

# "NAUSEA"

Jean-Paul Sartre

## INTRODUCTION

Hayden Carruth

Existentialism entered the American consciousness like an elephant entering a dark room: there was a good deal of breakage and the people inside naturally mistook the nature of the intrusion. What would it be? An engine of destruction perhaps, a tank left over from the war? After a while the lights were turned on and it was seen to be "only" an elephant; everyone laughed and said that a circus must be passing through town. But no, soon they found the elephant was here to stay; and then, looking closer, they saw that although he was indeed a newcomer, an odd-looking one at that, he was not a stranger: they had known him all along.

This was in 1946 and 1947. And in no time at all Existentialism became a common term. No question of what it meant; it meant the life re-emerging after the war in the cafes of the Left Bank-disreputable young men in paint-smearing jeans, and their companions, those black-stockinged, makeupless girls who smoked too many cigarettes and engaged in who knows what follies besides. And their leader, apparently, was this fellow Sartre, who wrote books with loathsome titles like *Nausea* and *The Flies*. What nonsense, the wiseheads concluded. Perfectly safe to dismiss it as a fad, very likely a hoax.

Meanwhile at centers of serious thought the texts of Existentialism, especially Sartre's, were being translated and studied, with a resulting profound shock to the American intellectual establishment. On one hand the Neo-Thomists and other moral philosophers were alarmed by Existentialism's disregard for traditional schemes of value; on the other the positivists and analytical philosophers were outraged by Existentialism's willingness to abandon rational categories and rely on nonmental processes of consciousness. Remarkably violent attacks issued from both these camps, set off all the more sharply by the enthusiasm, here and there, of small welcoming bands of the avant garde. That the welcomers were no less ill-informed about Existentialism than the attackers, didn't help matters.

Nevertheless Existentialism, gradually and then more rapidly, won adherents, people who took it seriously. Someone has said that Existentialism is a philosophy - if a philosophy at all - that has been independently invented by millions of people simply responding to the emergency of life in a modern world. Coming for the first time to the works of Sartre, Jaspers, or Camus is often like reading, on page after page, one's own intimate thoughts and feelings, expressed with new precision and concreteness. Existentialism is a philosophy, as a matter of fact, because it has been lengthily

adumbrated by men trained in the philosophical disciplines; but it is also and more fundamentally a shift in ordinary human attitudes that has altered every aspect of life in our civilization.

The name, however, like the names we give all great movements of the human spirit-Romanticism, Transcendentalism- is misleading if we try to use it as a definition. There are so many branches of Existentialism that a number of the principal Existentialist writers have repudiated the term altogether; they deny they are Existentialists and they refuse to associate in the common ferment. Nevertheless we go on calling them Existentialists, and we are quite right to do so: as long as we use the term as a proper name, an agreed-upon semanteme, it is as good as any, or perhaps better, for signifying what unites the divergent interests.

It is nothing new. William Barrett, in his excellent book *Irrational Man* (1958), has shown that what we now call the Existentialist impulse is coeval with the myths of Abraham and Job; it is evident in the pre-Socratic philosophies of Greece, in the dramas of Aeschylus and Euripides, and in the later Greek and Byzantine culture of mystery; and it is a thread that winds, seldom dominant but always present, through the central European tradition : the Church Fathers, Augustine, the Gnostics, Abelard, Thomas, and then the extraordinary Pascal and the Romantic tradition that took up his standard a century later. And in the Orient, concurrently, the entire development of religious and philosophical attitudes, particularly in the Buddhist and Taoist writings, seems to us now to have been frequently closer to the actual existence of mankind than the rationalist discourses of the West.

