



# FORESTEPS OF EXISTENTIALISM: AN INTERPRETATION OF SARTRE'S NAUSEA

**VIPIN BIHARI GOYAL**

Research Scholar

Dept. of English

Jai Narain Vyas University, Jodhpur.

(RAJ) INDIA

## ABSTRACT

*Jean-Paul Sartre is an iconoclastic French philosopher, novelist and playwright. He was born on June 21, 1905 in Paris and was raised by his grandfather. He lived his whole life with Simone de Beauvoir in an open relationship. He was impressed by the philosophy and ideas of Kant, Heidegger and Hegel. He refused the Nobel Prize for literature in 1964 on the ground that 'a writer should not allow himself to be turned into an institution.' The Nobel Foundation honoured him for his work which, rich in ideas and filled with the spirit of freedom and the quest for truth, has exerted a far-reaching influence on our age.*

## INTRODUCTION

The term Nausea was first used by Friedrich Nietzsche in his book *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* published in 1881. In *Zarathustra*, the feeling of nausea, or disgust, is usually associated with contemplating the common people. In particular, *Zarathustra* has a hard time in facing the full consequences of the eternal recurrence, because he is overcome with nausea at the thought that the mediocrity of humanity must recur eternally without change. In the novel Sartre has used the term nausea which is the feeling that everything exists. But pertinent question is what is that in the nature of existence to which nausea is our reaction? After reasonable deliberations Roquentin the main character in the novel finds that existence is experience of superfluous, of absurd, of contingent, and of viscous. The novel is narration of series of

VIPIN BIHARI GOYAL

1 Page



experiences of Roquentin to depict superfluosity, absurdity, contingency and viciousness of existence.

*Nausea* is the first novel of Sartre published in 1938 in French under the title *La Nausee* and in English in 1949. It is an ontological manifesto and canonical work of Philosophy of Existentialism.

The novel is thought-experiment containing an extra-ordinary description of real-life in the town Boueville. It portrays existentialist views of author and other philosophers like Kierkegaard and Heidegger. The characterisation is marvellous and descriptions are lucid. The setting is in the imaginary town Boueville which is probably Le Havre, a coastal city in the Normandy region of northwestern France where Sartre taught in a college from 1931 to 1936. Sartre, Beauvoir, Camus, Kafka were the novelist who ventured into ideological exploration in art of fiction.

The novel can be criticised for the following reasons —

The philosophy of existentialism is derived from Edmund Husserl's Phenomenology, which is the science of the essence of consciousness. Sartre read this book during imprisonment. Friedrich Nietzsche furthered Kierkegaard's idea of glorification of human will and advocated authentic living in his book *Beyond Good and Evil*. Heidegger was the first to propose that nature of "Being" is the proper subject matter of Philosophy. Then Sartre in his book *Being and Nothingness* described three kinds of being: 1. Object has 'Being-in-itself'; 2. Man with consciousness has 'Being-for-itself' and 3. Man exists in the eyes of others 'Being-for-others'.

Sartre's views are not the same in all three major works namely, *Nausea* (1938), *Being and Nothingness* (1943) and *Existentialism is a Humanism* (1946).

The protagonist Roquentin is an apprentice in solitude and aspires for absolute solitude. His decision to write a novel after toil and turmoil of existential angst and life redeeming observations seems to mitigate the impact of it. The irony and humour in the novel is crushed under the heavy weight of philosophy. Hayden Carruth says "Sartre, for all his anguished disgust, can play the clown as well, and has done so often enough: a sort of fool at the metaphysical court." (Carruth,Hyden. Introduction *Nausea* ).

*Nausea* is randomly written incoherent descriptions of a vagabond, loitering in the streets with no specific purpose. It is trivial work of art, which creates confusion and pessimism in the mind of readers. Protagonist's repulsion to bourgeois dominates, but he himself is caught



in bourgeois ambitions, taste like jazz music, casual sex, writing a book and desiring to be immortal. This novel is often cited as an example of negative capability. According to critic William Spanos it is a presentation of the uncertainty and dread of human existence which is so strong that the imagination cannot comprehend it.

