

“THIS LOVELY, SWEET REFRAIN”: READING THE FICTION BACK INTO *NAUSEA*

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Jean-Paul Sartre's novel of 1938, *Nausea* (*La Nausée*), has grown in stature to the extent that it may now be considered a seminal text of the twentieth century. It may also be considered to be the novelistic elaboration of Sartre's theories of Existentialism, which would take on a fuller form towards the end of the Second World War, when *Being and Nothingness* (*L'Être et le néant*) appeared in print. In a sense, then, *Nausea* has become what Sartre always claimed it was and what he always wanted it to be: a treatise on contingency.

In his introduction to the Penguin edition of Robert Baldick's English translation of the text, James Woods says of *Nausea* that “it is a philosophical novel which, if it does not quite propose philosophical arguments in the formal sense, discusses and dramatizes them.”¹ Similarly, in his introduction to Lloyd Alexander's translation, Hayden Carruth is quite categorical as to the novel's status as philosophy: if it is not the first of its kind, and if its protagonist is not actually an archetype, *Nausea*, he writes, is still an “Existentialist novel”.² Iris Murdoch, too, in her exploration of Sartre's novelistic works, *Sartre: Romantic Rationalist*, praises the text for its successful combination of philosophy and fiction: “*La Nausée*, Sartre's celebration of the horror of the contingent, is one of the very few unadulterated and successful members of the genre ‘philosophical novel’.”³

In order to get to the very essence of *Nausea*, the reader must turn the philosophy on its head. This approach may itself usefully be framed in Sartre's own philosophical terms: *Nausea* is not what it is, and it is what it is not. In short, it is a “sticky” text that, like Man, cannot synthesise the irreconcilable halves of the binary opposition: whereas Man seeks to be all consciousness and all body (for-itself-in-itself),

Nausea seeks to be all fiction and all philosophy. Like Man, the novel is always a mixture of both; it is up to the reader to assess the quantities of each that are present. Whilst criticism has understood the text as philosophy set to a novelistic beat or philosophy desiring to become fiction, it is possible to reread the text as an essence, a pure piece of fiction, put *en situation* and struggling beneath a veil of philosophy. As Jacques Deguy comments, in reaction to the weight of *des idées reçues*—the *a priori* judgements that close people's minds to the possibilities of the textual experience—“*La Nausée mérite mieux*” (“*Nausea* deserves better”).

It should be remembered that the novel masqueraded for a time before publication under the title of *Melancholia*, thus recalling not only Dürer's engraving of the same name but, importantly, Freud's essay of 1915, “Mourning and Melancholia”. These psychological beginnings, if not repressed in the unconscious, do not seem to have troubled *Nausea*'s perpetual present as existentialist emblem. No challenge has resisted the powerful mantra “existence precedes essence”. And yet it is far from clear which of the two actually precedes the other. In a word, the novel is one of inversion.

The very word inversion conjures up an image of an Antoine Roquentin who, far from projecting his transcendent being-for-itself out onto the world, is in fact internalising and repressing it (as if his attempt to become God were reduced to an onanistic bid to synthesise his being-for and in-itself within his own body). As Serge Doubrovsky points out in his work, *Autobiographiques: de Corneille à Sartre*,⁵ the Corsican in the library may be far nearer the mark than the reader at first suspects with his question: “Are you a fairy too?”⁶ For Doubrovsky, Roquentin's inversion hinges upon an overwhelming fear that one day his attempts to convince himself that men are ugly will fail and that he will not only gaze *at* but *with* the “magnificent eyes” of the Autodidact. For “nausea of the hands”, the reader may begin to read “nausea of the eyes”:

And what if Roquentin could not remember having looked at the sea or the stone because he was looking at the *kids*? And what if the (repressed) object of his desire could be revealed by metonymy; what if it slipped from the “stone” [*galet*] to the *kids* [*gamins*]? Not only in terms of signification but also in terms of significance. This “nausea of the hands” quite clearly runs through *ga-mins* [“mins”] being phonetically identical to *mains*, the French

for “hands”, and “ga” being very similar to *gars* or “bloke”), i.e. the *blokes’ hand*. How reassuring the experience of the *galet* inasmuch as it shows that “gars” are “laid” [“ugly”—phonetically, then, *galet* can be seen to signify “ugly blokes”].⁷

Any attempt to “out” Antoine Roquentin is, of course, only interesting inasmuch as it allows the reader to gain some kind of critical purchase on the text. In this respect, an inversion of nausea along the lines of sexuality is important because it changes the status of the Sartrean gaze. The traditional belief is that in *Nausea*, to gaze is to petrify the Other, and to be gazed upon is to become aware of one’s status as object-for-other-people. Doubrovsky’s “inverted” reading suggests that to see the Other as an object is to refuse to view him as beautiful. Nausea becomes a twisting of the gaze.

