CHAPTER II
KAFKA AND THE ABSURD

"Kafka's world is in truth an indescribable universe in which man allows himself the tormenting luxury of fishing in a bathtub, knowing that nothing will come of it."

- Camus

Kafka's vision of the absurd has an additional dimension of depth to it which is often absent in others, in that he sees the pathos of human existence more intensely. In Kafka's novels man is portrayed as an exile, Kafka describes a world which is a frightful maze in which there is no way out of man's perplexity. His works deal with a bewildering aspect of mystery which lacks solution. Kafka communicates the momentariness of human existence. He feels no certainty about anything, demanding from every single moment a new confirmation of his existence.

Kafka's protagonists live in a high-walled prison which has an oppressive atmosphere and in which they suffer from protracted illness. In the unaired rooms of the prison they suffer acutely from the agony of infinite separation. They toil unavailingly to liberate themselves
from this horrifying and agonising situation.

To Kafka everything seems to result from a mighty, inexplicable error which rules like Destiny itself. His heroes live, as if, in a gas chamber in which they suffer from an agony of despair which provides them no truth except that they are alive in a tormented and dehumanised state. They strive to reach the truth but they lack the strength for a genuine act of defiance. They are punished and doomed and they die like dogs. His world is marked by opaqueness and absurdity. It is not a transparent world through which we can glimpse the reality above or beyond the shadows. Kafka's human beings find themselves curiously out of touch with their own setting, and are unable to foresee their own chances of survival or doom. They are trapped in inevitable perplexity and doubt and seem incapable of personal salvation. Their damnation becomes inevitable.

Kafka's heroes toil to prove their innocence in the eyes of those who regard them with so much suspicion and distrust. One can see a humble resolve on their part to come closer and justify themselves before the unknown
and unapproachable accusers. But they are always driven back to their imprisoned state. Instead of growing in stature, they shrink. Thus we see that K. in The Castle is reduced to a mere initial, Joseph K. in The Trial dies like a dog, and Gregor Samsa in The Metamorphosis is reduced to an insect form.

Kafka's world, in short, is one of despair, anxiety and forlornness although this world is not altogether devoid of hope. Kafka's heroes flounder in their struggle to come out of a world of nightmare. They aim at reaching a goal which is mysterious and unattainable. N. Sarraute says: "On the bare lands to which he (Kafka) leads us, no blade of grass can grow." ¹ Nevertheless, in spite of the forbidding circumstances —circumstances such as would seem to blight all hope, K., Joseph K. and Gregor keep hoping like a Tantalus. Indeed, they keep up their struggle even when it is foredoomed to failure. Let us now examine a few of Kafka's works in some detail.

2. THE METAMORPHOSIS

The Metamorphosis opens with a startling image with which Kafka describes the zoological transformation of
Gregor Samsa who awakens from his uneasy dreams to find himself changed into a gigantic insect. Kafka is not the first writer to use the insect image in order to portray a dehumanised existence alienated from normal life. This zoological image is frequently used in modern literature as a means of symbolizing the degrading absurdity of human existence. Dostoevsky has his underground man say:

"Now I want to tell you, gentleman, whether you care to hear it or not, why I could not even become an insect, I tell you solemnly that I wanted to become an insect many times."

Through the depiction of man in terms of an insect Kafka seeks to expose the dreadful plight of human existence. The narrative device adopted by Kafka to have the hero transformed into an insect is calculated to convey the dreadful absurdity of his situation. The crippled protagonist's state mirrors the state of humanity. The story is divided into three parts each one of which shows Gregor's attempts to reassert himself as a human being, to re-establish his communion with his family and each part ends with his attempt being rebuffed and Gregor is seen being pushed back into his prison room. The sin
for which Gregor is dehumanized remains unknown. There is no justification for his frightfully catastrophe - his transformation into a loathsome insect and for his solitude, suffering, sickness and death. Gregor is not a wrong-doer. He is rather a gentle and self-sacrificing young man. There is no explicit reason for which the catastrophe befalls him, for his dehumanization, estrangement, persecution and his death. And this is characteristic of Kafka's vision.

Camus says that the absurd is the result of a fundamental contradiction of life and this contradiction must be preserved and strengthened in order to understand the absurd work. Kafka in his works represents the absurdity in a series of parallel contrasts and these contrasts are between the natural and the extraordinary, the individual and the universal, the tragic and the every day, the absurd and the logical. The tension of the absurd and the contradiction is present in The Metamorphosis. The opening sentence of the story announces the absurdity of Gregor's life. Everything about Gregor's physical condition is reduced to the level of an insect whereas Gregor's thoughts and feelings are still human.
Once Gregor's metamorphosis is established, there ensues a struggle on Gregor's part to seek re-entry into his family. His human feelings persuade him to try to re-establish himself in his family set-up while his insect shape blocks his way. Gregor is metamorphosed as an insect but at the same time he remains in his thoughts as a travelling salesman. On one level, Gregor's insect form depicts his private torments and, on the other, Gregor becomes an exponent of the universal human anguish. Kafka establishes Gregor's absurdity by contrasting his insect form with his normal human feelings.