The novel is in the diary form which suits to the storyline to show how nausea sets in and gradually takes over the total existence of the main character Roquentin, and is finally resolved. He even splits dates into hours to demonstrate viscosity of time. Metaphors have been used frequently in diversified form to establish unity of mind and world. There are numerous examples of comparing the incomparable. Objects, houses and things are imparted with human characteristics or in animal mode.

The diary begins with an updated sheet where the author claims to have recovered from an unknown disease and makes a promise to himself of writing down his impressions "like a little girl in a nice new notebook" (11). The phrase little girl is deliberately used by the author to show his naivety, innocence and honesty, since it was his first novel. Actually this update reflects upon the remedy or cure of Nausea caused by realisation that life is meaningless, and that purpose of life lies in one of the basic precincts of existentialism that "existence precedes essence" (Sartre Jean Paul, *Existentialism is a Humanism*: Lecture delivered at Club Maintenant in Paris, 1945). Sartre believes that we are necessarily free and have freedom to choose the project that may help define our life and action. The novel begins with the first date in the diary that is Monday, 29 January 1932. The protagonist Antoine Roquentin has come to live in Bouville which literally means a "mud-town" to complete his historical research and write a biography of Marquis de Rollebon, a French aristocrat who lived during French revolution. At the beginning the protagonist claims that he doesn't think much, but we find that he has a rational thinking. The next day diary starts with a statement "Nothing new". He observes a Negro colliding with a little woman which makes him recollect the memory of the school teacher who used to wear boot in one foot and slipper on another.

Nausea is a physical ailment in which a person might feel sick continuously due to a lack of sleep, stress and anxiety which may cause vomiting and dehydration. Antoine is unemployed, schizoid, friendless, socially deprived and has no contact with family members. He sustains on meagre means of livelihood and is trapped in the fantasy of being a secret service agent and global traveller who is unable to cope-up with realities of life, which make him a disgruntled biographer. He has anxiety and panic-disorder due to his existentialist views of the objects which is the main cause of his depression. Nausea is the first physical symptom of that disease. Roquentin undergoes a strange metaphysical experience that estranges him from the world. Roquentin is too sensitive to combat conflict inflicted by external object and his



ideology of social existence. Such conflicts can be noticed in the work of Dostoyevsky and Rilke also.

Antoine suffers from nausea for the first time while holding a pebble in his hand on a beach for playing Ducks and Drakes. The same feeling persist even while walking when he tries to pick a soggy piece of paper, and fails to do that. Touch of inanimate objects become unbearable to him. He thinks that these objects have started defining him and limit his spiritual and intellectual freedom. He recalls that while holding a pebble he felt a 'sweetish disgust' which passed from pebble into his hands; a sort of nausea. Objects have a property of never being fully disclosed to consciousness. Antoine perceives pebble has infinite possible appearances.

Antoine compiles information about Marquis from documents such as letters, fragments of memoirs, secret reports and police records etc. He wishes to pen down it like a work of art of new historicism by reading non-literary text as a literary text. But he is disappointed by lack of testimony, firmness and consistency in the character. He gets bored and ultimately abandons the idea of biography at the end of the novel.

The protagonist makes detailed analysis of his own face while looking in the mirror. He says about his face "I cannot even decide whether it is handsome or ugly. I think it is ugly because I have been told so" (30). He thinks, he has no friend so he doesn't know how to see himself in the mirrors as he appears to his friend.

Antoine had another stroke of nausea in the cafe where he visited frequently. He was in a physical relationship with Francoise, owner of the cafe. The colours in the cafe grip him in nausea. "It is one with the cafe; it is I who am inside it (35). In the cafe he does eavesdropping on card players, listens to the Negress singing popular song "when you leave me". Once out of cafe nausea is left behind and he feels happy in purity of cold, dark night. While walking in the boulevard, he finds a deserted woman fighting for strength to suffer.

