CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

And my poor fool is hang'd! No, no, no life!
why should a dog, a horse, a rat have life,
And thou no breath at all?

- King Lear

The dictionary meaning of the term 'absurd' is:
"Inconsistent with reason or commonsense; ridiculous, illogical; contradictory; out of tune."¹ According to Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary of the English Language:
"An absurd man acts contrary to the clear dictates of reason or sound judgement. An absurd proposition contradicts obvious truth." Again the absurd is defined as "the state or condition in which man exists in an irrational and meaningless universe and in which man's life has no meaning outside his own existence."² In his conversation with Eugene Ionesco, Claude Bonnefoy casually queried about Ionesco's conception of the word 'absurd' and Ionesco replied:

"The 'absurd' is a very vague notion. May be, it's the failure to understand something, some universal laws. It is born of the conflict between my will and a universal will; it is also born of the conflict within me and myself, between my different wills, my contradictory impulses. I want simultaneously to live and to
die, or rather, I have within me a movement both towards death and towards life. Eros and Thanatos, love and hatred, love and destruction, it's a sufficiently violent antithesis, isn't it to give me a feeling of absurdity?" 3

Charles I. Glicksberg writes:

"The myth of the absurd as embodied in modern literature contains within itself, like the literature of the absurd, a number of embarrassing contradictions. To begin with, it is impossible to communicate the absurdity of existence, it can only be suggested. No writer committed to the myth of the absurd actually believes that myth applies to his own creation." 4

The contradiction between the reality and unreality of the universe, between its transparency and opacity gives rise to the vision of the absurd.

The absurd is the feeling of being in the world and yet of not being a part of it, of not belonging to it. It is born of a dialectical pattern of relationship, an antagonistic dualism between two elements — the irrationality of the universe and man's quest for a rational existence. The absurd illuminates the predicament or plight of man's existence in the face of the obtuseness of an incomprehensible world. The knowledge of a lack of purpose in
this tuneless universe produces an existential anguish which is noticeable in the writings of Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco and others. There is an insatiable hunger for authenticity in man but he faces an absurdity of life where his hunger is mocked and remains unsatiated. Man is in search of a rationally ordered universe, a companionable cosmos but instead he finds a chaotic and irrational existence; Master Brian writes:

"What is absurd is the relationship between man and the objects of his understanding, the link which ties man to the world. The world is not absurd, it is irrational, incongruous. The absurd is born of man's dissatisfaction with this irrationality."5

The absurd is therefore born of the lack of correspondence, or the divorce between the chaos of the universe and man's need for unity. "It is the eternal disparity between man's need for coherence and order, and the world's stubborn disorder and incoherence which constitutes the absurd."6

It is the result of man's failure to establish a relation between himself and the universe. In other words, it is the lack of correspondence between man and his universe. Man's aspirations are thwarted by the irrationality of the universe. Man's yearnings are at odds with his frustrating
experience. He wants to perceive this world as a familiar and comfortable home but this urge is frustrated by the unfamiliarity of this universe. While seeking an explanation of his existence, man is betrayed time and again by the "unbridgeable gulf between rationality and experience." Man fails to explain the irrationality of his existence in terms of reason. The patterns of his existence are felt to be without meaning and value. His reason becomes ineffective to make a value judgement of life. In short, some kind of disruption occurs between the individual and his day-to-day existence. The resulting feeling of alienation between man and his life is the most elementary way of experiencing the absurd. "In short, reason is unable to sound the human dilemma while man is condemned to live in it. Man finds himself plunged into a maze of irrationality that rests impervious to his reason. Do what he may, he remains surrounded on all sides by the walls of the absurd." 

within the limits of his absurd existence man becomes a self-closed individuality, a prisoner of his own self. His search for a meaningful existence eludes him. He lives in a universe the key of which is lost and this
imprisoned condition proclaims the fundamental absurdity of his existence. No rational system is available to escape this dilemma. Now, being cut off from society, and living in an enclosed self, man becomes a fragmentated being, he starts shrinking in stature. His absurdity is reflected in his divided self. He finds himself totally isolated from his setting. Ionesco in an essay on Kafka defines this absurd situation as "that which is devoid of purpose .... cut off from his religious, metaphysical, and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless."

