Chapter IV
Philosophical themes are explicable through literature if they serve as the foundation of literary works. Many of Sartre's themes serve this purpose. The need to expose these notions through the aesthetic medium of literature is that it is the media accessible to everyone.

Sartre considers literature as communication. Man, according to him, is an animal engrossed in literature. In an interview in 1960 he said: "I shall hold one conviction, which I shall never relinquish: to write is a need for everyone. It is the highest form of communication."¹

Literature is communication in the sense that the writer never publishes anything that is not for others. In Sartre's view one very significant relationship is the relation between writing and reading. Here the requirement of a bilateral dialectic is salient, for the attempt on the part of the reader is to understand what he reads and to
interact with the writer's reflective attempt to make himself understood. As Sartre remarks

Man is nothing else but what he purposes, he exists only insofar as he realizes himself, he is therefore nothing else but sum of his actions, nothing else but what his life is.

To put this in different words, if the person is a writer, the totality of his writings makes his life. The literary process having an intimate involvement between the writer and reader becomes bilaterally reflexive as well as interactive. Thus it becomes communicative in nature. In *Saint Genet* Sartre declares that understanding man is his passion. The bulk of his exquisite literary ventures testifies to this specific orientation.

This chapter is an attempt to illustrate how Sartre underlines the importance of human freedom and the absurdities if it were a lack through his literary works.

4.1. Reflections on Freedom and Facticity in *Words* and *Nausea*

Sartre's autobiography, *Words* (1963) explores his childhood and its meaning for him. It elucidates his initial choice of being a writer over any other profession,
his early immersion in the world of books, his almost total isolation from other children until the age of ten and the remoteness of his family from everyday concerns.

In this work Sartre clearly explains his commitment to writing, his illusions about saving himself through writing. About his childhood days he writes:

I never looked for plants or threw stones at birds. But books were my birds, and my pets, my stable, and my countryside.  

These words elucidate his fundamental choice to live in the company of books rather than in the midst of anything else. Feeling his own "nothingness" and his own "contingency," the terms he used frequently in his philosophical and literary works, Sartre's sole concern is to "save" himself from his feeling of nothingness and contingency. Towards the end of the Words he writes:

I have never seen myself as the happy owner of a 'talent': my one concern was to save myself nothing in my hands, nothing in my pockets through work and faith.

In the Words writing appears not as the experience of having to choose what should be written and published,
but as the exalted experience of verbal creation for which one is responsible. In fact the major theme of the *Words* is the birth of a literary vocation. By writing Sartre means experiencing the soul and the speed with which the soul creates an aesthetic product.

Though Sartre's elucidation of freedom is not clearly explicit in his work, *Words*, the significance of this work lies in the fact that against all odds, the child seeks refuge in the world of letters and chooses to be there for days to come, thus in a way saving himself from his own nothingness and contingency and discovering the meaningfulness of his existence. It must be noted that as a descriptive ontologist, Sartre tries to define freedom as choosing a goal from various alternatives given in a particular existential situation. In the *Words*, the child, Sartre himself, after isolating himself from everything else, chooses to become a writer, thus unknowingly making use of his freedom.

It can be said that in the novel *Nausea* too Sartre deals with the theme of existential alienation. This work is no novel in the ordinary sense. It is in the form of
diary notes of Antoine Roquentin. It aims at the
denouncement of existence, but in vain. Overpowered by the
nauseating experience of his existence, Roquentin writes:

Existence is not something which allows itself to
be thought of from a distance; it has to invade
you suddenly, pounce upon you, weigh heavily on
your heart like a huge motionless animal - or else
there is nothing left at all.

This explicates Roquentin's encounter with his own
existence, existence suffocates him with a feeling that it
is a burden he has to face through out his life. He longs
for freedom from this engulfing and nauseating feeling of
existence against the is-ness of all objects and the
existence of his fellowman.