Gregor is a commercial traveller devoted to his family which he supports with his hard work. He has been compelled to take up the painstaking and monotonous job of a travelling salesman to feed his family and to pay back his parents' debts to his chief. Had it not been his duty to look after his family, he could possibly have had a much more pleasant, though less remunerative, job in an office. He not only draws a healthy picture of his family on his mind's canvas but also contemplates sending his sister to a conservatory where
she could learn to be a violinist. But once he is meta-
morphosed, he finds himself excluded from his family
circle. This exclusion makes his existence absurd.

Gregor's metamorphosis is not an accidental phe-
nomenon. The metamorphosis has antecedent or concomitant
conditions. Prior to going to sleep Gregor has some traum-
atic anxieties which make him retreat within himself.
Under some agonising conditions, Gregor is gradually
shrinking and becoming self-enclosed. He has an uneasy
dream because he is already suffering from inner unrest.
His inner unrest is reflected in his dream. The circum-
stantial evidence of his waking life confirms his uneasy
dream. The agony of his waking life is a prelude to his
metamorphosis. Gregor complains not only about the phy-
sical discomfort of the commercial traveller but also
about the dehumanising effect of his job which makes it
difficult for him to have intimate relations with others:
"Oh God, he thought, what an exhausting job I've picked
on! Travelling about day in, day out. It's much more
irritating work than doing the actual business in the
office, and on top of that there's the trouble of con-
stant travelling, of worrying about train connections,
the bed and irregular meals, casual acquaintances that are always new and never become intimate friends." Before the ambivalent and disgusting character of the head of the firm, Gregor feels humiliated and crippled. He has to work in a firm where the chief has the habit of "sitting on high at a desk and talking down to employees" and where "the smallest omission at once gave rise to the gravest suspicion." Gregor does not exactly get reconciled to his appalling official set up but is compelled to bear with it: "If I didn't have to hold my hand because of my parents I'd have given notice long ago, I'd have gone to the chief and told him exactly what I think of him. That would knock him endways from his desk!" Gregor looks forward to the time when he will have saved enough money to pay the debts his parents owe to his boss and freed himself completely from the tyrannical employer. So Gregor's zoological transformation can be seen as somehow related to what Gregor has already been for a long time. Though presented in an apparently unrealistic form, Gregor's metamorphosis is terribly authentic in the sense that it suggests that this metamorphosis may happen to any of us: "Gregor tried to suppose to himself that something like what had happened to him to-day might someday
happen to the chief clerk; one really could not deny that it was possible." His gruesome transformation shows the guilt without cause, a guilt that can make anybody a monster. The monstrous image first shapes itself in subjective consciousness and then is objectively manifested.

Gregor's metamorphosis gives an unpredictably fatal blow to his life. At first he tries to take everything as normal, to "restore all things to their real and normal condition." But his gigantic, monstrous appearance frustrates all hope. He seeks persistently to gain acceptance in his family even though he is rebuffed in his every attempt. He hankers after the food served by his sister knowing that this food provides him no nourishment and he must starve to death. Gregor ultimately resigns himself to the conditions of his insect life but before that he puts up a struggle. His meditations on his bed show him in isolation from the external world but still he frantically tries to overcome his temporary 'indisposition'. He does not humbly surrender to his metamorphosed condition. He even considers his physical discomfort as a temporary phase of indisposition. He wants to overcome his disability to catch the train and to follow the regular
routine of his job. He wants to come out of his room to rejoin the world but his monstrous transformation prevents him. He feels himself drawn once more into the human circle but his dehumanised appearance thwarts his desire. When Gregor opens the door after a lot of strenuous effort and makes himself visible to others, his grotesque look distresses them and they rebuff. Gregor discovers the disruption of link between himself and others. His father knots his fist to push Gregor back into his room. It is indeed piteous to see such a devoted son driven back into his room with a stick inspite of his humble entreaty that his helpless condition be realised. Here Gregor's desire to clarify his position and to find a place in his family is contradicted by his family's refusal to allow him to do so. So in the first section of the story Gregor awakens to the realisation that his life has turned absurd and he has been sundered from his family.

In the second section, Gregor tries to accommodate himself to his absurdly hideous predicament. His sister Grete realises his predicament and shows some sympathy. It is a horrible task to devote herself to the service
of her monstrous brother. But still she takes on the duty of looking after Gregor. She offers him various foods. Gregor is at first allured by the smell of food but he crawls back with disappointment finding that his most favourite food becomes distasteful to him. Even a day before his metamorphosis Gregor's favourite food was milk but now he relishes and feels satisfied with rotten and decayed stuff because his organic sensibilities have been altered by his metamorphosis. His sister offers him humanly unetable food and Gregor swallows it. Besides, he feels less incapacitated and afflicted by his physical discomfort because physically also he reconciles himself to his insect life.

