

Sartre's Concept of Freedom  
as Reflected in His Novels and Plays  
Before 1949

Honors Thesis ✓

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## INTRODUCTION

Sartre thinks of freedom not as something man has, but as something man is. He says: Man is his freedom; thus, man is condemned to be free. This study attempts to sound the depths of that statement.

Freedom is the major theme which links the works to be examined in this study. Subsidiary themes such as bad faith and the problem of engagement sometimes deserve special attention, but the concept of freedom itself is the focal point of the entire examination.

In Sartre's novels and plays written before 1949 there is an evident evolution in his expression of the concept of freedom. His early works emphasize the awareness of the contingency of existence which reveals one's freedom. Later works concentrate on various individual reactions to that awareness, especially on attempts to evade it. The authentic commitment of one's freedom is the subject of the final works. This gradual development of the concept of freedom shall be made explicit in the following study.

Numerous philosophers have described the nature of human existence and interpersonal relationships in highly technical terms, but few philosophers have been able to apply their theories to familiar human situations. In other words, few philosophers have been able to make their theories "come to life." Sartre, however, is an exception to that observation. In fact, Sartre is

often more skillful in applying theory than he is in formulating it; he is an outstanding playwright, a good novelist, but is considered by many to be only a mediocre philosopher. To appreciate fully the complex ideas which Sartre expresses in Being and Nothingness, one should examine Sartre's literary works, particularly his novels and plays. Chapter One of this study deals with the concept of freedom as is explained in Being and Nothingness. Chapter Two shows how this concept is employed in Sartre's novels, and Chapter Three how it is used in his plays.

Sartre wants to continue the evolution of the concept of freedom until it reaches into the realm of ethics. He cannot go that far without breaking away from the existentialist tradition. Perhaps Sartre will indeed break away. (It is not impossible for philosophers to be "born again.") It is highly unlikely, however, that Sartre will renounce his trend of thought and set out on an entirely different tack. As far as I can determine, he has reached the end of his line: authenticity. A foundation for ethics is beyond his grasp.

## CHAPTER ONE

### An Examination of Sartre's Concept of Freedom as Presented in Being and Nothingness

René Marill-Albères, one of Jean Paul Sartre's best-known critics, has made the following comment regarding the relationship of Sartre's philosophy to his plays and novels:

It can be said that Sartre is an esoteric writer, for his novels and his characters have a general meaning as well as a hidden meaning. For those not versed in philosophy his characters acquire a certain meaning at first reading; but to get at the meaning which Sartre confers to them, it is necessary to decipher them with the help of his philosophical works.<sup>1</sup>

In this first chapter, in order to prepare ourselves for a "deciphering" of Sartre's plays and novels, we will investigate his concept of freedom as it is explained in the first chapter of the fourth division in Being and Nothingness. First, however, we must study Sartre's fundamental ontological terminology before we can hope to understand what he means when he employs the word freedom.

This study is best begun with an examination of two terms which are of basic importance in Being and Nothingness: the en-soi and the pour-soi. According to Sartre the self is both frozen and volatile. It is frozen in the sense that it has a certain

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<sup>1</sup> René Marill-Albères, Philosopher Without Faith, (New York, 1965), p. 11.

past and a certain public image from which escape often seems impossible. It is volatile in the sense that it inexorably overflows the container in which history and other consciousnesses appear to hold it captive. The aspect of the self which seems confined within itself and fixed Sartre appropriately calls the en-soi. The aspect which is nothing in itself, but instead is pure nihilation or transcendence of the en-soi is called the pour-soi. It is important to recognize that the en-soi and pour-soi are interdependent. Only through the noetic pour-soi can the noematic en-soi be known, and only by reason of the existence of the en-soi can there be anything for the pour-soi to nihilate.<sup>2</sup> Were there no nihilation, there would be no pour-soi.

Although people often attempt to ignore either the en-soi or the pour-soi, consciousness always remains a combination of the two elements. As Sartre expresses it: "Consciousness is what it is not and is not what it is." Any endeavor to hide or forget either of the two elements Sartre calls an act of "bad faith." It will be explained later that when one is in bad faith he always seeks to cover up the fact that life is contingent, i.e., one always tries to conceal his own freedom from himself.

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<sup>2</sup> The terms, noetic and noematic were used by the phenomenologist Edmund Husserl. In his epistemology Husserl attempted to escape the traditional subject-object model for knowledge. In its place he substituted an epistemology of intentionality. Nevertheless, he could not help explaining his new model in terms of the old one. Noetic refers to the knowing aspect of knowledge but does not mean the subject per se. Likewise, noematic refers to the known aspect of knowledge, though it does not mean exactly the same thing as object. The noetic and the noematic must be understood in conjunction; they are two sides of the same coin.

In Being and Nothingness (Division Four, Chapter 1) Sartre commences his explanation of freedom by telling what freedom is not, then proceeds to explain what it is. The following presentation of the concept of freedom will follow the same order of discussion.

Sartre contends that freedom does not necessarily mean the autonomy of the will; i.e., the independence of the will from the influence of the passions. Sartre maintains that a passionate act is often more a manifestation of freedom than a rational, dispassionate act. Furthermore, he claims that freedom does not depend upon the successful accomplishment of an endeavor. As long as one can try to perform an act, he is free, regardless of whether he succeeds or not. Sartre writes:

...success is not important to freedom. The discussion which opposes common sense to philosophers stems from a misunderstanding: the empirical and popular concept of "freedom" which has been produced by historical, political, and moral circumstances is equivalent to "the ability to obtain the ends chosen." The technical and philosophical concept of freedom, the only one which we are considering here, means only the autonomy of choice. It is necessary, however, to note that the choice, being identical with acting, supposes a commencement of realization in order that the choice may be distinguished from the dream and the wish. Thus we shall not say that a prisoner is always free to go out of prison, which would be absurd, nor that he is always free to long for release, which would be an irrelevant truism, but that he is always free to try to escape... Our description of freedom, since it does not distinguish between choosing and doing, compels us to abandon at once the distinction between the intention and the act.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 592.

Finally Sartre asserts that freedom is not an essence and therefore cannot be the same thing for any two or more individuals. Freedom is unique for each individual, because as we shall discover, it is the same as the individual's own particular existence.

Sartre maintains that freedom, choice, nihilation, and temporalization are all the same thing. He writes:

Since...it is consciousness which temporalizes itself, we must conceive of the original choice as unfolding time and being one with the unity of the three ecstasies. To choose ourselves is to nihilate ourselves; that is, to cause a future to come to make known to us what we are by conferring a meaning on our past. Thus there is not a succession of instants separated by nothingness--as with Descartes--such that my choice at the instant t cannot act on my choice of the instant t. To choose is to effect the upsurge along with my engagement of a certain finite extension of concrete and continuous duration, which is precisely that which separates me from the realization of my original possibles. Thus freedom, choice, nihilation, temporalization are all one and the same.<sup>4</sup>

The influence of Martin Heidegger's Being and Time upon Sartre's ontology is striking. Although Sartre parts from Heidegger in regard to the problem of the individual's "being towards death" he nevertheless agrees with most of Being and Time and even borrowed terminology from Heidegger's work in order to write Being and Nothingness. The term, ecstasy was taken from Heidegger's comments on temporality. In order to understand the significance of the term in Sartre's context above, a short digression will be made in order to examine Heidegger's discussion of time.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 569.



Heidegger claims that time as we usually think of it, i.e., as a succession of "nows" which we measure in distinct units--that kind of time is a derivative of a more fundamental time. Fundamental time is related to one's own finite existence. One is his future, past and present at any moment in derivative time. One's future, past, and present cannot be distinctly separated; they flow into one another and for that reason Heidegger appropriately calls them "ecstasies." The future ecstasy is the most important of the three because it is in the light of one's "future" fundamental project that his past and present become meaningful. In other words, what one intends to do in the "future" determines how he interprets his "past" and how he conducts himself in the "present."<sup>5</sup> "Temporalization" refers to living in all three ecstasies. In Sartrean terms "temporalization" means the transcendence of the en-soi by the pour-soi. It is now possible to see how choice and nihilation are so closely connected with temporalization. Choice refers to the selection of a fundamental project from a host of possibilities. Nihilation refers to the negation of what one is (the en-soi); this negation is necessary for the realization of one's project. Freedom encompasses all three terms: choice, nihilation, and temporalization. According to Sartre, freedom, as seen from these three aspects is: the choosing of a fundamental project, the negation of what one is, and the living of all three ecstasies (which living is described

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<sup>5</sup> The three words are in quotation marks in order to show that they designate modes of human existence as well as discrete sections of time.

by both Heidegger and Sartre as "authentic.")

Now one can understand why freedom is unique for each individual. Freedom means each man's personal existence; it concerns each man's personal project and personal nihilation. As Sartre stresses, freedom is not and cannot be an essence which is possessed by individuals; rather, in existing, each individual is his freedom.

This last statement brings up a very important point regarding freedom. Insofar as one exists he is ipso facto free. One is not the basis for his own freedom; so he can choose everything except the ability not to choose. If one exists he is "condemned to freedom." Sartre says:

I am condemned to exist forever beyond my essence, beyond the causes and motives of my act. I am condemned to be free. This means that no limits to my freedom can be found except freedom itself or, if you prefer, that we are not free to cease being free.<sup>6</sup>

When Sartre says that no limits to one's freedom can be found except freedom itself, he means obviously that one is free within a given situation. The sum total of facts which constitute this situation he calls facticity. Facticity is essential to the existence of freedom. Without some "coefficient of adversity," i.e., without some facticity, freedom could not exist, because freedom is a

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 537.

nihilation, an overcoming of some restriction. On the other hand, freedom is essential to the existence of facticity. One encounters restriction only because he intends it as restriction. Situations have no value in themselves; they never come with labels already attached. A situation which I view indifferently another person might consider adverse. The difference in our evaluations of the same situation results from the difference in our fundamental projects. One's fundamental project is the major choice of one's life which guides all other choices; it is the goal which one sets for himself according to which he interprets his experiences and directs his actions. Sartre claims that everyone has a fundamental project, even the lethargic, whose project is indifference. More shall be said later regarding this point in the section concerning the relationship between action and freedom.

The relationship between facticity and freedom is one of necessary interdependence. As Sartre succinctly puts it:

We can see clearly...the inextricable connection of freedom and facticity in the situation. Without facticity freedom would not exist--as a power of nihilation and of choice--and without freedom facticity would not be discovered and would have no meaning.<sup>7</sup>

Though facticity and freedom are co-factors in every situation, it is never possible to determine the exact role which each plays in any given situation, i.e., it is never possible to discover

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<sup>7</sup> Being and Nothingness, pp. 606,607.

the proportion of facticity to freedom in a situation. Sartre writes:

...the situation, the common product of the contingency of the in-itself and of freedom, is an ambiguous phenomenon in which it is impossible for the for-itself to distinguish the contribution of freedom from that of the brute existent.<sup>8</sup>

From what has been said concerning freedom and facticity one may conclude that freedom cannot be defined as something objective, present-to-hand. This is how the determinists and the proponents for freedom construe it when they argue about its existence or non-existence. Both sides misunderstand freedom. Karl Jaspers says:

In every case determinism and indeterminism lead to a false level. They make the existential source dependent... The one makes freedom falsely objective and in spite of his constant affirmation dissolves it; a defense of freedom which is not genuinely freedom leads to an unconscious negation of freedom. The other denies freedom but actually never strikes it, for what he denies is an objectified phantom.<sup>9</sup>

Two more points regarding freedom remain to be considered before a survey of the consequences of Sartre's concept of freedom can be made. The first point concerns action. Sartre claims that there is no separation between intention and action. To choose is to take upon oneself some project, to engage oneself in some situation. Engagement need not be passionate and active;

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 597.