The literary representation of the sense of absurdity has a long history. In modern times, the vision of the absurd has found expression in different forms in the writings of Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Nietzsche, Marx, Dostoevsky, Freud, Sartre, Kafka, Camus, and others. This vision can be traced back to Greek tragedy. Everywhere we find that the absurd is the result of a fundamental conflict between man and his situation. Contradiction is the fundamental diagnosis of the absurd, though this contradiction manifests itself in various forms in various times. In Greek tragedy it is the conflict between the
individual and the inscrutable divine forces. In the primitive ages it was a conflict between the individual and the preponderant natural forces. In the Middle Ages the conflict was between the individual and feudalism along with its superstructure, religion. In modern times we find writers projecting man as grappling with the problems of the vacuity or even malignity of existence, limitation of reason and absence of faith in an objective God. Modern man, confined within his consciousness, confronts an alien world outside himself. The contradiction for him results from his quest for truth and the counter-vailing realisation that there is no truth to be found. His search for the absolute, the craving for cosmic harmony and the quest for freedom become futile. In Marx, the absurd is born of the breach between the individual man and the system of production. In Camus, the sensation of the absurd is born out of a confrontation between man's need for clarity and unity and the irrationality of the universe. In Beckett, the act of waiting for God is shown as essentially absurd; it is a conflict with an irremediably static situation, a stagnancy of life: "Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, its awful." Glicksberg writes:
"Beckett, in contrasting the infinite aspirations of the soul with the wretched limitations of the body, writes in order to demonstrate the impossibility of saying anything meaningful about the fate of man ... His heroes ... cannot be sure of their identity or distinguish between what goes on in their consciousness and what takes place in the world about them." 11

In Ionesco the absurdity springs from the anxieties arising from the uncertainty of one's own identity, from the difficulty in communicating with the mechanical conformity of society. He invests his characters with significance by disclosing the underlying meaninglessness of existence and the failure of human communication. "Ionesco's problem is that somehow the phrase whose very essence is meaningless insignificance should become significant without thereby becoming meaningful. It must visibly destroy itself, reveal its own absurdity." 12 In Kafka, the impossibility of either affirming or rejecting life reaches the climax of ambiguity thus giving rise to the absurd. The protagonist of his fictional world is caught as if in a spider's net and is punished without discernible reason. The desire of the protagonist to have a knowledge of his existence conflicts with the ambiguity and malevolence of a circumambient order. Kafka's characters are trapped in a nightmarish world.
In Kafka's major works the absurdity of man's condition has found a definitive expression. In his fictional world we find a clash between an irrational world and man's hunger for rationality. Kafka depicts this contradiction through an antagonistic co-existence of two elements — societal and individual. Society is hierarchical, hide-bound and demonic and the individual is trapped and undermined. Kafka depicts the irrationality and horror of existence through his dream-narratives. Kafka's characters find themselves both out of touch with their own setting and victims of it. His works at once reflect the experience of human isolation and the terror that results from an equivocating and malign system imperilling man's situation. The absurdity of Kafka's characters springs from the cleavage between them and their environs. They live in a society with which they cannot interact meaningfully, a society which punishes people without assigning any reason, a society where the slightest error is followed by the gravest punishment. All through his works Kafka can be seen trying to strip the mask of hypocrisy off the face of society and to get at the truth.

In Kafka man is compelled to face the trial of life.
in a universe whose pattern and temper are not only uncertain and incomprehensible but have a dehumanising and pulverising aspect. His anxiety and forlornness register in his monstrous appearances as in the case of the zoological transformation of Gregor Samsa. Kafka's protagonist tries to commune with this world but his attempts prove to be futile in the face of its contrary character. "Man's life passes in a series of crisis in which the veiled presence of 'the law', acting through impersonal agencies (the govt. the police, the office, the castle, and so forth), demonstrates the futility of human effort." It is a fundamental characteristic of Kafka's writings that his protagonists suffer and are condemned to die without any knowledge of their fault. "The protagonist in Kafka's fictional world is hunted down and caught and disposed of, without reason." Kafka was profoundly concerned with the meaning of human existence which he found to be enigmatic and elusive. His characters are stricken with an absurd sense of the utter futility of their quest for meaning. He presents his characters as victims of a system of justice which is incomprehensible as well as irrational. In the midst of the incomprehensibility
of the world, Kafka's characters experience a corresponding sense of emptiness, a loss of identity. This loss of identity cripples them and makes them retreat within themselves. An acute sense of anxiety and forlornness slowly consumes them. Their vitality is gradually dissipated. Through the plight of his protagonists, Kafka presents the plight inherent in the age. "If Kafka is such a vital literary figure today, it is because he expressed with such controlled dramatic irony the desperate plight of twentieth-century man, cut off from all sources of transcendence." Kafka's characters are lost in a labyrinthine world, a world of nightmarish entanglements which puzzle them but provide no exit. They are in a perplexity from which there is no escape. Kafka's works thus present the conviction that the human condition is beyond understanding and beyond hope. He describes the horror and anxiety, the solitude and wretchedness of man who is defeated and degraded by his absurd condition.