Yet in spite of these precursors and analogues we would be gravely wrong to deny the modernity of Existentialism. Philosophical truth assumes many forms precisely because times change and men's needs change with them. Thus what we call Existentialism today, in all its philosophical, religious, and artistic manifestations, springs with remarkable directness from three figures of the last century. Two were philosophers, Soren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche, who, although they lived a generation

apart, worked and wrote independently. They arrived at positions that were in many respects entirely contrary, for Kierkegaard was deeply committed to the idea of the Christian God while Nietzsche was just as deeply divorced from it; but in other respects they were alike. They shared the same experience of loneliness, anguish, and doubt, and the same profound concern for the fate of the individual person. These were the driving forces too in the work of the third great originator, the novelist Dostoevski, from whose writings, especially *The Brothers Karamazov* and *Notes from Underground*, springs virtually the whole flowering of Existentialist sensibility in literature.

Our own century has devoted much labor and intelligence to the elaboration of these beginnings. It is customary to say that the principal Existentialist philosophers of our time are Martin Heidegger, Karl Jaspers, Gabriel Marcel, and of course Sartre. But many others, including thinkers as diverse as Jose Ortega, Martin Buber, Nikolai Berdyaev, and A. N. Whitehead, have been influenced by the main factors of Existentialist concern. In literature many, or even most, of the chief modern authors have been, consciously or not, Existentialists; certainly the tradition is very strong in the line of development represented by Kafka, Unamuno, Lawrence, Malraux, Hesse, Camus, and Faulkner. Even

a writer as far removed as Robert Frost from the centers of self-conscious Existentialism joins in this alignment, as we see when we reread such poems as "The Census-Taker" and "Stopping by Woods." Then what is it, finally, that has produced such wide effects'?

Nobody knows. That is, nobody can pin it down in a statement, though a number of people, including Sartre, have tried. Simply because Existentialism is not a produce of antecedent intellectual determinations, but a free transmutation of living experience, it cannot be defined. Nevertheless the important tendencies are evident enough.

In the first place, Existentialism is a recoil from rationalism. Not that Existentialists deny the role of reason; they merely insist that its limits be acknowledged. Most of them probably like to think that their speculations are eminently reasonable, yet not rational; and they emphasize the distinction between the terms. In particular, Existentialism is opposed to the entire rationalist tradition deriving from the Renaissance and culminating, a hundred-odd years ago, in the "cosmic rationalism" of Hegel. Hegel's writing is difficult and often obscure, but his purpose was to unite tinal Keality with Ideal Reason in a system that sublimated all negative or oppositional tendencies. It was a magnificent work, symphonic in its harmonies and variations, and it took hold on men's imaginations so compellingly that today its effects are dominant everywhere, both in the academic and "practical" worlds. But for a few men, notably Kierkegaard, this apotheosis of the mind did not account for human experience. Pain and ecstasy, doubt and intuition, private anguish and despair-these could not be explained in terms of the rational categories. Long before Freud, Kierkegaard was aware of the hidden forces within the self, forces that, simply by existing, destroyed all rational, positivistic, and optimistic delusions.

Hegelianism was the philosophy of history and the mass. By projecting a Final Reality toward which all history flows in a process of ever-refining synthesis, Hegel submerged the individual consciousness in a grand unity of ideal mind. But for the Existentialist, who insists that reality is only what he himself knows and experiences, this is meaningless. Not only that, it is cruel and coercive. The Existentialist knows that the self is not submerged, it is present, here and now, a suffering existent, and any system of thought that overrides this suffering is tyrannical. "A crowd is untruth," Kierkegaard repeats with choric insistence. Only in the self can the drama of truth occur.

Yet when the Existentialist looks inside himself, what does he find? Nothing. Looking back beyond birth or forward beyond death, he sees the void; looking into his own center, thrusting aside all knowledge, all memory, all sensation, he sees the chasm of the ego, formless and inconceivable, like the nucleus of an electron. And he is led to ask, as philosophers throughout history have asked: why is there anything instead of nothing, why the world, the universe, rather than a void? By concentrating all attention on this nothing within himself and underlying the objective surface of reality, he gradually transforms nothing into the concept of Nothingness, one of the truly great accomplishments of human sensibility. Nothingness as a force, a ground, a reality -in a certain sense the reality. From this comes man's despair, but also, if he has courage, his existential integrity.