<sup>9</sup> Karl Jaspers, Existentialism and Humanism, (New York, 1952), p. 178.

it may just as well be apathetic and indolent. In other words, even if one chooses to remain aloof from a commitment, he is in a sense committing himself, but this commitment is one of withdrawal, abstention. One can never escape self-commitment; insofar as one lives he constantly chooses himself over and over. Sartre says:

Since freedom is a being-without-support and without-a-springboard, the project in order to be must be constantly renewed. I choose myself perpetually and can never be merely by virtue of having-been-chosen; otherwise I should fall into the pure and simple existence of the in-itself.<sup>10</sup>

The last point to be considered regarding the concept of freedom is the relationship between the freedom of oneself and the freedom of others. According to Sartre's definition of freedom, in order for my freedom to exist, the freedom of others must also exist. It will be recalled that the en-soi is a necessary factor in freedom. The en-soi can be constructed only by others, since one can never see himself as an object. If the freedom of others is taken away, that is, if others are objectified, then they are no longer capable of providing one with an image of himself, and without the image one's own freedom is impossible.

Maurice Natanson writes:

According to Sartre, the only way we can know ourselves is through what others tell us about ourselves for we cannot see ourselves as objects. By making another an object one endangers his own freedom, since

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 587.

the other must be a subject in order to see him and describe him, in order to make his pour-soi en-soi.<sup>11</sup>

Despite the fact that the freedom of others is a prerequisite for one's own freedom, Sartre nevertheless maintains that one always encounters others as if they were a threat to one's freedom. H. J. Blackham says:

...for Sartre, the awareness of others is inseparable from the shock of the encounter with what he describes as a 'freedom', an alien freedom which is adverse and threatening to himself.<sup>12</sup>

Sartre claims that one becomes aware of the other only by perceiving that the other is staring at him. The stare of the other is like a ray which objectifies and freezes one in an image over which he feels he has no control, but what one always desires in a relationship with others is to be able to choose the image which others have of him. According to Sartre, one's relationship with others is paradoxical, for one always desires to control the pour-soi of others, which forms an image of oneself, yet the pour-soi of others cannot form that image if it is objectified and controlled. If Sartre's description of interpersonal relationships is correct, then love and communion between people is impossible. H. J. Blackham comments:

For Sartre communion is impossible. Only appropriation is possible, but even that eventually

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<sup>11</sup> Maurice Natanson, A Critique of Jean Paul Sartre's Ontology, (Lincoln, Neb., 1951), p. 43.

<sup>12</sup> H. J. Blackham, Six Existentialist Philosophers, (New York, 1959), p. 52.

destroys itself. Take, for instance, the case of a man who succeeds in enslaving his wife. She becomes his instrument, his thing; he can do with her what he wills. But the probable result is that this successful appropriation will destroy his love for her. She will lose all interest for him and the climax of success will prove to be the climax of failure.<sup>13</sup>

Now that Sartre's concept of freedom has been explained, it is possible to take stock of the consequences of this concept. To begin with, if every individual is condemned to freedom, then life is utterly gratuitous. There is no a-priori meaning to life; rather, the individual himself creates meaning.<sup>14</sup> Anxiety, or as Sartre sometimes calls it, nausea, is the mood that envelops one when he realizes that life is gratuitous. In order to escape anxiety one falls into bad faith, i.e., one pretends that he is not responsible for his thoughts and actions; one acts a role with such skill that the role seems to overcome and control him.

Although bad faith may momentarily conceal one's responsibility, one can never totally escape it. To say that life is gratuitous is to imply that each individual is responsible not only for his own actions, but for everything. Since each individual constructs the world through his own intentions, he is the basis for everything in the world--everything, that is, except his own freedom, which has no basis. Sartre explains:

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>14</sup> The word, "meaning," does not necessarily signify some spiritual, moral or metaphysical order. To be able to type this page, to get up and move across the room, to speak to a friend who enters and greets me--to be able to do all these things and countless others I must impose meaning upon what Sartre calls the "brute existent."

The essential consequence of our earlier remarks is that man being condemned to be free carries the weight of the whole world on his shoulders; he is responsible for the world and for himself as a way of being. We are taking the word "responsibility" in its ordinary sense as "consciousness (of) being the incontestable author of an event or of an object." In this sense the responsibility of the for-itself is overwhelming since he is the one by whom it happens that there is a world; since he is also the one who makes himself be, then whatever may be the situation in which he finds himself, the for-itself must wholly assume this situation with its peculiar coefficient of adversity, even though it be insupportable. He must assume the situation with the proud consciousness of being the author of it, for the very worst disadvantages or the worst threats which can endanger my person have meaning only in and through my project; and it is on the ground of engagement which I am that they appear. It is therefore senseless to think of complaining since nothing foreign has decided what we feel, what we live, or what we are.<sup>15</sup>

We must beware of the use of the word, "responsibility" in the context of the passage above. As Sartre rightly states, the usual sense of the word is: "consciousness of being the incontestable author of..." However, "responsibility" often means more than that; it also carries the idea of an obligation to one's fellow man. In L'Existentialisme est un humanisme Sartre tried to extend the meaning of responsibility to the moral sphere, but in doing so he stepped beyond the logical boundaries of his own ontology. Sartre cannot deduce an ethical philosophy from the ontology presented in Being and Nothingness for the simple reason that he cannot (nor can any philosopher) move automatically from "is" to "ought."

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., pp. 677-678.



Chapter Two--The Concept of Freedom  
as it Appears in Sartre's  
Novels and Plays

La Nausée

Each of the novels, short stories, and plays to be analyzed in the following sections tends to stress a particular aspect of the concept of freedom as it was explained in Chapter One. La Nausée, published in 1938, stresses the gratuitousness of human existence. The recognition of one's freedom is intimately connected with one's realization that life is contingent. To say that one is free (in Sartre's terms) is to say that one is the author of meaning in a meaningless world. When Sartre says that each individual is "condemned to freedom" he means that everyone must assume full responsibility for his decisions in the world: there is no God, no a-priori order, no creed upon which one can lean for encouragement and support. The statement, "The world is gratuitous," is a correlate of the statement, "Every man is his own master."

The "avertissement des éditeurs" of La Nausée informs the reader that the book is a collection of notes entered in the diary of Antoine Roquentin, a middle aged bachelor who has traveled extensively in central Europe, North Africa and the Orient and then retired to the town of Bouville to write the biography of an obscure eighteenth-century historical figure, the marquis de Rollebon. In the first few pages the reader begins to experience the boredom and vague nausea that plague Roquentin. Life in Bouville is uneventful and stifling. One Saturday evening Roquentin writes

in his diary:

Quand on vit, il n'arrive rien. Les décors changent, les gens entrent et sortent, voilà tout. Il n'y a jamais de commencements. Les jours s'ajoutent aux jours sans rime ni raison, c'est une addition interminable et monotone. De temps en temps, on fait un total partiel: on dit: voilà trois ans que je voyage, trois ans que je suis à Bouville. Il n'y a pas de fin non plus: on ne quitte jamais une femme, un ami, une ville en une fois. Et puis tout se ressemble: Shanghaï, Moscou, Alger, au bout d'une quinzaine, c'est tout pareil. Par moments--rarement--on fait le point, on s'aperçoit qu'on s'est collé avec une femme, engagé dans une sale histoire. Le temps d'un éclair. Après ça, le défile recommence, on se remet à faire l'addition des heures et des jours. Lundi, mardi, mercredi. Avril, mai, juin. 1924, 1925, 1926.<sup>16</sup>

As the days pass Roquentin becomes more and more aware that the dull sickness which penetrates him is more than boredom; it is the awareness that he and everything about him exists for no reason whatever. He comes to realize that his existence, lacks justification. He feels de trop, i.e., overflowing with a baseless existence. After suffering many attacks of this nausea he is finally able to diagnose his sickness. Near the end of his diary he says:

Et moi--veule, alangui, obscène, digérant, ballotant de mornes pensées--moi aussi j'étais de trop. Heureusement je ne le sentais pas, je le comprenais surtout, mais j'esais mal à l'aise parce que j'avais peur de le sentir (encore à présent j'en ai peur-- j'ai peur que ça ne me prenne par le derrière de ma tête et que ça ne me soulève comme une lame de fond).

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<sup>16</sup> Jean Paul Sartre, La Nausée, (Paris, 1938), pp. 61-62.

Je rêvais vaguement de me supprimer, pour anéantir au moins une de ces existences superflues. Mais ma mort même eut été de trop. De trop, mon cadavre, mon sang sur ces cailloux, entre ces plantes, au fond de ce jardin souriant. Et la chair rongée eût été de trop dans la terre qui l'eût reçue et mes os, enfin, nettoyés, écorcés, propres et nets comme des dents eussent encore été de trop: j'étais de trop pour l'éternité.<sup>17</sup>

Roquentin recognizes that not even suicide can release him from the gratuitousness of life, since taking his own life would be a totally free act (thus, one without justification).

Although he did not realize it at the time, Roquentin's first awareness of the gratuitousness of existence occurred when he was looking at a Khmer statue. The experience gave him the feeling of being filled with lukewarm milk. Roquentin recollects:

Eh bien, j'étais paralysé, je ne pouvais pas dire un mot. Je fixais une petite statuette khmère, sur un tapsi vert, à côté d'un appareil téléphonique. Il me semblait que j'étais rempli de lympe ou de lait tiède.<sup>18</sup>

Sartre often connects the feeling of contingency with an image of something sticky and viscous, which explains the reference to warm milk in the above passage. The viscous is naturally disgusting; it is neither solid nor liquid. It is ambiguous, constantly assumes new shapes, resists being molded into any particular form. When Roquentin is riding in a streetcar he stares at a seat next to him; suddenly it becomes de trop and

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 182.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

nausea seizes him. He becomes aware that the seat exists as a seat for no reason; it could just as well be anything else or nothing at all. He says:

Je murmure: c'est une banquette, un peu comme un exorcisme. Mais le mot reste sur mes lèvres: il refuse d'aller se poser sur la chose. Elle reste ce qu'elle est, avec sa peluche rouge, milliers de petites pattes rouges, en l'air, toutes raides, de petites pattes mortes... Ca pourrait tout aussi bien être un âne mort, par exemple, ballonné par l'eau et qui flotte à la dérive, le ventre en l'air dans un grand fleuve gris, un fleuve d'inondation; et moi je serais assis sur le ventre de l'âne et mes pieds tremperaient dans l'eau claire. Les choses se sont délivrées de leurs noms.<sup>19</sup>

When nausea grips him Roquentin is threatened by things; they seem to become animated. When one realizes that everything is de trop, suddenly the hierarchy of existence is upset; objects which one normally takes for granted leap out of their ordinary context to assert themselves. In the library at Bouville Roquentin is fascinated by a piece of paper, goes to pick it up, but then draws back in alarm. He cannot bear to handle this because it is de trop, just like the pebble which he picked up on the beach a few days before. Looking at the paper he reflects:

Les objets, cela ne devrait pas toucher, puisque cela ne vit pas. On s'en sert, on les remet en place, on vit au milieu d'eux: ils sont utiles, rien de plus. Et moi, ils me touchent, c'est insupportable. J'ai peur d'entrer en contact avec eux tout comme s'ils étaient des bêtes vivantes.

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 177.