Life, as Kafka portrays it in his writings, does not follow any rational pattern. The tensions inherent in his writings result from the contradiction between
reality and illusion. His heroes live in a mechanised world that is marked by alienness and incomprehensibility. They are uprooted from their normal setting and are cast out in an exiled state where they feel homeless and menaced. "With disconcerting irony Kafka projects the 'why' of existence against the background of the 'what', the given, and thus gives birth in his fiction to the category of the absurd." 16 Kafka symbolically presents the mysterious appearances of reality, the insanity of mind, the torment of existence and the nightmare of meaninglessness. His protagonists are in desperate search of truth. But their yearning for truth is countered by the impossibility of attaining it. Here the contradiction arises and this contradiction enthrones the absurd. Kafka's "unwillingness to reconcile himself to the dominance of the irrational generates in his world a conflict which, though he is unable to resolve it, makes up the structure of the tragic vision." 17 The situation of Kafka's protagonists reflects the fundamental insecurity of man's imprisoned condition. His novels and short stories describe the nightmares, obsessions and anxieties of modern man in his damning alienation. The nightmare of Joseph K. accused of a crime of
which he has no knowledge or the predicament of K, the land surveyor, or the tragedy of Gregor Samsa, uprooted from his family setting by his sudden zoological transformation and his struggle to cling to and reassert himself — all these express the absurd and the tragic situation of modern man.

_The Myth of Sisyphus_ crystallizes Camus's fundamental concept of the absurd. This book is a magnificent exposition of the central idea of absurdity and is thus of enormous importance in trying to grasp the vision of the absurd. When Camus wrote _The Myth of Sisyphus_, the notion of the absurdity of human condition was not entirely unknown. Both Sartre and Malraux had familiarised the world with the concept of absurdity through their works. But _The Myth of Sisyphus_ has been the first major step in the search for positive values that could justify man's existence in a meaningless world.

Camus's writings represent an obsessive aspect of modern consciousness — the theme of the absurd — which reflects the plight of modern man's absurd forlornness
in the face of an unknowable world. In *The Myth of Sisyphus* man's exiled condition is called 'absurd'. Man impulsively aspires for intelligibility and coherence which is countered by the incoherence and indifference of the universe. "The absurd is born from this confrontation between the human need and the unreasonable silence of the world." In *Carnival* the absurd has been articulated with a distinct accent. According to Camus, a sense of absurdity is most likely to arise in one of the following ways. Firstly, there is the absurd routine. The mechanical ways of modern living may one day cause men to question the value and purpose of their existence. Camus writes:

"It happens that the stage-sets collapse. Rising, tram, four hours in the office or factory, meal, tram, four hours of work, meal, sleep and Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday, according to the same rhythm — this path is easily followed most of the time. But one day the 'why' arises and everything begins in that weariness tinged with amazement."  

Secondly, an awareness of the absurd finds its source in an acute sense of time passing, bringing man nearer to death. Thirdly, there is the sense of the arbitrary character of life, the sheer contingency of existence, the
sudden awareness of the alien nature of the world and, finally, we may possibly experience the absurd through an acute sense of our fundamental isolation from other human beings.