One of the most important passages in terms of the *regard* in *Nausea* is the description of the transfixing power of the great bronze patriarch, Gustave Impétraz. Roquentin records how the inhabitants of Bouville “cast furtive, satisfied, girlish glances at the statue”,⁸ as if they are reassured by and afraid of its power. The following description of a woman as provided by Roquentin shows her reduced to insect-like proportions before the statue:

I see an old lady timidly emerge from the arcade and look at Impétraz with a shrewd, stubborn expression. She suddenly plucks up her courage, crosses the courtyard as fast as her legs can carry her, and stops for a moment in front of the statue with her jaws working. Then she runs away again, black against the pink pavement, and disappears through a crack in the wall.⁹

Awe before the statue notwithstanding, the woman is being scrutinised. Her behaviour recalls the actions of somebody who has that eerie feeling of being watched; and the reason for this is quite simple: Roquentin is staring at her.

Cast as he is in bronze, Impétraz is incapable of engaging in the ontological duel that is the *regard*. Onomastically, too, his role as object, and therefore as an existent that cannot reflect one’s being-for-other-people, is spelt out; his inscrutability, or impenetrability, lies in the phonetic closeness of his name to the French *impénétrable*. Clearer still, however, is his inability to petrify with his own gaze, for the name Impétraz juxtaposes the beginning of the verb *pétrifier* and the negative prefix “im-”.

Having conquered the old woman with his conscious effort to watch her every move, Roquentin, whose transcendence through his eyes would appear to render him extremely liquid (his gaze being one of the purest expressions of his being-for-itself), begins to believe that he can predict the future, that somehow from his lofty position as man of letters he can write her next step: "I can *see* the future."¹⁰ And yet at the very same moment the inevitable failure of his bid to transcend his being-in-itself is signalled as he is himself turned to stone. Despite himself, and as it were unconsciously, Roquentin adopts the pose of the statue, his hands competing with his eyes: "I am holding my pipe in my right hand and my packet of tobacco in my left."¹¹ Just a few pages earlier, it was Impétraz who had been depicted with his hands similarly full: "He holds his hat in his left hand and rests his right hand on a pile of folio volumes"¹²

In the context of the novel, "having one's hands full" does not merely signify being occupied or preoccupied (and therefore more body than *cogito*); hands that are full cannot wander, which is what those of the Autodidact will do when his grip on his books and pencil is momentarily loosened. In terms of the narrative, full hands also stand for the hands-on style of the author: the writer of *Nausea* is ostensibly struggling to write a piece of existentialist prose—in a diary form—but each time his guard is dropped (and he himself becomes a prey to his being-in-itself), it is the very essence of fiction that wells up onto the page. In this inverted (con)text, it is not so much a choice made by Roquentin (be it in good or bad faith) that allows the project of writing a novel to be forged; the novel not only *is*, it is right there from the start.

The above attempt made by Roquentin to control his *regard* and to keep on top of the philosophy of the situation can be usefully compared to an earlier instance, in which the protagonist lapses into an apparent stream of consciousness. An account of an incident by the railway station witnessed by Roquentin is foreshadowed by a recollection of Anny. The mere mention of her name seems to be sufficient to send the text spiralling out of Roquentin's hands:

In the past—even long after she had left me—I used to think about Anny. Now, I don't think about anybody any more; I don't even bother to look for words. It flows through me, more or less quickly, and I don't fix anything, I just let it go.¹³

This "it" he speaks of is the novel itself, the novel in all its essence. This particular passage is all the more disarming for its vestiges of control: it lies in a dangerous space between the heavily underscored philosophical tracts and the surrealist tableaux, painted ironically with an overstated breakdown of grammar. The incident is recounted thus:

For example, on Saturday, about four in the afternoon, on the short wooden pavement of the station yard, a little woman in sky-blue was running backwards, laughing and waving a handkerchief. At the same time, a Negro in a cream-coloured raincoat, with yellow shoes and a green hat, was turning the corner of the street, whistling. Still going backwards, the woman bumped into him, underneath a lantern which hangs from the fence and which is lit at night. So there, at one and the same time, you had that fence which smells so strongly of wet wood, that lantern, and that little blonde in a Negro's arms, under a fiery-coloured sky. If there had been four or five of us, I suppose we would have noticed the collision, all those soft colours, the beautiful blue coat which looked like an eiderdown, the light coloured raincoat, and the red panes of the lantern; we would have laughed at the stupefaction which appeared on those two childlike faces.

It is unusual for a man on his own to feel like laughing: the whole scene came alive for me with a significance which was strong and even fierce, but pure. Then it broke up, and nothing remained but the lantern, the fence, and the sky: it was still quite beautiful.¹⁴

Roquentin himself comments that had this incident been viewed by a group—i.e. objectively—it would have provided an amusing and attractive spectacle to be enjoyed and cast aside: a chance event. This incident was not seen 'objectively', however, and it can thus—and perversely—be categorised as one of those events that may be put down to chance when considered 'objectively' and only then. This passage then is an instance of what André Breton labelled *le hasard objectif* (objective chance), and lies at the very heart of the novel's Surrealism. As such, it expresses the subconscious desire of the protagonist—the desire that usually runs parallel to the waking moment, in the dream space—as it suddenly encroaches on the conscious mind and the "real world". There is a dichotomy forming between the text's being-in-itself, its rationally ordered Existentialism, and its being-for-itself, its dream-like Essentialism.

The key questions here are: who is the cause of this desire, and why does it manifest itself in this particular form? There are two basic elements behind this example of objective chance. Anny, as has been suggested, is the trigger; and the key to the form taken by the encounter lies in the song *Some of These Days*. The nature of the dream is to invert elements from the waking moment.¹⁵ Throughout the novel, the song functions as a perfect inversion of its historical (existential) inspiration. The Negress and the Jew of *Nausea*, the singer and songwriter that bring the essential sequence of notes that seems to inspire Roquentin's decision to write a novel, are themselves a novelistic representation of white Jewish singer, Sophie Tucker, and black composer, Shelton Brooks. The passage above therefore brings together the black man and white woman in a glimpse of the reality behind Roquentin's song. As an inverted image, this tableau recalls the negative printing of Man Ray's photography or the cinematic techniques of 1920s experimental cinema. Specifically, the reversal of black and white recalls such photographs as *Woman with Long Hair* (c. 1929) and *Woman with Flowing Hair* (c. 1930),¹⁶ whilst the theme of Negroes with white hair was exploited as a narrative device in such novels as Pierre Mac Orlan's *La Maison du retour écourant*.¹⁷ The inversion of the dream is also picked up in the direction in which the woman is running: backwards. This reversal has the dual effect of prompting the reader to understand the opposite of what is being written and of pointing to film influences such as Louis Buñuel's *Un Chien andalou* (1929), in which the gaze can be seen to influence events (e.g. the act of looking from a window has the effect of causing an accident in the street below).

The tableau therefore synthesises a desire for Anny and an obsession with *Some of These Days*. This very synthesis leads the reader to ask whether these two elements are a mere juxtaposition or if, rather, they are a more deliberate reflection of each other. In Roquentin's tableau, the woman runs backwards into the man's arms: the inversion of this scenario suggests her flight from his arms. Although clearly a stock image of novel and cinema alike, the act of leaving on a train can be seen to constitute the full thematic content of *Some of These Days*. The ubiquity of the image within the novel, coupled with the fact that Roquentin only ever quotes the refrain of the song, serves to veil the reading that the lyrics contain:

The little girlie feeling blue said I'll go too
And show him two can play this game
When her honey heard this melancholy news
Why he quickly came back home again
But when he reached the house he found his girl had gone
So down he rushes to the train
While it was pulling out
He heard his girlie shout
This lovely, sweet refrain¹⁸

A logical conclusion would be to read Roquentin's obsession with *Some of These Days* as an intense desire for Anny to come back.