But inspite of his physical reconciliation with his insect existence, Gregor retains an emotional attachment to his family. Hiding himself under the sofa, Gregor recollects his earnest desire in his pre-metamorphosed stage to revive his family from the catastrophe that followed the collapse of his father's business. When the family assembles at the table to discuss the financial position, Gregor takes keen interest and cannot check the temptation to join the conference. But as soon as he
appears before them, they rebuff him. His presence in the living room is violently repulsed by his father who bombards Gregor with apples.

The tragedy of Gregor's life reaches its climax and his absurdity is fully pronounced when Gregor's last hope centred in his sister in whom he enjoyed "the enthusiastic temperament of an adolescent girl,"9 is shattered with her declaration that he be got rid of. We see the culmination of Gregor's suffering when Grete feels repulsed by Gregor's presence and even refuses to identify this huge insect with her brother's memory. She questions the presence of Gregor's entity in the bug form and her logic is that if it were Gregor, "he would have realized long ago that human beings can't live with such a creature, and he'd have gone away on his own accord."10 Gregor's alienation from his family becomes irrevocable when his sister, who was to him the last straw to catch at, becomes responsible for his death.

When Gregor's sister plays on the violin, he feels enchanted by the music and crawls out of his prison to hear the music which seems to be the food he has been
longing for. The deep effect of music makes him question his animal existence: "Was he an animal, that music had such an effect upon him? He felt as if the way were opening before him to the unknown nourishment he craved."\(^{11}\) Gregor's frightful advance is again repulsed by all and this time his sister takes the leading role with her verdict "we must try to get rid of it."\(^{12}\) And with the third attack Gregor finally retreats to his prison room and starves himself to death. Gregor's last effort to re-enter the human circle fails.

Thus Gregor's absurd existence comes to an end when the contradiction between his desire to reassert himself in the human circle and the rebuff from members of his family is finally resolved with Gregor's death. With the nourishment still remaining unknown, Gregor expires in his room alone. Thus the story which opens with an absurd announcement of Gregor's transformation, shows Gregor's futile effort to cling to life and ultimately ends with his tragic death. So against the tradition of acceptance and affirmation Kafka's story deals with despair to the point of annihilation.
3. THE TRIAL

In The Trial Kafka deals with the fate of a modern man in a world whose meaning is not comprehensible within the compass of his experience. In this novel we see that Joseph K. is accused of a crime the nature of which is not comprehensible to him and is compelled to face the trial of life in a hostile universe whose pattern and coherence are fundamentally alien to him.

Of Kafka's "Trilogy of loneliness" — The Trial, The Castle and America — The Trial presents the passively guilty victim-hero who is trapped in an absurd situation and is unable to extricate himself from the meshes of his absurd situation. He is entangled in a gap between the apparent reality and the so-called ideal manifestation of the law which he tries to identify but which always eludes him and makes him live in a tormented situation. His case shows an absurd dilemma and he becomes an absurd hero whose feverish activity seems to be absurd and abnormal in the eyes of an unattainable, remote and mysterious court.

This novel, like The Metamorphosis opens with another explosive announcement: "Someone must have been
telling lies about Joseph K., for without having done anything wrong he was arrested one fine morning. This unwarranted arrest of Joseph K. in his bedroom gives rise to a series of puzzling questions: who arrests K.? Why is K. arrested? And what is the nature of his arrest? And all these questions remain enigmatically unanswered throughout the novel. Any attempt to answer these questions simply tightens the knot. The more we try to grasp these questions, the more do they recede and dissolve like ripples leaving us wondering and stupefied. Our search for a clue to K's arrest and the nature of the arrest lead us only to discover new levels of enigma. After his arrest we find the situation for K. becoming more and more complicated and K. himself becoming more and more alienated from the commonplace world.

At the core of this novel there lies Kafka's vision of the absurd which springs from a disjunction in the world, the disjunction between the apparent reality and the ambiguous and equivocating character of the world. Joseph K is in a dilemma. He wants to prove that he is not guilty of a crime and this is countered by the court's refusal to accept Joseph as innocent. The Trial is informed by a
vision of absurdity and at the centre of the novel there is a passive man dominated by his situation rather than endeavouring to change it. This novel again presents another contradiction—the contradiction between Joseph K and the court that accuses and tries him. The central problem of the novel, that of guilt, can be understood in terms of the encounter between Joseph's subjectivity and the enigmatic trial court.