Maintenant je vois: je me rappelle mieux ce que j'ai senti, l'autre, jour, au bord de la mer, quand je tenais ce galet. C'était une espèce d'écoeurement douceâtre. Que c'était donc désagréable! Et cela venait du galet, j'en suis sûr, cela passait du galet dans mes mains. Oui, c'est cela, c'est bien cela: une sorte de nausée dans les mains.<sup>20</sup>

Roquentin's residence at Bouville is sometimes brightened by moments of relief from nausea. One day in his favorite café he feels uplifted by the music coming from a phonograph. The waitress plays an old American jazz record; the notes sound with a definiteness that nothing else in Roquentin's surroundings exhibits. Unlike the ambiguous, viscous things which have depressed Roquentin, this music, sharp and metallic, elevates him. For a moment it gives him the illusion that he and the things around him are justified. Roquentin describes the experience:

Quelques secondes encore et la négresse va chanter. Ça semble inévitable, si forte est la nécessité de cette musique: rien ne peut l'interrompre, rien qui vienne de ce temps où le monde est affalé; elle cessera d'elle même, par order...Le dernier accord s' est anéanti. Dans le bref silence qui suit, je sens fortement que ça y est, que quelque chose est arrivé...Ce qui vient d'arriver, c'est que la Nausée a disparu. Quand la voix s' est élevée, dans le silence, j' ai senti mon corps se durcir et la Nausée s' est évanouie.<sup>21</sup>

The relief from nausea lasts but a short time. One day while Roquentin is visiting the municipal art museum he becomes

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20 Ibid., p. 22.

21 Ibid., pp. 37-38.

again starkly aware of his own gratuitousness. Gazing at the portraits of deceased prominent citizens of Bouville, the Salards of bad faith, he realizes that whereas their lives at least appeared to be justified, his own is completely meaningless.

Je compris alors tout ce qui nous séparait.  
 ...je n'avais pas le droit d'exister. J'étais  
 apparu par hasard, j'existais comme une pierre,  
 une plante, un microbe...Mais pour ce bel homme  
 sans défauts, mort aujourd'hui, pour Jean Pacôme,  
 fils du Pacôme de la Défense Nationale, il en  
 avait été tout autrement: les battements de son  
 coeur et les rumeurs sourdes de ses organes lui  
 parvenaient sous forme de petits droits instantanés  
 et purs.<sup>22</sup>

Day by day Roquentin becomes increasingly introspective. He tries to escape nausea by forgetting himself, but the harder he tries the more his existence makes itself felt. He cannot escape his body; he feels himself existing as the saliva runs down the back of his throat. He looks at his hand; it too is de trop. Like the other things about him it threatens him; it turns into a crab and strangely detaches itself from his body. In disgust he thrusts it into his pocket, but then he feels his thigh and knows that he exists. He tries to annihilate his thoughts, but that too is impossible. He writes in his diary:

...la pensée, c'est moi qui la continue, qui  
 la déroule. J'existe. Je pense que j'existe.  
 Oh! le long serpent, ce sentiment d'exister--et  
 je le déroule, tout doucement...Si je pouvais

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 122.

m'empêcher de penser! J'essaie, je réussis: Il me semble que ma tête s'emplit de fumée.. et voilà que ça recommence: "Fumée...ne pas penser...Je ne veux pas penser...Je pense que je ne veux pas penser. Il ne faut pas que je pense que je ne veux pas penser. Parce que c'est encore une pensée." On n'en finira donc jamais? Ma pensée, c'est moi: voilà pourquoi je ne peux pas m'arrêter. J'existe par ce que je pense...et je ne peux pas m'empêcher de penser.<sup>23</sup>

Roquentin's insight into contingency becomes most acute when he is walking one day and notices the gnarled root of a chestnut tree. The significance of all of his former encounters with nausea is now revealed in one vision; Roquentin ponders:

Si l'on m'avait demandé ce que c'était que l'existence j'aurais répondu de bonne foi que ça n'était rien, tout juste une forme vide qui venait s'ajouter aux choses du dehors, sans rien changer à leur nature. Et puis voilà: tout d'un coup, c'était là, c'était clair comme le jour: l'existence s'était soudain dévoilée. Elle avait perdu son allure inoffensive de catégorie abstraite: c'était la pâte même des choses, cette racine était pétrie dans l'existence. Ou plutôt la racine, les grilles du jardin, le banc, le gazon rare de la pelouse, tout ça s'était évanoui; la diversité des choses, leur individualité n'était qu'une apparence, un vernis. Ce vernis avait fondu, il restait des masses monstrueuses et molles, en désordre--nues, d'une effrayante et obscène nudité.<sup>24</sup>

Roquentin tries in vain to create something exciting in his life, something that will divert his attention from the contingency of the present moment. He looks at old photographs showing sights of the places he had visited, but he cannot deceive

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 142-143.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 180.

himself. He knows that he never had any real adventures. All his memories of former travels and his present project at the library in Bouville are attempts to cover up his contingency. For a while he had hoped that Annie, his former mistress, would rescue him from nausea, but Annie too has been engulfed by nausea. She tells him that she is seeking to live the perfect moment; Roquentin knows that this is a useless endeavor, for his own attempts at finding adventures, (the counterpart of Annie's perfect moments), have failed. Roquentin tires of his work on the biography of Rollebon and finally decides to give it up and move to Paris. Just before leaving Bouville he hears the jazz tune that had once before expelled his nausea; again he is relieved by the music. Listening, he thinks about the Negress and the New York Jew who wrote the song. Their existence is justified through the song, thinks Roquentin. He decides to begin work on a new book, a book completely unlike the biography of Rollebon, a book that will make people aware of their contingency rather than hide it from them. As he leaves the café Roquentin thinks to himself:

Je m'en vais, je me sens vague. Je n'ose pas prendre de décision. Si j'étais sûr d'avoir du talent... Mais jamais--jamais je n'ai rien écrit de ce genre; des articles historiques, oui--et encore. Un livre, Un roman. Et il y aurait des gens qui liraient ce roman et qui diraient: "C'est Antoine Roquentin qui l'a écrit, c'était un type roux qui traînait dans les cafés" et ils penseraient à ma vie comme je pense à celle de cette négresse: comme à quelque chose de précieux de d'a moitié légendaire.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 250.



Just as the jazz tune seems to justify the existence of the Negress and the Jew, Roquentin hopes his new book will justify his own existence.

La Nausée illustrates better than any other of Sartre's works the idea that one is condemned to be free, i.e., that there is no basis for one's existence, nor for the existence of anything in the world, or in Sartre's terminology, that everything is de trop. Roquentin's intention to fix his life in a work of art in order to escape his freedom represents self-deception. If one is honest with himself (if one is in good faith) then he realizes that he must always remain free, unjustified. If one is to be authentic he must bear bravely the freedom which he is condemned to carry.

### Le Mur

One year after the appearance of La Nausée Gallimard published a collection of five short stories by Sartre under the title, Le Mur. The first four stories are less important to a study of the concept of freedom than the fifth one, L'Enfance d'un chef, but they do bear some relevance to the subject. The first story in the collection, entitled Le Mur, demonstrates that a man is free even when being held a prisoner. La Chambre, the second story, illustrates a point mentioned in Chapter One, namely, that it is impossible for one individual to be in communion with another. The third story in the series, Erostrate, concerns

bad faith as it is manifested in terrorism. Bad faith is also the theme of the fourth story, Intimité. In this story, however, the bad faith of the main character is revealed through indecision rather than terrorism.

The longest story in the collection, L'Enfance d'un chef, is the biography of the type of bourgeois salaud, the fugitive from freedom, that Sartre so bitterly attacked in the art gallery scene in La Nausée. Like the hollow men whose portraits hung in the gallery at Bouville, Lucien Fleurier, the main character in L'Enfance d'un chef, is the epitome of persons in bad faith. In a study of Sartre's concept of freedom an examination of the character of Lucien Fleurier is therefore of great importance.

Obviously, as a child Lucien cannot grasp so sophisticated a concept as his own freedom, but even during his infancy his experiences are related to it. At a very early age Lucien is plagued by the strange and disconcerting idea that his parents are only playing the roles of mother and father. Lucien reacts to this idea by pretending to be an orphan. In Lucien's world not only people play roles, but also objects:

.../Lucien/ prit l'habitude de jouer à l'orphelin. Il s'asseyait au milieu de la pelouse, sous le marronnier, remplissait ses mains de terre et pensait: "Je serais un orphelin, je m'appellerais Louis. Je n'aurais pas mangé depuis six jours." ...Papa et maman jouaient à être papa et maman; maman jouait à se tourmenter parce que son petit bijou mangeait si peu, papa jouaient à lire le journal et à agiter, de temps en temps, son

doigt devant la figure de Lucien en disant: "Badaboum bonhomme!"...Et Lucien jouait aussi, mais il finit par ne plus très bien savoir à quoi. A l'ophelin? Ou à être Lucien? Il regarda la carafe. Il y avait une petite lumière rouge qui dansait au fond de l'eau et on aurait juré que la main de papa était dans la carafe, énorme et lumineuse, avec de petits poils noirs sur les doigts. Lucien eut soudain l'impression que la carafe aussi jouait à être une carafe.<sup>26</sup>

The passage above demonstrates the ambiguity of existing things which results from one's awareness of the contingency of existence. Roquentin, it will be recalled, experienced the same ambiguity when he stared at the train seat. Roquentin sought to escape contingency by creating a work of art which needed no justification. Lucien Fleurier, however, as he matures follows a more common route of escape: he endeavors to grasp a public image of himself, an image which will fit Lucien Fleurier (as en-soi) into a comfortable context of meaning. Lucien's whole life is a search for an image which will hide his own freedom from himself. Lucien tries to absorb himself in the en-soi to such an extent that the pour-soi becomes forgotten. This ignoring of the pour-soi which is a form of bad faith, cannot successfully hide one's freedom, for as was pointed out in Chapter One, the en-soi and pour-soi are interdependent; neither can exist without the other.

L'enfance d'un chef is rich with imagery symbolizing the en-soi and the pour-soi. To signify the pour-soi Sartre employs the image of something light and free-flowing, for instance: fog

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<sup>26</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, Le Mur, (Paris, 1939), pp. 157-158.

or water. That which is transparent also stands for the pour-soi. Light is a good example. The ensoi is signified by solid, hard, and brittle substances. Sartre most frequently uses rock as a symbol for the en-soi. In the following passage, dealing with Lucien's supposed psychological complexes, one notices the contrast between en-soi and pour-soi imagery:

Il lui arrivait parfois de regretter ses complexes: ils étaient solides, ils pesaient lourd, leur énorme masse sombre le lestait. A présent, c'était fini, Lucien n'y croyait plus et il se sentait d'une légèreté pénible.<sup>27</sup>

When Lucien analyzes himself, he "sees" his pour-soi (in the form of fog). While helping his mother polish silver he stares at the utensils in his hands, trying to ignore the disconcerting fog, but to no avail; the fog always remains behind the objects.

...pendant qu'il regardait l'argenterie, il pensait qu'il regardait l'argenterie et, derrière son regard, un petit brouillard vivant palpitait. Et Lucien avait beau s'absorber dans une conversation avec M. Fleurier, ce brouillard abondant et tenu, dont l'inconsistance opaque ressemblait faussement à de la lumière, se glissait derrière l'attention qu'il prêtait aux paroles de son père: ce brouillard, c'était lui-même. De temps à autre, agacé, Lucien cessait d'écouter, il se retournait, essayait d'attraper le brouillard et de le regarder en face: il ne rencontrait que le vide, le brouillard était encore derrière.<sup>28</sup>

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27 Ibid., p. 211.