Camus writes:

"A world that can be explained even with bad reasons is a familiar world. But, on the other hand, in a universe suddenly divested of illusions and lights, man feels an alien, a stranger. His exile is without remedy since he is deprived of the memory of a lost home or the hope of a promised land. This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, is properly the feeling of absurdity."20

The absurd, as Camus sees it, is the result of the disparity between man and the intransigent world. : "... ... the feeling of absurdity does not spring from the mere scrutiny of a fact or an impression but that it bursts from the comparison between a bare fact and a certain reality, between an action and the world that transcends it. The absurd is essentially a divorce. It lies in neither of the elements compared; it is born of their confrontation."21 He says: "Absurd is not in man ...... nor in the world, but in their presence together."22
The absurd is the antithetically juxtaposed rational man in an irrational world. The absurd is man-in-the-world. It is the contradictory combination of the rational man in a non-rational world. The absurd is contingent upon both elements of the opposition; it is the link between them. The world presents itself as irrational, hostile and opaque and the conflict between man's desire for complete knowledge of the world and the presence of the unknowable world is responsible for the absurd condition of man. While discussing Camus's vision of the absurd, Arnold Hinchliffe says: "The absurd, for Camus, is an absence of correspondence between the mind's need for unity and chaos of the world the mind experiences."²³

Now Camus says that the world itself is not absurd. To quote from The Myth: "This world in itself is not reasonable, that is all that can be said. But what is absurd is the confrontation of the irrational and the wild longing for clarity whose call echoes in the human heart. The absurd depends as much on man as on the world. For the moment it is all that links them together."²⁴

The absurd occurs when two terms clash—the desire of
the human mind that the world should be explicable in human terms, and the fact that the world is not thus explicable. The absurd thus is born of man's desire for clarity in this universe, a world that can not satisfy it and the perplexity arising from the confrontation of man and the world.

Camus fundamentally differs from some contemporary existentialists who equate the irrational character of the universe with the character of man. Camus agrees that the universe is irrational but he finds man both rational and meaningful. "Separating man from his universe by virtue of this rationality, Camus agrees that human life can have value and purpose, though the chaotic universe stands in powerful refutation. In reality, then, man and the universe are antithetically related giving the age-worn struggle between good and evil the form of rational man versus irrational nature, and the good life must be lived not in harmony but in defiance of the natural order of things." The world is seen as a gigantic and monstrous force against which man must fight a forlorn battle. When man confronts the irrational world,
he feels within him a desire for happiness and reason. The absurd is born of this confrontation between the human appeal and the unreasonable silence of the world.

Can the absurd be overcome? Can it be either annihilated or remedied? According to Camus, the obvious response to the absurdity of life is suicide—physical or philosophical. The Myth of Sisyphus opens with the sentence—"There is but one truly serious philosophical problem and that is suicide." But Camus rejects physical suicide on the ground that "If the absurd results from the clash between the demand for clarity and justice and the 'unreasonable silence of the world', it cannot be resolved by destroying one term in the polarity which gives rise to the problem." 26 Suicide is not a solution of the absurd because without resolving, it confounds the absurd and intensifies it. Killing oneself destroys the absurd for that individual only; the absurd will persist as long as there are men. Physical suicide means suppression of the absurd by suppressing the individual who experiences the irrationality of the world. Camus says that though life has no meaning, yet we must go on
living. Since the ultimate problem cannot be resolved by destroying life, we should accept our existence. Suicide is merely a negation of life. Camus insists that life can be better lived in an awareness of absurdity. We must learn to live with a lucidity nourished only by "the wine of the absurd and the bread of indifference." 27

In order to destroy the tension of the absurd, Kierkegaard, Chestov, Husserl and Jaspers advocate a rationally unjustifiable leap. But Camus refuses any unjustifiable leap into a reconciliation which he calls 'philosophical suicide'. Camus does not rely on supernatural consolations, a transcendental escape. He says: "What can a meaning outside my condition mean to me? I can understand only in human terms." 28 And later: "Absurd does not liberate; it binds." 29 Living becomes meaningful in keeping the absurd alive. In his Myth of Sisyphus, Camus advocates that man who becomes conscious of the absurd should not surrender to either physical or philosophical suicide. Rather he should try to maintain the absurd. He should retain a courageous lucidity in the face of the ultimate meaninglessness of existence and the certainty of death. Meaninglessness of life should not make life
unlivable. On the other hand, the absurd man, bereft of any illusions about the transcendental realm, can be urged to find a better home, a better enjoyment here within his finite existence. The absurd man thus ultimately becomes a propagator of the absurd instead of being its victim. As has been observed:

"Unlike many of the existentialists, he (Camus) was close enough to the common man to know that everyman looks forward to a modicum of happiness and did not jump to the conclusion that this looking forward involved bad faith." 30

Shunning all absolutes, the absurd man demands of himself "to live solely with what he knows, to accommodate himself to what is and to bring in nothing that is not certain. He is told that nothing is. But this at least is a certainty. And it is with this that he is concerned: he wants to find out if it is possible to live without appeal." 31 That is why Don Juan insists on life rather than escaping it. He knows that beyond this universe all is collapse and nothingness and he faces the future with utter indifference to use up everything that is given. Camus's dilemma of the absurd conforms to the mythical image of Tantalus tormented by water beyond
his reach, of Prometheus chained and become eternal food for the vulture and of Sisyphus toiling to push his rock to the hill-top even though it must inevitably roll back. Sisyphus is condemned to eternal punishment. But his futile labour gives him the knowledge of his absurdity. His perpetual task gives him dignity. He never gives up the effort. His negation of the gods makes him aware of his task and this awareness illuminates the ceaseless burden he carries and makes him acutely aware of his freedom. "Sisyphus teaches the higher fidelity that negates the Gods and raises rocks. He, too, concludes that the all is well. This universe henceforth without a master seems to him neither sterile nor futile. Each atom of that stone, each mineral flake of that night-filled mountain, in itself forms a world. The struggle itself towards the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy." Sisyphus's happiness is contained in his struggle which reaffirms the value of life. He does not depair because he himself chooses his values and is responsible for his choice.

While Sartre or Malraux wanted to remedy the absurd by negating life itself, Camus redeemed the absurd by a
dedication to life. Camus asserted that man must find his home in this cosmic homelessness. Camus, though apparently a nihilist describing the sad frustration of the human condition, seeks to assert certain positive values of life. He refuses to yield to the absurd universe and his refusal turns into an affirmation of life. To him awareness of the absurdity of life is a beginning and not an end in itself. Cruickshank says:

"The dynamic of revolt which is produced by the absurd possesses sufficient force to carry him beyond negation to affirmation." 33

ALIENATION AND THE ABSURD

About alienation Nisbet writes:

"Alienation is a historical perspective within which man is seen as estranged, anomic and rootless when cut off from the ties of community and moral purpose." 34

It is a social phenomenon where man is seen totally isolated from the surrounding social scene. Sometimes he is isolated even from his own self. He is not only objectively alienated but also becomes a victim of subjective
alienation. A modern man is often seen uprooted, alone, cut off from his community or any prevailing system. From the social point of view, alienation means that the laws of community make an individual a fragmented self and an individual's personal yearning for a familiar home clashes with an impersonal and mechanised society which looks "inaccessible because of the remoteness." This gulf between the individual and the society gradually widens and becomes unbridgeable and the remoteness of the individual from society makes his existence absurd. In the face of the gigantically monstrous society, the individual fails to preserve the wholeness of his individuality and sometimes cannot even identify his own self. He primarily performs a mechanical role which makes life insipid and meaningless.

Alienation reaches back to antiquity. For example, in medieval literature alienation stands for the estrangement of sinful man from God. Hegel emphasises the objective character of alienation. Marx relates the origin of alienation with the division of labour. Marx's concept of alienation embraces the manifestation of man's estrangement from nature and from himself on the one hand, and
the expressions of this process in inter-personal relationships on the other. To Marx, alienation is a multi-faceted phenomenon involving at the same time alienation of man from nature, from his labour, from the species-being and from other men. The idea of alienation spread with a different meaning during the interwar and post-war period. It referred to the malaise that had resulted from the convulsive happenings of the twentieth century: the World Wars, Nazism, Fascism, the German Occupation of France, etc. Camus's The Outsider, J.P. Sartre's La Nausea or Kafka's works emphasise this kind of alienation. This alienation often arises from man's negation of a given social system because of its ambiguous, hypocritical and demonic character. It focuses on what a man is under a given social setting and what he would wish to be. Here the contradiction becomes apparent between man's hunger for reality and the menace-filled unreality of things. This contradiction makes man's existence absurd. Man's spontaneity clashes with the arbitrariness of existence. A man is alienated from his surroundings because he finds himself pitted against an alien world. John Cruickshank says that "The absurd arises from that sense of derelic-tion in an alien world which people feel in varying
degrees." He adds: "We may possibly experience the absurd through an acute sense of our fundamental isolation from other human beings." Now this alienation which is a pervading theme in modern literature is pre-eminently the theme in the writings of Kafka and Camus and it gives rise to the overpowering sense of the absurd in their works.