The novel opens with the information of Joseph K's arrest but we never get even an inkling of any trivial offence committed by K. for which he might be arrested and tried and this brings into a tearing focus the unambiguous insistence of the hero that he is simply an innocent victim of injustice. He encounters the unjust tribunal everywhere on his bed, on the street, in the bank and also in the cathedral. But the court never specifically announces Joseph's crime. Joseph K. persistently seeks to justify his innocence and makes an outcry about his feeling innocent. The protracted process of self-defence culminates in the cathedral scene. In support of his argument in self-defence K. produces some papers, even his birth certificate, but his papers are pushed aside by the warders on
the ground that the decrees of the court can never be unjust for the decrees are always issued against the guilty. And the irony is that the same court convicts certain people on certain obscure and inexplicable grounds whereas others are acquitted on the same grounds. K. faces a trial before a court where all cases are conducted on a certain foregone conclusion, and the judgement is given in camera. Before this court all accused are guilty and they are condemned in advance before the cases are legally established. There is no need for further trial proceeding and they must die like dogs. Now in a court which is guided by certain foregone conclusions, it is useless to seek any legal assistance. When K. seeks the Inspector's permission to talk to his lawyer over the telephone, the Inspector says, "certainly ....... but I don't see what sense there would be in that, unless you have some private business of your own to consult him about." But at the same time he allows K. to do what he wants to. K. cries: "what sense would there be in telephoning to an advocate when I'm supposed to be under arrest? All right, I won't telephone." 

Every where K. is puzzled by the events which he cannot comprehend. He is accused of a crime and is under
arrest. But when he wants to know the reasons of his arrest, he is told by the warders: "we don't answer such questions." And when K. insists on their producing the warrant for arresting him, they say: "Oh, good Lord, ... If you would only realize your position, and if you wouldn't insist on uselessly annoying us two, who probably mean better by you and stand closer to you than any other people in the world."  

The most ludicrous nature of the judgement is that K. has been accused of an unspecified crime and is arrested but he is allowed to carry on his regular business, to follow his normal routine. He is allowed to do his duty in the bank. In his astonishment K. enquires: "How can I go to the Bank, if I am under arrest?" and the official most surprisingly replies: "you are under arrest, certainly, but that need not hinder you from going about your business. You won't be hampered in carrying on in the ordinary course of your life."  

The trial of K. presents a mockery of justice. The punishment has preceded the commencement of any judicial proceeding. From the very first chapter through a succession of comical events, the farcical character of the court, its lack of rational legal codes, and its injustice are revealed to K. From the first chapter
where K. is arrested in his bed by the warders who come without any warrant, to the last where the priest advises K. not to seek any outside help, everything seems to be nothing but a farce, a deadly one though.

The court sits in a dirty, dingy place, in an abominable, unjudicial atmosphere where the Examining Magistrate does not even know anything about the convict, and has no qualms about his lamentable ignorance. In the court the proceedings are kept a secret from the accused and the accused has no access to the court records. The legal records and charge-sheets are inaccessible to the accused and his counsel. The judges wield power which they are not normally supposed to possess. Greenberg says: "The judges are comedians who condemn to death. Their justice cannot justify." 19 K's situation is really baffling. He hires a lawyer, sees judges, receives advice, yet never gets any hints about the crime he is accused of. He is referred to one judge after another but never sees the High Judges. The whole mechanism of the court has been active against K. for a sin which is not defined. "K is torn from the pattern of an ordered society, where familiarity with things in mistaken for understanding of
them and security is to be found in an accepted and unquestioned body of conventions, and plunged into a position where he finds himself alone and isolated, not knowing the rules, not knowing if there are any rules; life itself at stake, and no 'path or friendly clue' to be his guide. K. faces a gigantic and monstrous judicial body which is not only unknown to him, but unknowable. It is an unjust tribunal to which K. as an individual remains an alien. Bithell says:

"In his efforts to reach his judges he gropes like a grotesque automation through the swiftly moving ghost-like happenings of a nightmare, impelled forwards but held back."

About this dark, inscrutable organisation K says:

"There can be no doubt that behind all the actions of this court of justice, that is to say in my case, behind my arrest and today's interrogation, there is a great organisation at work. An organisation which not only employs corrupt warders, stupid Inspectors, and Examining Magistrates of whom the best that can be said is that they recognize their own limitations, but also has at its disposal a judicial hierarchy of high, indeed of the highest rank, with an indispensable and numerous retinue of servants, clerks, police, and other assistants, perhaps even hangmen."

When K faces such a farcical trial before an unjust court,
he feels that the pattern of his past experience is destroyed and he is drifting towards a place with no anchorage, a situation of unanswerable riddles. He finds himself trapped in a vacuum. His familiar relationships become uncertain. The insecurity of his existence is mirrored in the last chapter, 'In the Cathedral'. He gets a warning of his sentence from a sermon preached in the Cathedral and in the end he is stabbed to death by two officials of the court.

