II. Absurd: A Reality of the World

> At this point of his effort man stands face to face with the irrational. He feels within him his longing for happiness and for reason. The absurd is born of this confrontation between the human need and the unreasonable silence of the world. This must not be forgotten. This must be clung to because the whole consequence of a life can depend on it. (Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* 31-32)

Albert Camus is often described as the writer of the absurd; not the writer of the philosophy of the absurd, but of the sensibility of the absurd, as he himself makes it clear in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, "The pages that follow deal with an absurd sensitivity that can be found widespread in the age – and not with an absurd philosophy which our time, properly speaking, has not known" (10). Hence, it would be a misjudgment to conceive Camus as the originator of the concept of the absurd. Its roots seem to be sprouted out of the 19th century Russian nihilism of Ivan Turgenev and Fyodor Dostoevsky, and also from the German philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche. Peter Francev tries to trace the genealogy of the absurd and nihilism, and argues:

> Turgenev was nihilism's proponent, and he was the first person to refer to the new word as a proper term. . . . Dostoevsky elaborates on nihilism in terms of the character in: *Notes from Underground*, *Crime and Punishment*, *The Possessed*, and *The Brothers Karamazov*. . . . Nietzsche discusses nihilism in the most negative of terms: one where "Everything lacks meaning" . . . [however] it was Camus who became the first philosopher to examine the Absurd as an independent extension of nihilism. (29-31)

In his prominent critique of Camus, *Albert Camus and the Literature of Revolt*, John Cruickshank has also tried to give the historical context of the absurd as he writes:

> The history of the word 'absurde', used in French in this metaphysical sense, is no doubt an interesting one. . . . The story of its origins could probably be traced back at least to a growing reaction against science already underway in second half of the nineteenth century . . . however, what is so striking is its ubiquitousness in contemporary or very recent French writing. Malraux . . . speaks several times of a metaphysical absurdity dominating the western world in the twentieth century. . . . Sartre uses the term more sparingly, but he gives a full account of what he means by it in . . . *Nausea*. Various other writers have used the term, but its most recent and fullest investigation is that contained in *The Myth of Sisyphus.* (48-49)

Cruickshank sees the absurd as "a particularly intense form of anti-rationalism" (*Albert Camus and the Literature of Revolt* 50). He further argues that contemporary philosophies of the absurd, assuming all the claims of rationalism as right, claim not only that reality is unknown, but that it is unknowable. Therefore, the existence of intelligibility is denied with which "contact can ultimately be made either by reason, intuition or any other means" (*Albert Camus and the Literature of Revolt* 51).

The essence of the absurd is equally prominent in the existentialist philosophers like Sartre, Kierkegaard, and Jaspers. For Kierkegaard, the absurd is another quality of Christian faith, running counter to all that can be discerned through mundane human experience. In his *Journals,* Kierkegaard asserts that "the absurd, or

to act by virtue of the absurd, is to act upon faith, trusting in God" (291). As has already been described and will further be emphasized, Camus explicitly rejects this faith proposed by Kierkegaard.

For Sartre, with whom the idea is perhaps most usually associated, the term absurd denotes the contingent nature of human existence, the realization of which brings, what he calls, 'nausea'. He defines the absurd as that "which is meaningless. Thus man's existence is absurd because his contingency finds no external justification" (*Being and Nothingness* 628). While for Sartre, absurd is the pertinent presence of meaninglessness, for Camus, absurd is nothing but the sudden realization, the awakening of a thoughtful mind that finds, on the basis of its own immediate experience, a chaos impervious to reason. It is the unbridgeable-gulf between the mind that questions and the world that keeps mum. Indicating the same difference between the attitude of these two philosophers towards the absurd, Svenja Schrahe comments, "Sartre's overall feeling is disgust; Camus's in contrast is absurdity" (44). Sartre himself has commented, as follows, on the different meanings he and Camus give to the term 'absurd':

> Camus's philosophy is a philosophy of the absurd. For him the absurd arises from the relation between man and the world, between man's rational demands and the world's irrationality. The themes which he derives from it are those of classical pessimism. I do not recognize the absurd in the sense of scandal and disillusionment that Camus attributes to it. What I call the absurd is something very different: it is the universal contingency of being which is, but which is not the basis of its being; the absurd is the given, unjustifiable, primordial quality of

existence. (qtd. in Cruickshank, *Albert Camus and the Literature of Revolt* 45)

Therefore, the absurd is a definite situation, an end-point for Sartre. But for Camus, absurd is not final point of life, as he observes in the review of Sartre's *Nausea* in 1938: "The realization that life is absurd cannot be an end, but only a beginning. This is a truth nearly all great minds have taken as their starting point. It is not this discovery that is interesting, but the consequences and rules for action that can be drawn from it" ("On Jean-Paul Sartre's *La Nausee*" 201-02). The same idea is repeated in *The Myth of Sisyphus*: ". . . the absurd, hitherto taken as a conclusion, is considered in this essay as a starting point" (10).

Hence, one thing is clear i.e. whoever has tried to understand the meaning of existence, has faced the absurd. However, it is Albert Camus, who has examined the absurd methodically by analyzing its nature and its further consequences. The absurd is, for Camus, the first phase for his creative writings as well as for life in general. Therefore, Camus deals with the problem of the absurd in his first major writings, which include a novel, a dramatic work, and a philosophical essay.

***The Myth of Sisyphus* – Absurd in Theory**

The Myth of Sisyphus is the philosophical essay where Camus has examined the absurd in all of its colours. Published in 1942, during the German occupation of France, the essay determines the otherwise literary Camus as a philosopher. As is made clear in its Preface, the essay not only deals with the nature of the absurd, but also with its legitimate answer i.e. the revolt. No doubt, it deals with the gloomy subject of the absurd, but in itself, it is full of positivity and strength. Talking about its subject matter, Camus writes in its March 1955 Preface:

> The fundamental subject of *The Myth of Sisyphus* is this: it is legitimate and necessary to wonder whether life has a meaning: therefore it is legitimate to meet the problem of suicide face to face. The answer . . . is this: even if one does not believe in God suicide is not legitimate . . . [and] even within the limits of nihilism, it is possible to find the means to proceed beyond nihilism. . . . Although *The Myth of Sisyphus* poses mortal problems, it sums itself up for me as a lucid invitation to live and to create, in the very midst of the desert. (*The Myth of Sisyphus* 7)

Therefore, like all great philosophers, Camus has considered “the meaning of life” as “the most urgent of questions” (*The Myth of Sisyphus*12). Further, for him, the fundamental question of philosophy is “whether life is or is not worth living”, and it demands a reply (*The Myth of Sisyphus*11). Concentrating his focus on the most serious problem of suicide, Camus argues that no idea is worth dying for. However, people commit suicide as they get the idea that “life is not worth living” (*The Myth of Sisyphus*11). Suicide is a kind of confession which one does about his/her inability to cope with the absurd. Camus writes:

> … killing yourself amount to confessing. It is confessing that life is too much for you or that you do not understand it. . . . It’s merely confessing that that ‘is not worth the trouble’. . . . Dying voluntarily implies that you have recognized, even instinctively, the ridiculous character of that habit, the absence of any profound reason for living, the insane character of that daily agitation and the uselessness of suffering. (*The Myth of Sisyphus*13)

Now, the question arises – what, after all, is it that seems to take all the juice of life from a living fellow and persuades him/ her to the path of suicide? The answer is – the absurd. It is the feeling of the absurd which suddenly transforms a familiar world into an exile. But the point, here, is whether or not suicide is a legitimate reply to the absurd. Camus emphasizes the same and articulates that the subject matter of this essay is precisely "this relationship between the absurd and suicide, the exact degree to which suicide is a solution to the absurd" (*The Myth of Sisyphus* 14). The view that suicide is the consequence of the absurd deeply pinches Camus and stimulates him to question further as he puts it:

> One kills oneself because life is not worth living; that is certainly a truth. . . . But does that insult to existence, that flat denial in which it is plunged come from the fact that it has no meaning? Does its absurdity require one to escape it through hope or suicide – this is what must be clarified, hunted down and elucidated while brushing aside all the rest. (*The Myth of Sisyphus* 16)

And here lies the gist of this essay, the positivity of Camus, and the defeat of the absurd. Camus firmly states that the real effort lies not in committing suicide or in a hope for other life, but in staying face to face with the absurd and overcoming it.

Explaining the nature of the absurd, Camus enquires that the absurd is the sudden and conscious realization of the futile repeatedness of things. He 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. (*The Myth of Sisyphus* 19)

In the like manner, it is the strangeness of the world towards human sufferings, which initiates this realization that there is no coherence in the affairs of this world; and everything and each attempt ends up in incoherent absurdity.

Man is a rational creation whose deepest desire is to have clarity of this world, as Camus observes, "The mind's deepest desire . . . is an insistence upon familiarity, an appetite for clarity" (*The Myth of Sisyphus* 23). He further argues that man is always in the effort of reducing the world to human level "stamping it with his seal. . . . That nostalgia for unity, that appetite for the absolute illustrates the essential impulse for the human drama" (*The Myth of Sisyphus* 23).

