FREEDOM AND COMMITMENT IN JEAN-PAUL SARTRE'S LES CHEMINS DE LA LIBERTE

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ABSTRACT

1. Introduction

(i) A summary of the main aspects of Sartre's philosophical theories, especially those which relate to the concepts of freedom and commitment.

(ii) A brief discussion of Sartre's theories on the novel.

2. L'Age de raison: "la vaine liberté"

(i) The importance of technique in advancing Sartre's aims in the novel; in this case, his use of the multiple point of view approach.

(ii) Initial discussion of the principal characters and their relevance to the main themes of the novel.

3. Le Sursis: "la liberté, en situation"

(i) Sartre's skilful use of the technique of "simultaneity."

(ii) Daniel Sereno and the significance of the "le regard" motif in advancing Sartre's aims.

(iii) Reasons why Le Sursis is more successful than L'Age de raison in terms of Sartre's aims.

4. La Mort dans l'âme: "La Liberté, c'est la terreur."

(i) Final examination of the characters and their progress (if any) along their "chemins de la liberté."

(ii) Mathieu's decision to stand and fight: discussion of the degree to which he has "succeeded" in terms of Sartre's philosophy.

(iii) Discussion of how Sartre divides this volume into virtually two separate novels, and the reasons why this is a serious weakness in the work.

5. Conclusion

(i) Sartre's reasons for abandoning Les Chemins de la liberté.

(ii) Sartre fails to observe his own rules about novel-writing.

(iii) Serious faults in Sartre's characterisation, especially his failure to create convincing characters, and the consequent lack of human interest in the novel.

(iv) Despite several impressive features (effective depiction of minor characters; technical skill; ability to depict an atmosphere of evil and decay), Les Chemins de la liberté falls considerably short of achieving Sartre's clearly defined aims.

INTRODUCTION

It should be pointed out that this is essentially a literary study, rather than a philosophical one. At the same time, it is obviously not possible to discuss any aspect of Sartre's work without taking his philosophical ideas into account. However, the intention here is not to attempt the daunting task of critically analysing one of the most complex - and important - philosophies of the twentieth century; rather, it is an effort to determine how successfully Sartre manages to convey, through the novel medium, that part of his philosophy which relates to the concepts of commitment and freedom.

The first section of this thesis is simply an attempt to outline the main tenets of "engagement" as a vital aspect of Sartre's existentialism. The philosophical ideas which form the basis of Les Chemins de la liberté are essentially those propounded in Sartre's first major theoretical work, L'Être et le néant. This is an important consideration, because there has been significant development and modification of Sartre's ideas since the publication of Les Chemins. The remaining sections of this study are a closer examination of Sartre's attempts in Les Chemins to communicate and illustrate his philosophy of commitment.

The object then is to determine how successful Sartre is in his aims. At the same time, his success - or lack of it - may not necessarily hinge totally on the intrinsic merits of the work itself, although this will obviously be a major consideration. If the conclusion is reached that Sartre is less successful than he could be, the possibility may have to be taken into account that this could stem from shortcomings or

contradictions within his own theories and not only from faults in the novels as works of literature.

CHAPTER 1

COMMITMENT AND FREEDOM

> "To understand Jean-Paul Sartre is to understand something important about the present time. As philosopher, as politician, and as novelist Sartre is profoundly and self-consciously contemporary; he has the style of the age." (1)

These words, written by Iris Murdoch in 1953, underline the necessity of placing all of Sartre's philosophical ideas, and indeed all of his literary works, in the context of the age in which they were conceived. Sartre's is essentially an active philosophy, one which attempts to indicate to men how they should respond to the particular situation in which they find themselves. It is for this reason that the concept of "engagement", or commitment, is the central, unifying feature of all of Sartre's work.

