasions, by seeking a path to happiness and beauty through the very heart of his age with its tyrannies, its crimes, its moral nihilism.

This is the undertaking—the search for moral affirmations in the face of suffering and despair—which gave shape and purpose to his thought and which greatly influenced his work as an artist. Camus' own general account of dualism in his thought and work is conflicting. It implies that the conflict arose after two contrasting experiences, largely prompted by the fact of war. First of all there was perfect happiness, a kind of pagan insouciance which he associates with his youth and early manhood in Algeria. Later this happiness was destroyed by violent public events. Thus the dualism and the conflict first arose from the attempt to regain a happiness which would be as intense as that which war had destroyed. When
we read Camus that conflict characterized his thought and was reflected in his work from an early date. What war does is simply to alter the emphasis placed on the two terms of a dualism already deeply rooted in his experience of life. In his Algerian period he was continually disturbed by the presence of poverty, suffering and death whereas in his European period the dualism arose from his belief in the possibility of human aspirations being satisfied despite the immediacy; indeed the apparent supremacy of so many things that encouraged cynicism and despair. In the first period a predominant happiness was weakened by awareness of strong reasons for anxiety and disquiet; in the second, anxiety and disquiet never dispelled belief in the possibility of happiness. The key concept of the first period is the idea of the absurd, that of the second period is the notion of the revolt.

The paradox from which a sense of the absurd ultimately derives is found in the earliest collection of essays, L'Envers et l'Endroit. The title itself suggests the idea of contrast, of related opposites and the essays are both a victory of praise to physical existence and a sombre meditation its transitoriness. The terms of dualism are variously expressed in terms of the youthful vigour and the decrepitude of old age, health and sickness, natural riches and material poverty, life and death, man and nature,
joy and despair. In one essay, Camus tentatively defines happiness as a compassionate sense of our misfortune. The paradox behind this formula is made more explicit towards the end of this book. "There is no love of life without despair about life."

Camus' second publication, Noces, contains four essays which are more directly personal in expression as well as feeling. The rich, colourful beauty of life in Algeria with its appeal to all the senses is a major theme. Camus writes with lyrical intensity of the beautiful face of the world and his own sun-drenched youth amidst the vast libertinage of nature. This very intensity of the material presence of the world becomes in time a kind of absence. It ends by focussing attention on the absence of anything beyond his material presence. By the same token it precludes meaning, an explanation of itself. It may be a weakness in Camus that he should expect explanation, but he does so and the very libertinage of nature eventually becomes an imprisonment - imprisonment in the immediately temporal. At this point a succession of present moments lived with intensity gives rise to a sense of the absurd. This is particularly so when, during such an experience, attention is turned from the material world of men confronted by it. By staking all on the flesh and the senses a man also underlines the fact that he is the
prisoner of his own brief existence. He throws into striking relief his own inevitable mortality. We find in Noeas the mathematical certainty of death and man's desperate and often unconscious efforts to find deliverance from the idea that death is final and complete. This acute awareness of death, experienced against a background of physical plenitude which offers us spiritual consolations seems to be the main form in which Camus first met what he called the absurd. He wrote, my fear of death is related to the extent to which I detach myself from the world and identify myself with the fate of living men instead of contemplating the eternal sky."

This shift of emphasis to the fate of living men is typical of Camus. It is the standpoint he adopted a few years later in Le Mythe de sisyphe when he set out to examine the absurd in more details and began with the arresting statement: There is only one serious philosophical problem - suicide. To decide whether life is worth living is to answer the fundamental philosophical question. Man wants immortality but he is faced by an unjust death. Man yearns for justice. He desperately wishes to find some rationality in the world which surrounds him. Man wants clarity but nothing is clear, all is chaos. Absurdity springs from that confrontation between the pathetic call of man and the unreasonable silence of the world. Sisyphus
more stoically chooses to cherish his absurd doom and calm of mind, all passion spent to triumph stoically over it. Absurdity is a passion, the most heart-rending of all. To Camus, life will be lived all the better for its being devoid of meaning. He endows the universe with some significance and he is the one element which can utter a protest against the senselessness of it all. But there is no easy way out of the conviction of the tragic absurdity of conditions imposed upon creatures to have faith in reason.

In so far as Camus described the absurd in terms of a nihilistic attitude he wrote with considerable insight and conviction. Individual experience of the absurd doubtless takes its most dramatic form in the horror of dying and zealous love of living contrast. The senseless repetition of social existence which ought itself to prompt awareness of the absurd, normally seals off from it. Men follow easily enough the continual rhythm of getting up, taking the tram, four hours in an office or factory, a meal, the tram, four hours' work, a meal, a sleep. And this pattern is repeated week after week, month after month, year after year. But it something occurs which causes as suddenly, to query this existence, to utter the simple word, 'why', a link in the chain of daily gesture is broken, meaninglessness breaks in upon us, the absurd
becomes a reality.

In the course of his survey of nihilism, Camus goes to speak of the absurd as a more purely intellectual concept. Camus is right to insist that much of our experience of the world lies outside the reach of rational categories. It is true that the history of thought is a story of conflicting viewpoints of private convictions masquerading as universal truths, of the failure of speculation to achieve any certainty other than the conviction of its own ignorance and uncertainty Camus' own experience of the absurd is equally irreducible to neat rationalizing. When he moves on to a conceptual account of the absurd it is not difficult to convict him of circular argument, failure to distinguish between more than one sense of the same word, mistaken interpretation of philosophers from the past, identification of words themselves with the things they signify.

Camus' philosophy of the absurd is the logical crowning development of a long process of resistance to cartesian rationalism, driven to its utmost consequence by Hegel's assertion that the real is rational and the rational is real. Realism which implicitly assumed that the real could be faithfully described and made some rational sense had lost its appeal in France by 1910. The advances of psychology and the theories of the Freud had dealt hard
blows to the arrogant rationalism in the very years when Camus appeared. The First World War added to the universal bewilderment Camus found valid reasons in his own life to experience the absurd without having to find the notion in previous writings by others. His immense success was due to the fact that he came at a time when after a world depression and during a senseless massacre, people were rife for his questions and yearned for some answer.

For Camus, the subject matter of literature must be absurd. Literature must describe those features of the human condition which give rise to a philosophy of tragedy. In Le Mythe de Sisyphe, Albert Camus said that the great novelists are philosopher-novelists who write in images instead of using arguments because of their conviction of the uselessness of all systematized explanation.