At square he looks at the bronze statute of Gustav Impetraz, an unknown aristocrat noticed by his high society dress-up. He looks sickly and evil due to degeneration. The whole description is highly symbolic of class consciousness and erosion of elite values in bourgeois class.

Here he meets Ogier P., the autodidact or self-taught for the first time, who spent time in local library by reading every book in alphabetical order. He is a bailiff's clerk who lives for the pursuit of knowledge and love of humanity, which inspires in Roquentin much criticism and mockery, nonetheless he develops a strange compassion for him. In the afternoon at his



room, he observes a woman walking in the street. He senses eternity of time by losing sense of it. He hallucinates the images of his travel to Japan, Russia, Burgos, Greece, Morocco, Algeria and Syria. He doesn't confirm that he actually traveled or it is figment of imagination. He says "My memories are like the coins in the devil's purse: when it was opened, nothing was found in it but dead leaves" (52). However, he shows to autodidact a heap of photographs as an evidence of his travel abroad. He regrets having had no adventure in his life. He is patiently waiting for the magic moment when something will begin. Since there is no magic moment, he tries to seize every moment. He confessed his secret desire to be immortal when he uttered, 'I wanted the moments of my life to follow one another in an orderly fashion like those of a life remembered. You might as well try to catch time by the tail.'

He spent the entire Sunday in a monotonous eavesdropping, observing people in idleness unless he realised "nothing has changed and yet everything exists in a different way" (82). He is happy to be 'complete motionless whole'. End of Sunday is like death of tremendous social event for him.

Next day he received a letter from Anny. She is an English girl who was once her lover. She asked him to meet her in Paris on a particular date. That brought a flood of memories of the time spent with her five years ago. He admired her love of perfection. She always wanted to enjoy perfect moments.

Antoine Roquentin spent whole day chasing images. Sometimes he hallucinated, sometimes the images were real. The images persisted, drove him insane and he constantly behaved absurdly. Through images author narrates his philosophy. The idea and images go simultaneously. On a foggy monotonous day, lucidity leaves no room for hope.

Roquentin's visit to museum exposes his turmoil of existence. He wonders whether he is real or a figment of imagination. He constantly sees the object in essence form and their bare existence intrigues him causing nausea. All portrait displayed in museum were "man re-thought by man".

The following day Antoine Roquentin finishes biography of Monsieur de Rollebon. He concludes "How on earth can I, who haven't had the strength to retain my own past, hope to save the past of somebody else?"(139). He feels all that was not present did not exist. "Neither the things nor even in my thoughts" (139). Contemplating on the nothingness of past causes a fresh surge of nausea. Writing biography of Rollebon made him live and now since the work was over he had no purpose to exists. He hangs on different objects and thoughts to



prove his existence, but nothing gives him solace. Music brings him back to the world of existence.

Author plays language game endlessly. There is amalgam of desire and memories when Antoine talks about Anny. Many narratives run simultaneously. Disposition is fragmented and a collage is created filling the empty spaces with boredom and monotony. Story of Rollebon is a metafictional simulacrum of what he really was.

Autodidact invites him for lunch. They had a long discourse on humanism, wherein Antoine expresses his views in an anti-humanist tone. The discourse causes fresh surge of Nausea in Antoine with a greater force than he ever felt. To explain himself Sartre gave his famous speech almost after 8 years of the publication of *Nausea* known as “*Existentialism is a Humanism*”.

Antoine suffered nausea because objects start existing when he touches them. It started with a pebble on the beach and a soggy piece of paper which he tries to pick, and then at cafe by colours and discourses. There is a thin film which makes the objects look real, if you see through it they have life.

He sits under a chestnut tree and contemplates on its roots, when suddenly he is engulfed by nausea.