In his article "Looking for Annie": Sartre's *La Nausée* and the Inter-War Years", Nicholas Hewitt strongly advocates a reading that places Anny back into the text. By showing that *Nausea* functions around an elaborate framework of parody and intertextual references, Hewitt exposes the dangers of failing to read beyond the text's phenomenological discourse. As a work of fiction, *Nausea* has a psychological underpinning, at the centre of which is Anny, whom Hewitt labels "the absent moving-force of the work".¹⁹ Furthermore, the melancholia from which Roquentin is suffering—and which was originally destined to be the title of the novel—is none other than that expounded by Freud in "Mourning and Melancholia":

Roquentin is the victim of the loss of a love-object, believing that loss is no longer important to him. That he is deluded is indicated by the frequent and persistent references to Anny throughout the novel, long before the letter summoning him to Paris The unconscious effects of Anny's departure can therefore be seen in Roquentin's retreat into the melancholic capital of Bouville and in his transfer of interest to the misanthropic and cynical Rollebon.²⁰

Hewitt is correct in concluding that Roquentin's psychological condition precludes him from living in good faith and that his decision to write a novel cannot be considered to be an heroic existentialist project. What Roquentin is doing, according to Hewitt, "is confusing two totally separate categories: the Platonic realm of the work of art, and the real world in which he has to live"²¹

It is possible, however, to go one step further in an attempt to free Roquentin from the grip not so much of his author but of the philosophical interpretation of this author's protagonist. Hewitt clearly establishes that the psychological and the fictional are there,

running parallel to the existential. The importance of the tableau of the Negro and the white woman at the train station lies in the proof that it brings that these two worlds can be synthesised. It is clear that from the very outset, with the *exergue* and "Editors' Note", Sartre is leaving the reader in little doubt that what he has in his hands is a novel and that Roquentin is a protagonist in all that that entails. Indeed, Hewitt points out that the "Editors' Note" draws on an eighteenth-century convention and that it is too "hackneyed" to dupe the reader.²² It is quite possible to suggest that there is a more precise instance of intertextuality at work:

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

We think it our duty to warn the public that, in spite of the title of this work and of what the editor says about it in his preface, we cannot guarantee its authenticity as a collection of letters: we have in fact, very good reason to believe that it is only a novel.²³

This note is the preface to Laclos's *Les Liaisons dangereuses*. If *Nausea* begins, be it consciously or unconsciously (i.e. under the pen of Sartre or Roquentin), not only in a general literary tradition but, more specifically, within a collection of fake letters, it is not unreasonable to suggest that Roquentin himself is—quite literally—a man of letters. His initial interest in and, indeed, dependence upon Rollebon, and his later decision to kill him off, are explained by the fact that Adhémar de Rollebon (A.R.) only exists through a series of fake letters. Antoine Roquentin (A.R.) is born in Rollebon's letters; Rollebon is, therefore, Roquentin's literary father. His mother, too, can be found in letters about Rollebon: "In March 1820 he [Rollebon] married Mademoiselle de Roquelaure, a very beautiful girl of eighteen".²⁴ Even Rollebon's physiognomy recalls Roquentin: "Monsieur de Dangerville used to say that with all that blue and white he looked like a *Roquefort* cheese".²⁵

Despite the fact that Rollebon, who was ugly and yet attractive to women, appears to be a perfect role model for a character whose own ugliness has not proven sufficiently endearing to retain the woman he loves, Roquentin declares a need to make him more real. Describing his history of the Marquis, he writes:

Slow, lazy, sulky, the facts adapt themselves at a pinch to the order I wish to give them, but it remains outside of them. I have the impression of doing a work of pure imagination. And even so, I am certain that characters in a novel would appear more realistic, or in any case would be more amusing.²⁶