But Camus, like Nietzsche, Sartre, and Jaspers, is aware of the limited sphere of reason, which becomes insufficient to clear the irrationality of the world. He observes that the world is fine and arranged till "the mind keeps silent in the motionless world of its hopes. . . . But with its first move this world cracks and tumbles: an infinite number of shimmering fragments is offered to the understanding" (*The Myth of Sisyphus* 24). In such situations, what is reliable and understandable is one's self. Talking about the reliability of one's heart and mind, Camus further claims, "I know this heart within me. . . . I can feel, and I judge that it exists. This would I can touch, and I likewise judge that it exists. There ends all my knowledge, and the rest is construction" (*The Myth of Sisyphus* 24). This uncertainty of the world in the desired clarity of mind is absurd. Camus finds the strongest evidence for this concept of the absurd in "what seems the unimpeachably empirical domain of the physical sciences" (Foley 7). Camus realizes that even Science, which boasts of

rationality and empirical clarity, ultimately relies on poetry or metaphor or art to explain itself. Illustrating this point, he articulates in *The Myth of Sisyphus*:

> You describe it to me and you teach me to classify it. You enumerate its laws and in my thirst for knowledge I admit that they are true. . . . At the final stage you teach me that this wondrous and multi-coloured universe can be reduced to the atom and that the atom itself can be reduced to the electron. . . . But you tell me of an invisible planetary system in which electrons gravitate around a nucleus. You explain this world to me with an image. I realize then that you have been reduced to poetry. . . . So that science that was to teach me everything ends up in a hypothesis, that lucidity founders in metaphor, that uncertainty is resolved in a work of art. What need had I of so many efforts? (25)

Therefore, even intelligence (and not blind reason) concludes that "this world is absurd … unintelligible and limited" (Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* 26). However, it would be a mistake to see either the world or the human existence as absurd in itself. No doubt, the world is not reasonable and resists towards human intelligence and man's longing for clarity, but what is absurd is the realization of this conflict that Camus clarifies:

> I said that the world is absurd but I was too hasty. 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. (*The Myth of Sisyphus* 26)

He further argues that "the Absurd is not in man . . . nor in the world but in their presence together. For the moment it is the only bond uniting them" (*The Myth*

of Sisyphus 34). Camus believes in the "odd trinity" of the Man, the World, and the Absurd, which cannot be separated. Hence, he declares, "To destroy one of its terms is to destroy the whole. There can be no absurd outside the human mind. Thus, like everything else, the absurd ends with death. But there can be no absurd outside this world either" (*The Myth of Sisyphus* 34).

R. Kamber, in his critical entry, *On Camus*, emphasizes the same argument, ". . . we want the world to make sense, but it does not make sense. To see this conflict is to see the absurd" (52). Therefore, neither human existence nor the world is absurd. The absurd feeling is "the divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting" (Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* 13). David Carroll has tried to put this sense of absurdity and its resultant anguish in the following words:

> [Absurdity], the *feeling* of radical diverse, of living in a once familiar but now suddenly radically alien homeland, of being adrift between past and future and unable to rely on either to give meaning to the present, of being a stranger to the world and to oneself, might appear to be cause for despair, especially since the exile from self, world and others is described as 'without remedy'. (56-57)

The strength of *The Myth of Sisyphus* does not lie in the intellectual discovery of the absurd as many philosophers like Kierkegaard, Chestov, Jaspers, Dostoevsky etc. have already reached on this deserted plain. It lies in the apparent consequences of this discovery which have been dealt with in this essay. Camus shares his motto and writes:

> I am interested – let me repeat again – not so much in absurd discoveries as in their consequences. If one is assured of these facts, what is one to conclude, how far is one to go to elude nothing? Is one

> to die voluntarily or to hope in spite of everything? Beforehand, it is necessary to take the same rapid inventory on the plane of the intelligence. (*The Myth of Sisyphus* 22)

Camus examines that while the rationalists elude the nothing (absurd) by rejecting the existence of the absurd through eternal reason, the existentialists like Kierkegaard, Jaspers, Chestov, Dostoevsky etc. elude it through the irrational by denying even whatever little reason is in man. But he can't rely upon this partial vision. He recognizes the validity of reason, but equally accepts its limits. To him, complete faith in reason or absolute rejection of reason, both are betrayals of man's situation in the world and serve only to promote harmful delirium. "Camus's concern", Cruickshank observes, "is to find a way of living which accepts the absurd instead of veiling it behind either rationalism or irrationalism" (*Albert Camus and the Literature of Revolt* 45). Hence, to Camus, both the existentialists and the rationalists are escapers and he separates himself from the both. He believes, neither in the transcendental hope of the theistic existentialists, nor in the blind faith of reason of the rationalists. He believes in the absurd itself, in preserving the very thing that crushes him, in the "confrontation and the unceasing struggle" (*The Myth of Sisyphus* 34).

Camus exposes the forced hope of religion of the theistic existentialists one by one. He examines that Jaspers, though, asserts the unintelligibility of the world, but suddenly transfers it into the transcendent when he says: "Does not the failure reveal, beyond any possible explanation and interpretation, not the absence but the existence of transcendent?" (qtd. in *The Myth of Sisyphus* 36). In this way, Jaspers totally ignores the logic and makes the absurd the God. Likewise, Chestov (1866-1938), the Russian existentialist, accepts the fundamental absurdity of all existence, but frees himself from the burden of the absurd by rejecting the rational and converting the

absurd into God. Camus observes that Chestov doesn't say "This is absurd" but rather "This is God: we must rely on him even if he doesn't correspond to any of our rational categories" (*The Myth of Sisyphus* 37). For Camus, this leap is an escape from the absurd and from man's rational cravings for clarity. He further argues, "To Chestov reason is useless but there is something beyond reason. To an absurd mind reason is useless and there is nothing beyond reason" (*The Myth of Sisyphus* 38). Camus examines Kierkegaard also and observes that he has also taken the leap. Horrified by the sterile absurdity, Kierkegaard invents the concept of hope in God and after life. Camus terms this attitude of the existentialists as "philosophical suicide" (*The Myth of Sisyphus* 43). He examines that they have sacrificed the absurd for the sake of the irrational. In contrast to the above said existentialists, Camus's absurd man "recognizes the struggle, doesn't absolutely scorn reason and admits the irrational. . . . He knows simply that in that alert awareness there is no further place for hope" (Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* 39). Placing Camus within the tradition of French anti-rationalism, Patrick Henry observes:

> Many anti-rationalists, Pascal, Rousseau, and Bergson for example, stressed the limits of reason but substituted another means of knowledge, like faith, sentiment or intuition, in its place. Camus, as well as Voltaire, stressed the limitations of reason, without substituting an alternative. Indeed . . . Voltaire repudiated both Pascal and Rousseau for having done so, just as Camus reproached the Existentialists for the same reason. (96)

In this way, it can be evaluated that Camus rejects the negation of the absurd and puts human sensibility and its limited reason above the irrational. He writes in the same tone:

> . . . I want to know whether I can live with what I know and with that alone. I am told again that here the intelligence must sacrifice its pride and the reason bow down. But if I recognize the limits of reason, I do not therefore negate it, recognizing its relative powers. I merely want to remain in this middle path where the intelligence can remain clear. If this is its pride, I see no sufficient reason for giving it up. (*The Myth of Sisyphus* 42)

Showing his impeccable faith in his limited reason and in the unresponsive world as well, Camus further strengths his stand against the existentialists and saves himself from the intellectual suicide which is so easy to commit. He explains very clearly:

> My reasoning wants to be faithful to the evidence that aroused it. The evidence is the absurd. It is that divorce between the mind that desires and the world that disappoints my nostalgia for unity, this fragmented universe and the contradiction that binds them together. Kierkegaard suppresses my nostalgia and Husserl gathers together that universe. That is not what I was expecting. It was a matter of living and thinking with those dislocations. (*The Myth of Sisyphus* 50)

Therefore, Camus doesn't want to mask or suppress the absurd by denying one of the terms of its equation. He simply desires to enquire whether "one can live the [absurd] or whether . . . logic commands one to die of it" (*The Myth of Sisyphus* 50)). And he makes his choice, a choice totally contradictory to the theist existentialists, and writes in the same essay," I am not interested in philosophical suicide but rather in plain suicide" (50). Hence, what Camus wants is to be faithful and authentic to oneself, rejecting every kind of abstract speculation, however hopeful and peaceful it

may be, in the hopeless absurdity. For him, one can be sure only for what one's logic explains to him/ her. All other things are just speculations. Camus clarifies:

> I don't know whether this world has a meaning that transcends it. But I know that I do not know that meaning and that it is impossible for me just now to know it. What can a meaning outside my condition mean to me? I can understand only in human terms. . . . And these two certainties – my appetite for the absolute and for unity and the impossibility of reducing this world to a rational and reasonable principle. . . . What other truth can I admit without lying . . . ? (*The Myth of Sisyphus* 51)

In this way, the absurd man lives in certainty of the absurd, without an appeal either to this life or to another life. In other word, he is somehow like a Buddhist monk who lives in the state of Nibbana, without any attachment, however realizing the best what life provides.

