

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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Nausea (1938)

Sartre, Jean-Paul (1906-1980)

In 1938 Jean Paul Sartre published his first novel, *Nausea*, which explored the desperate illness of a man caught in the web of a pernicious history. Nazism was rumbling in on all sides, and western European societies felt the threats of a brutal ideology, which was in turn impelled by the revenge lust of a cultural group, the Jews, who considered themselves victims of brutal Aryan oppression. In this atmosphere the viciousness of man kind was in full charge and a young French philosophy professor was firm in his desire to respond to the situation the world presented to him. Wasn't philosophy, after all, a form of response from inside the needs of the self? Wasn't philosophy or the philosophic form of self-expression, useful, lest one find himself overbalanced by the power and weight in things? From the cavity of the room inside himself, and within the cavity of his richest responsiveness capacities, Sartre brewed three fictive characters who for him did the work of explaining or was it disciplining the chaos of the time. Being able to name this trio of sensibilities--we surmise--must have been a mind easing for the beleaguered intellectual sensation who was doing his best to become a coper or, what is of an equivalent, to become an intellectual, a placeholder who gives stability to the shaky syntax of a place in time. So there we have the world and there we have a guy named Sartre, whose real name of course is nothing at all, and there in addition we have names made up, the name of Sartre, a fictive intellectual, whose quest to understand an eighteenth century French political figure, drives him to an hegira of travels from one provincial French library after another, the name and presence of a former girlfriend of the name Sartre, and finally the name and presence of a genial humanist, who is forever trying to win Sartre himself over into a mellowness inside the ashes of his time. Which adds up to the formula for what Sartre here in has made up for the homework of an afternoon of existence quest here in the distant fields of Iowa thousands of miles away from the Cafe de Flore where this script is finding its way to foolscap beside byrrh on the Left Bank.

The narrator of the present text traces historicity to the point where it becomes too much for him. Whatever is is the turning point between a deathly sickness, provoked by the sense of temporality, a Kierkegaardian sickness unto death, and the routine pertaining to daily life. The insinuation remains that the closer the narrator gets, to the character of Rollebon, the closer he comes to the fatal sickness of life. So much at any rate for Sartre's 'fictional negotiation with the experience of time.' in the two fictions on temporality with which he makes his strongest career opening statements on temporality. And we have yet to visit the treatment of time in Sartre's next consequential encounter with the issue, a terrain in which he leads the reader to the most intimate places of humanity. We are at the portals of Sartre's early short story, *The Wall*. With this story we face individuals to temporality as it imposes itself in the setting of war rather than historical time quest. We are rolled out into the terror of three young mid-thirties, in the midst of the Spanish Civil war. We are immersed in the terror of three young militants who are being starkly interrogated by militants who have captured him. Time plays a devastating role for these individuals over the night time hours that follow. One young boy, barely out of his school years, is facing a firing squad of which he barely knows the meaning, and for charges which make no sense to him. The narrator and primary spokesperson knows that for Sartre he bears the most intimate relation to the pain of temporality; The fierce intensity of this relation is brought into play by the ticking of the clock and the crowing of the rooster. Gunshots have been heard in a nearby patio. The protagonist, of whom we talk, is in a growingly desperate state of anxiety, pissing and sweating; yes, time is closing in, and the man has not yet decided how to dispose of his greatest secret. His need to decide in fact the fate of this secret greatly tightens the vise of time around him. By revealing his secret, the location of Juan Gris, a keenly sought enemy of the fascist state, the narrator knows that he could buy his freedom from a death sentence. In an instant he decides to disclose the secret--the false secret, as it turns out--, for the truth it discloses, though in fact intended to be misleading, is in fact a direct lead to Juan Gris' hideout--he has moved--and leads headlong into the rebel's death.