Camus' imaginative writing comes within the terms of his own definition of the work of art which is born when the intellect gives up the attempt to account rationally for the human lot. Description replaces analysis and such description of the absurd is true realism of subject matter.

A novel in which character and plot remain subordinate to statements about human experience may be more
realistic than slice of life fiction. The philosophical novel is as close to life as the best kind of psychological novel. L'Etranger (1942) is the first novel of Camus based on the philosophy of the absurd.

Mersault, the protagonist of the novel is the embodiment of the idea of the absurd. He has no past and no links with any past, neither his mother's nor his own childhood memories, no idea of belonging to a culture, no interest in his work, no feelings for the Arabs among whom he has grown up, nor has he any project, ambition or desire for any future. Camus created Mersault depriving him of all sensibility, will power, anger, passion, even psychological substance. He has no feeling and no emotion. He is altogether passive. Camus began the novel by setting himself against the world as he found it. The incidents of Mersault's uneventful life are few. He is a clerk in a small commercial firm in Algiers. His mother dies in a home for the aged where he had placed her three years before. He receives the news of his mother's death merely with faint annoyance for having to ask for two days' leave of absence from the office where he works. He attends the funeral, unable to shed tear or to feel any emotion but he feels only the physical inconveniences watching over her body under the burning sun.

The very next day he goes swimming, meets a girl whom
he knows vaguely, goes to the movies with her and lies on bed with her that very night. But he shows neither any affection nor any feeling for her. He meets her again the following weekend and at lunchtime she asks him if he loves her. The question was almost meaningless to him; he answers that he doubts he does. She then asks him if he would marry her and since he does not care, he answers 'yes'. Mersault's calm routine is disturbed by his friendship with Raymond. Raymond suspects his Arab mistress of infidelity and wants to punish her. Quite casually, Mersault is brought into the affair; he agrees to arrange a meeting between Raymond and his mistress. After Raymond beats her, her screams summon the police; Mersault makes a false deposition for Raymond. Without any personal motive he becomes enmeshed in the ensuing struggle between Raymond and his mistress's brother and friends. At a Sunday outing on the beach a fight breaks out and Raymond is wounded. Later Mersault walks alone on the hot beach, seeking shade from the sun, and he encounters one of the Arabs armed with a knife. Mersault, who has been entrusted with Raymond's revolver, is confused by the blinding light. He mistakes the reflection of the sun for a flash of the knife blade and he fires, killing the Arab. He then fires four shots into the deadbody.

He kills the Arab for no reason whatsoever, except tho
glare of the sun. He is thrown into jail and the usual investigations are started about his private life to unearth some motives for his behaviour. The investigators are puzzled for he had failed consistently to show normal social reactions. It is considered as a bad sign that he evinced no grief after his mother's death. The examining magistrate asks him if he loved his mother; he answers casually, like everybody else, "yes". He never analysed his reactions and he can only state the facts dryly. God has never meant anything to him. His clumsy though frank and naive defence antagonises the gentlemen of the jury. The verdict is soon issued. He will be guillotined as guilty of premeditated murder. In the second part of the book, Mersault remains as detached and indifferent as he was in the first. Inexplicably he never thinks of pleading self defence when accused of the murder of the Arab, and refusing to pretend to emotions he does not possess, expresses no feeling of guilt about his victim. The evidence of his insensitivity at his mother's funeral weighs overwhelmingly against him and he is condemned to death. The passivity with which he has greeted all that has happened suddenly breaks down at a visit of a prison Chaplain to him. The Chaplain's prayers and the consolation he offers of another life sting Mersault into a violent affirmation that his life alone is certain and that in it the inevitability of death obliterates all significance. He is uncom-
cerned about another life and about God. The Chaplain goes and Mersault is filled for the first time with the tender indifference of the world. He realizes that he had been happy in his life, that he would like to live it all over again.

Mersault does not show any interest in all that happens in the world. He believes in none of the things which normally give significance to life. Family affection, love, friendship, ambition, none of these has any meaning for him. Mersault is completely indifferent to the world. His domain is the physical life. To swim, to run, to make love, to feel sun on his face, to walk through Algiers in the cool of the evening - these experiences have given him happiness and make him wish to live the same life again. His indifference is not towards life itself but only towards those emotions to which society attributes an arbitrary importance.

Lack of coherent significance in the world is a distinct point of the feeling of the absurd. This notion of the absurd is incarnated in Mersault's apathy and attitude towards life. Society incarnates a malign, ontological absurdity which prevents Mersault from continuing to be happy. Mersault is condemned through a misunderstanding. It is not because he killed the Arab but because he had not wept at his mother's funeral that he is executed.
The origin of the novel, *L'Étranger* is in Camus' own personal thoughts and experiences. His very assumption that life has no meaning, his denunciation of hope, his determined refusal of any comforting transcendence exactly fitted the mood of the time he had written the novel.

*L'Étranger* is first and foremost a statement about the absurdity of experience. It conveys the feelings that arise from the fact that reason is unable to change the world which he does not truly know and that genuine self-knowledge and knowledge of other people are unattainable. It is a vague awareness of this which Mersault experiences in his life.

In accepting his life and death, Mersault finds a strange peace and a sense of harmony with the external world. Mersault has opted for the earth, for the immediate course of events, and for the use of his intelligence within those limited areas where he can find certainty. He is condemned because his way of life is not acceptable to society.

For Mersault morality consists in acting in accordance with his sentiments; he must describe these sentiments to himself and to other people honestly and without exaggeration.
Mersault does not regard the killing as a sin. It is an error, caused by the blinding presence of the sun. He feels at fault only because he has disturbed the relationship between himself and the natural world. After his imprisonment he accepts his legal status as a criminal, but he only gradually realizes why society considers his whole mode of life to be guilty. Although Mersault is conscious of the absurdity of life he is nevertheless quite naive about social values. He finally accepts his social role, not by feeling guilty but by taking a defiant attitude towards the society that has condemned him. His scorn for the religious system will bear witness to his concept of truth.

L'Étranger records man's struggle with the external world as well as his conflict with society. The novel is a concrete image of what Camus terms as the absurd confrontation between man's desires and the indifference of the universal. Mersault shares the fundamental traits attributed to man in Le Mythe de Sisyphe - a desire for life and a desire for truth. He encounters the limitations that the universe places upon his desires.