Nausea here challenges the very concepts of reality. Roquentin is not only suggesting that to make Rollebon more real he would need to fictionalise him; he is also admitting that he is "certain" that he knows what it would feel like to be in a novel. When he later cuts his hand as a response to this "nausea of the hands", that is the revelation of the true nature of his existence; the hand is lying over his Rollebon manuscript: "I put my left hand on the pad and I jab the knife into the palm."²⁷ His blood spills onto the paper. Couched in the terms of existentialist theory, his past ceases to exist even as his blood dries. Within the pages of *Nausea*, however, the white pages of the pad are a *mise en abyme*: in this novel within a novel, Roquentin stabs the hand that is writing the story of his literary father:

... I look with a feeling of satisfaction at the white paper, where, across the lines I wrote a little while ago, there is this little pool of blood which has stopped being me. Four lines on a white paper, a splash of blood, together that makes a beautiful memory. I must write underneath it: "That day I gave up writing my book about the Marquis de Rollebon."²⁸

This memory becomes a memorial. The suspicions of paedophilia that run as a *leitmotif* through the novel are joined by this patricide. He kills his father that he may live; more precisely, he wishes to become the protagonist in his own novel. The autonomy he desires is as writer of his own tale. His blood and the words of *Nausea* are one. In terms of *Nausea* as novel, this is as real as the contingency out there, beyond the pages. Roquentin's desire to write a novel, whilst an assertion of independence, is not an existentialist project; it is a plot line in a novel that is already under way. Anny is bound into this desire to write. She is the romance at the very centre of this would-be love story. In this respect, she is inextricably linked to *Some of These Days*, the melancholy of the novel owing as much to the lines of the song as to Freud's essay ("When her honey heard this melancholy news"). In order to recover Anny, Roquentin must write his tale along the same lines: the novel thus builds towards the moment when he must himself take the train.

Anny acts in the text as a symbol of the search not simply for love but for a love story. It is a mention of Anny that precedes the encounter of the woman and the Negro. Inasmuch as she is more symbol than woman, it is interesting that her name is also preceded by a sexual reference. The *patronne* is set up in the text as the very

antithesis of Anny, a being-in-itself and a trap for a man struggling with his existence. The description of the act itself is masked, however, Anny's name intervening at the very last moment to blot out the reality of the sexual encounter (as if her essence can save Roquentin from the *vagina dentata*).

"... If you don't mind, I'll keep my stockings on."

In the past—even long after she had left me—I used to think about Anny.²⁹

According to the Freudian scheme, leg or foot fetishism—as portrayed here by the *patronne*'s suggestion that she keep her stockings on—symbolises a loss (of the phallic woman).

... The subject's interest comes to a halt half-way, as it were; it is as though the last impression before the uncanny and traumatic one is retained as a fetish. Thus the foot or shoe owes its preference as a fetish—or part of it—to the circumstance that the inquisitive boy peered at the woman's genitals from below, from her legs up; fur and velvet—as has long been suspected—are a fixation of the sight of the pubic hair, which should have been followed by the longed-for sight of the female member; pieces of underclothing, which are so often chosen as a fetish, crystallize the moment of undressing, the last moment in which the woman could still be regarded as phallic.³⁰

Anny is a symbol, standing for absence just as she functions as a screen memory to mask it. She is a focal point that keeps the novel on the straight and narrow.

This instance of fetishism in the novel is not isolated. Sex with the *patronne* again brings on a surrealist nightmare in which her genitals are transformed into a wild garden:

The broad leaves were black with animals. Behind the cacti and the Barbary fig trees, the Velleda of the municipal park was pointing to her sex. "This park smells of vomit," I shouted.

"I didn't want to wake you up," said the patronne, "but I ... have to go down to attend to the customers from the Paris train."³¹

The scene that immediately follows has Roquentin spanking Maurice Barrès. Once he has complained that he has been spending too much time recounting his dreams, Roquentin gets out of bed and follows

the *patronne* downstairs. By a curious juxtaposition, "going down to attend to the customers from the Paris train" has brought a letter from Anny. Once again, a symbol of Anny/the symbolic Anny has brought the novel back to the love story, masking existence and restoring order to the narrative. The letter also appears to have arrived by train: the mark of *Some of These Days*.

The culmination of the text's fetishism occurs immediately after the meeting with Anny in Paris. Roquentin finds himself at last on the railway platform, a lonely Negro waiting for a woman to come back to him and for the words of the song to write themselves into his novel.

