**Nausea** – Jean-Paul Satre

Summary

*Nausea* is about a man, Antoine Roquentin, who is strangely detached from the world finds himself afflicted with a kind of recurring condition he can only describe as the Nausea. It seems to affect his senses or at least his sensory interpretation of the external world. Although, he is the one with the sensation, he has the strange feeling that this it is in fact the world which is affected.

He tries to resist the feeling, burden, of his own existence but towards the end of the book, the Nausea grips him for a longer period of time and he comes to understand what it is. It is caused by the raw nakedness of existence, his existence and the existence of all the objects around him. At first, it overwhelms him but he comes to terms with it and decides to move to London.

He used to have a girlfriend, Anny, whom he meets again later in the book, after his final nausea experience. She has also changed. She used to be obsessed with creating, what she called, ‘perfect moments.’ These were orchestrated and scripted like plays where everyone and everything had to be in its place and say its lines in the right way at the right time.

Memorable Moments

* pg 39, 56 - *Reflections on ‘adventure’* – for anything to become an adventure you must recount it from the beginning. People try to live their lives as though they were telling a story, but you have to choose; live or tell. You can’t do both, because nothing happens while you live; the scenery changes, people come in and go out, that’s all. There are no beginnings.

Adventure does not come from events, it comes from the way moments are linked together. It occurs when you notice time passing and you feel that each instant leads to another which leads to another, and so on. But you incorrectly attribute this property to events which occur in these instants.

* pg 68 – *Sleepliving* – people live out their lives half-asleep, going through the motions without knowing why and then when they get to 40, they christen their obstinacies and a few proverbs with the name of experience. They cling to their past as if it has not been lost.
* pg 76-78 – *Non-reality* – The very existence of objects seems subject to doubt. Nothing seems true, like it was all cardboard scenery which could be removed quickly. Roquentin feels that as long as he is looking at the objects, they will stay as they are. If he looks away, anything could happen.
* pg 84 – *Existence* – he realises that he doesn’t have any right to exist. He had appeared by chance, and existed like a stone, a plant or a microbe.
* pg 95-96 – *The Present* – everywhere he looks, he sees the present. The present is what exists, and all that is not present does not exist. The past in particular, does not exist. Things are exactly as they appear to be and there is nothing behind them.
* pg 99 – *Thought* – the body lives by itself once it starts but thought – we are the ones who continue this and it is this, thinking, which gives us the feeling of existing. Our thoughts are us; that’s why we can’t stop. We exist because we think and we can’t stop ourselves from thinking.
* pg 111 – *Comedy* – everybody is busy eating. They all have their own personal tasks to keep them from noticing that they exist. Each person believes himself indispensable to something or someone. They are eating to maintain their existence but they don’t even notice it and they don’t realise that there is nothing, no reason for existing.
* pg 121 – *Being a man* – the Self-Taught Man points out that it’s difficult to be a man. It needs courage because the next instant may be the moment of your death. To be able to smile while knowing this is true courage.
* pg 120-134 – the Nausea – the moment when Roquentin realises what the Nausea is; his awareness of his own existence and that the world exists.

Things are divorced from their names, they are just there, nothing more. Names, methods of using things, points of reference… they are all just things humans have invented.

Usually, existence hides itself. It is all around us, it is us, but you can never touch it.

The individuality of things disappeared (it was just an illusion) and left behind it just a mass of things, all in disorder – naked. The only relationship between things was, what Roquentin calls ‘in the way.’ Even his death, would be ‘in the way’ through his corpse. Once you exist you are in the way for eternity.

There is no halfway house between existence and non-existence. If you exist, you exist all the way.

Any movement or event is only absurd by relation, but things are just irreducibly absurd.

The world of explanation and reason is not the world of existence. A circle is not absurd, but a circle doesn’t exist. You can never pass from function to existence. Objects exist below all explanation. Colours, tastes, smells… none of them are real.

The essential thing is contingency. You cannot define existence as necessary. Contingency is the absolute, the perfect free gift.

No one has any rights; they are entirely free.

Even the idea of the passage of time is an invention of man.

As the branches moved they suddenly existed, then ceased to exist, only to suddenly exist once more. Existence is without memory.

Willpower and the struggle for life are false. Nothing wants to exist, they can’t help themselves.

You can’t wonder where all of this existence came from because the question makes no sense. There had been nothing before it. There had never been a moment when it couldn’t have existed. The idea of nothingness was just an idea in his head; it hadn’t come before existence, it was an existence like many others.

* Pg 146-152 - *Anny* – Anny identified what she called ‘privileged situations,’ they were the scenes that people painted. Because they were painted, they must have been special in some way. To be king was a privileged situation; to die was as well. In each privileged situation there are certain acts, attitudes, words which have to done, taken and spoken – and others which are forbidden. The situation is the material – it demands exploitation, it needs to be transformed into perfect moments.

Roquentin realises that he and Anny have lost the same illusions, he realised that there are no adventures and she realised there are no perfect moments.

Anny says she ‘outlives herself.’ This is what happens, what you have to do, once you realise the truth of existence.

She asks for any reasons for living but all art, statues, music… they are useless. Even acting, which is all about creating perfect moments doesn’t work because you end up presenting the audience with a perfect moment, but even they didn’t live it and the actor also never lives it. In the end, even for an actor, perfect moments don’t exist.

* pg 167 – Sartre describes the Self-Taught Man, who has just been caught molesting a pair of boys, as unable to react in any way other than denial because he has to play his part to the end
* pg 169 – As Roquentin is about to leave Bouville, he savours the oblivion he has fallen into – being between two cities; he has escaped the burden of existence.