Mersault imprisoned symbolises man caught in a hostile world. He becomes less self-assured, less able to communicate with others. He sees himself in a prison as
a sisyphus, condemned to a neverending task. To him it seemed the same day had been going on since he had been in the cell and that he had been doing the same work all the time. The concluding pages of the novel call to mind Camus' descriptions of the absurd universe in Le Mythe de sisyphé. They suggest that Mersault's real enemy is not the bourgeois society of Algiers but the inevitable force of death in the universe. Mersault realizes that his execution is the fate awaiting all men. Although he becomes an enemy of human society, Mersault attains a harmony with the universe that has condemned him. He arrives at a point from which he can look back on his life as a complete entity. He accepts his life as a value in itself; in accepting this value he accepts his death. He feels himself opening to the benign indifference of the universe. Mersault, on the eve of his execution accepts death as the culmination of his own individuality. He reaches that peace of which Camus sometimes speaks - 'a tranquil homeland where death itself is a happy silence'. Mersault's acceptance of simple, spontaneous happiness in the physical world and his moral preoccupation with a just use of language are values with which Camus is in agreement. The universe is the ultimate force against which Mersault revolts and which crushes him, but this force acts through a social order that is comically portrayed.
L'Étranger is a classical work, a work of order composed about the absurd and against the absurd. The novel is divided into two parts - the first part describing Mersault's life until the murder and the second describing his imprisonment and trial.

The two parts of the novel also show the two faces of the external world. When he is free Mersault is able to enjoy the beauty of nature. When imprisoned, Mersault is placed in a cell where he cannot see the external world. This duality is shown by the variation in Mersault's feeling of time. When he is free, Mersault sees every moment as valuable in itself; every event is described as occurring at a precise time. In prison, all days seem monotonous.

The plot of L'Étranger is built around death and judgement. From the beginning, a feeling of judgement against Mersault is gradually built up. At the vigil before the funeral the old people look at Mersault curiously. For a moment he had an absurd impression that they had come to sit in judgement on him.

After the murder, Mersault sees himself as a criminal. Mersault later realizes that his way of life is being judged and that he is guilty in the eyes of society.

Mersault is an outsider who refuses to play the game.
of society because he sees the emptiness of the rules and his failure to conform causes society to will his death. The complete absence of significance of life which Mersault incarnates is what Camus felt in his own life. Camus felt instinctively that although the world might appear indifferent and strange he is basically at home in it on the physical plane.

The one moral principle which persists in Mersault after the disappearance of all other values is something which Camus admires in the simple pagan civilization of North Africa.

Wishing to express his own views of life, Camus choose to write L'Étranger, a novel of the philosophy of the absurd.

In choosing Mersault as the protagonist of his first novel, Camus set himself a difficult and challenging task. Mersault is the embodiment of a human type which Camus himself analysed in Le Mythe de Sisyphe: the type of the absurd man. Mersault's attitudes and responses, moral as well as intellectual, are so different from those of ordinary people that they brand him as an outsider, an 'stranger'. This is the ultimate cause of his tragedy. Morally he is indifferent and insensitive to the point of
callousness. Intellectually, he is inert and uninterested, unable to understand the implications of events, to analyse experience and to arrange it into a meaningful pattern. He lives entirely in the material world; abstract notions are meaningless to him.

At the very end of the novel, there is a change in Mersault's whole outlook: during his talk with the prison Chaplain he suddenly begins to understand what life had meant for him, and to appreciate the peculiar kind of happiness it had given him. He finds a simple but illuminating image for the philosophy of life which he now recognizes as his own creed.

From the early morning till night man leads a routine life. This kind of life makes it monotonous, dull and mechanical. There is neither any charm nor any joy in such a life. Man becomes frustrated. This kind of life has no meaning and value. It becomes wholly unbearable. This feeling of estrangement between a man and his life is the most elementary way of experiencing the absurd. In L'Étranger, Mersault is struck in such kind of absurd life. His activities lack spontaneity. They are prompted neither from a desire of his mind or heart nor from any urge of his conscience. Rather he acts in the most mechanical way.

At the outset of the story he receives the death news
of his mother very passively and as it is a duty to attend the funeral of his mother he goes to attend it. When he attends it he does not feel any sorrow for his mother. After attending the funeral he comes back home. He goes to take bath in the sea and meets Marie. He feels no passion for the girl but he goes with her to the film and sleeps with her in the night. He does not love her but wants her company. When she asks whether he wishes to marry her he answers in a very mechanical way. To him it does not mean anything. So inert is his mind, so mechanical are his feelings. He lacks passion, emotion and love but he wants some sort of physical satisfaction and that is also in a very mechanical way. He is perhaps deprived of all the fine senses. And he feels that the world around him has no charm, it has no meaning. And to him the world is almost mechanical. So the world does not evoke any appeal to him.

Mersault is perhaps born with a definite sense of boredom. His dissatisfaction to everything in society and his notion of living only for the sake of living without any feeling of charm and joy indicate his acceptance of the feeling of absurd and mechanical life. Society has not rendered any avenue of pleasure and any source of happiness. In his prison life he has led an almost frustrated life. He has accepted his guilt and is not willing to save him-
He has passed days and nights in the prison cell in a monotonous and mechanical way waiting for his final execution. During his prison life he has been very much annoyed with his mechanical life and he wants to escape from this disgusted life.

He sees that death is the only reality which can end this monotonous, mechanical and absurd life.

The novel is divided into two parts of equal length, but whereas the first part covers eighteen days the second deals with a period of twelve months. The first half is the period during which Mersault finds his existence ultimately meaningless but in which he responds actively to physical pleasure. Once the murder has been committed and the second half begins, time almost ceases to have any significance at all.

His second novel, La Peste (1947) is an account of the fight against an imaginary epidemic - the plague which supposedly afflicted Oran sometime in the 1940s. Camus describes a particular event (the plague) in a geographical location (North Africa) but he handles his subject in such a way that he extends its meaning beyond the particular to the universal. He conveys a general picture of man’s position in the universe, faced by the problem of evil and
the necessity of suffering.

La Peste is clearly something more than a directly realistic account of dramatic contemporary events. Camus is not writing as the witness of some contemporary events as a reporter on real situations in Europe or Africa. Instead he has deliberately created an imaginary situation, an epidemic in Oran. It allows him to give an impression of realism but it is also a neat prefigurement of his own desperate metaphysio. The plague provides him both with the closed universe of the absurd (the town of Oran cut off from the contact with the outside world) and with the necessity for revolt (the efforts of Dr. Rieux and others to combat the plague and reduce its effects).

La Peste may be interpreted as a symbolist novel. This means that the novel in which relationship between two levels of meaning is not so continuously sustained as in the allegory, yet is more complete and organic than a politico-metaphysical fiction. And such a symbolist novel enables Camus to get the best of the two worlds. In the politico-metaphysical novel the realistic element is most powerful. The particular human drama is of prime importance and possible metaphysical interpretations come as an after thought.