From this comes, too, the Existentialist's opposition to humanism. Not that he is inhumane; quite the contrary, his entire preoccupation is with the sanity and efficacy of the individual person. But he insists that men must confront Nothingness. In a universe

grounded in Nothingness, the anthropocentric vision

of reality that characterized rational humanism from the Renaissance to the nineteenth century is clearly untenable. Mankind, instead of being the central figure on the stage of reality, the rational creature for whom the nonrational world exists, is actually an accident, a late and adventitious newcomer whose life is governed by contingency; and the proof, paradoxically, comes from rationalism itself, from the Darwinian idea of evolution. Whatever may be the case with trees and stones and stars, man the thinker is a by-product, a nonessential component of reality, and he and all his works cling to existence with a hold that is tenuous and feeble.

Beyond this, generalities must cease. Each of the great Existentialist thinkers pursues his separate course toward the re-establishment of the individual person in the face of Nothingness and absurdity. Sartre is only one of them. But clearly Existentialism, the confrontation with anguish and despair, is a philosophy of our age. No wonder the time and place of its greatest flowering has been Europe in the middle decades of our century. It has deep significance for those who have lived through social chaos, uprootedness, irrational torture, and this accounts for the pessimism and nightmarish imagery that pervade much Existentialist writing. But it is worth remembering that if Existentialism flowered in the world of Graham Greene, Andre Malraux, and Arthur Koestler, it originated in the world of Dickens, Balzac, and Pushkin. Neither Kierkegaard nor Nietzsche lived in circumstances that outsiders would judge to be in the least uncomfortable. The aspects of the human condition that they discovered in their inner searching are far more deeply rooted than the particular catastrophes of history.

"Suffering is the origin of consciousness," Dostoevski wrote. But suffering is anywhere in the presence of thought and sensitivity. Sartre for his part has written, and with equal simplicity: "Life begins on the other side of despair."

To Existentialism Sartre has contributed a classically brilliant French mind. If he is not the leader that Americans first took him to be, he is certainly one of the leaders. And his forthrightness, his skill as a writer, his acuity and originality, have won him a wider audience than any philosopher, probably, has ever enjoyed in his own lifetime. He has brought to his work a characteristically French mentality, viz., attuned less to metaphysical than to psychological modes of reasoning. Paradoxically-for Descartes was a leader of Renaissance rationalism-Sartre is an Existentialist who operates in the Cartesian tradition; at the beginning of any investigation he poses the cogito, the self-that-is and the self that observes the self-that-is. From this duality, in almost endless brilliant progressions, he moves through other dualities: knowing-doing, being-becoming, nature-freedom, etc. Only the professional philosopher can follow all the way. But Sartre would undoubtedly subscribe to Nietzsche's remark: "I honor a philosopher only if he is able to be an example." He himself is an example, and has been at great pains to define and enforce his exemplitude: in journalism, in fiction, in drama, in political activity, and in teaching. The question naturally arises: who is this Sartre?

Jean-Paul Sartre was born in Paris in 1905. Brought up chiefly in his mother's family-the Schweitzers; Albert Schweitzer was his older cousin-the boy was educated by his grandfather, who had invented the Berlitz method for teaching languages. In fact Sartre spent so much time in his grandfather's library that he began writing, he said later, out of

sheer boredom. Eventually he studied philosophy at French and German universities, and taught at Le Havre, which he took as the model for Bouville in *Nausea*, his first full-scale work. When it was published in 1938 it was condemned, predictably, in academic circles; but younger readers welcomed it, and it was far more successful than most first novels. Then came the war. Sartre entered the army, was captured and sent to prison camp, then released because of ill health. He returned to Paris. There, under the Occupation, he wrote several plays and his first major philosophical work, *Being and Nothingness* (1943). By the end of the war he was known as a leader of the entire war-bred generation of Parisian intellectuals.