Camus is often criticized as the defender of nihilism, because he rejects the possibility of any superior hope in the scheme of the absurd. However, Camus's absurd is not a prelude to nihilism, but a method which allows the reconstruction of positive ethics. He asserts repeatedly that it is the implications of the absurd that interest him more than the absurd itself. He is ready to face the absurd and responds it with a positive attitude. But this acceptance is not a meek submission. On the contrary, it is a scornful revolt against the absurd and a deified faith in the dignity and capability of man to struggle with the absurd. His absurd man is that who doesn't flee from the absurd, but respects the tension of the absurd. Camus describes the absurd man in the following words:

> What, in fact, is the absurd man? He, who, without negating it, does nothing for the eternal. Not that nostalgia is forging to him. But he prefers his courage and his reasoning. The first teaches him to live without appeal and the get along with what he has; the second informs him of his limits. Assured of his temporally limited freedom, consciousness, he lives out his adventure within the span of his lifetime. (*The Myth of Sisyphus* 64)

But in spite of his repeated clarifications, he has been termed as a pessimist by the Christians as well as the Marxists. Responding to their charges, Camus comments in his lecture "The Unbeliever and Christians":

> By what right, moreover, could a Christian or a Marxist accuse me, for example, of pessimism? I was not the one to invent the misery of the human being or the terrifying formulas of divine malediction. . . . I was not the one who said that man was incapable of saving himself by his own means and that in the depths of his degradation his only hope was in the grace of God. . . . If Christianity is pessimistic as to man, it is optimistic as to human destiny. Well, I can say that, pessimistic as to human destiny, I am optimistic as to man. (*Resistance, Rebellion, and Death* 72-73)

Therefore, revolt is the only logical consequence of the absurd acceptable to Camus. Living is not killing the absurd, as is done by the rational extremists or the religious extremists, but keeping it alive. The only coherent philosophical position left to the absurd man is, thus, the revolt. Describing the ethics of revolt, he writes in *The Myth of Sisyphus*:

> It is a constant confrontation between man and his own obscurity. It is an insistence upon an impossible transparency. It challenges the world anew every second. . . . It is not aspiration, for it is devoid of hope. That revolt is the certainty of a crushing fate, without the resignation that ought to accompany it. (53-54)

Hence, Camus's absurd man is ready to be condemned to death than to commit physical or philosophical suicide. He affirms the value of life through revolt, devoid of all confusions and unapproachable hope. Thus, revolt "restores its majesty to life" (Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* 54). Camus further argues that while suicide consents to the absurd as final and limitless, revolt is an ongoing struggle with the absurd, denying each second its supremacy by re-affirming the dignity and irreconcilable spirit of man. To him, "revolt", therefore, becomes "the first consequence of the Absurd" (Hanna 24).

Correlating the absurd with Sartre's concept of freedom, Camus talks much like Sartre and explains that the absurd liberates man and enables him to acquire the freedom of action and thought. He states, "Now if the absurd cancels all my chances of eternal freedom, it restores and magnifies on the other hand my freedom of action" (*The Myth of Sisyphus* 56). Again, comparing the paradoxical freedom of the theist existentialists and that of the absurd man, Camus opines that the mystics find freedom giving themselves while the absurd man's freedom liberates him. The mystics, by losing themselves in "their god", by accepting his rules and regulations, become "secretly free" (*The Myth of Sisyphus* 57). To Camus, it is somehow a feeling of freedom in accepted slavery. On the contrary, accepting death – the most obvious absurdity, "the absurd man feels released from everything" (*The Myth of Sisyphus* 58).

Death and the absurd are liberators and not binders for him. Camus declares very clearly:

> The absurd man thus catches sight of a burning and frigid, transparent and limited universe in which nothing is possible but everything is given, and beyond which all is collapse and nothingness. He can then decide to accept such a universe and draw from it his strength, his refusal to hope, and the unyielding evidence of a life without consolation. (*The Myth of Sisyphus* 58-59)

It seems that Camus is not against atheistic existential philosophy of Sartre, because both of them seem to talk about the same kind of freedom. This returning to consciousness by rejecting all outer rules represents the first steps of absurd freedom. What is objectionable to Camus is "the existential preaching that is alluded to and with it that spiritual leap which basically escapes consciousness" (*The Myth of Sisyphus* 58). The second consequence of the absurd, therefore, is freedom.

Talking about the third consequence of the absurd i.e. passion, Camus opines that in an absurd universe without values to guide and choices to make, "what counts is not the best living but the most living" (*The Myth of Sisyphus* 59). The absurd man, fully aware of his limitations and his fate condemned with inevitable death, can never believe in the Greek saying that those who died young are beloved of gods. He is passionate about the earthly life and will never think about "entering the ridiculous world of the god . . . forever losing the purest joys which is feeling, and feeling on this earth" (Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* 62). Hence, there is no need to commit suicide or to flee away from the absurd. It should be faced with courage, with full consciousness of one's revolt, freedom, and passion.

Camus finds the incarnation of these responses to the absurd in the mythical character Sisyphus. He is "the absurd hero . . . as much through his passions as through his torture. . ." (Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* 108). He prefers the joys of this earth than the celestial blessing. It is his "scorn of the gods, his hatred of death, and his passion for life" which won him "that unspeakable penalty in which the whole being is exerted towards accomplishing nothing" (Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* 108). Camus observes that Sisyphus is condemned to "ceaselessly rolling a rock to the top of a mountain, whence the stone would fall back of its own weight. . . . There is no more dreadful punishment than futile and hopeless labour" (*The Myth of Sisyphus* 107). Camus compares the fate of a workman with that of Sisyphus and says, "The workman of today works everyday in his life at the same tasks and this fate is no less absurd" (*The Myth of Sisyphus* 109). However, there is no fate that can't be surmounted by scorn and this is what Sisyphus does. He accepts his fate as a choice and not as a punishment enthroned by some higher authority (this negates the gods). He realizes its futility but doesn't aspire for its fertility. This acknowledgement of his absurd struggle is Sisyphus's victory over his fate, over the gods, and, of course, over the rock. He is superior to his fate and stronger than his rock. And therefore, Camus argues that "one must imagine Sisyphus happy" (*The Myth of Sisyphus* 111).

Apart from Sisyphus – the archetype of an absurd man who is full of anguish and revolt against the absurd, Camus further suggests Don Juan, the Actor, and the Conqueror as the illustrations of the absurd life. However, Camus makes it clear that these shouldn't be taken as the model of an absurd behaviour but only as illustrations of an absurd idea. Don Juan prefers endless love making instead of an archetypal love, the Actor represents eternal liveliness instead of eternal life, and the Conqueror's greatest achievement is overcoming of the self. Apart from their desire to live the

most, all the three are aware of their limits. P. McCarthy explains Camus's point regarding these archetypes of the absurd and writes that Don Juan is not a passionate lover, the actor juxtaposes his energy with the awareness that he is playing a part, while the conqueror knows that the can win no political victories. Hence, "all three are conscious of limits" which enables them to live the absurd (McCarthy, *Camus* 151). McCarthy further argues that this free acceptance of limits paves way for other values essential for the absurd man as he points out :

> Don Juan demonstrates courage and lucidity. . . . Refusing to believe in the false mystique of love he seduces his last woman and waits to die. . . . The actor shows lucidity when he emphasizes the edge of nothingness that is present in all his roles. . . . When he writes that the conqueror can never win Camus is attacking the mystique of revolution which is another form of false oneness like religion or cartesianism. (152)

After going through Camus's *The Myth of Sisyphus*, it can be argued that Camus's philosophy of absurd is that of limitations, one, which respects the tension of the absurd. To him, it is never a question of overcoming the absurd but only of being faithful to the rules of the battle. "Conquest or play- acting, multiple loves, absurd revolt", says Camus, "are tributes that man pays to his dignity in a campaign in which he is defeated in advance" (*The Myth of Sisyphus* 86). Carroll puts the gist of Camus's concept of the absurd in the following words:

> The Absurd has meaning only in so far as it is not agreed to. Affirmed but not agreed to, resisted but not denied, engaged in the hopeless but at the same time not desperate tasks of living, thinking and acting, meaning and value emerge precisely out of their absence and in the

> very nihilistic desert that both negates them and makes them possible. (59)

Hence, Camus advocates for accepting and living the tension of the absurd, without ever flinching back, either in despair or in the absurd God.

This awareness of the human limitations is most and best evident in the artist-writer, who creates and destroys at the same time. This conception of creation will be fully discussed in the next chapter. To conclude, it can be said that *The Myth of Sisyphus* ends up, not in pessimism, but in optimism, without hope for the eternal and full belief in the absurd itself. One is not demanded to commit suicide, either physical or philosophical, but simply to live the absurd, as Meursault tries to do in Camus's absurd novel, *The Stranger*.

The Stranger – Absurd in Practice

Published in 1942, like *The Myth of Sisyphus*, in Nazi- occupied Paris, *The Stranger* is a simple story, told in an unconventional way, of the life of a young pied-noir named Meursault. The novel opens with, probably, the most famous line in modern literature: "Maman died today. Or yesterday may be, I don't know" (Camus, *The Stranger* 3). Meursault, after receiving the telegram of his mother's death, takes two days leave from his boss to attend the funeral at Marengo where his mother was living at the old people's home. He attends the funeral, somewhat passively, and returns to Algiers. The following day he goes for swimming, meets Marie, swims with her, goes with her to a Fernandel movie, and then takes her home with him for the night. The next day, Sunday passes in boredom; evening comes and the week- end is over, as Meursault himself realizes, "It occurred to me that anyway one more Sunday was over, that Maman was buried now, that I was going back to work, and that really, nothing had changed" (Camus, *The Stranger* 24). Meursault befriends, though

indifferently, with Raymond, reputed to be a panderer. In the same indifferent way, he writes a note to Raymond's former mistress, an Arab girl, so that Raymond could carry out his plan of revenge for her infidelity. The plan is carried out, the girl is beaten and the policeman comes. Again, in his habit of indifference, Meursault agrees to vouch for Raymond at the police station. Through an acquaintance of Raymond, Meursault and Marie are invited to the beach. There, they discover that an Arab, the brother of Raymond's former mistress, is waiting to avenge his sister. There is a fight and Raymond is wounded. Later, carrying a gun, Raymond goes back to the same spot. Meursault, might be trying to avoid further fight, takes the gun himself when Raymond attempts to begin another fight. But the Arab boy doesn't respond and they have to return without incident. Meursault, unwilling "to climb the wooden staircase and face the women again", decides to turn back "toward the beach" because "to stay or to go, it amounted to the same thing" to him (Camus, *The Stranger* 57). The sun is at its fullest tyranny as Camus explains, "All that heat was pressing down on [Meursault] and making it hard for [him] to go on" (*The Stranger* 57). Meursault heads towards the rock, but when he gets closer, he notices that "Raymond's man had came back" (Camus, *The Stranger* 57). He moves toward the coolness of the rock while the Arab draws his knife and holds it up to him in the sun. "The light shot off the steel", Meursault feels, "and it was like a ling flashing blade cutting at my forehead. . ." (Camus, *The Stranger* 59). It is then that Meursault fires the revolver. The Arab falls and after a few seconds, Meursault fires four more shots.