In La Peste we find an image which expands to universal
La Peste has a very little plot. The plague is first indicated by a large number of rats lying dead in the houses and streets of Oran. Soon, human beings begin also to die, stricken by inflammatory swellings in the groin and armpit. When the number of deaths rises steeply, the government admits the facts of the plague. Oran is shut off from the outside world; various measures are taken and sermons tried. For months the plague rages unabated and no effective answer can be found. Eventually one person recovers despite having had the dreaded symptoms, and others gradually follow. In time the illness becomes much less common, the death rate falls sharply, and finally the plague disappears. The city is freed from its terror. The community returns to normal life. Those who fought the plague do not know whether they have won a victory or merely benefited from chance.

During the period of the plague, the reactions of the inhabitants are reported. The attitudes of some individuals are described. Lastly, the fight against the plague,
the different attempts to overcome it is studied in the principal characters who include Dr. Rieux, Tarrou, Rambert and Father Paneloux.

Before the plague begins Rieux describes himself as tired of this world in which there is so much suffering. As he fights the plague and finds that his medical efforts are of little use, he loses his illusions about his ability as a doctor and about the permanence of love and friendship. His wife dies in the sanatorium. Rieux has only the lucid and hopeless knowledge of the world that Mersault attained in prison. Tarrou organises teams of volunteers to help the doctors inoculate and isolate patients. He fights the plague because he is obsessed with death and with the necessity to combat it. Shortly before his death, he tells Rieux his life story. Tarrou was awakened to absurdity when he was seventeen. Tarrou's father, a public prosecutor asked his young son to hear him plead a murder case. Rather than being impressed by his father's oratorical skill, the boy felt a strange identification with the poor, bewildered criminal. Aware that life has an intrinsic value in itself and that society denies this value, Tarrou left home and became a political revolutionary. When he realises that revolution also uses violence, that he too has condoned some sort of murder, Tarrou is left defenceless. All men, he feels, carry within themselves the germs
of the plague - a desire for violence; the most he can do is to limit the damage by fighting for the victims. The plague in Oran gives him an opportunity for purer action than he could find in any political situation.

Tarrou conscientiously develops an ironic awareness of life's absurdity. He remains a strange and lonely figure, but tries to understand others.

All the major characters in La Peste have strongly marked moral features. In their reactions to a sudden and overwhelming catastrophe, the plague, they are clearly focussed. They are presented in an extreme situation and it is with their behaviour in the face of this situation that Camus is concerned. The primary aim in La Peste is to portray a collective reaction to a collective problem. And so Camus is concerned to give his main characters general moral features. And this is in keeping with his own statement that the emphasis in literature has shifted from the psychology to metaphysics.

By using the symbol of the plague, Camus puts war and its attendant evils on a level with natural catastrophes. He equates war with the plague, evil with illness and then looks round for humanist medicaments. This attitude to the occupation is in keeping with Camus' own
metaphysical views. It is consistent with his sensitivity to human suffering and death combined with his disbelief in God.

La Peste with its picture of the inhabitants of Oran cut off from the rest of the world and suffering and dying from the epidemic is a picture of cosmic alienation of that metaphysical absurdity of man's condition analysed in Le Mythe de Sisyphe. The feature of the absurd which is particularly emphasised in La Peste is the problem of evil. This is a subject which preoccupies Camus. The problem of evil is particularly concentrated round two sermons preached by the Jesuit Father Paneloux. The first sermon is preached during the early days of the plague. Father Paneloux interprets the plague as being divine in origin and punitive in purpose, a fitting judgement on the sins of Oran. Father Paneloux's first sermon has been preached during the onset of the plague. In the following six months the death rate rises to terrible proportions. There then occurs the death of a child, the son of the examining magistrate. The scene is witnessed by both Rieux and Paneloux. Father Paneloux says that they ought to love that which exceeds their understanding. Rieux replies vehemently: "No Father ...... I have a different conception of love. And I shall refuse to the bitter end of love this scheme of things in which children are tortured."
When Paneloux watches the death of the innocent children he changes his views. He identifies himself with the community whose suffering he now believes is not caused by moral shortcomings.

Death and suffering are incomprehensible but he must retain his faith in God. Man must will the absurd human condition because God wills it. He helps to alleviate the suffering of others but finds an austere strength to accept suffering for himself. He dies of the plague after refusing to call a doctor.

Raymond Rambert, a Persian journalist is caught in Oran when the gates close. After many attempts to escape from the city to rejoin the woman he loves, he realises that he could not be happy while others suffer. He is not a stranger in Oran; he must stay, work and suffer with the community. The plague had forced on him a detachment which he could think away and which haunted his mind. Every moral choice in an absurd world is ambiguous.

If the plague is a symbol of human mortality, it is an enemy that can never be defeated. If the plague is man's permanent condition it is ironic to describe this condition as a sporadic phenomenon. When we consider the plague in universal terms, we find that man's heroic action against
it has limited value. No activity can change the reality with which man is confronted. All that the heroes of La Peste can accomplish is to increase their own consciousness of absurdity. They uphold man's dignity but in a hopeless struggle.

The standard bearer of Camus was Dr. Rieux who spurned any transcendence and attempted to cure evil then and there. Since the order of the world is ruled by death it is perhaps better for God that man should not believe in Him and that man must fight against the plague. He is aware of the limitations of reason but will not lightly have reason abdicate before fanaticism and stupidity. If there is any worthwhile transcendence it is only towards other men and for them.

The absurd is not tragic because the desire for explanation conflicts with the irrationality of the world, but because the need and possibility of happiness are contradicted by the existence of misery. The basic quality of the absurd world is that it reinforces man's solitude and renders all actions equally unimportant and insignificant.

The absurdity of the world changes only in its appearance when the rebel discovers his morality. But to the new kind of absurdity which manifests itself in the
plague revolt offers a possible reply. The world cannot be transformed but it can be resisted.