28 Ibid., pp. 213-214.

Sartre compares Lemordant, whom Lucien admires and envies, to a rock. Lucien sees Lemordant as a person whose strong personal convictions are apparent to everyone with whom he comes in contact. These convictions, thinks Lucien, must give Lemordant self-confidence and pride. Sartre probes Lucien's thoughts:

"C'est un type qui a des convictions," pensait Lucien avec respect; et il se demandait non sans jalousie quelle pouvait être cette certitude qui donnait à Lemordant une si pleine conscience de soi. "Voilà comme je devrais être: un roc."<sup>29</sup>

Lucien vacillates between consciousness of the en-soi and pour-soi, as is indicated by the following contrast in images:

Lucien avait encore des crises de cafard: il avait l'impression de n'être qu'une petite transparence gélatineuse qui tremblotait sur la banquette d'un café, et l'agitation bruyante des camelots lui paraissait absurde. Mais, à d'autres moments, il se sentait dur et lourd comme une pierre et il était presque heureux.<sup>30</sup>

Even as an infant Lucien Fleurier begins a flight from the pour-soi which is to become more and more deliberate and desperate. He enjoys the visits of his mother's friends because they fondle him and make him feel that he is a little doll.

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 218.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 229-230.

Elles traitaient Lucien comme un personnage. Madame Couffin prenait Lucien sur ses genoux et lui tâta les mollets en déclarant: "C' est le plus joli petit mignon que j' aie vu." ...Madame Besse était une grande et forte femme avec une petite moustache. Elle renversait Lucien, elle le chatouillait en disant: "Ma petite poupee." Lucien, était ravi, il riait d' aise et se tortillait sous les chatouilles; il pensait qu' il était une petite poupée, une charmante petite poupée pour grandes personnes et il aurait aimé que Madame Besse le deshabilite, et le lave, et le mette au dodo dans un tout petit berceau comme un poupon de caoutchouc.<sup>31</sup>

One day while playing in the garden Lucien stares at a chestnut tree nearby and becomes exasperated with it because it will have nothing to do with him. Unlike people, who usually help Lucien to forget his freedom by providing an image in which he can lose himself, things threaten to reveal his freedom to him because of their passive, ambiguous existence. Lucien shouts at the tree:

Il dit "marronnier!" et il attendit. Mais rien ne se produisait. "Marronnier!" C' était choquant: quand Lucien disait à maman: "Ma jolie maman à moi" maman souriait et quand il avait appelé Germaine: arquebuse, Germaine avait pleuré et s' était plainte à maman. Mais quand on disait: marronnier, il n' arrivait rien du tout. Il marmotta entre ses dents: "Sale arbre" et il n' était pas rassuré, mais, comme l' arbre ne bougeait pas, il répéta plus fort: "Sale arbre, sale marronnier! attends voir, attends un peu! et il lui donna des coups de pied."<sup>32</sup>

People are not always comforting, for sometimes they impose upon Lucien an image which he dislikes. When Lucien is

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 159.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 161.

caught in an undesirable image he feels that others are looking at him from behind; he can then no longer show them what he wants them to see. Their gaze seizes him by the back of the neck; helpless, he cannot break free. In the school laboratory Lucien is reading inscriptions on the wall and is quite amused until he comes upon his own name:

Il se releva et lut sur le mur de droite une autre inscription tracée de la même écriture bleue: "Lucien Fleurier est une grande asperche." Il l'effaça soigneusement et revint en classe. "C'est vrai, pensa-t-il en regardant ses camarades, ils sont tous plus petits que moi." Et il se sentit mal à l'aise... Il pensa: "Je suis grand." Il était écrasé de honte: grand comme Barataud était petit et les autres ricanait derrière son dos. C'était comme si on lui avait jeté un sort...il alla se regarder dans la glace. "Je suis grand." Mais il avait beau se regarder, ça ne se voyait pas, il n'avait l'air ni grand ni petit... Les jours suivants, il eût envie de demander à M. l'Abbé la permission d'aller s'asseoir au fond de la classe. C'était à cause de Boisset, de Winckelmann et de Costil qui étaient derrière lui et qui pouvaient regarder sa nuque...ils pouvaient ricaner en pensant: "Qu'il est maigre, il a deux cordes dans le cou."<sup>33</sup>

It is during his adolescence, a period of intense introspection, that Lucien becomes most clearly aware of his freedom; from that time on his life is a series of attempts to hide that awareness from himself. While working at his desk one day Lucien thinks:

"Je suis un bon élève. Non. C'est de la frime: un bon élève aime travailler... Je ne déteste pas ça non plus, je m'en fous. Je me fous de tout. Je ne

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 177.

serai jamais un chef." Il pensa avec angoisse: "Mais qu' est-ce que je vais devenir?"... "Qu' est-ce que je suis, moi?" Il y avait cette brume, enrôlée sur elle-même, indéfinie... Lucien frissonna et ses mains tremblaient: Ça y est, pensa-t-il, ça y est! J' en étais sûr: Je n'existe pas."<sup>33b</sup>

In the lycée Lucien finds comfort in following his group of friends, affirming what they affirm, condemning what they condemn. Later he meets a young surrealist who helps him to momentarily escape the awareness of his freedom by attributing all of his actions to his subconscious mind. His friendship with this young man, Berliac, eventually brings him into contact with another surrealist, Bergère, who convinces Lucien that he is a second Rimbaud. Bergère finally draws Lucien into a perverted sexual act. Berliac knows of the act, and Lucien is horrified that through Berliac his image as a pervert may become public. In order to combat that image he takes a mistress and even pretends that he is in love with her; his role as a lover is a comforting one, though not totally satisfying. While making love to Maud, his mistress, Lucien ponders:

"Dieu sait à quoi elle pense, avec des yeux si sévères." Lucien, lui, pensait toujours à la même chose: à cette petite existence triste et vague qui était la sienne, il se disait: "Je voudrais être Lémordant, en voilà un qui a trouvé sa voie!" A ces moments-là, il se voyait comme un autre: assis près d'une femme qui l'aimait, la main dans sa main, les lèvres encore humides de ses baisers et refusant l'humble bonheur qu'elle lui offrait: seul.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33b</sup> Ibid., p. 177.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 223.



Lemordant, whom Lucien admires and envies, is the leader of a radical right-wing student political group. He invites Lucien to join the group, but Lucien refuses. Gradually, however, Lucien finds himself attracted closer and closer to the group and begins to adopt the group's anti-Semitic prejudice. At a party one evening Lucien refuses to shake hands with a Jewish guest. His host and hostess, rather than being offended by Lucien's discourtesy, confess their admiration for his demonstration of deep-seated conviction. When Lucien visits Guigard, the host, to apologize for his conduct the following conversation takes place:

"J' ai eu mes torts, d'ailleurs. Je me suis conduit comme un mufle. Mais qu'est-ce que tu veux, c' est plus fort que moi, je ne peux pas les toucher, c' est physique, j' ai l'impression qu' ils ont des écaillés sur les mains. Qu' a dit Pierrette?-- Elle a ri comme une folle, dit Guigard piteusement.-- Et le type?--Il a compris...Il ajouta, toujours penaud: "Mes parents disent que tu as eu raison, que tu ne pouvais agir autrement du moment que tu as une conviction." Lucien dégusta le mot de "conviction"; il avait envie de serrer Guigard dans ses bras: "C' est rien, mon vieux, lui dit-il; c' est rien, du moment qu' on reste copains." Il descendit le boulevard Saint-Michel dans un état d'exaltation extraordinaire: il lui semblait qu' il n'était plus lui-même.<sup>35</sup>

Lucien is of course deceiving himself when he claims that he cannot control his convictions; indeed, he wishes that he could not control them, for if that were the case he could totally escape his freedom, and his responsibility; but he cannot. Lucien is the author of his own convictions: he is vaguely aware

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 239.

of that fact and attempts to smother his awareness altogether.

He reflects:

"Première maxime, se dit Lucien, ne pas chercher à voir en soi; il n' y a pas d' erreur plus dangereuse." Le vrai Lucien--il le savait à present--, il fallait le chercher dans les yeux des autres, dans l' obéissance craintive de Pierrette et de Guigard, dans l' attente pleine d' espoir d tous ces etres qui grandissaient et murissaient pour lui, de ces jeunes apprentis qui deviendraient ses ouvriers, des Ferolliens, grands et petits, dont il serait un jour le maire.<sup>36</sup>

Fortified by the admiration which others show him due to his anti-Semitic convictions, and consoled by the fact that his father has prepared a place for his son in society, Lucien develops the idea that that place is his by right. As heir to his father's position of leadership he has the right to existence. No longer is he plagued with the anxiety of responsibility. He feels that he was destined for his position and therefore has to make apologies to no one, not even himself, for assuming it. Lucien believes that his rights, like geometrical figures, have an existence that does not need to be justified. Lucien rejoices:

"J' ai des droits! Des droits! Quelque chose dans le genre des triangles et des cercles: c'était si parfait que ca n'existait pas, on avait beau tracer des milliers de ronds avec des compas, on n'arrivait pas à réaliser un seul cercle. Des générations d' ouvriers pourraient, de même, obéir scrupuleusement aux ordres de Lucien, ils n'épuiseraient jamais son droit à commander; les droits, c'était, par-delà l' existence, comme les objets mathématiques et les dogmes

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 243.

religieux. Et voilà que Lucien, justement, c'était ça: un énorme bouquet de responsabilités et de droits. Il avait longtemps cru qu'il existait par hasard, à la dérive: mais c'était faute d'avoir assez réfléchi. Bien avant sa naissance, sa place était marquée au soleil, à Férrolles. Déjà--bien avant, même, le mariage de son père--on l'attendait; s'il était venu au monde, c'était pour occuper cette place: "J'existe, pensa-t-il, parce que j' ai le droit d'exister."<sup>37</sup>

Lucien seems to have found a permanent solace from the anxiety of the meaningless<sup>ness</sup> of existence, but he must continually work to deceive himself, must continually run from his freedom in order for the comforting spell of bad faith to remain in effect. L'Enfance d'un chef seems to end with/a climax of self-deception, but were one able to investigate the rest of the life of Lucien Fleurier, one would no doubt discover that his assumption of le droit d'exister by no means marks the end of his career in bad faith.

Les Chemins de la liberté:

L'Age de raison, Le Sursis  
and La Mort dans l'ame

There are numerous approaches that could be used in analyzing the three novels of Sartre's trilogy, Les Chemins de la liberté; in the interest of the study of Sartre's concept of freedom, however, one approach seems particularly appropriate: the tracing of the character development of Mathieu Delarue. In

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., pp. 243-244.

L'Age de raison Mathieu, a young university philosophy professor, begins his search for a satisfying commitment, or engagement. It may be recalled from chapter one that action is a vital element in freedom. Sartre calls action, or self-involvement in a fundamental project, engagement. Not until the end of the third novel in the trilogy, La mort dans l'ame, does Mathieu finally succeed in experiencing his own freedom through engagement in violent action. More shall be said later concerning anarchistic violence<sup>As A</sup> manifestation of freedom.

Mathieu Delarue, a young and handsome intellectual is admired and envied by nearly everyone who knows him. He has a respectable position at the university, a modest but comfortable apartment, a pretty mistress whom he has been seeing for over seven years. What his friends most envy him for, however, is his freedom. Mathieu is not, as the familiar expression goes, "tied down" by wife or family. He is committed to no one and no thing; for him anything at all is possible, and that is precisely why Mathieu is miserable. To him all doors are open, but he cannot muster the courage to step over a threshold; so he remains outside of life, anxious and alone. He envies his friends, Gomez and Brunet, for they have committed themselves--Gomez to the civil war in Spain and Brunet to the Communist cause in France; but Mathieu remains a vague phantom breath of freedom which brushes by this and that, but never blasts. When Brunet visits Mathieu one afternoon in his apartment, Mathieu is awed by the aura of reality

which seems to surround his guest:

Il y eut un silence. Brunet avait posé les mains à plat sur ses genoux. Il était là, pesant et massif, il était assis sur une chaise de Mathieu, il inclinait son visage d'un air têtù vers la flamme d'une allumette, la pièce était emplie de sa présence, de la fumée de sa cigarette, de ses gestes lents. Mathieu regardait ses grosses mains de paysan, il pensa: « Il est venu. » Il sentit que la confiance et la joie tentaient timidement de renaître en son cœur.