Meursault is arrested after the incident, and the trial comes after a year in prison. During the trial, he is found guilty for what he is – a man who had sent his mother away in an old home, had not shed a tear on her funeral, had smoked and drank coffee in the presence of her dead body, and had not lingered at his mother's

grave following the burial. Moreover, he swam and slept with a girl on the following day. These innocent and careless acts have suddenly been gathered together to prosecute him. Thomas Hanna rightly comments, "Interpreted by a prosecuting attorney, confirmed by a jury, and Meursault is recognized as a "Monster" whose death has been decreed by society" (37). The trial enables Meursault to further realize the absurdity and arbitrariness of the world, where "familiar paths traced in summer skies could lead as easily to prison as to the sleep of the innocent" (Camus, *The Stranger* 97).

Keeping in mind the story of our stranger, Hanna remarks, "All of the novels and plays of Albert Camus are more or less direct dramatic expressions of his philosophic temper" (35). The question, here, is whether or not *The Stranger* qualifies all the essential philosophical concerns of the absurd depicted in *The Myth of Sisyphus*; or put in another way, whether Meursault is an absurd hero or not. Jean-Paul Sartre, in his critical essay "Camus' *The Outsider*", which is a critique both of *The Myth of Sisyphus* and *The Stranger*, supports Hanna's argument and praises the novel, both for its technical presentation and its thematic value. He writes:

> There is not a single unnecessary detail, not one that is not returned to later on and used in the argument. And when we close the book, we realize that it could not have had any other ending. In this world that has been stripped of its causality and presented as absurd, the smallest incident has weight. There is no single one which does not help to lead the hero to crime and capital punishment. *The Outsider* is a classical work, an orderly work, composed about the absurd and against the absurd. ("Camus' *The Outsider*" 41)

He further maintains that Camus's novel is an attempt to express the feeling of the absurd without justifying or proving anything, because "the absurd man does not explain; he describes" (28). Moreover, Camus is "simply presenting something and is not concerned with a justification of what is fundamentally unjustifiable" (Sartre, "Camus' *The Outsider*" 28). Further, supporting Hanna's argument, Sartre observes that the novel can be understood through the fundamental reasoning provided in *The Myth of Sisyphus.* To him, "*The Myth of Sisyphus* teaches us how to accept our author's novel. In it, we find the theory of the novel of absurdity" (Sartre, "Camus' *The Outsider*" 28). However, Sartre is somewhat disturbed by the insensitivity of Meursault and his lack of the sense of revolt until the last pages of the book. He concludes that Meursault is not in the revolt of an absurd hero "except for a brief moment in the novel" ("Camus' *The Outsider*" 31). Almost reaffirming Sartre, Hanna also opines that no doubt "the themes of the Absurd are here present, i.e., absurdity, revolt, a re-found freedom, and the transforming significance of death, but . . . it becomes obvious that these themes are presented in a dramatic pattern which does not conform the that ideal pattern which is suggested in *The Myth*" (39). However, both of the critics are right only in a partial way, as they omit the fact that Camus is a novelist while writing *The Stranger* and a philosopher while writing *The Myth of Sisyphus*. Further, his purpose in *The Stranger* is not limited just to the concept of absurd; it encircles in its sphere a vast range of moral and social problems. Hence, *The Stranger* is much more than being an absurd novel.

One of the recent critics of Camus, Simon Lea, has criticized Meursault as an unreal character and has denied the possibility of his being in real world. He writes, while comparing Meursault with other absurd characters of Camus:

> . . . unlike Caligula and Martha, Meursault could not exist in real life. That is, he in not real enough to be an illustration of an actual person experiencing the Absurd. In fact, this being so, it would be a mistake to take Meursault as an example; certainly not one to follow. . . . Camus did not intend to make him a god but he didn't make him human either. (2)

Lea's argument for his denial of Meursault as a human being is that Meursault doesn't possess tender human feelings as he argues:

> Meursault appears to be completely unaware of those aspects of love, friendship, and justice that are not rational. The experience of being in love, of having friendships with others, of justice is completely alien to him. As a result, Meursault is incapable of sharing these things with other members of his society. He is a pure individual with no sense of solidarity with others. He cannot identify with us and we cannot identify with him. He is a stranger. (13)

But I am not in agreement with Simon Lea, since he fails to understand Meursault fully. The reason for Meursault's apparent unreality and strangeness in our well balanced society is that he is an absurd hero par excellence. He appears as a stranger, simply because after the realization of the absurdity of this world and his limitations as a human being, he doesn't commit suicide (either physical or philosophical), but simply decides to live with the absurd, without taking leap in any abstractions like God, love, religion, friendship, or justice. Further, he is not hostile towards any body and no one, who is in his contact, seems to be surprised by his behaviour. No doubt, he doesn't express his emotions fully, yet he is not insensitive. He loves his mother, but in a way the absurd allows him to do. At a place, when

asked if he loved his mother, he replied in an assured sense, "Yes, the same as anyone" (Camus, *The Stranger* 67). Therefore, he is not insensitive, but simply prefers to live in the present and prefers physical sensibility in comparison to the abstract emotions. At a point, during the trial, he wants to explain to the prosecutor that his mind is always on what is coming next, today or tomorrow. Further, the reason for his shooting the Arab is more or less physical discomfort caused by the scorching heat of the Arabian sun, as he tried to make it clear to the judge, "I said, almost at random, in fact, that I never intended to kill the Arab. . . . Fumbling a little with my words and realizing how ridiculous I sounded, I blurted out that it was because of the sun" (Camus, *The Stranger* 102-03).

Lea's another argument for not recognizing Meursault as a human being is that he doesn't have human nature. But he is forgetting the fact that Camus doesn't believe in the existence of prior- essences. However, later in *The Rebel* he talks about a set of values, totally human and not transcendental, which should be respected, he, like Sartre, never advocates the preference of fixe-essence over existence. Meursault, therefore, is what he is and not what he should be according to the social set-up. Hence, it would be a mistake to judge an absurd fellow according to the predetermined notions of behavioral tendencies, fixed by the society.

The notion of the absurd, in the novel, is two- fold. On one hand, Meursault is an absurd hero, because of his recognition of the incoherence of the world and his absurd revolt against this incongruity. On the other hand, the society, in itself, is absurd, illogical and cruel. It executes Meursault, not because he has killed the "forever- unnamed Arab" but because of his "social non- conformity, exemplified by his failure to express conventional grief after the death of his mother" (Foley 14). Lea even denies the fact of Meursault's being an absurd hero on the basis that he denies

the happiness of this earth, which can be gained through "love, friendship and morality", for the sake of "arbitrariness of things. . . . The Absurd involves a clash of two conflicting beliefs" and Meursault knows only the second aspect – the incomprehensiveness of the world, and not the both, "he is not absurd" (16-17). Here again, he seems partial, as he denies the fact that Meursault is happy and contented in his life. He lives his life with full lucidity without taking refuse in morality. His is not an imposed temperament by the author rather he contemplates and observes things before reaching at any conclusion. He lives with the absurd and resolute to die with it, in full honesty with the absurd. Even at the verge of death, he doesn't distract from his path and accepts death, without a single consideration of fleeing in hope. He contemplates:

> Well, so I'm going to die. . . . But everybody knows life isn't worth living. Deep down I knew perfectly well that it doesn't much matter whether you die at thirty or at seventy. . . . In fact, nothing could be clearer. . . . At that point, what would disturb my train of thought was the terrifying leap I would feel my heart take at the idea of having twenty more years of life ahead of me. But I simply had to stifle it. . . . Since we're all going to die, it's obvious that when and how don't matter. Therefore . . . I had to accept the rejection of my appeal. (Camus, *The Stranger* 114)

This temptation of Meursault to take a leap from the absurd and his subsequent victory over it can be compared to the real experience of Primo Levi, an atheist, who faced an intolerable temptation to pray in a concentration camp, but showed incomparable integrity of character in overcoming that temptation. James

Wood quotes Levi's account of the episode in *The Drowned and the Saved*, in his Introduction to *The Myth of Sisyphus*:

> I too entered the Lager as a non-believer and as a non-believer I was liberated. . . . I must nevertheless admit that I experienced . . . the temptation to yield, to seek refuge in prayer. This happened in the October of 1944, in the one moment in which I lucidly perceived the imminence of death. Naked and compressed among my naked companions . . . I was waiting to file past the 'commission' that with one glance would decide whether I should immediately go into the gas chamber or was instead strong enough to go on working. For one instant I felt the need to ask for help and asylum; then, despite my anguish, equanimity prevailed: you do not change the rules of the game at the end of the match, not when you are losing. . . . I rejected the temptation: I knew that otherwise were I to survive, I would have to be ashamed of it. (xx)

Hence, Camus's Meursault is in quite contrast with Kierkegaard and other theistic existentialists, who try to change the rules of the game in the last moment. This is the difference between Camus's existentialism and that of Kierkegaard's and others'. Meursault is honest and truthful in contrast with the dishonest and truthless society. Camus stresses upon the same idea in the *Preface* to the American University edition (1956) of *The Stranger* and says:

> . . . the hero of my book is condemned because he does not play the game. In this respect, he is foreign to the society in which he lives; he wanders, on the fringe, in the suburbs of private, solitary, sensual life.