Since then Sartre's activity has been intense. He has produced novels, short stories, plays, literary and philosophical essays, biographies, many political and journalistic works, pamphlets, manifestoes, etc. He has been called the most brilliant Frenchman of our time; and no wonder. For wit, learning, argumentative skill and polemical zeal, none can match him. Certainly *Being and Nothingness*, whatever faults its critics, including Sartre, may now find in it, was a brilliant contribution to philosophy; and *Nausea* was not only a powerful novel but a crucial event in the evolution of sensibility.

In the quarter-century since Antoine Roquentin, the "hero" of *Nausea*, made his appearance, he has become a familiar of our world, one of those men who, like Hamlet or Julien Sorel, live

outside the pages of the books in which they assumed their characters. If it is not strictly correct to call him an archetype, nevertheless he is an original upon whom many copies, both fictional and actual, have been formed. This is not to say that Roquentin was the first "Existentialist man," or *Nausea* the first "Existentialist novel"; we have already spoken of the precursors. But Roquentin is a man living at an extraordinary metaphysical pitch, at least in the pages of the journal he has left us. His account of himself offers us many shrewd perceptions of life in our world that we appropriate, as parts of our cultural equipment, in defining our own attitudes. It is scarcely possible to read seriously in contemporary literature, philosophy, or psychology without encountering references to Roquentin's confrontation with the chestnut tree, for example, which is one of the sharpest pictures ever drawn of self-doubt and metaphysical anguish.

How did Roquentin arrive at his crisis of despair? It helps if the reader bears in mind a philosophical distinction that has been the source of endless debate over the centuries: the distinction between existence and essence. Take any object; a Venetian glass paperweight, for example. Its essence is everything that permits us to recognize it: its roundness, heaviness, smoothness, color, etc. Its existence is simply the fact that it is. This is the distinction that Roquentin discovers one day when he picks up a stone on the seashore and is suddenly overcome by an "odd feeling"; it is the feeling of being confronted by a bare existence. For him, quite unexpectedly, the essence of the stone disappears; he "sees through" it; and then as the days proceed he gradually discovers that all essences are volatile, until, in the confrontation with the chestnut tree, he finds himself in the presence of reality itself reduced to pure existence: disgusting and fearsome.

This is a point that all existential writers have repeated over and over: the detestability of existence. Jaspers has written: "The non-rational is found in the opacity of the here and now, ... in the actual empirical existence which is just as it is and not otherwise." Why is

it not otherwise? Why is it at all? What is this is-ness? Isn't it simply nothing, or rather Nothingness, the unknowable, indispensable Void? What could be more absurd, "non-rational," meaningless? The mind of man, which he did not ask to be given, demands a reason and a meaning-this is its self-defining cause-and yet it finds itself in the midst of a radically meaningless existence. The result: impasse. And nausea.

One by one Roquentin is offered the various traditional means for escaping his predicament, and his examination and rejection of them provide some of the most evocative scenes in the book. Rational humanism, as offered by the autodidact who is trying to read all the books in the town library, seems at first a good, almost charming possibility, until it collapses in a scene of terrible comic force. The life of the town, its commercial and pietistic affectations, clearly is unacceptable. But even more important are the parts of himself that Roquentin finds he must now reject as useless. His love of travel, of "adventures," in short, of objective experience-this has no value. "For the thinker, as for the artist," William Barrett writes, "what counts in life is not the number of rare and exciting adventures he encounters, but the inner depth in that life." Hence Roquentin must turn within himself, but when he does so, where is the "inner depth"-or rather what is it? Again, Nothingness. Neither the experience of the outside world nor the contemplation of the inner world can give meaning to existence. Perhaps the past has something to offer? Roquentin redoubles his efforts in connection with the research he has been engaged in for some time; but finds only that the myth of history cannot help him-it is gone, dead, crumbled to dust, its meanings are academic. Roquentin's last hope is love, human love, yet he knows now that this is a thin hope. He goes to meet his former mistress; expectantly, to be sure, but not confidently; and his defeat, when it occurs, is something that he had, in a sense, already acknowledged.