La Peste by his insistence upon separation is an allegory of the hostile nature of the absurd. In both La Peste and Le Mythe de sisyphe the absurd abolishes all belief in the future and all possibility of living elsewhere than in the immediate present. But in Le Mythe de sisyphe the absurd was recognised by the consciousness not imposed by the world's hostility but led to the discovery of complete freedom. In La Peste, the liberty which it brings concerning everything but the present is described as 'affreuse'. When the absurd assumes the form of the plague it holds man prisoner in the immediate present instead of liberating him. In this respect, the absurd is no longer a purely intellectual and individual experience but a symbol of the universal fate of man in the twentieth century. Prisoners of the absurd the inhabitants of Oran, were these bewildered people of whom daily one section was heaped into the mouth of oven and dissolved into greasy smoke, while the other, weighed down by the chains of impotence and fear, awaited its turn. The evil which afflicted a solitary consciousness has indeed become, through the pressure of the history, a collective plague. La Peste is the story of the plague-striken people of Oran. Their life is full of the sense of horror; they live a very mono-
tonous, dull and mechanical life and when the epidemic spreads, they die silently.

Rieux begins his narrative with a description of Oran before the plague struck. He sees his fellow citizens caught in routine, incapable of moving beyond their daily quest for money. Certainly nothing is commoner than to see people working from morning till night and then proceeding to fritter away at card-tables, in cafés. The people of Oran are incapable of recognising that a hostile universe might disturb their secure routine.

Within the closed city of Oran the plague takes a vast toll of lives. After nine months, the plague's force decreases and the city is freed from its terror; the community returns to normal life. The plague represents the power of death and destruction in the universe. It forces men to live in a monotonous and routine and mechanical world, where they must struggle to stay alive, and where their desires for love and pleasure are often thwarted.

Life during the plague is a series of monotonous actions. People queue for food, traffic turns in circles. Even those who fought the plague must submit to its routine. They must develop an indifference to suffering; they must
forego the very sympathy, happiness and love for which they are fighting. The plague forces its opponents to descend to its inhuman level. The plague symbolises the incomprehensibility of the universe, it comes and goes unexpectedly.

Throughout the novel there is a melancholic aspect of life. The volunteers serve the plague-stricken people in a very passive manner. They work in the most mechanical way. Almost all the people have lost hope of life. They see deaths around them and try to save people but not with firm faith in their capability.

Before the plague begins, Rieux describes himself as tired of the world in which there is much suffering. He loses his illusions about his ability as a doctor and about the permanence of love and friendship. He has only the lucid but hopeless knowledge of the world. Now whatever he does for the victims of the plague he does desperately and mechanically. Tarrou fights the plague because he is obsessed with death and with the necessity to combat it. All his actions provoke a lack of love for his own life and he works with a mechanical attitude to life.

Rambert caught in the trap of the plague feels guilty.
of escaping from the plague-stricken people of Oran to meet the lady he loves. As such he has no dedication to save the people. He serves almost in a mechanical manner counting the days that he has been separated from his mistress. The plague had forced on him a detachment which he could think away and which like a formless fear haunted his mind.

Less evident but more important is the irony in the presentation of the three figures who share many of Camus' moral attitudes: Rieux, Tarrou and Rambert.

The world around these people is absurd and mechanical. It has no charm of service but they serve for the sake of duty.

If we consider the plague in universal terms, we find that man's heroic action against it has limited value. No activity can change the reality with which man is confronted. All that the heroes of La Peste can accomplish is to increase their own consciousness of absurdity. The uphold man's dignity but in a hopeless struggle.

The metaphysical and moral implications of the plague with their stark realism and poignant concreteness bring us face to face with the cruelty of the absurd universe.
With its psychological insight and moral intentions, *La Chute* (1956), the third novel of Camus, comes under the category of 'roman personnel'. The choice and treatment of subject in *La Chute* emphasize Camus' connection not only with the 'roman personnel' but with the wider moralist tradition of French literature.

*La Chute* is an account of Jean Baptiste Clamence's life and ideas. This account he relates to a tourist in Amsterdam underworld where he frequents a citybar. He conducts his business at the bar where he waits for the occasional bourgeois tourists. Here he defends the lives and procurers. It is also a meeting place for the prostitutes and sailors. *La Chute* is the life story of Jean told in the form of confession. Once he had been a highly successful Parisian lawyer. He had defended with his oratorical gifts the poor, the victimised and the romantic criminals. He had enjoyed the respect and admiration which his devotion to good deeds and charitable causes had aroused in the public. He was very much an insider and a pillar of society. Then, all of sudden, he underwent an experience which stripped him of his moral comfort, and self esteem. As he was crossing the Pont des Arts, in the night on his way back home he heard a laugh of derision. He could not tell from where it came and he felt that the world was laughing at him; his
facade of happiness, innocence, and self-contentment crumbled down. From this point clamence dates his fall from the Eden of his happiness. He confesses that there was an earlier incident on a bridge in Paris, which explains his sudden attack of uncertainty. As he was crossing the Seine late at night he saw a young woman leaning over a railing of the bridge. He proceeded on his way, the girl jumped into the water and cried for help. Although he heard her cry and the splash of her body he failed to turn back for her rescue. He simply passed by on the other side.

The memory of his moment of cowardice, kept alive by the mysterious laugh which he occasionally thought he could hear, now haunt clamence. He gradually started to see his former good deeds as a mere sham indulged in for the sake of popular applause. He had utterly failed to do good when no potential witness against him was present. He remains haunted by his loss of self-respect. Overcome by a sense of moral bankruptcy he sought to escape in various forms of debauchery. Eventually he gave up his career as a lawyer, exiled himself from Paris and came to live in Amsterdam, a city which he hates for its dampness but which he chooses as a means of self-mortification. In Amsterdam, at the Mexico citybar he became a judge penitent. In this role he regains a
measure of self-confidence. Once he has confessed his shortcomings to strangers, he then turns the tables and judges the guilt of others. His story of his own life becomes a mirror held up to the lives of others. This is what he means by being a judge penitent. It is at this point we meet Clamence in La Chute when his progress from professional lawyer to moral judge penitent is complete. La Chute has for its background the damp mists and grey skies of Amsterdam. The atmosphere which pervades the novel is one of guilt, uncertainty and ambiguity. La Chute is a profoundly pessimistic novel. It is the outcome of brooding meditation on the subject matter. The ironical tone is well sustained throughout and there are many penetrating observations about life in general and contemporary bourgeois society in particular. There is an almost nightmarish atmosphere all throughout.

The outlook on life expressed in La Chute in world of uncomfortable truths and disturbing uncertainties makes it an unusual but original novel.

During his years in Paris, Clamence was content with his life and felt in harmony with the world. His health was excellent, he had many friends, since he enjoyed being charitable and kind to others, he felt at ease with his conscience. Most important, he was certain
of his power.

At one time Clamence had believed in the possible innocence of man. He speaks of his early attitude to life. "I was in perfect harmony with life. I blended with its entire being and avoided no part of its irony, its grandeur and its demands."