The anguish that pervades this novel becomes a universal anguish. Ronald Gray writes:

"within those confines one is stifled along with Joseph K, baffled by the same endless arguments, confused by the inscrutability of the court and relieved when execution is carried out and claustrophobia ends."23

The tragedy of Kafka's protagonists is that they are put to death as though by slow poisoning.

The opening sentence of The Trial, like that of the Metamorphosis, announces the captivity of K. and he is seen drifting towards death by slow degrees. The interval between the arrest of K. and his execution is a
prolonged nightmare, a horrible vision for him. The slow but protracted trial gradually overwhelms and crushes K's will. He fails to affirm himself because before the cumbersome machinery of the court, the outrageous absurdity of his trial, his feeble voice sinks. He lacks the strength to face up to a world that is so inscrutable and so hostile. His failure to encounter the monstrous machinery of the court subtly instils in him a feeling of guilt. The tragic end of K's life has been summed up in the following words by Friedman:

"The world of Joseph K. gradually changes from the everyday business world that he takes for granted into a mysterious Gnostic hierarchy that, like some gigantic Octopus, wraps its tentacles around the whole of reality until it finally crushes him to death—and most startling of all, does so with his compliance."24

According to Hubben, Kafka's major theme "is an ever-present sense of guilt."25 In The Trial also the existence of a guilt is assumed but its nature remains unknown and unexplained. The root of this unspecified guilt may be traced to different concepts. The unspecified guilt may correspond to the theological concept of original sin but the possibility of the presence of such a guilt
in the case of The Trial is not evidently present. There is also the possibility of the existence of guilt which relates to K's whole way of life. Such guilt cannot be specified because it involves the whole being of the person concerned and the punishment of such guilt can only be death. Such guilt can be removed by the total annihilation of the protagonist. The guilt may also be explained in terms of some psychological complex as a result of which the son may feel an infinite sense of guilt in him when the stronger personality of the father eclipses his comparatively weak self. This type of guilt is present in The Judgement and in The Metamorphosis. The son feels guilty subjectively when he contradicts a stronger opponent in the objective father, gradually shrinks within his own self and the feeling of guilt takes deep roots.

In The Metamorphosis Gregor at first tries to assert his innocence with regard to his sudden physical dehumanisation but his father infuses in him the feeling of guilt by refusing him participation in the human circle and then pushing him back into an exiled state by pelting him with apples. In The Trial such guilt has been generalised and depersonalised.
Joseph K. tries to know the nature of the guilt for which he is arrested but in the face of the apparent hostility of the court his desire for clarity becomes meaningless and because of his ignorance of the charge, he ultimately resigns himself to self-examination so that he can know his guilt. In the face of the silence of the court, K tries to discover the guilt in his own self. But one may suggest that the central problem of guilt is ultimately focussed neither on the hero's subjectivity nor on the unjust court that tries him, but on the encounter between the two.

K. always lives in an atmosphere of intrigue and conspiracy. His sincere effort to come to terms with the universe is frustrated by the dualistic nature of the world which K. fails to comprehend. He is thus embarrassed and constrained by the ambiguity of events around him. His arrest has been announced but he is not under detention. He goes about his daily work but he always encounters his strong opponents everywhere. His life becomes absurd to him because he is trapped midway between good and evil whose contradiction is never resolved till he dies like a dog.
Man is in a perpetual state of siege and in spite of his honest effort he cannot interact with his society. K. has done nothing wrong and wants to be known as such. But he is treated by his society as a criminal. This supposed criminality in him makes him guilty and K finally gets rid of this guilt in his execution.

4. THE CASTLE

The Castle, like Kafka's other novels and short stories, presents an oppressive atmosphere, full of frustration and dread. Like a riddle, the castle invites K. with a tantalizing call but it always remains inaccessibly remote. Though perceived as a benevolent institution, the castle always remains mysterious and unattainable and nothing can be definitely predicted about it. As a rule, Kafka writes on different planes at once, and this is true of The Castle as well. One plane is that it presents the picture of the world that is not rational and the irrationality of this world contradicts man's search for rationality. Through the irrationality of this world, Kafka wants to expose the essential absurdity of
things. Kafka's world is full of enigmas and torments where man is presented as an outcast, debarred from acquiring a link with his own community. The plight of man is intolerable and there is no solution for him. Some unforeseen catastrophe descends upon him, the authorities declare him an outsider without adducing any reason. He persistantly struggles to gain acceptance in the world but miserably fails. The world of K. is such that while he believes in the reality of the castle, his image of the Castle collapses and dissolves in his encounters with the Castle officials. On another plane, The Castle represents the predicament of a Jew in Europe, and lastly the novel may be interpreted as a representation of the spiritual anguish, as a symbol of a tortuous religious quest.