In his suffering Roquentin is reduced to nothing, to the nauseated consciousness of nothing. He is filled with meaningless, anarchic visions. Yet perhaps he is experiencing what Jaspers calls "the preparing power of chaos." At any rate suffering is the necessary prelude to the re-establishment of the self, as both philosophy and folk wisdom attest. Roquentin's way out of his predicament is not given in detail, but in his remarks about the jazz recording and about his own plans for future literary endeavors, he seems to indicate that he knows a means of survival. It is unfortunate that Sartre chose to call by the name of "jazz" a recording that, from Roquentin's description of it, most musically minded Americans will recognize as commercial pseudo-jazz; but this does not alter the validity of the point Sartre introduces through a reference to the music. What is the point? What is Roquentin's "way out"? The matter has been debated by many commentators, partly because it is not specified in the book, partly because it raises issues that extend far beyond the book. If

Roquentin's way out is to be through art, what use is it to the nonartist? What elements in the music make it suggestive of a possible mode of survival? What does "survival" mean in Roquentin's catastrophe? What is the real, ultimate relationship of Roquentin to his former mistress and to the people of Bouville? These are extremely important questions. But they cannot be decided in a few pages, nor can they be answered dogmatically by any individual reader. They are questions that Sartre-at least in this book-purposefully leaves open.

Later in his philosophical development the idea of freedom became Sartre's main theme.

Man, beginning in the loathsome emptiness of his existence, creates his essence-his self, his being -through the choices that he freely makes. Hence his being is never fixed. He is always becoming, and if it were not for the contingency of death he would never end. Nor would his philosophy. "Existentialists," wrote the Irish philosopher Arland Ussher, "have a notable difficulty in finishing their books: of necessity, for their philosophy-staying close to the movement of life-can have no finality." To what extent this applies to *Nausea* the individual reader must decide.

Another question, even more difficult, is the line between jest and sermon in the novel. 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. How much self-mockery is detectable in Roquentin's account of the chestnut tree? Some, certainly. The rhetoric at points turns coy: the "suspicious transparency" of the glass of beer, the trees that "did not want to exist" and "quietly minded their own business." And what does Roquentin mean, at the end of the episode, by the "smile of the trees" that "meant something . . . the real secret of existence"? What is the relationship between the smile of the trees and Roquentin's description of the jazz recording: "The disc is scratched and wearing out, perhaps the singer is dead. . . . But behind the existence which falls from one present to the other, without a past, without a future, behind these sounds which decompose from day to day, peel off and slip towards death, the melody stays the same, young and firm, like a pitiless witness"?

What is the "melody"? For that matter, what is the novel, which is another kind of melody? Is it a good novel? Is it a work of art? We know that Sartre, the philosopher, is also a marvelous writer; in the techniques of realistic fiction-the construction of dialogue, the evocation of scene and mood-he is the equal of anyone. But a novel is more than technique; it is a self-consistent and dynamic whole. As if this weren't difficult enough, Sartre compounds the aesthetic problems by insisting that the novel must conform to the details of his philosophy. He is not content, like some philosophers, to write fable, allegory, or a philosophical tale in the manner of *Candide*; he is content only with a proper work of art that is at the same time a synthesis of philosophical specifications. A tall order; and the critics, although widely divergent in their interpretation of the substance of *Nausea*, seem to agree that Sartre, brilliant though his verbal gifts may be, has not quite brought it off. Germaine Bree and Margaret Guiton (in *An Age of Fiction*, 1957) have written: "When Sartre, the philosopher, informs us that we have an immediate intuition of existence in the sensations of boredom and of nausea, we tend to raise an eyebrow. But when Sartre, the novelist, describes this situation, we are almost convinced." William Barrett, a keener critic of the philosophy, has called *Nausea* Sartre's best novel "for the very reason that in it the intellectual and the creative artist come closest to being joined," but the joining is not complete: "*Nausea* is not so much a full novel as an extraordinary fragment of one." Similarly a recent anonymous critic, writing in the *London Times Literary Supplement*, has mentioned the "bite and energy . . . [of] the best pages of *La Nausee*." And so on and so on. The tone of reluctant praise-"almost," "fragment," "the best pages"-pervades nearly all the criticism of Sartre's fiction.