This picture of primal innocence and ideal adjustment was shattered by Clamence's experience of his own cowardice. The compromising underside of each of his virtues became increasingly clear to him. His modesty had allowed him to shine, his humility had helped him to succeed, his goodness had permitted him to dominate. It was in himself that he first discovered 'la duplicité profonde de la créature.' To find an element of self-interest in morality is not necessarily to affirm the utter uselessness of morality. But what does emerge from such an experience is the presence of disturbing ambiguity in human conduct. This ambiguity gives rise to distrust, a distrust that envelops both man's capacity to fulfil his ideals and even the very existence of these ideals themselves. Doubt is thus woven into the fabric of all existence. Clamence says that the world is ambiguous in its essence. When existence is ambiguous and uncertain the idea of innocence cannot be easily accepted.
All men seen compromised and guilty in some measure. It is against this background of ambiguity that one must interpret the fall which is the central symbol of the novel. There is a sense in which Camus means by the fall human fallibility but this fallibility is not original sin. It is human guilt rendered all the more acute because there is no available standard of innocence. Clamence says that the worst human torment is to be judged without reference to laws. The nature of ambiguity is its lack of a single and certain point of reference. The nature of falling is loss of stability and failure to grasp and hold some permanent object. Ambiguity and falling are aspects of the same reality in La Chute. Man is seen continually falling. And this falling is without beginning or end—like the fall into a bottomless void which is a familiar kind of nightmare.

In La Chute, a man becomes aware of life's absurdity, Clamence experiences a disillusionment similar to that of Mersault when he was forced to abandon his studies. Clamence sees the discrepancy between reality and his youthful desires. He believed in his own innocence and strength, and in a world that would allow him to live happily; suddenly he loses confidence in himself and he feels that a hostile universe is laughing at him. He finds that his body disobeys his wishes; on the bridge a 'bodily weakness'.
paralyses him, and he cannot help the drowning girl. Awakening to absurdity, according to Camus, is the first step towards a fruitful rebellion. After a man becomes aware of his dissatisfaction with the world, he revolts in order to establish such values as human dignity, beauty and happiness. Clamence values nothing and he has lost all self-respect. He is frightened by the need to make choices in a world that lacks absolute laws. His career after his fall from innocence is a series of unsuccessful attempts to create a system of absolute morality. When he realises that he is not innocent, he decides that he is absolutely guilty. He re-examines his earlier life, every act that he thought virtuous now seems to reveal a profound self-centredness. He felt satisfied in his sexual relationships, now he sees that these were attempts to dominate others. His aid to victims of injustice now appears to have been a means of self-aggrandisement. He thought that he was innocent and just; now he realises he was a hypocrite. Because he prefers guilt to uncertainty, Clamence judges himself and others by impossibly high standards.

Since there is no universally accepted judge, Clamence himself becomes a judge-penitent and proclaims the guilt of all men. He chooses the name of Jean Baptiste, because he wishes to be the prophet of a new religion of guilt and
slavery that will rule the world and save him from the painful stirrings of his conscience. Clamence is playing with words and gestures on the surface of life. He surrounds himself with stage effects in a desperate attempt to regain his self-respect, but he is not successful in any of his roles. Although he neglects the drowning woman he does nothing else of an overtly shocking nature. He is less guilty than Mersault. Rather than openly create a story of despair rather than directly express his personal bitterness or the larger tragedy of modern politics, Camus chooses to write in a deliberately ironic and understated fashion. La Chute mocks the moral tragedy of contemporary life. Clamence's story is an image of the dangers inherent in the metaphysical aspirations of contemporary political philosophy.

The bitterness lying beneath the comedy and the refusal to formulate a more positive attitude are perhaps the clearest indications of the extent to which Camus changed as a result of his experiences after the war.

Clamence failing to save a drowning woman finds himself utterly responsible for her death. He repents for his inactivity and punishes himself for the sin. His life has been fully shattered and has started leading an almost criminal life. Psychologically and morally he is a doomed
man. His way of living has been totally changed and he now lives a formal and mechanical life. The absurdity of life has been a void to him. Whatever he has done after his fall from his dignitary position is only to try to console himself and in all his activities there is really no moral support but he is only living a mechanical life as he has understood the absurdity of the universe. The world does not convey any meaning, any charm, it is devoid of all senses. To him it is a world of bitterness, despair and failure in life. He has been severely frustrated with his own life.

Camus expressed the idea with a great force and conviction. And it fits in perfectly with the cynicism displayed by Clamence towards himself as well as towards people in general. At one time Clamence had believed in the possible innocence of man. He speaks of his early attitude to life in language that recalls the Camus of Noces and L'Étranger. "I was in perfect harmony with life. I blended with its entire being and avoided no part of its irony, its grandeur and its demands."

L'Exil et le Royaume (1957) is a collection of six short stories one of which is told by a narrator, and the other five by the author himself.

It is the true that Camus' natural mode of expression
was essentially imaginative, lyrical and political, then
one would expect this lyricism to burst forth triumphantly
in the five stories told in his own name.

Le Renégat is the only piece in this collection which
is told by a narrator. Le Renégat is closer in theme and
treatment to La Chute. The Renégade is a young catholic
priest who is determined to convert a fierce, isolated
tribe in the Algerian desert. After much physical torture
and spiritual humiliation, he is instead converted to the
barbarous religion of the natives. We had renounced the
christian faith to worship the fetish of the captors. The
renegade turns from a religion of love to a religion of
hatred and slavery. This radical change in the renegade's
outlook is motivated by certain pathological traits in
his character. He distrusts women and he lacks self-
respect. He takes pleasure in feelings of guilt. Since
all whitemen are guilty in the eyes of the natives, he
hopes that the native tribe will conquer the whites. He
will then be able to join a community of the guilty. The
renegade sees no beauty in the world and has no respect
for anyone he wants to transform reality. When he dis-
covers that the christian God is not omnipotent, he turns
to a stronger power. He hopes to establish an earthly
kingdom in which men will be forced into a common mould
of guilt. At the end of his confused monologue, the
renegade priest is crucified by the natives. He becomes a perverted Christ figure, perhaps the saviour whose coming is prophesied by Jean Baptiste Clarmence. The priest failing to achieve his end meets an adverse world where he finds the absurdity of life. He finds that the universe is totally hostile to him. The world is bereft of all senses and it is a mechanical world in which a change is not possible.