Chestnut tree is a powerful image drawn by author to exhibit existential anguish of Antoine. His self-doubt and metaphysical anguish reaches its zenith and consciousness moves towards project that could give meaning to his life. He has an epiphany that everything is superfluous and thus absurd. The nothingness is existence. Trees swayed in the park to and fro with funny little meaning which went beyond them. Antoine gets baffled and retreats from the park. The park, trees and bushes smiled at him when he looked back from the gate of the park. This was the kind of smile people share when they share some common secret. The real secret of existence had transcended on him by an act of conspiracy through Chestnut tree.

Antoine had a self-realisation on the bench under Chestnut tree, as Buddha after long penance attained an enlightenment under a Bodhi-Tree. This incident paves the way for his encounter with his former lover Anny. Antoine meets Anny in Paris. They discuss privilege situation and perfect moments at length. According to Anny, the privileged situations are the raw material for creating perfect moments. One can encounter infinite number of privileged situation in his life and it is the moral duty of every human being to transform those privileged situations into a perfect moments. After meeting with him, Anny makes it clear that she has changed a considerable amount and must go on with her life. In fact, she



categorically pleads Antoine that he is the milestone and should not change so that she can measure her journey in terms of him. Anny claims that she has changed a lot, not only in physical appearance but in thinking also. Antoine finds that she has same bias and opinion which she had four years ago. Both were on the journeys the paths of which were diagonally opposite to each other. Anny is now happy in being a kept of a capitalist and has adapted bourgeois attitude. Antoine spent his time reflecting upon the nuances of mundane life and captured a magic moment sitting under the chestnut tree. Antoine clings to the past, hoping that she may want to redefine their relationship, but he is ultimately rejected by her. They depart again probably never to meet again. Antoine comes back from Paris to wind up and say goodbye to Boueville. He goes to library to meet autodidact where autodidact is caught in the act of paedophile. He is beaten by the librarian till he bleeds profusely. Antoine offered to help but he refuses to accept any help from him. Then he goes to cafe where the Patronne who was owner leaves him to be attended by waitress and walks away with another customer. The waitress plays a song on gramophone for him for the last time. 'Some of these days you will miss me honey'.

In the end he is waiting for the train at station with a resolution in his mind to write a book. He no more feels Nausea.

Antoine is a Baudrillard's flaneur. The Baudrillard's "simulacrum is never that which conceals the truth- it is truth which conceals that there is none" (Simulacra and Simulation). The simulacrum is true. Antoine felt "The real sea is cold and black, full of animals; it crawls underneath this thin green film which is designed to deceive people"(179). The Antoine makes a confession "The only real thing left in me is some existence which can feel itself existing" (241). This draws parallel to ancient Indian scripture *Mandukya Upanishad* 3.1.1 "Two birds, Inseparable companions, perch on the same tree, one eats the fruit, the other looks on. The first bird is our individual Self feeding on the pleasures and pains of this world; The other is the universal Self, silently witnessing all" ( *Mandukya Upanishad* 3.1.1).

In his essay *What Is Literature?*, Sartre wrote, "On the one hand, the literary object has no substance but the reader's subjectivity ... But, on the other hand, the words are there like traps to arouse our feelings and to reflect them towards us ... Thus, the writer appeals to the reader's freedom to collaborate in the production of the work" (Methuen & Co,1950).

The novel, according to Sartre, is an intricate formal achievement modelled on much 18th-century fiction that was presented as a diary discovered among the papers of Antoine Requentin.



