CHAPTER IV
CONCLUSIONS

"A man has need of happiness, true. But he needs, too, to find out what he is."

- Camus.

In their fictional world Kafka and Camus render the tortured, yet authentic quest of the twentieth century mind. The task which Kafka undertook and left unfinished, was carried by Camus in his lucid manner to its natural culmination. Kafka built upon the intellectual experience of the early twentieth century and Camus, who had passed through the agonising days of the Second World War and Fascism, was in a position to depict this absurd situation with more acutely felt experience and emboldened conviction. The absurd world of Camus was not qualitatively a different one from that of Kafka. Only Camus found the world, because of the time element, more irrational and hollow. Both Kafka and Camus portray their characters having feelings and experiences which are universal, which are latent in all men. Their characters represent the anxieties and isolation which afflict the contemporary society. Their characters are strangers bound to an indifferent and incomprehensible world; they are aliens in a universe whose
illogic and illusions stare them in the face. Both Kafka and Camus explore the agonising experiences of the modern man who, if a generalisation is permissible, undergoes an unjust trial without any guilt.

Camus was provoked and held by the themes of Kafka's works. His works reflect the Kafkaesque qualities of writing. In his essay on Kafka 'Hope and The Absurd in the work of Franz Kafka', Camus discovers and recognises the paradoxes and contradictions which characterize Kafka's works. He says that Kafka's works are absurd because they represent the fundamental ambiguity of life. Camus writes:

"These perpetual oscillations between the natural and the extraordinary, the individual and the universal, the tragic and the everyday, the absurd and the logical, are found throughout his work and give it both its resonance and its meaning."  

These are the paradoxes which, Camus feels, must be enumerated and the contradictions which must be underscored in order to understand the absurd work. Camus says that the absurdity can be given form in a series of parallel contrasts and Kafka expresses tragedy through the commonplace and the absurd through logic.
Camus's concept of the irrationality of the universe has many affinities with that of Kafka. Both are concerned with the fate of man in a universe whose logic and justice are not comprehensible. In the thoughts of both Kafka and Camus the feeling of absurdity arises from the clash of the desire of the human mind that the world should be explicable in human terms and the fact that the world is not so explicable. The search for life's meaning and the search for truth are constantly defeated by the irrational world. For Kafka and Camus are profoundly disturbed by this alien world where people die for trifling reasons or for no reason at all. Both the novelists have exposed the unauthenticity of society where K. dies like a dog without any specified fault or where Meursault is condemned to die for smoking at wake. It is a false social structure where false values win at the cost of authentic ones. In the face of the iron structure of a false society, the characters of Kafka and Camus find themselves alone and helpless. They symbolize man caught in a hostile world and the strangeness of the world makes them strangers. They yearn to move in harmony with the world but because of the incomprehensibility of the world, they fail to
communicate with it. Camus says that in the strict sense of the term the absurd means a strange but unavoidable link between the world and man—a link based on confrontation. The absurd stems from the shock of discovery that human desires are just insupportable and without consequence. The works of both Kafka and Camus represent the most modern theme—the theme of dislocation and alienation. Their characters experience a displacement, a discordance that exists between themselves and their world. Their desire for rationality is incongruously juxtaposed with the alien thrust of an impervious universe. Thus, we see Meursault becoming a victim of the hostility of a theatrical society. His spontaneous responses contradict and offend the insincere, hypocritical codes of society. The people of Oran become victims of the sudden onslaught of a bubonic plague and fight an unequal battle for survival. In Kafka Joseph K. of The Trial is accused and executed for an undefined crime and K. of The Castle is caught in a vacuum from which there is neither exit nor retreat. Gregor's desire for continued participation in the family business is rebuffed by those for whom he had to accept a self-annihilating job and suffer the tortures of the damned.
But one fundamental difference between Kafka and Camus regarding their approach to the absurd should be noticed at this stage. Camus's protagonists try to assert the value and purpose of their living though the regimented universe stands in powerful refutation. The violent outrage of this irrational and unjust universe cannot subdue inherent human virtues. Camus says that though the universe is irrational, man must find his happiness within the limits of his finite existence. Camus defines absurdity as a magnificent struggle between man and the world. Camus's protagonists possess a spirit of rebellion and throw a challenge to the hostile universe and attempt to establish a harmonious relation with it. Thus Sisyphus wants to find a meaning in his hopeless job. Though he is condemned to unrelieved and fruitless labour, he never gives up his struggle, never loses heart. Meursault, a scapegoat for a hypocritical society, ultimately feels a sense of a physical solidarity with the existing world. These characters are unflinching in the face of tragic destiny, they exhibit resolute endurance, their spirit is never totally exhausted by the absurd. About Sisyphus Camus says so memorably, 'One must imagine Sisyphus happy' and Meursault lays his heart open to the 'benign
indifference of the universe. In *The Plague* Doctor Rieux will never give up the struggle. On the other hand, he unflinchingly encounters the Plague that has wrought such a havoc. He knows that the germs of the plague cannot be totally and finally destroyed. They remain hidden and in a dormant state to revive again and one must prepare oneself to fight the plague as and when it should recur.