I I I

MILIEU

It is necessary to make a brief survey of the social background that made the emergence of Kafka and Camus possible. A writer is conditioned by the compulsion of his time. To this compulsion a writer may respond in two ways. Either he may conform to it or he may choose to be a non-conformist. In either case, his writing provides a mirror to the age. Conflicts and contradictions, angst and forlornness are for him inescapable experiences. A writer also reacts and responds to the surrounding social, political, historical as well as cultural events of his
time. He cannot shun the events of his personal life, nor can he remain a silent spectator of the happenings around him.

About his commitment as an artist Camus said:

"Artists of the past could at least keep silent in the face of tyranny. The tyrannies of today are improved; they no longer admit of silence or neutrality. One has to take a stand, be either for or against. Well in that case, I am against."[38]

Kafka said:

"...... art for the artists is only suffering, through which he releases himself for further suffering. He is not a giant, but only a more or less brightly plumaged bird in the cage of his existence."[39]

In the West the Industrial Revolution brought about a change not only in the modes of production but also in the sphere of human relations. Initially the Industrial Revolution acted as the liberator of mankind and progenitor of individual man. But it also ushered in a mammoth growth of technology, which ultimately proved to be self-defeating. Liberation of mankind paved the way for the creation of its own captor, and the progenies of the liberated individual man of the Nineteenth Century after the lapse of a
century, were now experiencing the fate of slaves in the midst of technological revolution and its fall-outs. The two devastating world wars and the ramifications and legacies of the so-called material progress left a bleak world for mankind to live in. The aspiration for the liberation of the individual self ultimately created an exiled condition. Man's alienation from his surrounding social setting has reached a point of culmination. Thus man's correspondence with the universe, society and even with his own self has been totally destroyed. There exists a radical cleavage between the individual and the rest of the world and the individual has none as his companion except his own desolated image reflected through a broken and opaque mirror. The change in the social order is total and the resultant destruction in human experience is depicted in the 'absurd' art form of Kafka and Camus. Thus the emergence of Kafka and Camus in the arena of western literature can be seen to have been not quite accidental; rather such emergence was inevitable in the given situation.

Kafka's life story provides a key to his work and philosophy. His relationship with his father was very much
strained and this can be read in his writings. Under the triumphant Fascism and shattering effects of the World War, Kafka's mind was disintegrating and, significantly, this mind in a process of disintegration is reflected in his protagonists. Society tends to become de shaped, shadowy and enigmatic. Kafka's personal anguish becomes symptomatic of the general dilemma of his time.

Kafka first experienced the anxiety of isolation at home: "At home? I live with my parents, that is all. It is true I have a small room of my own, but that is not a home, only a place of refuge, where I can hide my inner turmoil, only in order to fall all the more into its clutches." His family situation, instead of providing a healthy support, beleaguered his literary genius. The distance between Kafka and his family gradually widened and ultimately became a distance between his inner self and the exterior world. Kafka's endeavour to find a root in his family was thwarted by the dominant personality of his father. He blamed his father for preventing him from becoming an independent, self-reliant person. The father-complex first give him the sensation of an absurd existence. About his father he remarked:
"You had worked yourself up to such a position by your own strength that you had unlimited confidence in your own opinion ... from your armchair you ruled the world ... your self confidence was so great that there was no need for you to be consistent, and yet you were always right."⁴¹

All through his life Kafka was struggling against hostile circumstances. He said:

"Where I lived I was an outcast, condemned, defeated, and although I struggled my utmost to flee elsewhere, it was labor in vain, because I was trying to do something that was impossible, that was beyond my strength except for a few insignificant exceptions."⁴²

The cleavage at home extends to Kafka's office life. Here also he experiences a gap between his ideals and the bureaucratic settings of his office. Max Brod writes:

"It is clear that Kafka derived a great amount of his knowledge of the world and of life as well as his skeptical pessimism, from his experiences in the office, from coming into contact with workmen suffering under injustice and from having to deal with the long-drawn-out process of official work, and from the stagnating life of files."⁴³