«Et à part ça,» demanda Brunet, «qui est-ce que tu deviens?»

Mathieu se sentit gêné: par le fait il ne devenait rien.

«Rien,» dit il.<sup>38</sup>

Somewhat later Mathieu tells Brunet:

Toi tu es bien réel...Tout ce que tu touches a l'air réel. Depuis que tu es dans ma chambre, elle me paraît vraie et elle me dégoute...Tu es un homme.

Brunet responds:

Un homme?...Le contraire serait inquiétant. Qu'est-ce que tu veux dire?

And Mathieu answers him:

Rien d'autre que ce que je dis: tu as choisi d'être un homme.<sup>39</sup>

Brunet invites Mathieu to join the Communist Party. He understands Mathieu's indecisive mentality and wants to give him the opportunity to commit himself, for his own sake, not for the party's. Mathieu is grateful for Brunet's interest in him. He says:

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<sup>38</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, L'age de raison, (Paris, 1945), p. 168.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 173.

Tu sais, je vis entouré de gosses qui ne s'occupent que d'eux-mêmes et qui m'admirent par principe. Personne ne me parle jamais de moi; moi aussi, quelquefois, j'ai de la peine à me retrouver. Alors? Tu penses que j'ai besoin de m'engager?

Brunet sympathetically and perceptively answers:

Oui...tu as besoin de t'engager. Tu as suivi ton chemin...Tu es fils de bourgeois, tu ne pouvais pas venir à nous comme ça, il a fallu que tu te libères. A présent c'est fait, tu es libre. Mais à quoi ça sert-il, la liberté, si ce n'est pas pour s'engager?<sup>40</sup>

It is interesting to note that Mathieu lived a childhood very similar to Lucien Fleurier's in L'Enfance d'un chef. Both characters were raised in bourgeois homes, and Mathieu underwent the same struggle for identity that Lucien did. Mathieu too tried to obliterate the awareness of his own existence, without success. He remembers vividly an experience that had disturbed him twenty eight years before:

Il avait sept ans, il était à Pithiviers, chez son oncle Jules, le dentiste, tout seul dans le salon d'attente et il jouait à s'empêcher d'exister: il fallait essayer de ne pas s'avaler, comme lorsqu'on garde sur la langue un liquide trop froid en retenant le petit mouvement de déglutition qui le ferait couler dans l'arrière-gorge. Il était arrivé à se vider complètement la tête. Mais ce vide avait encore un goût. C'était un jour à sottises.<sup>41</sup>

Soon filled with the nausea of his existence, Mathieu picked up a heavy, ornate vase nearby and shattered it on the floor. This wanton act of violence had given him, he remembers, a strange

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 172.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 72.

feeling of relief. (The incident foreshadows a much later violent act which occurs at the end of La Mort dans l'ame.)

Mathieu recalls the former incident:

...il avait soulevé le vase, qui était fort lourd, et il l'avait jeté sur le parquet: ça lui était venu comme ça, et, tout de suite après, il s'était senti léger comme un fil de la Vierge. Il avait regardé les débris de porcelaine, émerveillé: quelque chose venait d'arriver à ce vase de trois mille ans entre ces murs quinquagénaires, sous l'antique lumière de l'été, quelque chose de très irreverencieux qui ressemblait à un matin. Il avait pensé: « C'est moi qui ai fait ça! et il s'était senti tout fier, libéré du monde et sans attaches, sans famille, sans origines, un petit surgissement têtue qui avait crevé la croûte terrestre.<sup>42</sup>

As adults Lucien and Mathieu are radically different.

Lucien has fallen into bourgeois bad faith. Mathieu has escaped that fate, but still walks a treacherous tight rope of freedom. He cannot long remain in the precarious balance of unengaged freedom; he is in danger of falling at any moment. As Brunet puts it, Mathieu has said no to everything else. Now he must go one step further and say no to abstract freedom by engaging himself. Brunet says:

Tu as renoncé à tout pour être libre. Fais un pas de plus, renonce à ta liberté elle-même: et tout te sera rendu.

Mathieu is clearly aware of his "psychological problem," but lacks the courage to act in order to overcome it. He feels confined in a cage without bars; in Sartrean terms he is overwhelmed and

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 73.

totally exhausted by his awareness of the nothingness of existence, which expressed in terms of the self is freedom. Mathieu reflects:

Pourquoi suis-je dans ce monde dégueulasse de tapages, d'instruments chirurgicaux, de pelotages sournois dans les taxis, dans ce monde sans Espagne? Pourquoi ne suis-je pas dans le bain, avec Gomez, avec Brunet? Pourquoi n'ai-je pas eu envie d'aller me battre? Est-ce que j'aurais pu choisir un autre monde? Est-ce que je suis encore libre? Je peux aller où je veux, je ne rencontre pas de résistance mais c'est pis: je suis dans une cage sans barreaux, je suis séparé de l'Espagne par...par rien et cependant, c'est infranchissable.<sup>43</sup>

After further reflection Mathieu is tempted to play a role in order to escape his freedom. Perhaps the only way out of nothingness is to play at being what one is; but that is the solution of bad faith. Mathieu realizes this and resists the temptation. He is in a bar and the following thoughts run through his mind:

Autour de lui, c'était pareil: il y avait des gens qui n'existaient pas du tout, des buées, et puis il y en avait d'autres qui existaient un peu trop.<sup>44</sup>

Le barman, par exemple. Tout à l'heure il fumait une cigarette, vague et poétique comme un liseron; à présent il s'était réveillé, il était un peu trop barman, il secouait le shaker, l'ouvrait, faisait couler une mousse jaune dans des verres avec des gestes d'une précision légèrement superflue: il jouait au barman. Mathieu pensa à Brunet. Peut-être qu'il faut choisir: n'être rien ou jouer ce qu'on est. Ça serait terrible, se dit-il, on serait truqués par nature.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 172.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 164.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 254. The connection between this passage and Sartre's anecdote concerning the waiter in bad faith in Being and Nothingness is obvious.



In contrast to Mathieu stands his friend, Daniel. Mathieu is struggling to escape his pour-soi, Daniel to escape his en-soi. Daniel is a homosexual, ashamed of himself, and lives in constant suspicion of other people, for they threaten to petrify him in the image of himself which he detests. Daniel becomes a masochist, because the only way of attacking the en-soi which he loathes is to torture it. One morning he places his three pet cats in a basket and carries them to the river to drown them, but cannot bring himself to do it. He hates himself all the more for his weakness; the hate relieves him somewhat. Later, in an oft-frequented neighborhood bar he ponders:

C'est drôle qu'on puisse se haïr comme si on était un autre. Ça n'était pas vrai, d'ailleurs: il avait beau faire, il n'y avait qu'un Daniel. Quand il se méprisait, il avait l'impression de se détacher de soi, de planer comme un juge abstrait au-dessus d'un grouillement impur et puis, tout d'un coup, ça le reprenait, ça l'aspirait par en bas, il s'engluait en lui-même.<sup>46</sup>

(In the passage above notice that Sartre again conveys the concept of en-soi through imagery of that which is swarming, entangling, and impure: "...il avait l'impression de...planer...au-dessus d'un grouillement impur...il s'engluait en lui-même.") The bartender asks if he would like the usual thing and Daniel replies negatively in a dry tone. Then he thinks:

Qu'ils aillent se faire foutre avec leur maine de cataloguer les gens comme si c'étaient des parapluies ou des machines à coudre. Je ne suis pas...on n'est

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 125.

jamais rien.<sup>47</sup>

Yet Daniel cannot convince himself; he knows what he is, a homosexual. Try as hard as he may to escape that category, in his own eyes, he cannot.

Early in the novel Mathieu learns from Marcelle, his mistress, that she is pregnant with his child. The two lovers have discussed marriage before, and Marcelle was then strongly opposed to it. Assuming that her views on marriage have not changed, Mathieu neglects to consult her again regarding the matter and automatically eliminates marriage as a possible solution to their problems. To abandon Marcelle would also be out of the question. Mathieu's only remaining alternative, then, is to raise enough money for an abortion. Mathieu approaches Daniel for a loan. Daniel has also been paying regular visits to Marcelle's apartment and has become her confidant. By marrying Marcelle himself he foresees the opportunity to torture himself and humiliate Mathieu whom he envies. Daniel lies to Mathieu, telling him that he does not have sufficient funds at the time to make a loan. Mathieu then turns to his brother, Jacques, a self-righteous bourgeois. According to Jacques, liberty consists in one's willingness to carry out the responsibilities which society hands down to him. (He fails to recognize, of course, that responsibilities cannot be handed down. To accept responsibilities that have been simply handed down is to fall into the bad faith characterized by

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 125.

Lucien Fleurier. In order to be authentic, one must create his own responsibilities.) Sartre writes:

Tu as pourtant l'âge de raison, mon pauvre Mathieu! dit-il avec une pitié grondeuse. Mais ça aussi tu te le caches, tu veux te faire plus jeune que tu n'es. D'ailleurs...peut-être suis-je injuste. L'âge de raison, tu ne l'as peut-être pas encore, c'est plutôt un âge moral...peut-être que j'y suis arrivé plus vite que toi.<sup>48</sup>

Jacques advises Mathieu to marry Marcelle, to accept his "moral responsibility," and thereby (according to Jacques) to exercise his freedom. Mathieu is more authentic than his brother. He refuses to marry Marcelle in order to perform a "moral obligation." To do so, he knows, would be to surrender one's freedom, to carry the burden of secondhand responsibilities, to fall into the anonymity of bourgeois morality. Mathieu recalls a letter which his brother had written to him, just before his own marriage. In the letter Jacques had written: "Il faut avoir le courage de faire comme tout le monde, pour n'être comme personne." Disgusted with his brother's proposal, Mathieu responds: "Bah...ton âge de raison, c'est l'âge de résignation, je n'y tiens pas du tout."<sup>49</sup> Later, after having left his brother's apartment, Mathieu reflects:

Seulement voilà, c'est un salaud qui me tient au coeur, quand je n'ai plus honte devant lui, j'ai honte pour lui. Ah! ...on n'en finit jamais avec la famille, c'est comme la petite vérole, ça vous prend quand on

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48 Ibid., p. 156.

49 Ibid., p. 157.

est gosse et ça vous marque pour la vie.<sup>50</sup>

Mathieu cannot bear the thought of marrying Marcelle because he no longer loves her. Another woman has gradually, almost imperceptibly stolen his affection. That woman is Ivich, one of his young students. One evening Ivich and Mathieu are drinking together in a night club. It is a critical time for both Mathieu and Ivich for Mathieu must very soon procure the money for Marcelle's abortion, while Ivich is awaiting the results of her final examinations which will determine whether or not she can continue in school. In order to escape their worries, both become drunk. Ivich begins to play with a pocket knife lying on the table between them. She says:

Je me fous des examens...si je suis collée je serai contente. Ce soir, j'enterre ma vie de garçon... Ce moment/ci... Il est tout rond, il est suspendu dans le vide comme un petit diamant, je suis éternelle.<sup>51</sup>

Here Sartre uses imagery similar to that which he employed in the closing scene of La Nausée. In that scene, Roquentin described the metallic, brittle quality of the jazz tune to which he was listening. It may be recalled that during that moment Roquentin had the feeling of belonging to eternity. Ivich, compares her moment to a diamond; it is hard, brittle, and beautiful. It elevates her, makes her feel eternal. Suddenly Ivich raises the

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 159.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., pp. 282-283.

knife and pins her hand to the table with it. Horrified, yet fascinated, Mathieu watches her blood slowly surround the blade. He asks her whether her hand hurts. She replies: "C'est une sensation très agréable...Je croyais que ma main était une motte de beurre." (Butter, a viscous material, is here used to symbolize the en-soi. Ivich hates herself. She wishes that her en-soi were something different, yet she cannot succeed in changing it; so she derives pleasure from torturing the self which she hates. Daniel went to drown his cats; Ivich plunged a knife through her hand; both characters manifest their bad faith through masochism.) Mathieu pulls the knife from Ivich's hand and thrusts it into his own palm. His act, however, is anarchistic, not masochistic; it is a senseless act of violence showing Mathieu's defiance of a world which refuses to receive him. Sartre writes:

Il se sentait doux et massif et il avait un peu peur de s'évanouir. Mais il y avait en lui une espèce de satisfaction butée et une mauvaise volonté malicieuse de cancre. Ce n'était pas seulement pour braver Ivich, qu'il s'était envoyé ce bon coup de couteau, c'était aussi un défi à Jacques, à Brunet, à Daniel, à sa vie...<sup>52</sup>

Sartre describes Mathieu's mood somewhat later:

Il était heureux, il ne pensait plus rien sur lui-même, il avait l'impression d'être assis au-dehors sur un banc: au dehors, hors du dancing, hors de sa vie. Il sourit: "Elle a dit aussi ça. Elle a dit: je suis éternelle..."<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 286.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 291.