Some famous authors and philosophers have expressed their views about Nausea. First of all we will see what Albert Camus has to say about it. Camus shared common views with Sartre, so far as freedom and justice was concerned. They were committed to combat injustice at every front specially for the worker class, the proletariat. At the time of the novel's release, Camus was a reviewer for an Algiers left-wing daily. In his review, Camus wrote, "the play of the toughest and most lucid mind are at the same time both lavished and squandered" (*Alger Republican*). Camus felt that each chapter of the book taken by itself "reaches a kind of perfection in bitterness and truth" (*Alger Republican*). However, he also felt that the descriptive and the philosophical aspects of the novel are not balanced, that they "don't add up to a work of art: the passage from one to the other is too rapid, too unmotivated, to evoke in the reader the deep conviction that makes the art of the novel" (*Alger Republican*). He likewise felt that Sartre had tipped the balance too far in depicting the repugnant features of mankind "instead of placing the reasons for his despair, at least to a certain degree, if not completely, on the elements of human greatness" (*Alger Republican*). Still, Camus's largely positive review led to a friendship between the two authors.

In distinction both from Camus's feeling that Nausea is an uneasy marriage of novel and philosophy and also from Matthey's belief that it is a philosophy text, the philosopher William Barrett, in his book *Irrational Man*, expresses an opposite judgment. He writes that Nausea "may well be Sartre's best book for the very reason that in it the intellectual and the creative artist come closest to being conjoined" (*The Existentialists: Sartre*). Barrett says that, in other literary works and in his literary criticism, Sartre feels the pull of ideas too strongly to respond to poetry, "which is precisely that form of human expression in which the poet—and the reader who would enter the poet's world—must let Being be, to use Heidegger's phrase, and not attempt to coerce it by the will to action or the will to intellectualisation" (*The Existentialists: Sartre*).

Nabokov has also a wry negative opinion about Nausea. He maintains that Nausea was Sartre's first try to inflict his idle and arbitrary philosophical fancy on Roquentin, the hero of the novel, and that "a lot of talent is needed to have the trick work" (Nabokov, Valdimir. *Review of Nausea*. The New York Times, April 24, 1949). Nabokov thinks that the central discovery in *Nausea* is arbitrarily concocted and that this discovery might have been of a different nature without affecting the rest of the book. Nabokov declares that: "one has no special quarrel with Roquentin when he decides that the world exists. But the task to make the world exist as a work of art was beyond Sartre's powers" (NY Times 24Apr.49). So in Nabokov's eyes Nausea falls short of a genuine work of art in many respects. His negative criticism reaches its zenith when he declares that Nausea "belongs to that tense-looking but really wry loose type of writing, which has been popularised by many second raters" (NY Times 24 Apr.49).



More recently, younger French academics follow Emmanuel Legeard have rather built upon cultural psychology to interpret the nausea feeling more metaphorically “The feeling of nausea has spawned a series of implausible interpretations, but any truly involved reader should be able to apprehend through intuitive sympathy that nausea is disgust at the traumatic decomposition of the divine within existence, symptomatic of the discovery of the absurd, of the disenchantment of the world. Transcendence and providence were invented by man. Every being is meaningless "in itself". There is no God. But the experience through nausea ends up taking a positive turn: if God doesn't exist, then everything becomes possible. And that's how, with despair, true optimism begins"(Legeard, Emmanuel. *Le Narrataire* Presses Univesitaires de lalle, 2001).

### **Themes in the novel:**

There are three major themes in the novel

#### **1. Absurdity in existence**

Existence is absurd. absurd is ridiculously unreasonable or unsound or incongruous. An argument is absurd if its conclusion contradicts its premises. A phenomenon is absurd if no possible reason can explain it. Therefore, a thing is absurd if it precludes the possibility of explanation. Since existence is not a part of rational plan it is absurd.

Sartre suggests that ordinarily people believe that existence is nothing but an empty form added to the structure of things, and that this addition of existence changes nothing in the nature of things.

Roquentin sitting under a chestnut tree contemplates and for the first time meaning of existence is revealed to him.

“I was in the park just now. 'The roots of the chestnut tree were sunk in the ground just under my bench. I couldn't remember it was a root any more. the words had vanished and with them the significance of things, their methods of use, and the feeble points of reference which men have traced on their surface then I had this vision. It left me breathless. Never, until these last few days, had I understood the meaning of 'existence' ...usually existence hides itself. It is there, around us, in us, it is us, you can't say two words without mentioning it, but you can never touch it” (182).