The Gare d'Orsay clock struck five, I was looking at the pictures in a book entitled *The Doctor with the Whip*. There wasn't much variety about them: in most of them a tall bearded man was brandishing a riding whip above huge naked rumps. As soon as I realized it was five o'clock I threw the book back on the rest and I jumped into a taxi, which took me to the Gare Saint-Lazare.

I walked up and down the platform for about twenty minutes, then I saw them. She was wearing a heavy fur coat which made her look like a lady. And a short veil.¹²

This is the epicentre of the novel. This is *Some of These Days*. In this extract, it is the song itself that is masked by a heavily underscored example of fetishism. The opening bars are symbolised by the notes of the striking clock. Roquentin finally enters the song, realising that his girlie is leaving him; he rushes down to the station (here, another station) and watches her board a train with another man. Just as the song screens its true identity at the moment of climax, Anny, too, is robed in a clear fetish symbol: a fur coat. Anny the symbol, when clothed in all the trappings of a screen memory, at last lives up to what she represents. All symbol, she finally looks like a lady. The short veil that she wears adds a little mourning to Roquentin's melancholia whilst the tall, bearded man reminds the reader of the importance of Freud's role behind the lines. Anny's departure is a perfect moment: from this point on the novel will become absorbed with its own completion. The song that has just synthesised so perfectly with the novel will henceforth exist in name only, its refrain being repeated to fade.

The fetishisation of the song is symbolic of the existential crisis faced by Roquentin the writer: the story that is the being-for-itself of the novel will not admit its own solidification onto paper form; the very text

of which the novel must be made is a concretisation in the past, a being in-itself. The writing process itself—the *mise en situation* of the concept at the very heart of the novel—is self-alienating. Fetishisation offers itself to Sartre/Roquentin as a possible solution. The fetish allows mediation between the essence, or story, behind the novel and the existent, or text. Ellen Lee McCallum, in her book *Object Lessons: How to do Things with Fetishism*, describes the way in which fetishism, which she describes as the “unique intersection of desire and knowledge”,³³ allows a negotiation between otherwise incompatible terms:

[More importantly] in the way that it brings together peculiarly modern anxieties—especially those about sexuality, gender, belief, and knowledge—fetishism reveals how our basic categories for interpreting the world have been reduced to binary and mutually exclusive terms.

[Indeed,] the central conflict of fetishism, whatever form it may take (commodity, sexual, anthropological) is between belief and knowledge; this conflict necessarily engenders competing interpretations of the world, particularly because it is the belief that the fetishist acts upon, not the knowledge alone. In this light the fetishist could be construed as the prototype of the political activist, acting on a belief about how things should be rather than on a knowledge of how the world really is.³⁴

In this way, *Some of These Days* lies at the heart of the novel not despite, but by virtue of its absence. This absence, upon which the fetish is predicated, is such that the screen memory becomes both veil and indicator of the truth.

As the text draws, or is written, to its conclusion, the voice of the Negress dominates the narrative; this essential being becomes the voice for Roquentin’s existentialist treatise:

*It [this little diamond pain] does not exist. ... It does not exist, since it has nothing superfluous: it is all the rest which is superfluous in relation to it. It is.*³⁵

A look at the original French reveals that this pain, so poignant in its absence from immediate reality, is feminine. The further the text continues with this repetition of the feminine personal pronoun, the clearer the reference to Anny—the *elle* of the text—becomes:

*Elle [cette petite douleur de diamant] n'existe pas. ... Elle n'existe pas, puisqu'elle n'a rien de trop: c'est tout le reste qui est de trop par rapport à elle. Elle est.*³⁶

Physically absent, Anny is, at least, grammatically present.

Just as the voice of *Some of These Days* operates as a toast to an absent love, when Roquentin visits the textually present Anny she becomes a symbol for the song. Even as he proclaims his love for the woman before him, it is a voice that acts as the trigger:

"... I've changed down to the whites of my eyes."