Roquentin is a man crushed by the world, a man
unable to confront his own existence. His adversary is
gluey existence, the enveloping world which nauseates him.
It fills him with a sense of absurdity. To him existence is
de trop, superfluous, absurd. Experiencing acute anguish
in the face of the gulf which segregates him from the world
- the gulf which Sartre considers as freedom - he attempts
to escape into the midst of the in-itself, into the midst of
objects which confront him with silent and stubborn
hostility. But this is in vain, for there arises in his consciousness a horrible, oppressive fear of "being-there" of things. In a deep sense of despair he writes:

We were a heap of existents inconvinced, embarrassed by ourselves, we hadn't the slightest reason for being there, any one of us, each existent, embarrassed, vaguely ill at ease, felt superfluous in relation to others.

In *Nausea*, Roquentin feels the abyss of nothingness generated by freedom. He strives to elude the contingency of the present and the indefiniteness of the future by shutting himself in an immutable, determining past. He devotes himself to reconstruct the life of a certain Marquis de Rollebon, and this attempt to resurrect a frozen past has become his whole reason for existence. It has provided him with an alibi that protects him from an abrupt fall into an inconsistent present that is constantly slipping away from him. In choosing consciously to be in the past, he runs away from his freedom.

To escape from the enveloping, nauseating, feeling of existence, he decides to do a work of pure imagination. But later on he discovers it to be impossible to resurrect the past in the present through memories. He admits: "I
build my memories with my present, I am rejected, abandoned in the present. I try in vain to rejoin the past: I cannot escape from myself."^9

I would like to remark that Roquentin's awareness of his radical contingency signals his liberation, for if he is contingent it means that he owes his existence only to himself, he is but what he wants to be in his life. Therefore he is free. But since he is free only within a given situation, he must take his freedom upon himself by an act of free will. Sartre reminds us: "man is freedom." Man's freedom lies in choosing a goal from different alternatives thrown open to him. Success is not what matters in this choosing of the goal. This is what Roquentin failed to accept in his life.

Most of Sartre's characters experience their absolute loneliness on account of the impossibility of penetrating someone else's consciousness. The result is their total alienation. Consider for example Roquentin, the lead character in *Nausea*. Most often he deliberately confines himself within his subjectivity. He abhors all immediate
contacts. He categorically denies any manifestation of complicity with others through his deliberate choice of solitude. It remains a notable fact that this step marks the first sign of Roquentin's liberation. But subsequently, instead of concretely assuming his condition as a free man, he paralyzes his freedom, transforming it into an object, inert and useless, endowed with the opacity of the in-itself.

Prisoner of his abstract ideologies, Roquentin is guilty of bad faith by completely abdicating an aspect of his existence, viz. his being-in-the-world and confining himself in the circularity of his own self. He makes use of his estranged condition the starting point of a total, inauthentic and deliberate alienation instead of taking it as the source of an ever-renewed transcendence. The freedom which we possess will appear only as a mode of determinism if we do not make it our freedom, if we do not always strive to make ourselves free.

4.2. Sartre's Treatment of Freedom In The Wall and No Exit

The short story The Wall and the play No Exit are considered to be probably the best illustrations of Sartre's
treatment of freedom. *The Wall* begins in the background of the Spanish civil war and the theme focusses on three characters: Pablo, Tom and Juan, who are accused of anarchy and they await execution. Apart from the experiences of freedom and its limitations, viz. facticities, this exquisite short story handles various existentialistic themes of Sartre. They include among others the fundamentals of the Sartrean treatment of intersubjectivity, the examination of death, and the life through the careful characterization and remarkable account of the existential situations within the story.

The accused are constantly confronted with anguish, threatened by the verdict of execution and chocked by the unexpected turn of events in their lives. They are doomed in despair because they have no other choice but to be there and face the fatal consequences of their lives. Though Sartre advocates absolute freedom of the for-itself, *The Wall* presents a freedom with its limitations and restrictions. In the story, the circumstances, the fellow beings and the fear of death limit the freedom of the accused.
The wall in the courtyard of the cell, from which the story gets its title, is the symbol of freedom with its restrictions. It is best illustrated through Tom's description of his last minutes, his plight "to get inside the wall with every ounce of strength he had though he knows that the wall will stay like a nightmare,"\textsuperscript{10} denying him his freedom.