He realises that existence is nothing but a kind of emptiness which is not empirical, but something inexplicable that surrounds him.

“Even when I looked at things, I was miles from dreaming that they existed; they looked like scenery to me. I picked them up in my hands, they served me as tools, I foresaw their resistance. But that all happened on the surface. If anyone had asked me what existence was, I would have answered, that it was nothing, simply an empty form which was added to external things without changing anything in their nature” (183).

On the surface of it the things existed as merely tools and when they are picked up they resist. How can objects resist the change in the form of Being-in-itself. Roquentin understands, through his intuitive experience, that existence is not an abstract category, but the very paste of things and everything else is kneaded into it. Thus, at the time of illumination, all man-made distinctions disappear and pure existence in its nakedness manifests itself:

“the roots, the park gates, the bench, the grass, all that had vanished: the diversity of things, their individuality, were only an appearance, a veneer. This veneer had melted, leaving soft, monstrous masses, all in disorder-naked, in a frightful, obscene nakedness” (183).

The individuality is an illusion. If you can see through all objects, they are soft monstrous mass, the gross elements that constitutes all existence. According to Sartre this absurdity comes from the superfluous nature of things, since they have no purpose to serve.

Roquentin wonders “Existence everywhere, infinitely, in excess, for ever and everywhere ...this enormous presence mounting up, mounting up as high as the sky, spilling over, filling everything with its gelatinous slither, and I could see depths upon depths of it reaching far beyond the limits of the garden, the houses, and Bouville, as far as the eye could reach...”(190)

Since all objects around him are superfluous for lack of purpose, he is no way different from them.

Sartre describes the feeling of Roquentin in the following words:

“We were a heap of living creatures, irritated, embarrassed at ourselves, we hadn't the slightest reason to be there, none of us, each one, confused, vaguely alarmed, felt superfluous in relation to the others....I dreamed vaguely of killing myself, to destroy at least one of these superfluous existences. But my death itself would have been superfluous, Superfluous, my corpse, my blood on these pebbles, between these plants, in the depths of this charming park...I was superfluous for all time (184-85)”.



Sartre uses the term *de trop* for superfluous existence. If empirical explanation fails we have rationality in support of abstract things. According to Sartre the world of explanations and reasons is not the world of existence. However Roquentin refuses to acknowledge the existence of music since it is veiled in layers and layers of existence. Since only the superfluous exists, the tune does not exist.

“The root existed in such a way that I could not explain it. Knotty, inert, nameless, it fascinated me, filled my eyes, brought me back unceasingly to its own existence. In vain to repeat: "This is a root", it didn't work. ... I saw clearly that you could not pass from its function as a root, as a breathing pump, to that, to this hard and compact skin of a sea lion, to this oily, callous, head-strong look. The function explained nothing: it allowed you to understand generally that it was a root, but not that one at all. This root, with its colour, shape, its congealed movements, was ... below all explanation” (186).

However Roquentin refuses to acknowledge the existence of music since it is veiled in layers and layers of existence. Since only the superfluous exists, the tune does not exist.

“It (the tune) does not exist. It is even an annoyance; if I were to get up and rip this record from the table which holds it, if I were to break it in two, I wouldn't reach it. It is beyond always beyond something, a voice, a Violin note, through layers and layers of existence, it veils itself, thin and firm, and when you want to seize it, you find only existents, you butt against existents devoid of sense. It is behind them: I don't even hear it. I hear sounds, vibrations in the air which unveil it. It does not exist because it has nothing superfluous: it is all the rest which in relation to it is superfluous. It (the tune) is” (248).

Do we have some scheme of rational plan to justify the abundance of existence? If so, whatever is part of rational plan is absurd. Not only absurd, but also it is contingent.