Kafka lends a deep insight into the absurdity of human existence. In this novel Kafka presents another document of the predicament of modern man for whom the world is a puzzle. K. desperately wants to be recognised by the Castle authorities but for him the doors of the Castle always remain locked. K. is in a dilemma. He can neither gain entrance to the Castle nor can he become
disloyal to it. He frantically continues his journey to reach the Castle. Though he stubbornly keeps up his attempts to enter the Castle, his stubbornness immobilizes him because of the silence of the Castle officials. Kafka here deals with the theme of the fate of modern man in a world whose meaning cannot be understood within the purview of human experience. The purpose of life for a modern man finally becomes an endless but futile quest for the meaning of life. Man makes frantic efforts to establish an organic relationship with something which lies beyond himself but which always excludes & evades him and this exclusion and evasion make his existence meaningless and absurd for him.

K. claims to have been appointed and summoned as Land Surveyor by the Castle which rules over the village at which K. arrives. But on his arrival he receives a negative response from the Castle. He is not even allowed to sleep in the village inn because to sleep in the inn one must have a permit. The young man who introduces himself as the son of the Castellan, says:

"This village belongs to the Castle, and whoever lives here or passes the night here does so in a manner of speaking in the Castle itself. Nobody may do that without the Count's
permission. But you have no such permit, or at least you have produced none."  

And the young man sternly says, 'you must quit the Count's territory at once.'  

Although K. has been asked to come to the village to work as land-surveyor, he is denied the privilege of settling in the village. K. gradually gets entangled in the maze of ambiguity. He confesses to the teacher: 'I am to be staying here for some time and already feel a little lonely. I don't fit in with the peasants nor, I imagine, with the castle.' K. wants to adapt himself to the new setting but he is bewildered everywhere: 'He felt irresistibly drawn to seek out new acquaintances, but each new acquaintance only seemed to increase his weariness.'

As K. resumes his walk towards the Castle, he finds himself lost in a tortuous street, a labyrinth which only puzzles him: 'For the street he was in, the main street of the village, did not lead up to the Castle hill, it only made towards it and then, as if deliberately, turned aside, and though it did not lead away from the Castle it got no nearer to it either. At every turn K. expected the road to double back to the Castle, and only because of this
expectation did he go on; he was flatly unwilling, tired as he was, to leave the street, and he was also amazed at the length of the village, which seemed to have no end. The castle refuses to admit his claim and treats him with injustice. K. consistently tries to establish his claim, spends his energy on successive stratagems for getting closer to the officials of the Castle, particularly one named Klamm. But his attempts to justify his claims remain thwarted.

Every intermediary through whom K. wants to reach the Castle fails him. Everything K. encounters is deceptive, elusive and incessantly fluctuating. The women whom K. meets are also ambiguous. Gardana, the landlady, allows K. to be left alone with her but challenges his presence there. Olga, Amalia, Frieda, Pepi - all elude K. with their enticing charm and leave him in betwilderment. K. goes, as if, from mirage to mirage, hovers between uncertainties and can settle nowhere. He wants to work in the village and marry and settle and at the same time he wants to learn the secrets of the castle. But his calculations fail and he seems to be caught between the ambiguities of the two worlds.
Kafka is one of the most sombre advocates of modern man's predicament in this world and his endless struggle with nothingness. His protagonists are engulfed in a deep sense of anguish. His frighteningly ambiguous world is pervaded by a vision of absurdity where the human beings grope in the midst of an unintelligibility and incomprehensibility and where everything ends in despair. This world is enveloped in nothingness and shadowiness because the endless search for truth proves to be futile and the search for certainties of life ends in death. The Castle is concerned with a man's efforts to belong to an inaccessible Castle and its inhabitants but these efforts take him nowhere. K's every attempt at identification with a higher authority is thwarted. In every chapter of the novel there is an attempted expedition, an attempted progress towards an unknown, enigmatic world. K always has a peripheral existence. He lives outside the boundary of the castle and the Castle always remains intractable. The Castle looms obscurely over the horizon of his mind. K gets occasional glimpses of the higher world but a full view is always denied to him. Now, he could see the Castle above him clearly defined in the glittering air, its outline made still more definite by the moulding of snow
covering it in a thin layer." But soon K's image of the Castle collapses: 'The castle above them, which K. had hoped to reach that very day was already beginning to grow dark, and retreated again into the distance.'

When K. hastens his steps towards the Castle, the image of the Castle dissolves: 'The castle, whose contours were already beginning to dissolve, lay silent as ever; never yet had K. seen there the slightest sign of life—perhaps it was quite impossible to recognize anything at that distance, and yet the eye demanded it and could not endure that stillness.' K's existence becomes absurd when his hunger to have a fuller knowledge of the Castle, a closer identification with it, is countered by the refusal of the Castle officials to accept him.