The boredom and exhaustion of his sterile official work gradually absorbed him into a feeling of incarceration and pain and threatened the flowering of his genius. He worked
as an Insurance official and constantly fretted about his duties. He detested bureaucracy but had to work in a bureaucratic setting. Kafka was born into a social and cultural milieu where he was under great social constraints and where the problem of assimilation into non-Jewish society was very acute. He was a German of Jewish origin and his father migrated to Prague and built up a prosperous business there. The cultural environment in which Kafka was brought up was completely German. But in his early youth he sympathised with the cause of Czech nationalism. Unfortunately his German upbringing did not allow him to identify himself completely with the Czech aspirations. So he suffered from a sense of inner contradictions. When he came to Germany, he did find a congenial atmosphere for the satisfaction of his cultural appetite, but his Jewish origin proved to be deterrent to his complete identification with the cause of aggressive German nationalism. The instability of Kafka’s status and his lack of a sense of belonging anywhere are brought out acutely by Gunther Anders: "For where indeed did he belong? As a Jew not quite to the Christian world, and as a non-practising Jew - as he originally was - not
quite among the Jews. As a German-speaking Czech, not quite among Jews; and a German-speaking Jew, not quite among the Bohemian Germans. As a Bohemian, not quite to Austria. As an official of a workers' insurance company, not quite to the middle-class. Yet as the son of a middle-class family, not quite to the working class."

Anti-Semitism which was to sweep Germany in subsequent days, was not on the surface at that time but his intuition perceived the slow but sure penetration of Nazism into the fabric of German social life. The reaction of Kafka to this growing challenge to his community was immediate and direct. He joined a Zionist group in which he thought the future salvation of his community lay. It is thus clear that Kafka derived his experiences from the contradictions inherent in his domestic life, office-setting and social circumstances and it is these contradictions which made his fictional world what it is. In his works we can trace the shattering impact of the First World War and the subsequent social changes. His works reflect the bitter experiences of many Europeans who lived in a world of nightmare, an imprisoned world of trial without error, punishment without crime. Being a
Jew who lived in the shadows of aggressive anti-Semitism Kafka foretold the fate that was to overtake his people.

Camus's literary genius grew to maturity during the turbulent years of the Second World War and the beginning of the Cold War. Camus who was aware of the writer's need for social commitment tenaciously adhered to the truth of his own experiences and proclaimed his personal viewpoint with resolute insistence. His sense of social responsibility made him concerned with the crisis of his time. Emmett Parker writes:

"Camus believed that the artist is obliged by his very art to bear witness to man's basic right to freedom and justice in the face of the historical aberrations of his time."

Camus then could not remain a silent spectator of the contemporary political scene. The German occupation of France greatly perturbed him and he joined the Resistance Movement and edited the leading newspaper 'Combat'. The political injustice of the post-war society concerned him. The agony of the French people under subjection to
Nazi Germany became Camus's own agony. About Camus's commitment to his age Germaine Bree writes:

"It has been his strength as an artist to refuse to write any work that did not take into account and express directly or indirectly the latent anxieties of his generation." 46

Thus we see that *The Plague* represents the awful atmosphere of the German occupation of France and the hero of *The Fall* represents the guilt-ridden conscience of post-war Europe. Camus never sat in the ivory tower to look disinterestedly at the problems of his day. Being a man with sensitive conscience and a keen sense of the writer's responsibility, Camus sincerely concerned himself with the pre-war and post-war problems. His powerful imagination made him aware of the inhuman conditions that threatened to enslave humanity. Keats says that a true authentic experience is one that is felt 'on the pulses'. The European writers of the pre-war and post-war period were moved to review and investigate the human situation under the impact of such authentic experience as left them agonised and questioning.

The old, traditional view of God-man relationship where a benevolent God was seen to have created the world
for his chosen creature-man to live in and work out his potentialities thus gives way to an anguished vision of the human situation where man is left high and dry, intimidated, undermined and perplexed, and where therefore the notion of a beneficent deity caring for man is replaced by a vision of hapless and beleagured man having to make whatever he can of the dismal situation all by himself without any scope for invoking a benignant presiding deity. Man and his world were not made for each other. The world has an irreducible alienness and the incurable absurdity of the situation is such that man has to make do with it.