“The essential thing is contingency. I mean that one cannot define existence as necessity. To exist is simply to be there; those who exist let themselves be encountered, but you can never deduce anything from them. I believe there are people who have understood this. Only they try to overcome this contingency by inventing a necessary, causal being. But no necessary being can explain existence; contingency is not a delusion, a probability which can be dissipated; it is absolute, consequently, the perfect free gift” (188).

## 2. Nausea of Being



The awareness of the existence of objects cause nausea for the first time when Roquentin picks up a pebble on the beach. The awareness that one's body and thoughts exist, gives rise to the same sensation.

“I exist. It's sweet, so sweet, so slow. And light; You'd think it floated all by itself. It stirs. It brushes by me, melts and vanishes. Gently, gently. There is bubbling water in my mouth. I swallow. It slides down my throat, it caresses me-and now it comes up again into my mouth. For ever I shall have a little pool of whitish water in my mouth-lying low-grazing my tongue. And this pool is me. And the tongue. And the throat is me” (143).

Due to prolong study of Phenomenology Sartre had its influence on his writings. Roquentin suffered nausea due to his consciousness of being. The thoughts seems to possess him and transcend him to another world .

“Thoughts are the dullest things. Duller than flesh. They stretch out and there's no end to them, and they leave a funny taste in the mouth. Thoughts are born at the back of me. Like sudden giddiness. I feel them being born behind my head...if I yield, they are going to come around in front of me, between my eye - and I always yield, the thought grows and grows and there it is, filling me completely and renewing my existence” (144-45).

Roquentin thought cafe was safe place, but he had a stroke of nausea in cafe

“Things are bad! Things are very bad: I have it, the filth, the Nausea. And this time it is new: it caught me in a cafe. Until now cafes were my only refuge because they were full of people and well lighted: now there won't even be that anymore; when I am run to earth in my room, I shan't know where to go. I was coming to make love but no sooner had I opened the door than Madeleine, the waitress, called to me: "The Patronne isn't here, she's in town shopping."...Then the Nausea seized me, I dropped to a seat, I no longer knew where I was; I saw the colours spin slowly around me, I wanted to vomit. And since that time, the Nausea has not left me, it holds me” (32-33).

Sartre argues that the appearance of a phenomenon is pure and absolute. The noumenon (Kant) is not only inaccessible but it doesn't exists.. Appearance is the only reality. From this starting point, Sartre contends that the world can be seen as an infinite series of finite appearances. Roquentin describe his confusion thus:

“Nothing has changed and yet everything is different. I can't describe it; it's like the Nausea and yet it's just the opposite: at last an adventure happens to me and when I question myself I



see that it happens that I am myself and that I am here; I am the one who splits the night, I am as happy as the hero of a novel" (82).

For Sartre, nothingness is the defining characteristic of the for-itself. A tree is a tree and lacks the ability to change or create its being. Man, on the other hand, makes himself by acting in the world. Instead of simply being, as the object-in-itself does, man, as an object-for-itself, must *actuate* his own being. Ultimately, Roquentin has a blinding evidence of his existence. "So this is Nausea: this blinding evidence? I have scratched my head over it! I've written about it. Now I know: I exist—the world exists—and I know that the world exists. That's all. It makes no difference to me. It's strange that everything makes so little difference to me: it frightens me. Ever since the day I wanted to play ducks and drakes. I was going to throw that pebble, I looked at it and then it all began: I felt that it *existed*.. Then after that there were other Nauseas; from time to time objects start existing in your hand. There was the Nausea of the "Railwaymen's Rendezvous" and then another, before that, the night I was looking out the window; then another in the park, one Sunday, then others. But it had never been as strong as today" (176).

### 3. Theme of Perfect Time

From the beginning the Roquentin is aware of proper time. Sartre was influenced by Heidegger's "Being and Time". Time is flux, there are no past, present or future. Every end is a new beginning.