This incident with the knife is one more foreshadowing of Mathieu's final act of violence to be discussed later.

Daniel finally marries Marcelle in order to spite Mathieu, and torture himself. By so doing he robs Mathieu of the last chance he had to commit himself. Mathieu envies Daniel, not for having married Marcelle, but for having committed an act which will allow Daniel to forget his freedom. Sartre writes:

Il était fasciné par Daniel. Il pensait: "Est-ce que c'est ça la liberté? Il a agi; à présent, il ne peut plus revenir en arrière: ça doit lui sembler étrange de sentir derrière lui lui un acte inconnu, qu'il ne comprend déjà presque plus et qui va bouleverser sa vie. Moi, tout ce que je fais, je le fais pour rien; on dirait qu'on me vole les suites de mes actes; tout se passe comme si je pouvais toujours reprendre mes coups. Je ne sais pas ce que je donnerais pour faire un acte irremédiable."<sup>54</sup>

At the close of the novel Mathieu is totally aware of his freedom but still has not succeeded in directing it to some purpose. Even though he is a young man, he has for some time shown the spirit of an old man who is tired and bored with life, ready to die. As he is preparing for bed he wearily surveys his barren past and sterile future:

...cette vie lui était donnée pour rien, il n'était rien et cependant il ne changerait plus: il était fait. Il ôta ses chaussures et resta immobile, assis sur le bras du fauteuil, un soulier à la main; il avait encore, au fond de sa gorge, la chaleur sucrée du rhum. Il bailla: il avait fini sa journée, il en avait fini avec sa jeunesse. Déjà des

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., pp. 438-439.

morales éprouvées lui proposaient discrètement leurs services: il y avait l'épicurisme désabusé, l'indulgence souriante, la résignation, l'esprit de sérieux, le stoïcisme, tout ce qui permet de déguster minute par minute, en connaisseur, une vie ratée. Il ôta son veston, il se mit à dénouer sa cravate. Il se répétait en bâillant: "C'est vrai, c'est tout de même vrai: j'ai l'âge de raison."<sup>55</sup>

The future holds a possibility which Mathieu has not foreseen, a possibility which is not included in the philosophies listed in the above passage. This remaining possibility is the nihilation of all philosophies: terrorism.

#### Le Sursis

The middle volume of Les Chemins de la liberté, Le Sursis (translated, "the postponement," or "the reprieve"), is appropriately named. The novel covers the week of Munich, the period just before the outbreak of the second world war. During this period personal goals and hopes are suspended. The threat of war is a great leveler. It reaches into every life, disintegrates any mortar that might have held its fragile structure together, and brings it tumbling down to ground level: absurdity. The impending war brings every past to the same level of insignificance, every future to the same level of uncertainty. Staring at the white posters ordering French soldiers to their mobilization posts, Mathieu reflects:

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 441.

...ils m'ont débarrassé de ma vie. C'était une vie minable et ratée, Marcelle, Ivich, Daniel, une sale vie, mais ça m'est égal, à présent, puisqu'elle est morte. A partir de ce matin, depuis qu'ils ont collé ces affiches blanches sur les murs, toutes les vies sont ratées, toutes les vies sont mortes.<sup>56</sup>

The possibility of war becomes the center of everyone's life. Some accept it with an indifferent attitude; others, eagerly anticipating a world upheaval and how it might change their lives, welcome it. Daniel is one of these latter few. His marriage has not turned out as he expected it would; it has not concealed from him his freedom. Daniel longs for fixity, stability in an image, but he cannot find it. He remains in his favorite armchair one evening after Marcelle has gone to bed, and he sucks on the pasty residue of a drink which he has just finished. This sticky material, suggesting the gratuity of existence, brings to mind his freedom:

Marcelle est là. Tu l'as voulu, se dit-il, tu l'as voulu! Il restait un peu de marc au fond de son verre, il le but... Tout ça pour en venir là, au faut-euil d'osier, au goût doucement pourri du marc dans sa bouche, à ce dos nu. La guerre, ça serait pareil. L'horreur, c'est toujours pour le lendemain. Moi marie, moi soldat: je ne trouve que moi. Même pas moi: une suite de petites courses excentriques, de petits mouvements centrifuges et pas de centre. Pourtant il ya un centre. Un centre: moi, moi-- et l'horreur est au centre.<sup>57</sup>

The war offers Daniel one hope: death. Death will remove from him the horror of freedom; death will stop Daniel and allow him to "coincide with himself" at last. Daniel wants

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<sup>56</sup> Sartre, Jean-Paul, Le sursis, (Paris, 1965), p. 101.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 154.



fixity, not so that he may accept himself, but so that he may hate himself:

Etre de pierre, immobile, insensible, pas un geste, pas un bruit, aveugle et sourd, les mouches, les perce-oreilles, les coccinelles monteraient et descendraient sur mon corps, une statue farouche aux yeux blancs, sans un projet, sans un souci; peut-être que j'arriverais à coïncider avec moi-même. Pas pour m'accepter, dieu non: pour être enfin l'objet pur de ma haine.<sup>58</sup>

Mathieu is one of those who apathetically accept the war. Like many other Frenchmen, he feels that the war is lost from the start. Stunned by the absurdity of the war, he is too confused to struggle against it; he will passively let the war strip him of what little identity he ever had:

...il pensait qu'il allait dépouiller ses vêtements, sa profession, son identité, partir nu pour la plus absurde des guerres, pour une guerre perdue d'avance et il se sentait couler au fond de l'anonymat; il n'était plus rien, ni le vieux professeur de Boris, ni le vieil amant de la vieille Marcelle, ni le trop vieil amoureux d'Ivich; plus rien qu'un anonyme, sans âge, dont on avait volé l'avenir et qui avait devant lui des journées imprévisibles.<sup>59</sup>

Mathieu is so overwhelmed by the absurdity of his situation that he nearly commits suicide on his way to the front. He leans over the railing of a bridge crossing the Seine, ready to end his life; but just as he has lacked the courage to commit himself many times before, so now he cannot bring himself to make

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 155.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 132.

the leap. Sartre describes his thoughts:

"Je suis libre pour rien," pensa-t-il avec lassitude. Pas un signe au ciel ni sur la terre, les objets de ce monde étaient trop absorbés par leur guerre... A présent c'est vrai, je vais me tuer. Tout à coup, il décida de ne pas le faire. Il décida: ce ne sera qu'une épreuve. Il se retrouva debout, en marche, glissant sur la croute d'un astre mort. Ce sera pour la prochaine fois.<sup>60</sup>

In the closing pages of Le Sursis Sartre deals with a phenomenon already discussed in the section of L'Enfance d'un chef, namely, "the gaze of the Other." (In the classroom Lucien Fleurier felt that someone was staring at the back of his neck. That feeling disturbed him; it meant that someone else was objectifying him.) Near the end of Le sursis Daniel gives in to his abnormal sexual tastes. After committing a perverted sex act with a young boy in his hotel room, Daniel feels as if he is being followed by the gaze of another. The gaze stabs him with guilt; but Daniel loves that guilt, for it objectifies him. He says to Mathieu:

"Je suis enfin changé en moi-même. On me hait, on me méprise, on me supporte, une présence me soutient à l'être pour toujours. Je suis infini et infiniment coupable. Mais je suis, Mathieu, je suis. Devant Dieu et devant les hommes, je suis. Ecce homo.<sup>61</sup>

Mathieu also has the opportunity to feel the comforting, objectifying "gaze of the Other." At the end of the novel he

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., pp. 420-421.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 470.

meets a young woman of the working class. He visits her basement apartment where he spends the night with her. Before they go to bed, she stares at him, trying to fathom his character. She tells him: "C'est vrai que vous êtes un bourgeois, vous." Mathieu replies: "Oui. Je suis un bourgeois." Sartre looks into Mathieu's mind:

Elle me voit. Il lui sembla qu'il durcissait et qu'il rapetissait à toute vitesse. Derrière ces yeux il y a un ciel sans étoiles, il y a aussi un regard. Elle me voit; comme elle voit la table et le ukulele. Et pour elle je suis: une particule en suspens dans un regard, un bourgeois. C'est vrai que je suis un bourgeois. Et pourtant, il n'arrivait pas à le sentir.<sup>63</sup>

The gaze of the other comforts Mathieu for only a moment. He sees himself as the Other sees him only imperfectly, and for just a fleeting second. In the gaze of the Other Daniel thinks he has found a permanent escape from freedom, but Mathieu must continue his search.

#### La mort dans l'ame

Mathieu's search for a haven from freedom ends in "la mort dans l'ame" (translated, "utter despair"). Mathieu ends his despair with a romantic act of violence. In the preceding chapters various events have been indicated which foreshadowed Mathieu's violent death in *La Mort dans l'ame*. Mathieu himself

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 438.

realizes the significance of these events. Just before his company engages the German attacking force, Mathieu finds himself talking to a young comrade on the subject of freedom. The youth tells Mathieu that he looks forward to shooting the invaders, not because he has any hope of helping to save France (for that is now beyond hope),\*but because it will save his own honor. Mathieu thinks:

Se fendre la main d'un coup de couteau, jeter son anneau de mariage, tirailler sur les Fridolins: et puis après? Casser, détériorer, ca n'est pas une solution; un coup de tête, ce n'est pas la liberté. Si seulement je pouvais être modeste.<sup>64</sup>

The last line of this passage reveals that Mathieu is aware of the hunger for violence which burns within him. His soliloquy above is an attempt to persuade himself that this is not the solution to the problem of engagement. One discovers later in the novel that he does not convince himself. The Germans trap Mathieu and several other stubborn French soldiers in the garret room of a town hall. The frenchmen resolve to fight to the last man, despite the fact that their resistance is strategically useless. When Mathieu hits and kills his first German, he earns a new and long-sought identity. Sartre writes:

Pendant des années, il avait tenté d'agir en vain: on lui volait ses actes à mesure; il comptait pour du beurre. Mais ce coup-ci, on ne lui avait rien volé du tout. Il avait appuyé sur la

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<sup>64</sup> Sartre, Jean-Paul, La mort dans l'ame, (Paris, 1965), p. 222.

gachette et, pour une fois, quelque chose était arrivé. "Quelque chose de définitif," pensait-il en riant de plus belle...il regardait son mort avec satisfaction; il pensait: "Il l'a senti passer, nom de Dieu! Il a compris, celui-la, il a compris!" Son mort, son oeuvre, la trace de son passage sur la terre. Le désir lui vint d'en tuer d'autres...<sup>65</sup>

Enraptured with the joy of terror, Mathieu fires on anything that moves below him. If he can stay alive just fifteen more minutes, he will have won his battle. All his life he has sought for something to make his existence meaningful. Heretofore all his acts have had no meaning in themselves; he has had to give them meaning. This act of terror, however, stands by itself; it defines Mathieu. Sartre concludes:

Il tirait sur l'homme, sur la Vertu, sur le Monde: la Liberté, c'est la Terreur; le feu brûlait dans la mairie, brûlait dans sa tête: les balles sifflaient, libre comme l'air, le monde sautera, moi avec, il tira, il regarda sa montre: quatorze minutes trente secondes; il n'avait plus rien à demander sauf un délai d'une demi-minute, juste le temps de tirer sur le bel officier si fier qui courait vers l'église; il tira sur le bel officier, sur toute la Beauté de la Terre, sur la rue, sur les fleurs, sur les jardins, sur tout ce qu'il avait aimé. La Beauté fit un plongeon obscène et Mathieu tira encore. Il tira: il était pur, il était tout-puissant, il était libre.  
Quinze minutes.<sup>66</sup>

"La liberté, c'est la Terreur." The next section, devoted to a discussion of Sartre's drama, contains a further development of this idea.