> And this is why some readers have been tempted to look upon him as a piece of social wreckage. ("Preface to *The Stranger*" 335-336).

He further argues that Meursault's positivity lies in the fact that he refuses to lie. Camus explains:

> To lie is not only to say what isn't true. It is also and above all, to say more than is true, and, as far as the human heart is concerned, to express more than one feels. This is what we all do, every day, to simplify life. He says what he is, he refuses to hide his feelings, and immediately society feels threatened. He is asked, for example, to say that he regrets his crime, in the approved manner. He replies that what he feels is annoyance rather than real regret. And this shade of meaning condemns him. ("Preface to *The Stranger*" 336)

However, Conor Cruise O' Brien, one of the most influential critics of *The Stranger*, denies the fact of Meursault's honesty and suggests that it is Meursault's dishonesty that is apparent by close reading of the novel. For example, Meursault lies when he writes a letter for Raymond, designed to "deceive" his Arab girlfriend and "expose her to humiliation" (*Camus* 20-21). But John Foley refutes this charge of Cruise O' Brien and argues:

> Meursault is as honest as the absurd will allow. He is honest when he feels he can speak in honesty – that is, ultimately, in relation to his own feelings. The absurd disallows him the possibility of constructing criteria for determining good and bad, right and wrong, in other more inclusive or social contests. (15)

Foley's argument can be supported through the help of the text, where, at least seven or eight times, Meursault seems to reject the morality of right and wrong. At

one point, during the wake, he desires for smoking and contemplates, "But I hesitated, because I didn't know if I could do it with Maman right there. I thought about it; it didn't matter" (Camus, *The Stranger* 8). The same sense of honesty on the part of Meursault can be observed when he reads on a paper, discovered in his cell, of the murder of a man by his mother and sister. The man had been in disguise and his mother and his sister killed themselves when they discovered what had they done. Meursault's response is intriguing when he says, "On the one hand it wasn't very likely. On the other, it was perfectly natural. Anyway, I thought the traveler pretty much deserved what he got and that you should never play games" (Camus, *The Stranger* 80). This episode becomes the essence of Camus's play *The Misunderstanding*. Summarizing the meaning of that play, Camus writes, "It amounts to saying that in an unjust or indifferent world man can save himself, and save others, by practicing the most basic sincerity and pronouncing the most appropriate word" (qtd. in Foley 178-79). However, the opposite happens to Meursault because of his sincerity and straightforwardness. The same sense of sincerity is evident on Meursault's part when he replies Marie about his views regarding marrying her. Though he likes her and at one point even thinks about marrying her, he doesn't express more than what he really feels.

Meursault is occasionally accused for not loving and caring his mother. But this is not true. It is because of his modest earnings that he has to send his mother in old home. At a place he says, "I probably did love Maman", but being an absurd man, realizing the meaninglessness of life, he equally says, "but that didn't mean anything" (Camus, *The Stranger* 65). As has been earlier said, he lives in present and his physical needs often get in the way of his feelings. He further explains, "The day I buried Maman, I was very tired and sleepy, so much so that I wasn't really aware of

what was going on. What I can say for certain is that I would rather Maman hadn't died" (Camus, *The Stranger* 65). But sincerity is not enough for the hypocrite society. Meursault's honesty confronts, again and again, with the dishonest society. During his mother's wake and funeral, Meursault is considered as a stranger; and both of these events appear as his trials, even before his committing any crime. Meursault realizes this and comments about the attitude of the other inmates of the old house, "For a second I had the ridiculous feeling that they were there to judge me" (Camus, *The Stranger* 10). Foley is right when he says: "In both of these cases, Meursault's lucidity and honesty are seen to come into conflict with the dishonesty of society in general. From the perspective of the absurd, these two events, paradoxically enough, could be said to have greater significance than the killing of the unnamed Arab" (16). Moreover, the killing of the Arab appears as a necessity, not to prove the reign of justice, but to put Meursault on trial for what he is.

Hence, Meursault's lucidity comes directly in conflict with the dishonesty and false positivism of both the state and its proxy, the court. While for Camus, Meursault is "the only Christ we deserve" ("Preface to *The Stranger*" 337), the magistrate in the novel refers him as "Monsieur Anti-Christ" (Camus, *The Stranger* 71). Meursault's simple and direct language is ignored by the institutional and conventional law and morality. Though he makes it clear during the trial that he "never intended to kill the Arab" and "it was because of the sun", yet it doesn't make any sense to the magistrate (Camus, *The Stranger* 102-103). What interests the magistrate is not the actual killing, but the pause between the first shot and the four others, as he asked Meursault, "Why did you pause between the first and second shot?" (Camus, *The Stranger* 67). And here, the real motive of the magistrate is exposed. He is not interested in the crime, of which Meursault has been accused, but in his non-conformity, his atheism, and

especially his lack of religiously inspired remorse and guilt. Meursault recollects about the same:

> But he cut me off and urged me one last time, drawing himself up to his full height and asking me if I believed in God. I said no. He sat down indignantly. He said it was impossible; all men believed in God, even those who turn their backs on him. That was his belief, and if he were ever to doubt it, his life would become meaningless. "Do you want my life to be meaningless?" he shouted. (Camus, *The Stranger* 69)

Similarly, the State prosecutor ignores the actual killing and accuses Meursault of his being morally and socially non-conformed. Meursault's crime appears to him "the basest of crimes" and he thinks that he is "dealing with a monster", not because Meursault has killed an Arab, but solely because he is "a man without morals" (Camus, *The Stranger* 96). When the defense lawyer tries to make the dealings logical and asks, "Come now, is my client on trial for burying his mother or for killing a man?" the prosecutor shouts, "Indeed . . . I accuse this man of burying his mother with crime in his heart!" (Camus, *The Stranger* 96). Claiming to have peered into Meursault's soul, the prosecutor claims that he has no soul at all. Meursault contemplates, "He said that he had peered into it and that he had found nothing, gentlemen of the jury. He said the truth was that I didn't have a soul and that nothing human, not one of the moral principles that govern men's hearts, was within my reach" (Camus, *The Stranger* 101).

The prosecutor insists that in Meursault's case "the wholly negative virtue of tolerance must give way to the sterner but loftier virtue of justice" (Camus, *The Stranger* 101). As Meursault denies conformity to the moral codes of society, the

prosecutor finds in him emptiness and "an abyss threatening to swallow up society" (Camus, *The Stranger* 101). So much frightened is the prosecutor from the individuality of Meursault that he appeals for his execution, as Meursault reflects:

> He stated that I had no place in a society whose most fundamental rules I ignored and that I could not appeal to the same human heart whose elementary response I knew nothing of. "I ask you for this man's head", he said, "and I do so with a heart at ease". (Camus, *The Stranger* 102)

To our most surprise, the prosecutor further accuses him of being guilty of patricide, a case planned to be dealt the next day. The prosecutor claims:

> . . . a man who is morally guilty of killing his mother severs himself from society in the same way as the man who raises a murderous hand against the father who beget him. . . . [And therefore] I suggest to you that the man who is seated in the dock is also guilty of the murder to be tried in this court tomorrow. He must be punished accordingly. (Camus, *The Stranger* 102)

Therefore, Meursault is tried and is being executed "in the name of the French people", not because he commits a murder, but because of his non-conformity, his refusal to lie, and his denial to take a leap from the absurd into the grace of an unknown God. Camus rightly claims that "one would therefore not be much mistaken to read *The Stranger* as the story of a man who, without any heroics, agrees to die for the truth" ("Preface to *The Stranger*" 336-337).

Critics like Sartre, Thomas Hanna, Cruise O'Brien and many others, perceive a distinct indifference in the character Meursault. They opine that, as cleared by Camus, the problem of the absurd does not arise until we have become conscious of

it, until "the awakening" (Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* 19). According to these critics, Meursault lacks this awakening until the last pages and his consequent revolt to the absurd is evident only in the last. Hanna opines:

> Meursault is a paradox, because from the beginning he shows the absolute indifference of the hero, but at the same time does not possess the absurd hero's consciousness of the absurdity of his life and the revolt against it. . . . [He] acts like he is in an absurd universe but is not conscious of being in an absurd universe. . . . (39-40)

Likewise, as has been already discussed, Sartre also argues about the lack of constant consciousness of the absurd on Meursault's part. However, I refute the above said critics' opinions and confirm that Meursault is awakened and conscious of the absurd from the very first page of the novel. He apparently appears indifferent only because he is an absurd fellow, fully conscious about the futility of any traditional morality in the face of an incomprehensive and mute world. He is totally devoted to the idea that there is no use of yearning for the coherence, hope, and the absolute. His is the lucid indifference necessarily required for an absurd man, as Camus explains in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, "Everything begins with lucid indifference" (87). Likewise, Meursault is in revolt against the absurd, not in the last pages, but from the very beginning. His not crying at his mother's funeral, his not staying for the next day to pay homage at her grave, his enjoying and swimming with his girlfriend, his not showing any remorse, but only annoyance, after murdering the Arab, and, at least, his not submitting himself to the concept of God, depict, not his insensitivity or indifference or lack of human emotion, but his revolt against the absurd and against a society which tries to deny the absurd. He knows from the very beginning that nothing is important and that nothing can alter the absurd. There are numerous

examples from the novel to support his revolting soul. At one place, when his boss offers him a lucrative position in Paris, Meursault replies as if matured by the absurd:

> I said yes but that really it was all the same to me. Then he asked me if I wasn't interested in a change of life. I said that people never change their lives, that in any case one life was as good as another and that I wasn't dissatisfied with mine here at all. . . . When I was a student, I had lots of ambitions like that. But when I had to give up my studies I learned very quickly that none of it really mattered. (Camus, *The Stranger* 41)