Pablo, the protagonist in the story is conscious of his limitations to freedom, i.e. his "future is shut like a bag and yet everything inside it was unfinished."\textsuperscript{11} This indicates that Pablo, if allowed to live, has numerous (future) possibilities which may provide him with a meaningful existence.

There is only one instance in the story when one of the characters reiterates Sartre's notion of freedom, i.e. freedom of choice. This is when Pablo opts to die in order to save the life of his leader, Ramon Gris. Rest of the time, the others are incapable of recognizing the freedom inherent in them.

Characters presented in The Wall are constantly confronted with the absurdities of life - false accusations,
civil war, arrest, imprisonment, anticipation of execution and above all the threatening image of approaching death. Each adversary reminds them only of the freedom which lies just a wall behind, within reach, but at the cost of the life of their beloved comrade. In the end Pablo, in a sense, makes use of his freedom (mockingly) in an attempt to annoy the militia but ultimately ends up in experiencing his own personal freedom, unknowingly at the cost of the life of Ramon Gris. Sartre here shows how irony can play its role in the freedom of the for-itself, saving one life while dooming that of the other's.

An almost similar treatment of freedom is presented in his very popular and repeatedly enacted play No Exit. It presents an unusual, unknown, condemned world - the hell - a world from where no one can exit, hence the name of the play, where three persons meet each other after their death. The hell pictured here is a unique place of absurdities, a place where there is no torture or a torture-chamber, a place which gives no allowance to human dignity.

Though the three characters Garcin, Inez and Estelle are already dead, they view their 'present life' in
the hell as something like an eternal life. As the time
tickle by they become aware of the fact that each one of
them is condemned to be there in the disturbing presence of
the other for ever. This realization leads them to another
irrefutable fact, viz. the hell is nothing but the other. 12
This hell represents or symbolizes the limitation to human
freedom. Freedom simply ceases to be there.

All characters in the play have some common
features. They have not fully recovered from the impact of
their earthly lives, all of them try to justify their way of
life on the earth, all of them are victims of bad faith,
each tries to "throw dust on the other's eye." As Inez
remarks all are "criminals," "all tarred with the same
brush," all "damned souls." 13

The play is set in such a manner that the
characters fail to establish a stable relation among
themselves. Bad faith, pride, possessiveness, personal
preferences and expectations of each individual clash with
those of the others. Above all, the past life on the earth
haunts them giving no room for love or trust. Instead
indifference, hatred, suspicion jealousy and the like creep
in their attitude. One tries to free oneself from the grip of the other. But where no night falls or tears roll, where sleep remains an impossibility, there they are doomed for ever without any possible exit towards the outside world. Herein lies the significance of the title of the play, No Exit.

It seems inappropriate on the part of Sartre, the champion of human freedom, to picturize such a hell which represents human finitude especially when the hell does not stand for the hell of the Christian theology.

The five limitations of the freedom seen in No Exit include: (a) one's past, i.e. it is because of their past wicked deeds they are doomed in the hell; (b) place, i.e. the hell is supposed to be a place of all rejections and negativities; (c) environment, i.e. the hell represents a surrounding beyond human understanding; (d) the other, i.e. the characters of the play representing contradictory preferences; and finally, (e) death, i.e. they are already dead. The shadow of death already has a firm grip on their new existential condition - the existence in the hell.
However, it appears that this sort of the Sartrean outlook can be justified on two grounds. First, as a versatile writer, it is his individual freedom to create such a hell making use of his creative talent. Secondly, his acceptance of five limitations of freedom justifies such a conception of hell.

Both *The Wall* and *No Exit* commence with tragic situations and culminates in similar pathetic scenes. Sartre's portrayal of characters is unique in the sense that humaness evades them. They are victims of bad faith. They are incapable of making a compromise between their facticity and transcendence. The absence of satisfying, mutual and reciprocal human relationship is adversely portrayed. Sartre in his writings provides no room for love, care, trust, sympathy or any other positive human attitudes. He exposes mainly trapped feelings and complexities of personal relationship.

A reader of *No Exit* may take for granted that Sartre has created such an extreme situation to make us aware of how man himself becomes an obstruction to his freedom and how he becomes a limit to other's freedom as
well. By declaring that the other is hell, Sartre makes it clear to us that we need to guard our freedom and not to spoil it in relationship with the others.