Down to the whites of my eyes ... What is it then which, in her voice, has just stirred me? In any case, all of a sudden, I gave a start. I have stopped looking for a vanished Anny. It's this girl here, this fat girl with a ruined look who moves me and whom I love.¹⁷

Roquentin's claim to love this existent Anny must itself be put into its narrative context. Not only is it followed by the second fetishised symbol of *Some of These Days*, it is also part of a whole trip to Paris that can readily be interpreted as a dream. The train that takes Roquentin to Paris is notable (symbolic) in its absence; it is sign-posted by the short diary entry that mediates between the strong narrative use of the plain future (the tense of authorial power: *I shall be in Paris as I am writing this novel*) and the opening of Anny's door:

By 1 March, at the latest, I shall be permanently installed in Paris.

Friday

At the Rendez-vous des Cheminots. My train leaves in twenty minutes. The gramophone. Strong feeling of adventure.

Saturday

Anny opens the door to me, in a long black dress.¹⁸

Anny is dreamt into the text; or rather the text moves into a dream sequence. The gramophone clarifies the sentence that precedes it: the feeling of adventure, the feeling of recounting a tale, is synonymous with the tale itself, i.e. *Some of These Days*. Anny is present in the only way she can be: as a dream-woman. As such, she becomes the centre of the text's Surrealism. As has already been indicated, the synthesis of Surrealism and Existentialism can only be achieved through an absent mediator, be it fetishism or parody. The train sequence that brings *Some of These Days* to the surface of the text is convulsive inasmuch as the song is simultaneously present and absent. It is convulsive, too, because it draws on André Breton's seminal surrealist prose work, *Nadja*, in which a train symbolises the shuddering and ineffable nature of beauty:

It [beauty] is like a train that surges continuously at Gare de Lyon and which I know is never going to leave, that it has not left. It is made of bursts, many of which have hardly any importance, but which we know are destined to lead to one *Burst* that will have.³⁹

Nadja, intertextually present in Anny's recollection of leaping from a third-floor window (a *leitmotif* in Breton's text), is an attempt to write that which cannot exist. The reconciliation of surging movement and immobility becomes the image of essential love. Through the fetishisation of this image and the symbol of *Some of These Days*, Roquentin manages to maintain at the unconscious level what Breton has to bring into the conscious realm to explain.

The crisis that is *Nausea* may well be said to lie in this dilemma: Roquentin must assume his being-for-other-people in order to write a novel. The meaning of his text will depend ineluctably upon the intervention of his readers. He will be forever rewritten with each reread of his text. The very act of writing is a death of the being-for-itself. Perhaps Hewitt is right to suggest that the text is "open-ended".⁴⁰ Its very circularity (the text begins with an indicator of its own fictionality—the "Editors' note"—and closes with a self-consciously literary line) exposes the novel to an immediate reread that will, in turn, offer potential for a different interpretation. This is what Anny cannot stand. For her, a privileged situation is one that is defined by her, a scene set in which actors must play. The success of the situation depends on the actors' ability to follow stage directions to which they have no direct access. For such a situation to become a perfect moment, the actor must perform the version as authorised by Anny. This is a plea for authorial power, which she realises cannot be materialised. For Roquentin, an adventure is subtly different: for an event to become an adventure it must be recounted. Whilst Anny's perfection depends on the future, Roquentin's hinges on the past. In other words, for a text to become real, it needs to be read. According to such a reading, Roquentin may perhaps be considered a post-modernist.

With its final line ("The yard of the New Station smells strongly of damp wood: tomorrow it will rain over Bouville."), *Nausea* becomes what it is. This line of pure romance is not merely a line from a romance novel but an expression of essential novel. The French term for a piece of pulp fiction, *un roman de gare*, gives a new meaning to this most mis-/re-understood of novels: *Nausea* is a *roman de gare*: it is a novel about a railway station.