The similar kind of absurd reasoning appears throughout the novel. No doubt, all is said in an implicit way and not directly until the last pages, the reason for this implicit behaviour is that Meursault doesn't find the occasion to express it. It is only when he is in the prison and the chaplin tries him to submit before God that Meursault's revolt, full of Sisyphian anger and contempt, bursts out. Thrice he has refused to see the chaplin. But the chaplin, equally obstinate, comes to him without prior-information and asks him the reason for not seeing him (chaplin). Here, Meursault appears as our modern Sisyphus, now explicitly conscious and revolting towards the absurd, full of contempt and hatred for any kind of Kierkegaardean leap. He bluntly says that he doesn't believe in God. We get here the glimpses of a man, in his full dignity, ready to embrace the cruelest absurdity of life i.e. death, without a single moment to dishonor his integrity and endeavour, in rejecting every kind of hope, either hope in this unjust society or in the other world. The chaplin, here, seems to represent theistic existentialists, and Meursault becomes Camus's mouthpiece for his kind of existential thinking. Like Kierkegaard, the chaplin asserts that we all are condemned to die. But unlike Camus, he is afraid of the absurd and starts escaping

from it through hope in the concept of God and other life. The chaplin asks Meursault, "But if you do not die today, you will die tomorrow, or the next day. And then the same question will arise. How will you face that terrifying ordeal?" (Camus, *The Stranger* 117). To this Meursault calmly answers, ". . . I would face it exactly as I was facing it now" (Camus, *The Stranger* 117). Frustrated by Meursault's answer the chaplin asks, "Have you no hope at all? And do you really live with the thought that when you die, you die, and nothing remains?" (Camus, *The Stranger* 117). And Meursault, with the same angst, affirms, "Yes" (Camus, *The Stranger* 117).

Camus believes in the innocence of man and therefore, when the chaplin informs Meursault that he is carrying the burden of a sin from which he has to free himself, Meursault replies, "I did not know what a sin was" (Camus, *The Stranger* 118). He boldly accepts the consequence of his action without fleeing from the existential tension of choice and responsibility. He says, "All they had told me that I was guilty. I was guilty, I was paying for it, and nothing more could be asked of me" (Camus, *The Stranger* 118). Refuting again and again the certainty of God and after life, Meursault almost shouts at the chaplin, saying that he would like an after- life (if he has ever imagined) "one where [he] could remember this life!" (Camus, *The Stranger* 120). He further states, "I had only a little time left and I didn't want to waste it on God" (Camus, *The Stranger* 120). Meursault, clearly representing the absurd hero, repudiates fully the certainty and hope showed by the chaplin. He recollects his encounter with the chaplin in anger and joy:

> He seemed so certain about everything, didn't he? And yet none of his certainties was worth one here of a woman's head. He wasn't even sure he was alive, because he was living like a dead man. Whereas it looked as if I was the one who'd come up empty handed. But I was

> sure about me, about everything, surer than he could ever be, sure of my life and sure of the death I had waiting for me. (Camus*, The Stranger* 120)

He is certain about nothing else except the absurd destiny of every man, which is finite and inevitable and which makes everything worthless and meaningless. That is why Meursault contemplates:

> I had lived my life one way and I could just as well have lived it another. I had done this and I hadn't done that. . . . And so? It was as if I had waited all this time for this moment and for the first light of this dawn to be vindicated. Nothing, nothing mattered, and I knew why. . . . Throughout the whole absurd life I'd lived, a dark wind had been rising towards me from somewhere deep in my future . . . and as it passed, this wind leveled whatever was offered to me at the time. . . . (Camus*, The Stranger* 121)

Hence, Meursault is fully aware that death equalizes all. By accepting his fate without excuse, Meursault becomes our modern Sisyphus, exhibiting the same wild courage and rebellious scorn that we witness in the mythological Sisyphus.

Some critics like Carol Petersen, Louis Hudon, Girard, and Brisville opine that Meursault's crime of murdering an Arab is excusable. Petersen opines that the Arab "in truth, was murdered by the sun and not by Meursault" (qtd. in Foley 180). But it would be too simplification of Meursault's crime. Further, Camus himself nowhere seems to propose this. If Meursault is executed for his crime, then all is well, because, if the absurd denies suicide, it equally denies murder. But this doesn't happen and the trial fails to justify Meursault's execution in the logic of the absurd. Here, it can be said that, apart from exposing the hypocrisy of the society, Camus has also intended

to expose the judicial system in colonial Algeria where a *pied- noir* is supposed to be executed, not for his murdering an Arab, but not crying at his mother's funeral. In one of his remarks, Camus himself points out this and writes, "In our society any man who does not weep at his mother's funeral runs the risk of being sentenced to death" ("Preface to *The Stranger*" 335). Foley has also indicated about Camus's dual purpose in the novel. He writes, "The killing of the unnamed Arab, I suggest, serves both as a formal necessity, so that Meursault could stand trial, and as a powerful criticism of the inherent racism of French-Algerian justice, where an individual kills an Arab but is executed for failing to cry at his mother's funeral" (16).

Therefore, apart from its being an absurd novel, *The Stranger* can also be read as a post- colonial writing. It is also a mouthpiece of the rights of an individual against social conformity, as it depicts how a fundamentally sincere and honest man becomes a mortal victim of the State's judicial system, not because he refused to tell the truth, but simply because he refused to lie.

The novel is also gives suggestion, almost exclusively, about the possible consequences of the realization and living of the absurd in a society, well protected by traditional morality and pseudo- judiciary. There is one more thing that is worth noting. Camus has emphasized again and again that what interests him is not the advent of the absurd but its further consequences. Meursault, somehow, saves himself from the pessimistic consequences of the absurd acknowledgement. He accepts the absurd and tries to live with it, without degenerating into abject nihilism as Caligula does in Camus's historical play with the same title of *Caligula*.

***Caligula* – Absurd in History**

Originally written in 1938, *Caligula* is reworked, to some extent, both in 1945 and in 1958. However, the first version underwent no fundamental alteration. Camus

draws his material, directly, from Suetonius's *Lives of the Twelve Caesars*. The historical facts appear to be that Caius Caesar Caligula (AD 37- AD 41), third of the twelve Caesars, was an enlightened and generous ruler. He developed an incestuous love for his sister Drusilla and announced to marry her. However, Drusilla suddenly died and Caligula's character apparently changed completely so that Suetonius describes him as having become a monster than a man. Because of his increasing atrocities, Caligula's patricians rebelled against him and assassinated him. However, while Suetonius speaks of epilepsy as the reason for Caligula's reversal in character, Camus has another explanation for it, as John Cruickshank has suggested in the Introduction to *Caligula and Other Plays*:

> Camus, however, treats Drusilla's death as an experience which suddenly reveals the nature of the absurd to Caligula and the truth that 'men die and are not happy'. It is this feature of our human condition which Caligula presses to its logical conclusion. He does so in the belief that this will confer freedom upon him, yet in the course of the play he learns that one cannot be free *against* other people. (22)

Hence, it can be fairly argued that by taking a historical figure as an absurd figure, Camus is not only complementing the mythical Sisyphus and the fictional Meursault, but also representing "the very real implications that may result from the absurd once it has left rarefied air of fiction and myth to firmly take its place in history" (Foley 22). A little bit farther from both *The Myth of Sisyphus* and *The Stranger*, Camus has undertaken a different task of exposing the extreme consequences of the probable nihilism expounded by the acknowledgement of the absurd. "In *Caligula*", Cruickshank argues, "Camus portrayed what he considered to be one individual's mistaken reaction to his discovery of the absurd" (23).

The play opens with a political crisis resulted by the death of Caligula's sister and beloved, Drusilla. Caligula has been an emperor for about one year, and it is considered that "as an emperor, he was perfection's self" (Camus, *Caligula and Other Plays* 36). The young poet, Scipio, recalls about Caligula's generosity and says:

> He's been very good to me. He encouraged me; I shall never forget some of the things he said. He told me life isn't easy, but it has consolations: religion, art, and the love one inspires in others. He often told me that the only mistake one makes in life is to cause others suffering. He tried to be a just man. (Camus, *Caligula and Other Plays* 42)

However, all this humanity and justness of morality disappear when Caligula is confronted with the absurd, which comes to him face-to-face in the death of Drusilla. He is intimated to the absurdity of human situation, and as a result, the notions of love, religion, and art sweep away from his mind. Death reveals to him "a childishly simple, obvious, almost silly truth, but one that's hard to come by and heavy to endure", the truth that "men die; and they are not happy" (Camus, *Caligula and Other Plays* 40). He realizes the absurd truth that "things as they are … are far from satisfactory" and that "this world of ours, the scheme of things as they call it, is quite intolerable" (Camus, *Caligula and Other Plays* 40).