"I wanted the moments of my life to follow and order themselves like those of a life remembered. You might as well try and catch time by the tail." "I think this is what happens: you suddenly feel that time is passing, that each instant leads to another, this one to another one, and so on; that each instant is annihilated, and that it isn't worth while to hold it back, etc., etc. And then you attribute this property to events which appear to you in the instants; what belongs to the form you carry over to the content. You talk a lot about this amazing flow of time but you hardly see it. You see a woman, you think that one day she'll be old, only you don't see her grow old. But there are moments when you think you see her grow old and feel yourself growing old with her: this is the feeling of adventure. If I remember correctly, they call that the irreversibility of time. The feeling of adventure would simply be that of the irreversibility of time. But why don't we always have it? Is it that time is not always irreversible? There are moments when you have the impression that you can do what you want, go forward or backward, that it has no importance; and then other times when you might say that the links have been tightened and, in that case, it's not a question of missing your turn because you could never start again" (85-86).



As a student of Philosophy Sartre had admiration for Noble Prize winner Henri Bergson who wrote an essay *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*.(1889) .

When Roquentin meets Anny in Paris he accepts his failure to attain a perfect moment anymore. He says:

"I have a sort of ... physical certainty. I feel there are no more perfect moments. I feel it in my legs when I walk. I feel it all the time, even when I sleep. I can't forget it. There has never been anything like a revelation; I can't say: starting on such and such a day, at such a time, my life has been transformed. But now I always feel a bit as if I'd suddenly seen it yesterday. I'm dazzled, uncomfortable, I can't get used to it" (205-06).

He begs to Anny to explain to him the concept of perfect moment. Following conversation between Roquentin and Anna explains a lot about their relationship.

"And the perfect moments? Where do they come in?" "They came afterwards. First there are annunciatory signs. Then the privileged situation, slowly, majestically, comes into people's lives. Then the question whether you want to make a perfect moment out of it."

"Yes," I say, "I understand. In each one of these privileged situations there are certain acts which have to be done, certain attitudes to be taken, words which must be said—and other attitudes, other words are strictly prohibited. Is that it?" "I suppose so..." "In fact, then, the situation is the material: it demands exploitation." "That's it," she says. "First you had to be plunged into something exceptional and feel as though you were putting it in order. If all those conditions had been realized, the moment would have been perfect." "In fact, it was a sort of work of art." "You've already said that," she says with irritation. "No: it was ... a duty. You had to transform privileged situations into perfect moments. It was a moral question. Yes, you can laugh if you like: it was moral" (211-12).

It is everyone's moral duty to create perfect moments in life.

## REFERENCES:

Barrett, William. *The Existentialists: Sartre, Irrational Man*. Anchor Books, 1962

Bergson, Henri. *Time and Free Will*, Dover Publications, 1889.

Baudrillard Jean. *Simulacres and Simulations*. Semiotext(e) (English), 1983.

VIPIN BIHARI GOYAL

14 Page



- Camus, Albert. *Review of Nausea*. Alger Republican, October 20, 1938.
- Carruth, Hyden. Introduction *Nausea*. New Directions Publishing, 1964
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Nausea*. Penguin Books, 1983.
- Sartre, Jeau-Paul. *What is Literature ?*, Methuen & Co, 1950.
- Sartre, Jeau-Paul. *Existentialism is a Humanism*. The University Press, New Haven, 1948.
- Sartre, Jeau-Paul. *Being and Nothingness*. Washington Square Press, 1943.
- Spanos, william. *The Un-Naming of the Beasts: The Postmodernity of Sartre's Nausea*.  
*Criticism*. Binghamton Press & Sun-Bulletin, Vol.20:Iss.3, 1978.
- Legard, Emmanuel. *Le Narrataire* Presses Univesitaires de lalle, 2001.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Dover Publications, 1844.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm. *Beyond Good and Evil*. Fingerprint Classics. 1886.
- Nobokov, Valdimir. *Review of Nausea*. New York Tmes, April 24, 1949.