The story opens with a brutally realistic description of the physical and mental agony of the renegade. When he hears that Taghaza is ready to receive another missionary, he feels as if a wheel of needles and knives were turning inside him.

The renegade's state of mind, his obsessions, hallucinations, and delirious transports of rage and pain and many of his abnormal experiences have been expressed in this story in the most fitting language.

Janine, the heroine of La Femme adultere is caught in a small bourgeois' routine; she has sacrificed happiness to material security. She is the middle-aged wife of a French businessman. When she goes with her husband on a sales tour in the Algerian desert, she gradually becomes aware of the vast contrast between her life and that of the
nomadic tribes she sees. Janine and her husband are encumbered with material possessions and they have lost most of their physical vitality. Her husband must degrade himself in order to sell his goods. The Arabs live in a physical harmony with the world around them; they have natural pride in their existence. Late at night when her husband is asleep in the hotelroom, she climbs up to the terrace at the top of the port and leaning against the parapet, is lost in contemplation of the slowly moving stars. Suddenly she is invaded by a cosmic experience, a sense of almost physical union with nature. She feels in contact with a purer world. This is her symbolic act of adultery, which is a betrayal of her husband's way of life. She experiences an identity with nature similar to that which Camus describes in Noces: a moment when man can feel part of a larger and enduring beauty, when the concerns of material existence seem trivial and when death is no longer an enemy. Janine's deliverance is similar to Mersault's acceptance of the 'benign indifference of the universe.' This deliverance is only temporary for Janine and she must return to the world of her husband.

Janine fed up with her daily mechanical life tried to bring a change by coming in close contact with nature. But she cannot force herself to stay in union with the nature as she has to bring herself back to the monotony
of her life, to the mechanism of her daily routine, to the world and life pattern of her husband. This life has not brought any charm, any joy in her but the sad monotony and the absurdity of her life. Life seems meaningless to her as she has to surrender to this life inspite of her very will and desire.

Les Muets and L'Hôte are stories about misunderstanding and social barriers between groups of men. Les Muets tells of a quarrel between workers and employer in a small Algerian workshop. Because the shop is no longer economically profitable, the employer cannot meet the demands for higher wages. The men are so filled with despair and bitterness that they are unable to sympathise with the employer whose child becomes critically ill. Both employer and employees are imprisoned in a world of exile and death.

Daru, the hero of L'Hôte is a schoolmaster in a small village on the Algerian plateau. He is asked to take an Arab prisoner into custody and to deliver him to the police. Although he has little sympathy for the prisoner who killed another Arab in a brawl, Daru cannot agree to act as a policeman. After one night he sets the prisoner free, showing him the roads to the town where he will be judged and to the hills where nomadic tribes will
give him protection. The Arab chooses to surrender.
Returning to his school, Daru finds a message: 'you
handed over our brother. You will pay for this.'

Neither the Europeans nor the Arabs understand him.

L'Hôte expresses the tragedy of the Algerian political situation. Violence was prevalent on both sides and both sides demanded complete allegiance from their followers. Daru who cannot give such allegiance is faced with a dilemma similar to Camus. Like Camus, Daru finds only a painfully solitary cause of action that seems to be a way of avoiding responsibility. The political problem is deliberately simplified in L'Hôte. Daru is required only to hand over one prisoner whose crime was not political.

In Les Muets, there is no solution of the problem the people face but they find themselves in the face of world where man has to surrender to the cruel jaws of death which is the only cruel truth of this absurd world.

In L'Hôte, Daru is facing a world which fails to understand him. It is world where there is no reward for the service but only hostility. The world is absurd, meaningless to one who is true to himself.
Jonas, ou l'artiste at travail begins a humorous satire on literary and artistic society in Paris. Gilbert Jonas, a painter, is exploited by his dealer; his acquaintances cultivate him for social prestige. Jonas has little time and little space to paint. His small apartment is filled with canvases and visitors. A turning point occurs when he realises the dangers of being a famous artist and tries to escape. He begins casual love affairs, he spends most of his time in bars, he neglects his art. When his experiment of living in unrestricted freedom is not successful, Jonas returns home to work. In the crowded apartment he builds a loft where he can be alone. He refuses to eat and he falls unconscious from the loft. He leaves one canvas with a word painted on it. No one can tell whether it should be read 'solitary' or 'solidary.' He faces the problems that confront all artists in contemporary society. He tries to balance his family life and his need for creative solitude.

The artist should not work in isolation from the problems of his time, nor should he be so much a part of his society that he cannot see beyond it.

La Pierre qui pousse, the final story of 'L'Exil et le Royaume' tells of D'Arrast, a French engineer who goes to Brazil to construct a dam. D'Arrast has rejected his
bourgeois culture, where the masters are policemen or merchants, but he does not feel at home among the people of Brazil. He sees that the white ruling class is riddled with petty prejudices but he cannot fully understand the elemental frenzy of the uneducated negroes. During a religious festival one of the negroes attempts to fulfill a vow by carrying a heavy rock in a procession to the church. When he stumbles and falls, D'Arrast picks up his rock, but instead of completing the journey to the church, he carries the rock to a native cabin and deposits it on the hearth. Although no one understands the reason for the act, the Negroes invite him to eat with them. D'Arrast temporarily overcomes his feeling of exile and solitude. In La Pierre qui pousse, Camus attempts to create a myth of the condition of modern man. Carrying the rock represents the patient effort of men to overcome the racial, cultural and economic barriers between them. Like the task of Sisyphus D'Arrast's act is gratuitous, because it is directed against God and offers no hope of eternal salvation. The kingdom is always a temporary construction within the exile.

Camus considered these stories as experiments towards a more realistic narrative form. In L'Exile et le Royaume, he chooses to show the tensions of modern life through more commonplace experiences.
In these stories the characters do not feel a profound psychological shock when they first encounter absurdity; through simple experiences they slowly become aware of their dissatisfaction.

The renegade experiences pathetically the absurdity of the world when he vainly tries to create a religion of love but instead gets the bitter experience of the barbarous attitude of the uncultured native people.

Janine wants to be away of her monotonous life by escaping to the beautiful world of Nature. The world of her husband made her a prisoner of life and she wanted to escape from it. The world around all the characters is absurd and meaningless, monotonous and mechanical.

During the last phase of the second world war and after the war drama in France displayed a freshness and vitality which made it pre-eminent in Europe, perhaps in the world.