Like Meursault, Caligula comprehends that the inescapability of death renders all things equally transient and unimportant. But he goes a farther step than Meursault and sees in this arbitrariness a means to get boundless freedom. He accepts the inevitability of the absurd and resolves to revolt against it. The confusion of the world instigates in him the desire to achieve the impossible, as he says to Helicon, "That's why I want the moon, or happiness, or eternal life – something, in fact, that may

sound crazy, but which isn't of this world" (Camus, *Caligula and Other Plays* 40). Caligula further clarifies that he is not mad. He says to Helicon, "Now, listen! I'm not mad; in fact I've never felt so lucid. What happened to me is quite simple; I suddenly felt a desire for the impossible. That's all" (Camus, *Caligula and Other Plays* 39-40). When Helicon tries to make him understand that, in practice, such a theory can't be carried through to its conclusion, Caligula calmly replies, "You're wrong there. It's just because no one dares to follow up his ideas to the end that nothing is achieved. All that's needed, I should say, is to be logical right through, at all costs" (Camus, *Caligula and Other Plays* 40). In this way, the realization of the absurd frees Caligula from traditional thinking and initiates him to enhance the absurd by effort. The logic given by Caligula behind his forthcoming brutality and arbitrariness is that of Sade's (who has been provided enough space by Camus in *The Rebel*) for whom man-made absurdity and boundless freedom are answers to the general absurdity of the world. Like Sade, Caligula's argument for his atrocities is this – as the absurd destroys all order existed in the world, "men must no longer be deceived by the illusory value of the present order and customs" (Hanna 58). He lucidly argues with Scipio and says, "I have simply realized that there is only one way of being equal with gods. All that's needed is to be as cruel as they" (Camus, *Caligula and Other Plays* 40). This kind of attitude of Caligula exemplifies his revolt against the absurd. However, his revolt is that of a negative kind. Camus' own comment on Caligula's mistake is contained in a note included in the programme for the Hebertot production:

> . . . if his integrity consists in his denial of the gods, his fault is to be found in his denial of men. One cannot destroy everything without destroying oneself. This is why Caligula depopulates the world around him and then, in keeping with his own logic, does what is necessary to

> arm against himself those who will ultimately kill him. . . . He consents to die, having learned that no man can save himself alone and that one cannot be free by working against mankind. But at least he will have rescued some souls, (qtd. in Cruickshank, *Albert Camus and the Literature of Revolt* 197)

Hence, Caligula uses his knowledge of the absurd in a destructive way, destructive both for himself and for others. Working in the logic of the absurd, he destroys all the sense of preference, so that morality becomes so confused with immorality that neither is meaningful in a society. To him, everything is important or nothing is important, as he sarcastically declares:

> Everything's important: our fiscal system, public morals, foreign policy, army equipment, and agrarian laws. Everything's of cardinal importance, I assure you. And everything's on an equal footing: the grandeur of Rome and your attacks of arthritis. . . . Well. Well, I'm going to apply my mind to all that. (Camus, *Caligula and Other Plays* 43)

In fact, for Caligula, only this logic of the absurd can make people live with the truth of the absurdity of human existence. Further, being an emperor, Caligula has the power to do so and this he makes others to realize:

> HELICON. This truth of yours doesn't prevent them from enjoying their meal.
>
> CALIGULA. [with sudden violence] All it proves is that I'm surrounded by lies and self-deception. But I've had enough of that; I wish men to live by the light of truth. And I've the power to make them do so. For I know what they need and haven't got. They're

> without understanding and they need teacher; someone who knows what he's talking about. (Camus, *Caligula and Other Plays* 40-41)

In this way, Caligula prepares the ground for answering the call of the absurd through contemplated destruction and nihilism. Cruickshank is absolutely right when he writes:

> *Caligula* and *Cross Purpose* belong to the early, predominantly negative and nihilistic phase of Camus's thought. In the case of *Caligula*, and in keeping with the point made above, Camus's aim was not to study the psychology of a monster in human form but to investigate the consequences of taking nihilism to its logical conclusions. (Introduction 21)

And, here, the consequences of this undertaking are fatal and brutal. There is no doubt in the fact that Caligula exhibits the same courage and lucidity as that of Sisyphus or Meursault. As an absurd man, he realizes the limitations of human reasoning in the face of the absurd. He talks about it to Caesonia, who talks about his powers. Caligula says:

> And what's the use to me of a firm hand, what use is the amazing power that's mine, if I can't have the sun set in the east, if I can't reduce the sum of suffering and make an end of death? No, Caesonia, it's all one whether I sleep or keep awake, if I've no power to tamper with the scheme of things. (Camus, *Caligula and Other Plays* 48)

But paradoxically enough, Caligula forgets his limitations and from this same reasoning, derives an unquenchable thirst for murder and tyranny. He proclaims to be totally logical in his dealings and declares, "I have resolved to be logical, and I have the power to enforce my will" (Camus, *Caligula and Other Plays* 44). The outcomes

of his unbounded logic are the atrocities and executions he imposes on his people. He has brought his subjects completely under the sway of arbitrariness, confusion, and absurdity. There is no need of any explanation for the executions he proclaims on his people, because in his logic, "a man needn't have done anything for him to die" (Camus, *Caligula and Other Plays* 56). Denying every criteria of right or wrong, Caligula does everything what an ordinary person can never think to do. He orders:

> Now mark my words. The first move's this. Every Patrician, everyone in the Empire who has any capital – small or large, it's all the same thing – is ordered to disinherit his children and make a new will leaving his money to the State. ((Camus, *Caligula and Other Plays* 44)

He orders to close the public granaries. His absurd brutality can be witnessed through the words of a Patrician who enumerates Caligula's wrong doings and shows the signs of discontent for Caligula:

> He confiscated your property, Patricius. He killed your father, Scipio. He's taken your wife from you, Octavius, and forced her to work in his public brothel. He has killed you son, Lepidus. I ask you, gentlemen, can you endure this? I, anyhow, have made my mind up. I know the risks, but I know this life of abject fear is quit unbearable. (Camus, *Caligula and Other Plays* 51)

Caligula does all this only to prove his endless freedom in the wake of the absurd as he says to Caesonia, ". . . at last I've come to see the uses of supremacy. It gives impossibilities a run. From this day on, so long as life is mine, my freedom has no frontier" (Camus, *Caligula and Other Plays* 45). He thinks himself "the one free man in the Roman Empire" (Camus, *Caligula and Other Plays* 49). Having the realization of the absurd and the power to implement it at the universal level, Caligula

desires the impossible to happen. He, again and again, argues that it's the impossible that is the whole point. He cries out, "I'm exploiting the impossible. Or, more accurately, it's a question of making the impossible possible" (Camus, *Caligula and Other Plays* 45).

Like Meursault or Sisyphus, Caligula realizes his freedom through the absurd – a freedom from all the traditional notions of morality and justice. He explains the same to Cherea, who requests him to stop his eccentricity in the name of this world, and says:

> This world has no importance; once a man realizes that, he wins his freedom. . . . And that is why I hate you, you and your kind; because you are not free. You see in me the one free man in the whole Roman Empire. You should be glad to have at last amongst you an emperor who points the way to freedom. (Camus, *Caligula and Other Plays* 46).

But unlike Meursault or Sisyphus, Caligula becomes nihilistic and takes this realization as a clean chit for destruction. Comparing the three, John Foley rightly comments that Caligula "is like Meursault, absolved of hope and brutally honest. He is like Sisyphus, whose scorn defies the gods. But he is also Caesar, with a veto on the lives of all his people" (23).

Some readers of *Caligula* find the glimpses of Hitler in the character of Caligula and apprehend that Camus had Nazism in his mind when he wrote the play. Camus is thought to be acquainted with the fact that Nazism is the product of modern nihilism. John Cruickshank, emphasizing the same and taking the play as a symbolic representation of the atrocities of Hitler, writes:

> . . . as Nazi doctrine responded to nihilism in exactly this way, it would be possible to interpret his play as a dramatic symbol, in the person of Caligula himself, of the 'mad emperor' who derived his political logic from the absurd and plunged the world into violent bloodshed between 1939 and 1945 (Introduction, 17)

No doubt, Camus's *The Myth of Sisyphus* emphasizes upon the necessity to be logical till the end; no doubt, it ends with an emphasis on the quantitative life rather than a qualitative one; but nowhere Camus dictates suicide or murder as the logical outcome of the absurd. For Camus, absurd is just a passing moment upon which he never wants to stop. It is not destructive and valueless. It denies value to the traditional morality and the world, but not to human life. It doesn't degenerate into nihilism, but picks up arms against it through revolt – a revolt which accentuates human solidarity. Hence, Contrary to Caligula's negative approach, Camus's absurd is just a means to realize a special form of humanism, as Cruickshank states, "It (absurd) provides a starting-point for Camus's exploration of a possible route from nihilism to a form of humanism" (Introduction 17). This humanistic revolt is exemplified in the play through the character of Cherea – a onetime close ally to Caligula – who later accomplishes his assassination. In this way, *Caligula,* apart from its absurd implications, is the mouthpiece of Camus's concept of true rebellion.

It is noteworthy that while Meursault's revolt is for the absurd and against the certainty of things prophesized by society and religion, in *Caligula*, revolt is generated, through the character of Cherea, against the exigencies of the absurd itself. The roots of this type of revolt are present in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, where Camus makes clear that Ivan Karamazov's saying – 'Everything is permitted' should not be taken in the vulgar sense. Talking in the tone of Sartre, Camus essentializes

responsibility with freedom and, therefore, his absurd "does not liberate; it binds. It does not authorize all actions. Everything is permitted does not mean that nothing is forbidden. . . . It does not recommend crime, for this would be childish, but it restores to remorse its futility" (Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* 65).

Cherea, equally acquainted with the absurd as Caligula is, becomes the mouthpiece of Camus's revolt against nihilism. Further, while in *The Stranger*, the opposition to the absurd is practice by legal and religious moralists, who are equally absurd in their dealings, in *Caligula*, nihilism is drawn back by an opposition which draws its strength "not from eternal values, nor from sanctified social institutions, but from a defense of needs which are felt native to human existence" (Hanna 59). Here, Camus has tried to struggle with the nihilistic absurd through the positive absurd.

Cherea alone recognizes the absurd and the reasoning behind Caligula's frenzy. He knows, like no one else, Caligula's condition better; but he doesn't want the absurd to win and engulf his positivity. That's why when Caligula asks Cherea why he doesn't like him, Cherea replies bitterly, "Because there's nothing likeable about you, Caius. Because such feelings can't be had to order. And because I understand you far too well. One cannot like an aspect of oneself which one always tries to keep concealed" (Camus, *Caligula and Other Plays* 81-82).