Literary critics are a cheerless, canny breed, inclined always to say that a given work has its good and bad points. Perhaps the best comment on their scrupulosity is that *Nausea* was published twenty-six years ago and they are still writing about it. Something

must hold their attention. If it is not Sartre's novel-istic technique, then perhaps novelistic technique is not a just criterion of what is pertinent or valuable. Certainly Nausea gives us a few of the clearest and hence most useful images of man in our time that we possess; and this, as Allen Tate has said, is the supreme function of art.

William Blake once remarked that he had to create his own system of thought in order to avoid being enslaved by those of others, and Sartre has said that genius is what a man invents when he is looking for a way out. The power of Sartre's fiction resides in the truth of our lives as he has written it. The validity of his fiction resides not only in the genius but in the courage that he has invented as an example for the age.

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#### Editors' Note

These notebooks were found among the papers of Antoine Roquentin. They are published without alteration.

The first sheet is undated, but there is good reason to believe it was written some weeks before the diary itself. Thus it would have been written around the beginning of January, 1932, at the latest.

At that time, Antoine Roquentin, after travelling through Central Europe, North Africa and the Far East, settled in Bou-ville for three years to conclude his historical research on the Marquis de Rollebon.

#### THE EDITORS

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#### UNDATED PAGES

The best thing would be to write down events from day to day. Keep a diary to see clearly-let none of the nuances or small happenings escape even though they might seem to mean nothing. And above all, classify them. I must tell how I see this table, this street, the people, my packet of tobacco, since those are the things which have changed. I must determine the exact extent and nature of this change.

For instance, here is a cardboard box holding my bottle of ink. I should try to tell how I saw it before and now how I Well, it's a parallelopiped rectangle, it opens-that's stupid, there's nothing I can say about it. This is what I have to avoid, I must not put in strangeness where there is none. I think that is the big danger in keeping a diary: you exaggerate everything. You continually force the truth because you're always looking for something. On the other hand, it is certain that from one minute to the next-and precisely a propos of this box or any other object at

1 Word left out.all I can recapture this impression of day-before-yesterday. I must always be ready, otherwise it will slip through my fingers. I must never<sup>2</sup> but carefully note and detail all that happens.



Naturally, I can write nothing definite about this Saturday and the day-before-yesterday business. I am already too far from it; the only thing I can say is that in neither case was there anything which could ordinarily be called an event. Saturday the children were playing ducks and drakes and, like them, I wanted to throw a stone into the sea. Just at that moment I stopped, dropped the stone and left. Probably I looked somewhat foolish or absent-minded, because the children laughed behind my back. So much for external things. What has happened inside of me has not left any clear traces. I saw something which disgusted me, but I no longer know whether it was the sea or the stone. The stone was flat and dry, especially on one side, damp and muddy on the other. I held it by the edges with my fingers wide apart so as not to get them dirty.

Day before yesterday was much more complicated. And there was also this series of coincidences, of quid-pro-quos that I can't explain to myself. But I'm not going to spend my time putting all that down on paper. Anyhow, it was certain that I was afraid or had some other feeling of that sort. If I had only known what I was afraid of, I would have made a great step forward.

The strangest thing is that I am not at all inclined to call myself insane, I clearly see that I am not: all these changes concern objects. At least, that is what I'd like to be sure of.