In this novel, too, Kafka deals with the enigmatic character of human existence. Man and the universe are at odds with each other; they are at loggerheads. They do not fit each other. Here Kafka draws the picture of a society which is inimical to our interests. An individual is vulnerable at the hands of a deceptive society. We cannot be sure of our locus standi in this world; we do not know where actually we belong. Our existence is always
uncertain, always in jeopardy. There is a quest, a determined kind of search to know the actual nature of our existence, but everything seems to be so treacherously mysterious. Society is marked by a lack of trust or faith, a sense of incredulity. K. is summoned to the Castle but he also seems not to have been summoned. The Superintendent says: 'The only thing I will not agree to is that you should be taken on as Land Surveyor, but in other matters you can draw on me with confidence.' He wants to belong to the place, to accommodate himself to the situation but in vain. He suffers from a sense of non-belonging, a sense of rootlessness while he wholeheartedly wishes to belong. His existence is of a floating character. The landlady says: 'You are not from the Castle, you are not from the village, you aren't anything.' K. is thus enticed to the Castle and then threatened with being thrown out. In the midst of an enigmatic and hideous society, his whole being is at stake. He strenuously keeps up an existence—'Which is threatened by a scandalous official bureaucracy.' K's tenacity is very much evident in his struggle to reach the Castle, to establish a rapport with the Castle officials. But the Castle with its opacity remains a mystery to him. He remains a
stranger to the people of the village, to the authorities of the castle. K's predicament is that he is neither repulsed nor accepted by the castle inhabitants but everywhere is treated with suspicion. He is regarded as an outsider, an alien.

K. is baffled by the enigmatic nature of the Castle authorities at all levels. When he reaches the village he begins his journey towards the castle but he never gets a full glimpse of the castle because "the Castle hill was hidden, veiled in mist and darkness, nor was there even a glimmer of light to show that a castle was there. On the wooden bridge leading from the main road to the village K. stood for a long time gazing into the illusory emptiness above him."37

On a deeper level one can see that K's quest is for truth. He has a deep craving for truth which the castle alone can satisfy. He is tormented by the problem of justifying his existence. When he comes to the village, he is hopeful of fulfilling his mission. But his struggle to achieve certainty is frustrated by the knowledge of the futility of his quest. The Castle stands shrouded in mystery
and it is beyond K's capacity to unveil this curtain of doubt. Although the Castle hill is "veiled in mist and darkness" when K. arrives in the village, he stands for a long time "gazing into the illusory emptiness above him". At first he is convinced that the emptiness is only apparent and later on he encounters the endlessly phantasmagoric vision of the castle. He continues his quest to know the reality but this quest is ultimately nullified by the ambiguity of reality. Kafka's works are fragments of an infinite quest leading to endless futility.

The world of Kafka is marked by darkness and illusions of hope. Kafka presents a nihilistic picture of the world which centres round man's loneliness and isolation. Kafka dwells on the senseless character of human existence, an inevitable fact of living in suspense, where man is haunted by a sense of fear, where he has lost all inward ties with his fellowmen and where life lacks a true foundation. In this novel, The Castle, K's experiences are symbolic of Kafka's experiences of life. The real experiences of a Jew have been filtered into the texture of the work. The experience embodied in this novel quite closely fits Kafka's own experience, the sense of ostracism he often
suffered from during his life time. Kafka lived his life in extreme desolation. All through his life he suffered from the pangs of alienation. He had a fluid station in life and never found solid ground to stand on. He was isolated from the Czechs as a German, from the Germans as a Jew, from his family because of the overbearing nature of his father. He lived as a lonely man and suffered intensely from the feeling of having remained unaccepted in life. Kafka's works symbolise this alienation from society, from his family and even from his profession. He was denied due recognition during his life time, though he is highly admired and widely read posthumously. He suffered from a feeling of rootlessness and uncertainty in life and like K. in the castle was certain of nothing and needed at every moment a fresh confirmation of his existence. K. in The Castle becomes a prototype of a particular ethos. His alienation from the village people as well as Castle authorities reflects the feeling of alienation of the Jews who were eyed with suspicion and contempt in Europe. Harry Slochower writes:

"Kafka's work depicts the lonesomeness of the individual in a world where hierarchial impediments are intertwined with the nature of existence. Human existence appears as a series of tortuous compulsions and crucifixions, exacted
by an anonymous, ubiquitous enemy. The alone-
ess and helplessness of the modern Orphan
generation, of the alien and alienated, in
short, of the Jew, has nowhere been as sustaine-
dly expressed as in the works of Franz Kafka.38

Being a Jew Kafka came from a race with an ingrained
feeling of isolation in a hostile world. Kafka belonged to
a race which had been isolated and persecuted intermitten-
tly for long years and it was difficult for a Jew to feel
at home in a non-Jewish atmosphere.