One of the most striking features of the post-war French drama has been its concern with the human condition, with man's place and purpose in the universe. Camus had made a distinctive contribution to the French drama. Camus has treated the theatre as a medium for serious statements.
about human life in some of its most general aspects. Leading dramatists for the post-war period have all been concerned to reflect in their work the moral dilemmas and philosophical inquiries of the day. Camus insisted that the drama must draw its strength first and foremost from the significance of its subject matter. He believes that a living theatre can only retain its vitality by discussing serious themes and portraying fundamental emotions. Camus is a particularly independent thinker and writer, and his aims in his plays have distinctive features of their own. Camus sees contemporary tragedy as ultimately metaphysical in nature and this view has had a very noticeable effect on his own plays. Difficult situations have an important part in them, and Camus usually pays more attention to the philosophical implications of these situations than to the psychology of the characters who experience them. Camus believes that modern tragedy should be independent and distinctive. Contemporary characters in a contemporary play are similar to ourselves in appearance and speak to us in our own times about our own times.

Caligula is the first drama written by Camus. It was written when Camus was most acutely aware of the absurd. The play opens after the death of Drusilla and this event makes Caligula really conscious of the absurd for the first time. It appears that Drusilla's death in itself has upset
him less than the features of the human condition which it indicates. It has revealed to him that men die and they are not happy. The death and despair of human beings constitute his discovery of the absurd. Having become aware of the absurd in this way Caligula both accepts its inevitability and rebels against it. Although he really regards it as an inescapable reality he also tries to evade its consequences for himself by intensifying those consequences for other people. He wants to center the realm of the impossible Caligula thinks that the seemingly impossible may perhaps be obtained if one is logical to the utmost limits. In the context of the absurd this all embracing logic means reducing everything to the same level of unimportance and turning upside down most conventions and sanctions. The logic of the absurd brings complete freedom to the individual who wields power and authority. Furthermore it tells him that all human beings are condemned to death. It is this kind of logic that Caligula has bitterly decided to follow to his conclusion and this decision sets the main action of the play in motion.

Caligula came to power at the age of 25, and reigned for four years. For the first eight months of his reign he proved a relatively enlightened and generous ruler. He made a series of concessions by freeing state prisoners.
bringing about progressive changes in the judicial system. He conceived an incestuous love for his cousin Drusilla and announced his intention of marrying her. Then Drusilla suddenly died and almost overnight Caligula's character seemed to change completely. He abruptly became a monster of vice and cruelty. He instituted a cruel and capricious reign of terror among his subjects. It has the threefold purpose of accepting the fact of the absurd, making a personal protest against it by bringing it out into the open, forcing others to recognise the truth Caligula has discovered.

He hoped that by acting freely and amorally he could overcome the power of the hostile universe. Just before he is killed by a patrician uprising he realises that he failed to reach his goal. "I have chosen a wrong path, a path that leads to nothing. My freedom is n't the right one." In a world with no transcendent meaning, what arguments can be advanced for respecting human life?

Caligula's story is that of a high-minded type of suicide. It is an account of the most human and most tragic of mistakes. Caligula is faithless towards humanity in order to keep faith with himself. He consents to die, having learnt that no one can save himself alone and that one cannot be free by working against mankind. But at least he will have rescued some souls, including his own.
and that of his friend Scipio from the dreamless sleep of mediocrity.

The death of Drusilla makes Caligula really conscious of the absurd. The death and despair of human beings constitute his discovery of the absurd. Having become aware of the absurd Caligula both accepts its certainty and revolts against it. In the context of the absurd this all-embracing logic accepts the fact of the absurd, making a personal protest against it by bringing it into the open, forcing others to recognize the truth Caligula has discovered. "Life is the opposite of love."

Like Caligula, Le Malentendu is a drama of the absurd. A man had left his village and had gone abroad to make his fortune. He was successful, became rich and after twenty five years returned to his native village, accompanied by his wife and child. His mother and sister now ran a small hotel in the village. For the sake of fun the son, Jan, decided that he would put up at that hotel as an ordinary guest without revealing his identity. He left his wife and child behind at another inn. His mother failed to recognise him as her son and during the night the mother and the sister killed him, took his money and threw his body into the river. Next morning his wife arrived and his identity was revealed. Thereupon the mother hung herself and the sister jumped into a well.
Le Malentendu is primarily a portrait of several character caught up in the absurdity of existence. At the end of the drama awareness of the absurd has been the reason for Martha's acceptance of crime and lack of remorse. She thought that she and her mother were united by the crimes they had committed together but her mother rejected her daughter and took her own life. Martha thinks that crime is a form of solitude and this awareness of solitude is another aspect of her feeling for the absurd. She meets solitude in the course of destroying life; her brother Jan finds himself equally alone in the way he chooses to affirm life.

Martha and Jan differ greatly in the way each is related to the absurd. Martha sees absurdity as the essential fact of existence and she bases her actions on its ineradicable nature "life is more cruel than we are." Jan takes the opposite point of view - "I have confidence in the things that are" - and becomes an unwitting vehicle through which the absurd works. He sees happiness through confidence in existence rather than revolt against it. Despite this confidence, he is an outsider. He returns to the lives of his mother and sister as a stranger. His fundamental mistake is to act irresponsibly in the desperate and serious situation that is life overshadowed by the absurd. If Jan had revealed his identity the tragedy
could have been avoided. Camus thinks that a man can save himself and others even in an absurd world by exercising sincerity and speaking with simple directness to those with whom he comes in contact. Within the wider context of Camus' doctrine of the absurd, Le Malentendu is clearly comprehensible. But this philosophical meaning does not develop naturally from the realistic aspect.

Martha appears to be devoid of all human responses and entirely empty, except for her logically inconsistent desire to escape from the absurd - to a far off country of sunshine and plenty. She experiences no sense of guilt at any point and commits suicide through rage, not remorse. In accordance with the absurd the murder of a man by his mother and sister is carried out in indifference, having been set in motion by a capricious combination of chance and habit. The murder appears at no point as being due to a fatal clash of real characters. The tragedy in Le Malentendu is one of banality, indifference and human emptiness. This type of hollow absurdist character may not be a success on the stage but Camus' preoccupation with the absurd led him to interpret promising dramatic material.

The novels, plays and essays of Camus reflect the general tendencies in modern writings which may be called 'la litterature problematique'. His writings on the absurd belong to a wider world in which the sense of inco-
herence has grown rapidly more acute. The modern writers have expressed something similar to Camus' feeling of insecurity and his search for meaning in experience. The emphasis on the absurdity and incoherence of existence has entailed a rejection of the explanatory and unifying absolutes.

Camus has been regarded as an important writer of this age because he is deeply concerned to understand man's nature and his place in this modern world.