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Perhaps it was a passing moment of madness after all. There is no trace of it any more. My odd feelings of the other week seem to me quite ridiculous today: I can no longer enter into them. I am quite at ease this evening, quite solidly terre-a-terre in the world. Here is my room facing north-east. Below the Rue des Mutiles and the construction-yard of the new station. From my window I see the red and white flame of the "Railwaymen's Rendezvous" at the corner of the Boulevard Victor-Noir. The Paris train has just come in. People are coming out of the old station

2 Word crossed out (possibly "force" or "forge"), another word added above, is illegible.

1 Evidently in the evening. The following paragraph is much later than the preceding ones. We are inclined to believe it was written the following day at the earliest.

and spreading into the streets. I hear steps and voices. A lot of people are waiting for the last tramway. They must make a sad little group around the street light just under my window. Well, they have a few minutes more to wait: the tram won't pass before 10.45. I hope no commercial travellers will come to-night: I have such a desire to sleep and am so much behind in my sleep. A good night, one good night and all this nonsense will be swept away.

Ten forty-five: nothing more to fear, they would be here already. Unless it's the day for the man from Rouen. He comes every week. They reserve No. 2, on the second floor for him, the room with a bidet. He might still show up: he often drinks a beer at the "Railwaymen's Rendezvous" before going to bed. But he doesn't make too much noise. He is very small and clean with a waxed, black moustache and a wig. Here he is now.

Well, when I heard him come up the stairs, it gave me quite a thrill, it was so reassuring: what is there to fear in such a regular world? I think I am cured.

Here is tramway number seven, Abattoirs-Grands Bassins. It stops with a clank of iron rails. It's leaving again. Now loaded with suitcases and sleeping children, it's heading towards Grands Bassins, towards the factories in the black East. It's the next to the last tramway; the last one will go by in an hour.

I'm going to bed. I'm cured. I'll give up writing my daily impressions, like a little girl in her nice new notebook.

In one case only it might be interesting to keep a diary: it would be if . . .\*

1 The text of the undated pages ends here. DIARY

Monday, 29 January, 1932:

Something has happened to me, I can't doubt it any more. It came as an illness does, not like an ordinary certainty, not like anything evident. It came cunningly, little by little; I felt a little strange, a little put out, that's all. Once established it never moved, it stayed quiet, and I was able to persuade myself that nothing was the matter with me, that it was a false alarm. And now, it's blossoming.

I don't think the historian's trade is much given to psychological analysis. In our work we have to do only with sentiments in the whole to which we give generic titles such as Ambition and Interest. And yet if I had even a shadow of self-knowledge, I could put it to good use now.

For instance, there is something new about my hands, a certain way of picking up my pipe or fork. Or else it's the fork which now has a certain way of having itself picked up, I don't know. A little while ago, just as I was coming into my room, I stopped short because I felt in my hand a cold object which held my attention through a sort of personality. I opened my hand, looked: I was simply holding the door-knob. This morning in the library, when the Self-Taught Man<sup>1</sup> came to say good morning to me, it took me ten seconds to recognize him. I saw an unknown face, barely a face. Then there was his hand like a fat white worm in my own hand. I dropped it almost immediately and the arm fell back flabbily.

There are a great number of suspicious noises in the streets, too.

So a change has taken place during these last few weeks. But where? It is an abstract change without object. Am I the one who has changed? If not, then it is this room, this city and this nature; I must choose.

I think I'm the one who has changed: that's the simplest solution. Also the most unpleasant. But I must finally realize

1 Ogier P . . . , who will be often mentioned in this journal. He was a bailiff's clerk. Roquentin met him in 1930 in the Bouville library.

that I am subject to these sudden transformations. The thing is that I rarely think; a crowd of small metamorphoses accumulate in me without my noticing it, and then, one fine day, a veritable revolution takes place. This is what has given my life such a jerky, incoherent aspect. For instance, when I left France, there were a lot of people who said I left for a whim. And when I suddenly came back after six years of travelling, they still could call it a whim. I see myself with Mercier again in the office of that French