Cherea recognizes that Caligula is "putting his power at the service of a loftier, deadlier passion" (Camus, *Caligula and Other Plays* 53). Hence, he doesn't hate Caligula, because he understands his plight. But he can't like him equally, because of his abject negativity begotten by his absurd realization. He makes it clear to Caligula and says, "I do not hate you. I regard you as noxious and cruel, vain and selfish. But I cannot hate you, because I don't' think you are happy. And I cannot scorn you, because I know you are no coward" (Camus, *Caligula and Other Plays* 82).

The same idea he makes known to the Patricians, and clarifies the reasons for his taking arms against Caligula. While the other Patricians are discontent for silly things like honour or wealth, Cherea's reasons are equally lofty like that of Caligula. He states to the courtiers with full lucidity, "Though I am with you, I'm not for you" (Camus, *Caligula and Other Plays* 52). He is fighting for the sake of human solidarity – a passion, it might be, like the absurd, but greater and broader than the absurd and compatible enough to face it even in defeat. Cherea declares:

> . . . it's not the first time Rome has seen a man wielding unlimited power; but it's the first time he sets no limit to his use of it, and counts mankind, and the world we know, for nothing. That's what appals me in Caligula; that's what I want to fight. But what's intolerable is to see one's life being drained of meaning, to be told there's no reason for existing. A man can't live without some reason for living. (Camus, *Caligula and Other Plays* 53)

He further clarifies to the Patricians that Caligula is striving for an equally loftier and deadlier passion which imperils everything known as reasonable and sacred in the world. Therefore, Cherea's revolt against Caligula is a revolt against the absurd. He opines:

> No, if I join forces with you, it's to combat a big idea – an ideal, if you like – whose triumph would mean the end of everything. I can endure your being made mock of, but I cannot endure Caligula's carrying out his theories to the end. He is converting his philosophy into corpses and – unfortunately for us – it's a philosophy that's logical from start to finish. And where one can't refute, one strikes. (Camus, *Caligula and Other Plays* 53)

This clash, between the acute sense of nihilism of Caligula and the consequent revolt of Cherea, becomes the gist of *Caligula.* When Caligula asks Cherea for the reason of his contradiction with Caligula, Cherea clearly speaks the voice of a human being:

> I like, and need, to feel secure. So do most men. They resent living in a world where the most preposterous fancy may at any moment become a reality, and the absurd transfix their lives, like a dagger in the heart. I feel as they do; I refuse to live in a topsy-turvy world. I want to know where I stand, and to stand secure. (Camus, *Caligula and Other Plays 82*)

He explains to Caligula that his plan of life might not be logical, "but at least it's sound" and he will be "no party to [Caligula's] logic", because he has "a very different notion of [his] duty as a man" (Camus, *Caligula and Other Plays*82). Hence, Cherea accepts the validity of the absurd, but puts the fact of his being a human being at the utmost priority. Caligula seems to blame Cherea for a leap in some higher principle and asks him either to pay the price of the absurd, or disown it fully. But Cherea rejects both the political as well as philosophical implications Caligula has drawn from the absurd. He says:

> . . . what I want is to live, and to be happy. Neither, to my mind, is possible if one pushes the absurd to its logical conclusions. . . . True, there are moments when, to feel free of them, I desire the death of those I love, or I hanker after women from whom the ties of family or friendship debar me. Were logic everything, I'd kill or fornicate on such occasions. But I consider that these passing fancies have no great importance. If everyone set to gratifying them, the world would be

> impossible to live in, and happiness, too, would go by the board. And these, I repeat, are the things that count, for me. (Camus, *Caligula and Other Plays* 82-83)

Therefore, Cherea is not condemning the idea of nihilism in the name of God or some transcendental power but in the name of humanity and happiness which are far greater than absurdity. He disproves Caligula's assertion that "all [actions] are on an equal footing" with a qualitative ethics and says firmly, "Certainly I believe that some actions are – shall I say? – more praiseworthy than others" (Camus, *Caligula and Other Plays* 83). This assertion marks a clear departure from the ethics of quantity, posited by Camus in *The Myth of Sisyphus*. And positive enough, Camus enables Cherea to make this advancement without invoking the aid of sources beyond human experience. Cherea is combating Caligula's nihilism, not for any higher morality, but for an earthly morality of peace and happiness. He clarifies his motive and says, ". . . all I wish is to regain some peace of mind in a world that has regained a meaning. What spurs me on is not ambition but fear, my very reasonable fear of that inhuman vision in which my life means no more than a speck of dust. (Camus, *Caligula and Other Plays* 54)

He does not take the absurd as despair but as an opportunity which enables to recognize value of human life. This aspect of him is evident when he persuades Scipio to take part in Caligula's assassination. When Scipio favours Caligula and says that Caligula has taught him to expect everything of life including murder and suicide, Cherea refutes him and argues, "No, he has taught you despair. And to have instilled despair into a young heart is fouler than the foulest of the crimes he has committed up to now. I assure you, that alone would justify me in killing him out of hand. (Camus, *Caligula and Other Plays* 87)

In this way, Cherea's revolt surpasses the negative revolt of Caligula through the higher notion of human solidarity. He doesn't deny the reality of the absurd and knows well beforehand that nothing matters, even Caligula's assassination; but he is not ready to submit himself before the without rebelling against it. He finally tells Caligula, "I understand and, to a point, agree with you. But you are pernicious, and you've got to go" (Camus, *Caligula and Other Plays* 83).

Colin Davis, in his recent essay, "Violence and Ethics in Camus", claims that in this confrontation, Caligula and Cherea "articulate the ethical impasse at the heart of the philosophy of the Absurd" and several of Camus's subsequent works "can be seen as repeatedly re-staging the same quarrel" (106, 115). Davis is partially right here, since Camus's works are a confrontation between the absurd and its subsequent revolt. Foley denies the other aspect of Davis's idea that this confrontation articulates an impasse. For him, "the ethical subtext of *Caligula* is not as ambiguous as Davis suggests" (24). No doubt, Cherea is not using any traditional morality to confront Caligula's nihilism; no doubt, Camus, for present, doesn't use any logical argumentation to defend his moral ethics as he has used to defend the absurd; no doubt, he doesn't give a specific terminology for the basis of his revolt – all this doesn't mean that Cherea is revolting against Caligula unconsciously, without any reason or logic. He has his own ethics, an ethics devoid of any transcendental hope or morality, an ethics which believes as well in human integrity, as it believes in the absurd. It puts human life above the absurd. Again, Camus has not used the language of traditional morality to defy nihilism, only because, it might have been controversial to his basic ideology of the absurd. In any ways, whether or not morality is behind Camus's revolt is less significant than the fact that Camus clearly rejects the conclusion Caligula has drawn from the absurd. The assassination of Caligula

signifies Camus's belief in human solidarity and initiates the way for his concept of revolt as a legitimate answer to nihilism and the absurd. Even Caligula, in the end, accepts that the impossible is impossible to be possible. He accepts, "I have chosen a wrong path, a path that leads to nothing. My freedom isn't the right one. . . " (Camus, *Caligula and Other Plays* 103). However, it would be a mistake to argue that Camus approves, without reservations, Caligula's murder to surpass the unsurpassable absurd. I think that he is aware of the fact that Caligula's assassination is itself an absurd act, because it will fail to curb the absurd forever, as the curtain falls with Caligula's warning, "I'm still alive!" (Camus, *Caligula and Other Plays* 104). Therefore, as is mentioned earlier while analyzing *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus's interest lies, not in the defeat of the absurd (since he is aware of its infallibility), but in the constant struggle between the absurd and man's eternal revolt against it.

Hence, it can be suggested that Camus's primary intention, in his trilogy of the absurd i.e. *The Myth of Sisyphus*, *The Stranger*, and *Caligula*, is not to dictate any moral ethics (which has been dealt with in his later works), but simply to examine the absurd and discover its exigencies. The questions raised in *The Myth of Sisyphus* have been tried to answer in *The Stranger* and *Caligula*. In *The Stranger*, Camus asks whether a leap should be taken in God or religion in the face of the absurd; through the character of Meursault; he disallows it. In *Caligula*, he asks whether the absurd leads inexorably to nihilism; and through the character of Cherea, he suggests that it does not. Despite being, like Caligula, conscious of the absurd, Cherea appears to discern the ethics of revolt in the face of the absurd. This newly invented ethics of revolt is taken as the main concept for the discussion in the next chapter.

Hence, it can be summarized that, though not totally, Camus's theory of the absurd is somewhere closer to the atheist existentialism that considers man devoid of

all external hope. However, like Kierkegaard and other theistic existentialists, Sartre could not bear the burden of the absurd and later took his leap into a similar kind of abstraction i.e. history. Here, I want to take the liberty of saying that Camus's observation of the absurd is an answer to the theistic existentialism of Kierkegaard and his group, who don't show the guts in taking the responsibility of their condition i.e. – abandoned and doomed to death in an incoherent and silent world. Camus, contrary to them, tries not to evoke the silent God, but the inherent courage, hope, and human solidarity in man himself. Hence, we agree with Thomas Landon Thorson who declares in his article, "Albert Camus and the Rights of Man":

> Thus, while Camus's thought exhibits significant differences from what may be called the conventional existentialist position, he is nonetheless very much in the tradition of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Sartre. If a label is demanded, I would suggest "post-existentialist", for in many ways the whole purpose of Camus's investigations is to create a new and positive moral position by solving the existentialist dilemma. (285)

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