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 271.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 281.

## Chapter Three--

The Concept of FreedomIn Sartre's Drama Before 1949

Sartre employed the concept of freedom as a central theme in his drama as well as in his novels. This section deals with the development of that concept and related concepts in his plays written before 1949. Of the five plays written before that date, two are of particular importance to a thorough study of the concept of freedom: Les Mouches and Les Mains sales. The other three plays involve related issues which have already been mentioned in this study: bad faith, and the problem of engagement. These latter plays will be examined first, before moving on to an analysis of Les Mouches and Les Mains sales.

Huis Clos, a play dealing with the concept of bad faith, shows Sartre's talent for applying the technical philosophical ideas of L'Être et le néant to the theater. The play is set in a gaudily furnished Victorian drawing room. The set description specifies that there are to be no mirrors in the room--nor window-panes that might reflect one's image. Each of the characters in the play desires an image of himself, but none can create his own image. Each, instead, must rely on the others to describe himself. Except for a bellboy, who plays a minor role, there are only three characters in the play: Ines, a lesbian, Estelle, a nymphomaniac, and Garcin, a coward. The natural tension between the three characters caused by their personalities furnishes

Sartre with a means to dramatically portray the interpersonal conflict which Sartre claims is basic to human existence. After talking with one another for some time the characters come to the realization that they are in hell. The implication of Sartre's play is that hell is human existence itself. Hell is having to live with others upon whom one's self-recognition depends; it is the frustration that one encounters in trying to make his en-soi and pour-soi coincide (in trying to be God, says Sartre). Ines, Estelle, and Garcin torment each other because they are in bad faith. If they would only accept the fact that they are authors of their own lives, then they could escape hell; but instead, they play the roles which they create for one another. In Huis Clos Sartre reveals that one lives in hell when he refuses to accept his own freedom; i.e., when he lives in bad faith.

The concept of bad faith is the major theme of La Putain respectueuse. The play is set in a village in southern America during the late 1940's. Lizzie, the respectful prostitute, is the main character of the drama. Thomas, the son of a prominent American Senator, in a fit of drunkenness, shoots and kills a Negro. Lizzie witnesses the murder. When the curtain rises, a friend of the victim is paying a visit to Lizzie's apartment, begging her not to lie to the officials about what she saw. Later, Thomas' friends and the Senator himself call on Lizzie to persuade her to give false testimony in Thomas' favor. She flatly refuses, but her visitors force her to sign a document of accusation against the Negro despite her protests.

The character most exemplary of bad faith is Fred, a friend of Thomas'. He sleeps with Lizzie, then threatens to turn her over to the police on a charge of prostitution unless she testifies in Thomas' behalf. Fred is attracted to Lizzie because she tells him that he gave her sexual pleasure during their night together. Fred, it seems, must be assured of his own virility; he is in bad faith because he needs someone else to tell him what he is. His last speech to Lizzie, delivered just before the curtain falls, bears resemblance to Lucien Fleurier's thoughts concerning his bourgeois "rights":

Moi, j'ai le droit de vivre: il y a beaucoup de choses à entreprendre et l'on m'attend... Je t'installerai sur la colline, de l'autre côté de la rivière, dans une belle maison avec un parc. Tu te promèneras dans le parc, mais je te défends de sortir: Je suis très jaloux. Je viendrai te voir trois fois par semaine, à la nuit tombée: le mardi, le jeudi et pour le week-end. Tu auras des domestiques noirs et plus d'argent que tu n'en as jamais rêvé, mais il faudra me passer tous mes caprices. Et j'en aurai! C'est vrai que je t'ai donné du plaisir? Réponds. C'est vrai?<sup>67</sup>

Fred is similar to Lucien, for both characters think that their bourgeois heritage gives them a ready-made role which automatically justifies their existence. Both take shelter from freedom in a social position which they themselves have not earned.

The prisoners in Morts sans sépulture find themselves suddenly robbed of the comforting roles which had formerly justified

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<sup>67</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, La Putain respectueuse, (Paris, 1964), p. 89.



their existence. Five men and a woman are being held by German soldiers for questioning. The French prisoners face excruciating torture if they refuse to reveal the whereabouts of their leader, Jean. None of them, however, knows where he is, so they have no secret to keep, hence, nothing for which to die. Stripped of their former roles of bad faith, the prisoners stand face to face with their own freedom. One of them, Henri, says:

C'est la première fois depuis trois ans que je me retrouve en face de moi-même. On me donnait des ordres. J'obéissais. Je me sentais justifié. A présent personne ne peut plus me donner d'ordres et rien ne peut plus me justifier. Un petit morceau de vie en trop: oui. Juste le temps qu'il faut pour m'occuper de moi. Canoris, pourquoi mourons-nous?<sup>68</sup>

Canoris replies that he has always lived for the cause (French resistance) and that he has always expected to die for it. Henri warns him not to deceive himself by thinking that he is about to die for the cause. Henri points out that "the cause" is never something abstract which stands outside oneself and orders one how to act. Rather, one gives voice to the cause oneself. Henri says:

La cause ne donne jamais d'ordre, elle ne dit jamais rien; c'est nous qui décidons de ses besoins. Ne parlons pas de la cause. Pas ici. Tant qu'on peut travailler pour elle, ça va. Après il faut se taire et surtout ne pas s'en servir pour notre consolation personnelle.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, Morts sans sépulture, (Paris, 1964), p. 121.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 122.

The Germans capture Jean, but are unaware that he is the French leader whom they have been seeking. When Jean is imprisoned with his companions, once again they are provided with a role to play; they must protect Jean. Now they have something for which to die. Henri tells Jean:

Écoute! si tu n'étais pas venu, nous aurions souffert comme des bêtes, sans savoir pourquoi. Mais tu es là, et tout ce qui va se passer à présent aura un sens. On va lutter. Pas pour toi seul, pour tous les copains. Nous avons manqué notre coup mais nous pourrions peut-être sauver la face. Je croyais être tous a fait inutile, mais je vois maintenant qu'il y a quelque chose à quoi je je suis nécessaire: avec un peu de chance, je pourrai peut-être me dire que je ne meurs pas pour rien.<sup>69b</sup>

Jean is eventually released. The Germans continue to torture the other prisoners in order to discover where their chief is hiding. The fortitude of the captives outlasts that of the captors. Realizing that torture is ineffective, the Germans promise to release the prisoners if they will divulge the desired information. Henri and Lucie at first refuse to tell the Germans anything, for to talk at this point, they think, would be to concede defeat. Canoris, however, suggests that they give the Germans false information. To resist any longer, he thinks, would only encourage the Germans to kill them; and to face a firing squad now would be to die for nothing. Canoris maintains that they do not have the right to die for nothing. He

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<sup>69b</sup> Ibid., p. 142.

says:

Nous n'avons pas le droit de mourir pour rien...Henri; tu veux sauver ta vie...Bah! Il faut travailler; on se sauve par-dessus le marché... Si tu te laisses tuer quand tu peux travailler encore, il n'y aura rien de plus absurde que ta mort.<sup>70</sup>

Henri and Lucie's desire to die a romantic (but absurd) death resembles Mathieu's craving for self-fulfillment in terrorism. Canoris' speech above would have been excellent advice to Mathieu. It would also be good advice to Oreste, the main character of Les Mouches, as shall be pointed out in the next section.

#### Les Mouches

Sartre's play, Les Mouches, seems to have been written especially to express in literary form the concept of freedom. It illustrates, perhaps better than any other of Sartre's works, the philosophical points from L'Être et le néant, which were discussed in the first chapter. It reveals what Sartre means by "freedom" and deals with the concepts of bad faith and engagement.

The play is set in the Greek city of Argos. The young hero of the play, Oreste, has returned to his home, Argos, after many years of absence. Neither his mother, Clytemnestre, the queen, nor his sister, Electre, recognize him. Orestes has

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., pp. 232-233.

learned that during his absence Clytemnestre conspired with Egisthe, her lover, to murder her husband. The two of them slaughtered Agamemnon in his bath. Now Egisthe and Clytemnestre rule the city and force the citizens to atone for the guilt of their crime. Electra, who is treated like the lowest of servants by her mother, longs for the return of her brother, who, she hopes, will avenge Agamemnon. Oreste's teacher warns his pupil not to get involved in the affairs of his native city. He says:

Que faites-vous de la culture, monsieur?  
 Elle est à vous, votre culture, et je vous l'ai  
 composée avec amour, comme un bouquet, en assortissant  
 les fruits de ma sagesse et les trésors de  
 mon expérience... A présent vous voilà jeune,  
 riche et beau, avisé comme un vieillard, affranchi  
 de toutes les servitudes et de toutes les croyances,  
 sans famille, sans patrie, sans religion, sans métier,  
 libre pour tous les engagements et sachant qu'il ne  
 faut jamais s'engager, un homme supérieur enfin...<sup>71</sup>

At this stage in the play Oreste reminds one of Mathieu; he is quite aware of his freedom, but has made no commitment which allows him to direct his freedom toward some purpose. When Electre tells Oreste that she cannot justly expect him to avenge his father, since he has no hate in his heart, he replies:

Tu dis bien: sans haine. Sans amour non plus.  
 Toi, j'aurais pu t'aimer. J'aurais pu...Mais quoi?  
 Pour aimer, pour haïr, il faut se donner. Il est  
 beau, l'homme au sang riche, solidement planté au  
 milieu de ses biens, qui se donne un beau jour à

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<sup>71</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, Les Mouches, (Paris, 1966), p. 95.

l'amour, à la haine, et qui donne avec lui sa terre, sa maison et ses souvenirs. Qui suis-je et qu'ai-je à donner, moi? J'existe à peine: de tous les fantômes qui rôdent aujourd'hui par la ville, aucun n'est plus fantôme que moi. J'ai connu des amours de fantôme, hésitants et clairsemés comme des vapeurs; mais j'ignore les denses passions des vivants.<sup>72</sup>

Imagery signifying the en-soi and the pour-soi appears in Oreste's speech above. He compares his loves to vapor (which, it may be recalled, is a common Sartrean symbol for the pour-soi.) Oreste says he knows nothing about the dense passions. (Dense substances, remember, signify the en-soi.) Oreste's psychological problem is the same as Mathieu's, Lucien's, Daniel's, Jean's-- He is aware of his pour-soi and is disturbed by the feeling of gratuity which that awareness carries with it. He craves fixity, stability: he wants to rest in the comfortable haven of the en-soi. As long as his freedom remains uncommitted, it is impossible for him to know what he is.