Indeed, we cannot isolate Kafka's work from his
real experiences. Kafka perpetually searched for a city
that would welcome him. But for his entrance to the city
Kafka had to justify his own existence in the eyes of others.
Kafka's works are documents of his agonies of social isola-
tion. Living among Czechs under the Austro-Hungarian rule,
as a German-speaking Jew Kafka was acutely aware of his
odd position in life. This isolation and a feeling of root-
lessness heavily weighed upon Kafka and reflected through
his works. For Kafka loneliness becomes a recurring theme
and this loneliness emerged from his isolation from the
family, his isolation as a member of a Jewish community.
As a German-speaking Jew Kafka was in a tormenting situation.
He was no where fully assimilated. As we said earlier, as a Jew, he was a suspect in the eyes of Czechs and Germans around him, and a suspect as a German and a Czech among the Jews. K. of the Castle represents this absurdity of Kafka's life. He is neither welcome nor totally repulsed. In K. of The Castle one can identify the perplexing situation of a Jew who wrestles miserably in a hostile world, who is persecuted without reason, who wishes to re-claim his rights but dares not, who has been subjected to a lot of arbitrariness, while trying to fit himself into the inimical situation, and who is ultimately consumed by his agony and resigns in the face of a fearful leviathan.

He is seen as an outcast who is perpetually kept away. He suffers from a sense of alienation, which reflects Kafka's own feeling of isolation in a dark, iniquitous and hate-filled system. Cut off from the mainstream, having no solid ground to stand upon, a Jew always strove to belong to the larger humanity. The alienation of K. from the village people and the Castle officials reflects Kafka's own alienation and his persistent striving for assimilation.

The Castle can also be interpreted as a religious
allegory. It may be interpreted as the symbolic representation of a religious quest. K. of the Castle may be considered not merely as a Land Surveyor who has been summoned but who cannot do his work because his calling is not recognised, but as a soul who is not sure of God's will. The Land Surveyor K. cannot ascertain his position; his relation to the enigmatic Castle remains mysterious and undefined. He can not ascertain the will of God. He frantically tries to reach the Castle but the Castle remains unapproachable. Inspite of his failures, K never gives up his quest. The higher powers that dwell in the Castle remain incomprehensible, yet K. asserts his humanity against that. The struggle of K. to assert his claim reinforces the pattern of the absurd.

Now regarding Kafka's religious faith, there are diverse interpretations. Kafka's friend Max Brod sees the inaccessible Castle as the mystery of God's rule and divine grace. Brod is responsible for the theological interpretation of Kafka's works. He was the first man who described Kafka's theme in *The Castle* as the incommensurability between man and the divine and who focussed on man's attempt
to achieve divine grace. Brod's interpretation has been further supplemented by John Kelly and Muir who consider the novels of Kafka as dealing with the relations between man and God. Muir even compared Kafka's novels to the overtly religious work, 'Pilgrims' Progress' and affirms that Kafka's works follow the lines of mystical revelation. Camus in his essay on Kafka also discovers in him an attempt towards religious leap.

Thus the subject of Kafka's work has been seen as an attempt to reconcile the finite with the infinite. But the theological mode of interpretation has not been accepted by all, Glicksberg writes:

"There is no strictly religious element in his novels and short stories, no reflection of the divine, only an intimation of the absurd that is beyond reason." 39

Greenberg says that Kafka's religious faith is not a belief in God but a hunger for a lasting meaning, it is an eternal trust of man in something indestructible, something permanent. Religion for Kafka is not an unshakable faith in God but a perpetual quest for truth in life.
"Kafka does not affirm God, however negatively or paradoxically, in his work. He does not care about God, he does not care about theism or atheism, he leaves all that behind; his world is entirely the human world." Kafka wants to overcome this world, packed with lies, by affirming his faith in a system of truth though his attempt is negated by the nature of existence. Kafka's works appear absurd because man's hunger for truth remains unsatisfied in the face of the unreality of existence. Margaret Chatterjee comments that Kafka describes "a godless world in which there is no one way out of man's perplexity." 

K. in The Castle is also in quest of truth. He strives to find the right way to reach his goal but he stumbles because he ultimately finds that there is no way for him to reach his goal and he sometimes even finds that goal itself is not visible and known. K's religious quest fails to get any where. If remains only an attempted transcendence. Leaving aside the muddles of religious controversies, it cannot be gainsaid that the tension of the absurd is conspicuously present in The Castle. It is a tension that exists between K. and his world which remains unknown and inaccessible to him. The contradiction that
K. faces is between his striving to reach the Castle and the mysterious and unpredictable nature of the Castle.

K. becomes an alien, a stranger to the place where he actually wants to belong. This novel presents another haunting example of an absurd fiction where the enigma of absurd existence remains unresolved.