Kafka, who died early at the age of forty-one, had the agonising experiences of the First World War. Those experiences, coupled with the tragedy of daily existence at which we glanced earlier, deeply touched and tormented the sensitive youth and as a visionary Kafka could anticipate the chain of tragic reactions that would follow the Great War. In his novels and short stories Kafka undertook a sustained enquiry to diagnose the roots of the social malady and in the process he placed before his readers a world tormented by nightmares, hollowness and futility.

Camus repeatedly writes about violence, absurdity and death. But even then he attempts to avoid the nihilistic pessimism of Kafka. He never abdicates faith - his faith in men, his fellow-men. He never loses faith in regenerative action even when it can only bear temporary
results. Kafka, on the other hand, presents a nihilistic universe in spite of the flickers of hope that seem to sustain his characters.

Kafka presents a gloomy and despairing picture of man's position in a demonic universe. He presents a neurotic obsession in his works, "neurotic because his characters are from the start stricken with an absurd sense of the utter futility of their quest for meaning."\(^2\) The quest for meaning on the part of Kafka's protagonists always ends hopelessly. They suffer from an acute sense of emptiness, an erosion, almost a loss of identity. They just drift in the sea of life without any rudder or anchorage. They wander about and are ordered about even when they seem to have chosen a path to follow and a destination to reach. This nihilistic aspect of Kafka's writings has been convincingly described by Glicksberg in the following words:

"Man wanders, lost and alienated, in the night of being, without a fixed destination, but he keeps on wandering, asking himself in perplexity what he shall do to be saved while realizing all the time that there is nothing to be done. Kafka could never make clear to himself the meaning of human existence. Like a sleep-walker he groped his way through the labyrinthine corridors of a dream without end, a dream within a dream, trying to find an answer when he was inwardly convinced no satisfying answer was to be found."\(^3\)
Kafka was convinced that the human condition was beyond understanding and beyond hope and beyond redemption. Thus his characters, inspite of their urge to live, are condemned to die with hellish torments. Gregor Samsa thus starves himself to death in an imprisoned state before being swept away with the other rubbish and Joseph K. dies like a dog.

Kafka presents an oppressive world in which his men live. They live in a dark, unaired room where they are puzzled by the horrible images of themselves reflected in their consciousness which in its turn, reflects the hideous Organisation of human relationship. In their prison-room they suffer terribly from the agony of infinite separation. This is a world of human debasement and dehumanization in which the characters gradually shrink. Think of Barnabas and the family of Olga and Amalia, and the contrasted images of the Castle and the village impinge powerfully on our awareness. The world of the Castle is one of libidinous, jealous, spiteful and vengeful lords in their hierarchical order while most villagers, men and women are kept waiting, guessing and hoping—all in a state of ignominy and eroded self-respect. Kafka's is a grotesque
and ambiguous world where sickness and disgust combine to make the mortal's existence absurd, horrible, painful and pathetic, Kafka describes a frozen, degenerate world in which the hero is paralysed and this agonising paralysis extends over all his works. His characters are ridden by fear and guilt which ultimately dissipate them, exhaust them to death.

The presence of the chilling image of a grotesquely monstrous phantom is not seen in Camus. The disconcerting gloom and cloud which mark Kafka's world, is not visible in Camus. Camus's characters are often seen breathing in a sunny atmosphere. While Kafka's characters choke in closed chambers, Camus's characters get a full view of the open sky. The trial of Joseph K. is held in a dingy room; K. meets the Superintendent in a faint light and Gregor sits motionless in his prison room staring at the darkness. Meursault, on the other hand, is seen having a bath with Marie on the sea-beach with the sun shining, if somewhat tyrannically over their heads. The warmth of a female body, the odors of the sea, the soothing light of the moon make Camus's characters cling to the natural universe and resign themselves to the grandeur of the universe. Thus in The Outsider we see that even in the prison cell stars shine
down on Meursault's face and the cool night air fans his cheeks. Gregor in Kafka starves himself, dies of suffocation under a sofa and his starved and dried out body is swept away with rubbish. Kafka often reminds one of Webster's torture chambers as in *The Duchess of Malfi* and *The White Devil* on the one hand, and Hitler's gas chambers on the other. The psychology of Camus's protagonists is generally different. Meursault, even on the verge of death, wishes to start life all over again and opens his heart to the "benign indifference of the universe."