After having committed himself by killing his father's murderers, Oreste realizes what he is. He tells Jupiter: "Je suis ma liberté!"<sup>73</sup> Oreste, is choice that has manifested itself in action, i.e. freedom. Freedom is not something that Oreste possesses; rather, by choosing, then acting in accordance with his choice, Oreste is freedom.

Jupiter conspires with Egisthe to prevent Oreste from

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., pp. 135-136.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 181.

revealing to the citizens of Argos the secret that all men are free. Jupiter also talks with Oreste and tries to persuade him that freedom is a curse rather than a blessing. Oreste tells Jupiter that he knows that freedom is a curse; but that, he says, is something which man must accept. Man is condemned to freedom, says Oreste. Every man must invent his own path for the journey of his life. Jupiter, representing any system or institution which offers to carry the burden of choice for the individual, begs Oreste to repent for his crime and return to worshipping the gods. He pleads with Oreste:

Reviens parmi nous. Reviens: vois comme tu es seul, ta soeur même t'abandonne. Tu es pâle, et l'angoisse dilate tes yeux. Espères-tu vivre? Te voilà rongé par un mal inhumain, étranger à ma nature, étranger à toi-même. Reviens: je suis l'oubli, je suis le repos.<sup>74</sup>

Oreste answers Jupiter:

Etranger à moi-même, je sais. Hors nature, contre nature, sans excuse, sans autre recours qu'en moi. Mais je ne reviendrai pas sous ta loi: je suis condamné à n'avoir d'autre loi que la mienne. Je ne reviendrai pas à ta nature: mille chemins y sont tracés qui conduisent vers toi, mais je ne peux suivre que mon chemin. Car je suis un homme, Jupiter, et chaque homme doit inventer son chemin.<sup>75</sup>

The ending of Les Mouches is rather disappointing, for by leaving Argos instead of remaining there to rule his people,

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 182.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

Oreste renders his crime meaningless. By fleeing from the responsibility which ensues from his deed, Oreste transforms himself from a true savior into a mere romantic hero. Since Oreste fails to remain in the city to carry out the work that needs to be done there, his killing of the king and queen becomes absurd. With a little alteration Canoris' speech to Henri and Lucie becomes excellent advice to Oreste:

Nous n'avons pas le droit de /tuer/ pour rien...  
 Il faut travailler; si tu /quittes la ville/ quand  
 tu peux travailler encore, il n'y aura rien de plus  
 absurde que /leur/ mort.

Sartre could have made Oreste an example of the truly authentic individual, but he chose not to do so. Instead, he represented authenticity by another figure: Hoederer, a main character in Les mains sales, the next and last work to be discussed.

#### Les Mains sales

Les Mains sales marks the culmination in Sartre's expression of the concept of freedom, because it is in this play that Sartre depicts a truly authentic character, i.e., one who is fully aware of his freedom and commits that freedom. The ending of Les Chemins de la liberté might seem to imply that terrorism is the answer to the problem of engagement. Sartre's plays (especially Les Mains sales) show, however, that Sartre

does not think so. Instead, Sartre suggests that one should commit his freedom to the improvement of human existence by getting involved in the worldwide struggle for freedom. Les Mains sales advises one to "get his hands dirty" in the affairs of the world.

At the beginning of the play, Hugo, a young bourgeois intellectual, is trying to recollect why he killed Hoederer, a former leader in the Communist party. Was his act merely the result of a fit of anger, or was it the manifestation of a deliberate commitment? Hugo must discover the motive for his act; if he killed because of anger, then his act proves nothing, but if he killed because of a conviction, then Hugo has proved himself. Hugo knows that he did not shoot Hoederer simply because he was following the party's orders. (Like Henri in Morts sans sépulture Hugo recognizes that "the cause" never orders one to do anything.) Hugo says to Olga, a young party agent:

Avec la meilleure volonté du monde, ce qu'on fait, ce n'est jamais ce que le Parti vous commande. "Tu iras chez Hoederer et tu lui lâcheras trois balles dans le ventre." Voilà un ordre simple, n'est-ce pas? J'ai été chez Hoederer et je lui ai lâché trois balles dans le ventre. Mais c'était autre chose. L'ordre? Il n'y avait plus d'ordre. Ça vous laisse tout seul les ordres, à partir d'un certain moment. L'ordre est resté en arrière et je m'avançais seul et j'ai tué tout seul et...je ne sais même plus pourquoi.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 33.



Somewhat later he tells her:

Un acte ça va trop vite. Il sort de toi brusquement et tu ne sais pas si c'est parce que tu l'as voulu ou parce que tu n'as pas pu le retenir. Le fait est que j'ai tiré...<sup>77</sup>

Hugo envies both Hoederer and his body guards, Georges and Slick. Hugo admires Hoederer because he has proven himself by actively participating in the Communist cause. Hugo feels that Hoederer's authority makes real everything which he touches. Hugo says:

Tout ce qu'il touche a l'air vrai. Il verse le café dans les tasses, je bois, je le regarde boire et je sens que le vrai goût du café est dans sa bouche a lui.

Hugo envies George and Slick, on the other hand, because they lack authority altogether. They seem to him to be thoughtless automotons who never question their motives for acting and consequently never become aware of their freedom. Hugo wishes he were like Slick:

Je ne suis pas lâche, mais je ne suis pas courageux non plus. Trop de nerfs. Je voudrais m'endormir et rêver que je suis Slick. Regarde: cent kilos de chair et une noisette dans la boîte crânienne, une vraie baleine. La noisette, là-haut, elle envoie des signaux de peur et de colère, mais ils se perdent dans cette masse. Ça le chatouille, c'est tout.<sup>78</sup>

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77 Ibid., p. 129.

78 Ibid., pp. 157-158.

One discovers early in the play that Hugo feels guilty about his bourgeois background and therefore will do nothing which compromises the principles of the Communist party as he sees them. When he is talking with Louis, his Party boss, he says:

J'ai quitté ma famille et ma classe, le jour où j'ai compris ce que c'était que l'oppression. En aucun cas, je n'accepterais de compromis avec elle.

Louis asks him:

Mais si les choses en étaient venues là?

Hugo answers:

Alors, je prendrais un pétard et j'irais descendre un flic sur la Place Royale ou avec un peu de chance un milicien. Et puis j'attendrais à côté du cadavre pour voir ce qui m'arriverait. Mais c'est une blaque.<sup>79</sup>

Hugo's response indicates that he is inclined to fanaticism. He is ready to commit the same sort of terroristic act which Mathieu did. Like Mathieu, Hugo wants a romantic gesture to justify his existence. Later in the play Hoederer deplores Hugo's attitude. Hoederer tells Hugo that what justifies one's life is not one grandiose act, but a continuous commitment. Such a commitment is the constant renewal of one's project, the perpetual choosing of oneself which is discussed in the first chapter.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>80</sup> See page 9.

Hoederer also says that in order to accomplish anything by working one must be willing to compromise his ideals. The best work is not that which costs the most, claims Hoederer, but that which achieves the most. He says:

Tu as voulu te prouver que tu étais capable d'agir et tu as choisi les chemins difficiles: comme quand on veut mériter le ciel; c'est de ton âge. Tu n'as pas réussi: bon et après. Il n'y a rien à prouver, tu sais, la Révolution n'est pas une question de mérite, mais d'efficacité; et il n'y a pas de ciel. Il y a du travail à faire, c'est tout. Et il faut faire celui pour lequel on est doué: tant mieux s'il est facile. Le meilleur travail n'est pas celui qui te coûtera le plus; c'est celui que tu réussiras le mieux.<sup>81</sup>

Hoederer is Sartre's answer to the problem of engagement. He is the most remarkable and the most admirable of Sartre's characters because he accepts himself for what he is and other people for what they are. Hoederer takes one step beyond the realization of the absurdity of life; he accepts it, but then gets to work to change it. (Had Oreste remained in Argos after wiping away the old order, he too might have been a Hoederer.) Sartre himself seems to speak through Hoederer when he describes his attitude toward other men:

Et moi, je les aime pour ce qu'ils sont. Avec toutes leurs saloperies et tous leurs vices. J'aime leurs voix et leurs mains chaudes qui prennent et leur peau, la plus nue de toutes les peaux, et leur

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., pp. 223-224.

regard inquiet et la lutte désespérée qu'ils mènent chacun à son tour contre la mort et contre l'angoisse. Pour moi, ça compte un homme de plus ou de moins dans le monde. C'est précieux. Toi, je te connais bien, mon petit, tu es un destructeur. Les hommes, tu les détestes parce que tu te détestes toi-même; ta pureté ressemble à la mort et la Révolution dont tu rêves n'est pas la notre: tu ne veux pas changer le monde, tu veux le faire sauter.<sup>82</sup>

Authenticity is the destination of the path of freedom. It is a dynamic state, for it requires a continuous commitment. Hoederer points out the way to authenticity, but every man must travel it himself: One must first accept the awful fact that life is gratuitous, i.e., that one is condemned to freedom. Then one must get down to work in the face of absurdity. As Oreste says, "La vie humaine commence de l'autre cote du desespoir."<sup>83</sup>

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82 Ibid., p. 202.

83 Sartre, Les Mouches, p. 183.

Summary and Concluding  
Remarks

The foregoing study reveals a definite evolution in the expression of Sartre's concept of freedom. La Nausée deals with the vague awareness of one's freedom as it manifests itself in the nauseous realization that life is gratuitous. The flight from freedom, bad faith, is a theme that runs throughout the works discussed, but is particularly important in the stories in Le Mur, especially L'Enfance d'un chef. Les Chemins de la liberté and Les Mouches stress the problem of engagement. Mathieu and Oreste demonstrate a reaction to this problem which Sartre deploras: the romantic gesture. Les Mains sales points out Sartre's dissatisfaction with the romantic gesture. The play shows that a sudden, violent act cannot justify one's existence, but only a day to day struggle against the injustices of life. Thus the evolution of Sartre's concept of freedom leads to what he has called "authenticity."

Anyone who reads Sartre's comments in Being and Nothingness concerning the constant tension between individuals and the impossibility of ever accepting other people as people finds it hard to believe that Sartre could have created a character like Hoederer. Although it would be going too far to say that Sartre presents Hoederer as the ideal man, still, Sartre has an undeniable admiration for him. Considering Sartre's highly individualistic philosophy, it would be inappropriate for him to offer Hoederer as a model man and admonish his audiences: "Go thou and do likewise." There can be no question, however, that Sartre is trying to follow Hoederer's example as far as his own life is concerned.

At the close of Being and Nothingness Sartre raises the question whether the ontology set forth in that volume can serve as the basis for an ethical philosophy. He asks: Can freedom take itself as a goal? Sartre writes:

...is it possible for freedom to take itself for a value as the source of all value, or must it necessarily be defined in relation to a transcendent value which haunts it?<sup>84</sup>

Hoederer is the answer to Sartre's question. If Hoederer is possible, then it is possible for freedom to take itself for an end, for that is precisely what Hoederer did. To say that freedom can take itself as an end, i.e., that there can be a

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<sup>84</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, Being and Nothingness, p. 768.

Hoederer, does not quite solve the ultimate ethical question, however. That question is: Ought one to be like Hoederer? Ought one to be authentic? What sort of answer could Sartre propose for this question? If Sartre cannot say, "Go thou and do likewise," then what can he say? Nothing. Sartre can describe authenticity, but he cannot urge his audiences to seek it, for if he did he would be introducing a "transcendent value to haunt us." Sartre has promised the world a book devoted to ethics.<sup>85</sup> It has not yet been published, nor in all likelihood will it ever be, for Sartre's philosophical orientation will not allow him to write such a book. If Sartre wants the world to hold freedom for a value, the only thing that he can do to encourage it is to be a Hoederer and hope that the world will follow his example.

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85 Ibid.

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