Sartre never rules out the possibility of others' presence in the life of a self-conscious being, the for-itself. They exist in togetherness. One has relevance and significance only in the presence of the other. However, if interpersonal relationship gets sour, it is always advisable to make use of one's freedom to choose a goal not only in the face of his fellow being, but also in similar disturbed situations relating to one's past, place, environment or even when one is conscious of one's own death. This can be done by making use of one's choices and claiming responsibility for them.

4.3. An Exposition of Freedom and Facticity in The Flies

Sartre's play The Flies (1943) forcefully underscores the central theme of his infernal gospel of hatred and revolt. Sartre comments on this play:

I wanted to treat the tragedy of freedom as opposed to the tragedy of destiny. In other words, the theme of my play could be summarized as follows: "How does a man react when he has
committed an action for which he fully accepts the consequence and responsibility but which nevertheless appalls him?

The plot of the play is the modern variant of the Greek tale of Orestes who, as a small child, was taken away from his homeland, Argos, after Aegistheus, the tyrant king, had slain Orestes' father Agamemnon and married his mother Clytemnestra. As an adult Orestes returns to Argos, "as light as a feather, free from prejudice and superstition." In Argos, he experiences total alienation and exile and a kind of nausea invades his being, a nausea caused by an encroaching awareness of the emptiness, the unreality and the nothingness of his past life. Freedom has suddenly struck him. Brought up in the rarefied atmosphere of radical intellectualism, he longs for the sensuous promiscuity of things, for an immediate contact with real life.

Even before arriving at Argos, Orestes' teacher has, in a way, liberated his pupil from the bonds of love, faith and religion. This kind of liberation made it easy for Orestes to challenge the tyrannical hold which both Aegistheus and Zeus have had on the people's consciousness.
From an initial stage of lethargy Orestes, encouraged and aided by his sister Electra, fights against the prevailing, deep rooted prejudices.

Orestes then realizes that until the day of assuming this responsibility, he has not really lived his own life, i.e. he has never had that lived, existential experience. When he was forced to choose between obedience to the law of Zeus and rebellion against this law, he boldly chooses the latter against all odds. He declares:

If there were something I could do, something to give me the freedom of the city; if, even by a crime I could acquire their memories, their hopes and fears and fill with these the void within me, yes, even if I had to kill my own mother.

Aegistheus, the tyrant, becomes so terrified of Orestes' freedom that he is hesitant to lay hands on Orestes. He is convinced: "A free man in a city like Argos acts like a plague-spot. He will have the power to infect his whole kingdom and bring king's work to nothing." This conviction is also shared by Zeus, the God of the people, who admits: "Once freedom lights its beacon in a man's heart even the gods are powerless against him."
Orestes dedicates himself to the task of liberating the people of Argos from evil and injustice which reign over them, from the burden of repentance for a crime they never committed. Even after committing the double murder of the tyrant and his wife (who happens to be his mother) Orestes remains unrepentant. He challenges both God, Zeus, and the tyrant:

What do I care for Zeus? Justice is a matter between men, and I need no God to teach me it. It's right to stamp you (Aegistheus) out, like a foul brute you are, and to free the people of Argos from your evil influence. It is right to restore to them their sense of human dignity.

Orestes acknowledges that his freedom - which absolves him from any obligation to God, man or nature - is the precarious freedom of an exile. He whole heartedly accepts its burdens and responsibilities together with its privileges, i.e. he decides to take over all the crimes of the people of Argos and to heap on himself all their remorse. He conceives the burden of his crime as his freedom. This freedom enables him to challenge Zeus too:

Your whole universe is not enough to prove me wrong. You are the king of Gods, king of stone and stars, king of the waves of the sea. But you are not the king of man.
In another context Orestes remarks that, though Zeus created man, he created him free. God blundered in His making of man by making him free. 21

Here lies the power of man's freedom. Orestes declares loudly and firmly to Zeus: "Neither slave nor master. I am my freedom. No sooner had you created me than I ceased to be yours." 22 When freedom crushed down on him and swept him off his feet he admits to Zeus of his feeling:

Nature sprang back, my youth went with the wind, and I knew myself alone, utterly alone in the midst of this well-meaning little universe of yours. I was like a man who's lost his shadow. And there is nothing left in heaven, no right or wrong nor anyone to give me orders. 23

In Existentialism and Humanism, Sartre states: "man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself." 24 One finds the same attitude in The Files as well when Orestes says, "... I am doomed to have no other law but mine ... and every man must find out his own way." 25

It seems that Orestes has done exactly that, he has found his way. After removing the veil of ignorance from their minds, enabling them to see their life as such, Orestes wants the people of Argos to choose for themselves
because they are free to do so. This indicates that human freedom and life begins on the far side of despair.

It must be kept in mind that it is Orestes' freedom which makes him admit his crime. He points out:

I claim it as my own, for all to know, it is my glory, my life's work and you can neither punish me nor pity me... it was for your sake that I killed... As for your sins and your remorse, your night-fears, and the crime Aegistheus committed - all are mine, I take all upon me.

Thus by adorning himself with his subject's crimes and atonements, he sets them free from guilt. Orestes' action of bravery only helped the people to realize that they are free from their traumatical experiences of the past. By preferring to be a king without kingdom, without subjects, he transforms himself into a legendary hero. Instead of accepting the throne of Argos, instead of opting to fight along with his subjects and participating in their collective endeavour for liberation, he, in fact, abandons them to the anarchy of a kingdom without a king which they do not know how to handle, to the anguish of a radical emptiness they cannot fill.
Here Sartre is dealing with an act of solitary heroism aimed at personal salvation and not at the liberation of all. It can be justified on the ground that, one's freedom is the freedom to choose a goal. Orestes' goal is self-redemption. If at all he aimed at the redemption of all, he should not have left them all alone to face their future.

This kind of culmination goes against the Sartrean conviction that when one chooses, he chooses for all, and thus, responsible not only for himself but also for all others. Though, at first, Orestes becomes successful in removing the obstacles against the people's freedom, viz. the facticities, the tyrant and the environment stifled with black magic, exorcism of the dead, fake public confessions and so on by modifying each situation, he fails to utilize his freedom for the sake of the whole humanity. In turn, he makes use of his freedom in an act of self-assurance of his own individual freedom - that to ensure that he himself is a free individual. It turns out to be an act of extreme selfishness.
4.4. The Treatment of Freedom and Facticity in *Roads to Freedom*

*Roads to Freedom* is the title of the classic trilogy of Sartre which includes three works: *The Age of Reason*, *The Reprieve* and *Iron in the Soul*.

The first volume of the trilogy *The Age of Reason* covers two days in the life of Mathieu Delarue, a teacher of philosophy, and the lives of his acquaintances and friends. Mathieu is trying to raise money for the abortion of his partner, Marcelle. At the same time he is obsessed with a desire for personal freedom. Individual tragedies and happiness are etched against the Paris summer of 1938, with its night clubs, galleries, students and cafe-society. But behind all these there is a threat, only partly realized, of the coming catastrophe of the second world war.

There is always a confrontation between Mathieu, the teacher and the lover, and the Mathieu, who aspires to become a free individual. His consciousness reminds him: "Freedom, that is his secret garden."27 From his very childhood and throughout his teenage he had said to himself:
"I will be free," or rather he did not say anything else at all, but that was what he wanted to say.

Daniel, a friend of Mathieu, advises him that Marcelle's motherhood will serve as the superb opportunity to proclaim his freedom by marrying her and thereby changing his whole life. In Daniel's view freedom means: "to do the exact opposite of what one wants to do, to feel oneself becoming someone else." But Mathieu rejects this idea.

When Mathieu approaches his elder brother, Jacques, for financial assistance for the abortion, the latter agrees on one condition that Mathieu should marry Marcelle. But the institution of marriage finds no room in his principles of life. Mathieu reiterates his sole purpose of life, viz. to retain his freedom. Jacques then interprets his understanding of freedom as: "The freedom consisted in frankly confronting situations into which one had deliberately entered and accepting all responsibilities."