Joseph K. in *The Trial* and K. in *The Castle* are always under restraints and their existence becomes absurd because they cannot freely choose their way of life. Camus's characters, on the other hand, seem to defy the barriers imposed on them. They prefer natural life and this preference contradicts the superimposed barriers of the society and thus makes existence absurd. While Joseph K. moves under the strict vigilence of the sphinks-like tribunal, Camus's Meursault moves under the open sky. Kafka's characters suffer to be intimidated, fear-striken dwarfed and diminished, while Camus's protagonists unflinchingly
wrest life in the face of death.

The unedifying, slimy character of the world that Kafka presents is not a little due to most of his women characters who are often given the role of tools, of accessories in relation to their dark masters. One can usefully recall in this connection the many mistresses in The Trial and The Castle. Of easy morals and ambiguous intent, they would seem not to have known self-respect and dignity.

While both Kafka and Camus present the impossible situation of men, their approach to the solution of the problem is different. Despite striking affinities, Kafka and Camus have some fundamental differences so far as the remedy of the absurdity of life is concerned.

To transcend the absurd condition, Kafka seeks solace, though remotely, in religion. But Camus, branded as an atheist, rejects all theological consolations, and ultimately his half-hearted optimism seeks reconciliation with this material world. To him it is better to wage even a hopeless fight in the known world, than to aspire for an unknowable and unattainable paradise.

Individual man, according to Camus, is facing a
world that provides no rational justification for his existence and consequently he might be forced to resolve the dichotomy of the situation by self-annihilation. As noticed earlier, Camus rejects this solution as self-defeating, since an individual decision is not a real solution to a universal and perpetual dilemma. Camus prescribes a reconciliation with the absurd, because what cannot be cured must be endured and human endeavour should be to add honour to this endurance. To strive for discovering a meaning in this meaningless world might be a hopeless exercise but Camus urges upon man to undertake the task since he believes that that way and that way alone man could justify his unjustifiable existence. J.P. Sartre remarks:

"Albert Camus's views are entirely on earth, and Kafka is the novelist of impossible transcendence; for him, the universe is full of signs that we cannot understand; for Camus, on the contrary, the tragedy of human existence lies in the absence of any transcendence."4

For Camus, there is no life after death. Camus's hero does not believe in heaven or God. Though he is at the mercy of alien and unpredictable forces, he does not look
upward to heaven, which is an unknown land to him. He does not catch a glimpse of any religious significance in his life to mitigate his unrelieved suffering. He rather seeks to assert his solidarity with the human existence because he knows that there is no supernatural power for him in which he can take refuge. For Camus there can be no meaning beyond his human condition: "Having thrown off all illusions, or so he thinks, Camus's absurdist hero faces the universe without any lofty faith to sustain him."5

For Camus God does not exist. So it is a folly to rely upon any external aid. Man must find out the compass of his enterprise within himself. He must decide his own course of life. Camus refuses to accept any doctrine of divine transcendence. Camus is concerned with the natural and does not attempt at an affirmation of values that lie beyond the sphere of the natural. And since for Camus there is no world beyond, man must make his finite experience an end in itself. It is not, as in the case of Kafka, a means to reach a religious goal.

Camus sees "the human voyager as utterly alone and with nothing to rely upon except the compass of his mind"
and heart, Man must give himself his own directions: it is up to him, and to him alone, to decide where he shall go,"6

For Camus no illumination is possible, But in the case of Kafka the light of transcendence occasionally flashes but never totally illumines. These occasional flashes simply dazzle the eyes and never blaze the path. For this reason Kafka's universe is more nihilistic than that of Camus. In Camus there is no attempt at transcendence at all. Man must seek his solidarity with this world. But in Kafka there are attempts at transcendence but such attempts remain always unrewarded. So the basic difference between Kafka and Camus lies in the fact that the former seeks to find consolation in a spiritual faith while the latter questions the validity of spiritual quest and seeks solidarity with the enviroring material world.

It is an image of the imperilled human situation that both Kafka and Camus get across to the reader in their powerfully distinctive ways. If our examination of Kafka's texts (those we have chosen for the present purpose) nearly reveals a vision similar to that of Gloucester in King Lear. "Like flies to wanton boys are we to the Gods; they
kill us for their sport", Camus's world would seem to suggest a situation where the invitation of the earth, the only place conceivable for humankind, incongruously coexists with a pitiless repudiation of human cravings.

Both the writers survey the scene with a naked integrity and peer into the fate reserved for man unflinchingly.

Both can be seen to stand in an organic relationship with their predecessors right since the Greek tragic writers (for both) are seeking to come to grips with man's predicament with as much sympathy and courage as any writer of the past with a similar thrust of mind.