Notes

- 1 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Nausea*, trans. Robert Baldick (London: Penguin, 1965), p. vii (page numbers refer to the 2000 edition).
- 2 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Nausea*, trans. Lloyd Alexander (New York: New Direction, 1964), p. xi.
- 3 Iris Murdoch, *Sartre: Romantic Rationalist* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1989), p. 12.
- 4 Jacques Deguy, *La Nausée de Jean-Paul Sartre* (Paris: Gallimard, 1993), p. 12.
- 5 Serge Doubrovsky, *Autobiographiques: de Corneille à Sartre* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1988).
- 6 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Nausea*, p. 238 (this and all future references are to the Penguin 2000 edition).
- 7 "Et si Roquentin ne se souvenait plus d'avoir regardé la mer ou le galet, parce qu'il regardait les *gamins*? Et si l'objet (refoulé) du désir se livrait par métonymie, glissait du «galet» aux *gamins*? Non seulement sur le plan de la signification, mais de la signification, la «nausée des mains» traverse évidemment les «*gamins*», c'est-à-dire la *main des gars*. Comme l'expérience du «galet» se rassure de trouver les *gars laids*." Serge Doubrovsky, quoted as an appendix to Jacques Deguy's essay on *Nausea*, *La Nausée de Jean-Paul Sartre*, p. 217 (author's own translation and notes).
- 8 *Nausea*, p. 45. The whole sado-masochistic nature of rapports in Sartre's fiction has been analysed, notably by Suzanne Lilar in *À propos de Sartre et de l'amour* (Paris: Gallimard, 1967) and Andrew Leak in *The Perverted Consciousness: Sexuality and Sartre* (London: Macmillan, 1989).
- 9 *Nausea*, p. 46.
- 10 *Nausea*, p. 50.
- 11 *Nausea*, pp. 49-50.
- 12 *Nausea*, pp. 45-46. At another point in the text, a wooden cut-out waiter is cast in a similar mould, both hands full.
- 13 *Nausea*, p. 17.
- 14 *Nausea*, p. 18.
- 15 As revealed by such case studies as Freud's account of the Wolf Man, in which a dream of being watched by wolves masks a case of scopophilia or of "having watched".
- 16 These photos can be found in *Man Ray* (Berlin: Benedikt Taschen, 1992), p. 32 and p. 33 respectively.
- 17 Paris: Bibliothèque humoristique, 1912.
- 18 Author's transcription of Sophie Tucker singing *Some of These Days*, second and final verse (Shelton Brooks, 1910).

- 19 Nicholas Hewitt, "Looking for Annie": Sartre's *La Nausée* and the Inter-War Years", in *Journal of European Studies*, vol. 12 (1982), pp. 96-112 (p. 105).
- 20 Nicholas Hewitt, "Looking for Annie", p. 105.
- 21 Nicholas Hewitt, "Looking for Annie", p. 103.
- 22 Nicholas Hewitt, "Looking for Annie", p. 99.
- 23 Pierre Choderlos de Laclos, *Les Liaisons dangereuses*, trans. P.W.K. Stone (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961). It should be pointed out that the translation "Publisher" is a closer translation than "editor" of the French *éditeur*. It should be noted, too, that the French text of *Les Liaisons dangereuses* also uses the term *avvertissement*, as does *La Nausée*, and not, as Hewitt points out, the more usual term *avis*. This serves to join the two texts yet more closely together.
- 24 *Nausea*, p. 24 (author's italics).
- 25 *Nausea*, p. 32 (author's italics).
- 26 *Nausea*, p. 26.
- 27 *Nausea*, p. 145.
- 28 *Nausea*, pp. 145-146.
- 29 *Nausea*, p. 17.
- 30 Sigmund Freud, "Fetishism" in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol.21 (London: Hogarth Press, 1953-1975), pp. 147-157 (p. 155).
- 31 *Nausea*, p. 89.
- 32 *Nausea*, p. 220.
- 33 Ellen Lee McCallum, *Object Lessons: How to do Things with Fetishism* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1999), p. xii.
- 34 Ellen Lee McCallum, *Object Lessons*, p. xii & xvi.
- 35 *Nausea*, p. 248.
- 36 Jean-Paul Sartre, *La Nausée* (Paris: Gallimard, 1938), p. 245-246 (2002 edition).
- 37 *Nausea*, p. 205.
- 38 *Nausea*, p. 194.
- 39 Author's own translation. "Elle [la beauté] est comme un train qui bondit sans cesse dans la Gare de Lyon et dont je sais qu'il ne va jamais partir, qu'il n'est pas parti. Elle est faite de saccades, dont beaucoup n'ont guère d'importance, mais que nous savons destinées à amener une *Saccade*, qui en a." André Breton, *Nadja* (Paris, Gallimard, 1994), p.214 (first published in France in 1928).
- 40 Nicholas Hewitt, "Looking for Annie", p. 10.