Jacques implores Mathieu to behave like a man who has attained the age of reason. On the other hand Mathieu
also rejects an invitation to join the party saying that he is not convinced of that kind of new life and newly found freedom. But self-deceptively he admits that only that life would provide him with salvation. Yet he is not free to free himself from the past.

Towards the end of the story, though Mathieu realizes that his freedom lies in marrying Marcelle, unexpectedly the relation gets spoiled irreparably, dooming with it his newly conceived freedom. Even in that moment he fails to recognize that he is free because in his opinion giving up the women once loved would not bring one freedom. The unnoticed fact is that he has indeed become free from the family ties and from the life which offered him nothing. He fails to acknowledge that he has attained the age of reason.

Mathieu, in fact, gets baffled by different ways in which the freedom is understood by various individuals in the story. Mathieu could not decide what sort of freedom he is searching for during his life time. He turns his back to the freedom within him and takes it as a burden with no purpose because this life offered him nothing but confusion.
and dissatisfaction. To add to the dismay there is always an uproar within him for not being natural like other fellow beings and he gets carried away by the freedom enjoyed by others.

Sartre warns us that those who ignore freedom and the consequent responsibilities will end up in nothing. Search nowhere for freedom for the for-itself is freedom itself. Man is condemned to be free and he has already attained the age of reason. Man has to accept this irrefutable phenomenon.

*The Reprieve* follows *The Age of Reason* in the trilogy and it includes many common characters. It surveys that heat-wave week in September 1938 when Europe waited tensely for the result of the Munich Conference. Sartre's technique of simultaneous descriptions of several scenes enables him to suggest the mood of Europe as it tried to blinker itself against the threat of war.

In the beginning of the work everybody including Mathieu was still waiting on the threshold of a dreadful future. All men are afraid. The situation is so tense that
a man who is afraid is not considered to be normal. The terror of the forthcoming war made their present and future adrift. They prepared themselves to partake in the war like a sheep led to the slaughter house. War will make man just a man without name and freedom. It robs him of his future, with days before him that could not be foreseen.

Consequently, Mathieu says that "I have lost my soul," in the sense that the soul which has helped him to choose his relation to his past life, before the commencement of the war, is lost. He then realizes that he is his own freedom, though he sought it far away: "liberty - I sought it far away: it was so near that I can't touch it: it is, in fact, myself. I am my own freedom." 

But since the present and future remain indefinite Mathieu feels: "I am nothing. I possess nothing ... freedom is exile and I am condemned to be free." He continues to reflect wearily: "I am free for nothing."

Many choices are thrown open before him: to go to war or to stay back or to run away from the war. Then in a moment of reflection, he convinces himself saying that acts
of those kinds would not call his freedom into play. He then decides to risk his freedom by choosing to participate in the war even if he gets himself killed - "Here lies his freedom, and how horrible it was."34

Here one's personal likings, commitments, principles, future and present life, freedom, and the like are fighting against a single force, viz. the war. Sartre here clearly shows how even in the most absurd situation a man can choose himself against all odds, never intending to attain success but determined to realize his freedom, though at first it seemed far away.

Finally, in Iron in the Soul, the third part of the trilogy, the same characters of The Age of Reason and The Reprieve face reality at last in the shape of defeat and occupation. Against a graphic narrative of the fall of France, Sartre weaves a tapestry of thoughts, feelings and incidents which portray the meaning of defeat. As in the earlier books, Mathieu is the most articulate character here as well capable of reflecting on the nature of freedom even as he fires his last rounds against the oncoming enemy.
The general impression in the minds of the characters is the same as that of Mathieu: "I didn't choose this war. I didn't choose this defeat."

But his insecure future compels him to "choose a rifle," to fight against the enemy acknowledging the fact that in an already lost war he is going to die for nothing: to die in order to demonstrate the impossibility of living.

Here Sartre exposes in various stages and different ways one's past, place, fellowmen, environment and one's death as limitations to one's freedom. Sartre reminds us through the trilogy that the tragedy inherent in the story is self-imposed by man. It tells us that the tragedy of the trilogy arises because one has ignored one's freedom, to modify an absurd situation irrespective of the limitations to one's freedom. It also results from one's lack of the sense of responsibility over the events one causes during one's life time.