The turbulent period which gave rise to the philosophical "school" of existentialism, particularly its French manifestation, is clearly delineated through the three completed volumes, as well as the fourth unfinished fragment, of Les Chemins de la liberté. The first volume, L'Age de raison, takes place in the Paris of 1938, a world of hedonism and escapism, as people tried desperately to ignore the looming Nazi threat. Le Sursis, the second completed volume, is set in the so-called "Munich week", with the same futile attempts to avoid action or, in Sartrean terms, "engagement." By the time of the third part of the work, La Mort dans l'âme, France has fallen, and Sartre traces the various reactions to this situation of dishonour and defeat. It is this world of chaos,

meaninglessness, and alienation to which Sartre and others addressed themselves. Men were finding themselves increasingly unable to seek solace or refuge in traditional values, religious or otherwise, as these now appeared irrelevant in a world without order, where all human ambitions and aspirations seemed inevitably condemned to failure. Existentialism, particularly that expounded by Sartre in his major philosophical work, L'Etre et le néant, was a response to these grim times, an attempt to give men some indication as to how they should act in an apparently hopeless situation. It is this which gave rise to the characteristically Sartrean concept of "engagement." As Orestes, a character in Sartre's play Les Mouches, states, "chaque homme doit inventer son chemin." Before any analysis can be made of Les Chemins as an example of "la littérature engagée", it is necessary to establish the meaning, as Sartre sees it, of commitment and its relation to the question of human freedom.

While existentialism is generally seen as primarily the domain of Sartre and a number of his French contemporaries, it would be wrong to assume that the emergence of this mode of thought represented a total break with the past, owing nothing to the influence of any preceding thinkers. Most critics see in Sartre links with philosophers like Husserl and, more especially, the Danish Christian thinker Kierkegaard, with his insistence on the importance of the individual man and his rejection of a philosophy based on a set of pre-existing concepts. The French critic R.M. Albérès makes the quite reasonable claim that, notwithstanding the apparent novelty of Sartre's ideas when his works first appeared, he is in fact simply another in the long line of French moralists. Albérès sees parallels between Sartre and Montaigne, La Bruyère,

Stendhal, La Rochefoucauld, and especially Pascal:

> "Comme Pascal, il insiste sur la justification ou la non-justification des actes, et pose essentiellement le problème de leur valeur dans le cadre d'une condition humaine strictement définie avec quelque dureté". (2)

Like Kierkegaard, Sartre represents a break with the Aristotelean tradition of contemplation and impersonal analysis, which assigns to the philosopher the role of spectator: Sartre's is an active philosophy closely related to his own personal problems and to those of the society in which he is living. Whereas some philosophers would claim, when confronted with a situation of stress or adversity, that we cannot evade or alter it, Kierkegaard and Sartre both show an intense desire for liberation and positive change. This description of Kierkegaard's philosophy by Frederick Copleston could well apply equally to Sartre:

> "He does not stand back from problems as an impersonal analyst and spectator; he grapples with them as one who is involved in them with his whole being; they are for him not merely objects of intellectual curiosity but rather matters of vital concern which he cannot regard with a purely detached interest. He is not spectator, but actor". (3)

It can thus be seen that both Kierkegaard and Sartre are "committed" philosophers. However, the notion means more to Sartre than simply commitment to overcoming purely personal problems. For Sartre, the problems faced by each individual in the pre-war and Occupation years were the problems of French society as a whole. Nobody could hope to be unaffected by the crushing weight of events, no matter how desperately he tried to avoid having to face up to this fact. This is powerfully illustrated in Les Chemins de la liberté, especially in Le Sursis.

Sartre therefore goes beyond this solely personal focus. He aims to encourage each individual to face up honestly to the situation he is in, no matter how difficult it may appear. In this way, he hopes that men will recognise the importance of what he calls authentic choice. Despite the wider social and political implications of his philosophy of commitment, Sartre still insists on the total responsibility of each individual person. In a world where all traditional values have been eroded or distorted, the individual stands alone, alienated and apparently helpless to change anything. Yet despite this, Sartre's existentialism is essentially a philosophy of freedom, one which places the human will at the centre of everything. Man, for Sartre, is totally free, but this is not a freedom to be enjoyed in the normal sense of the word. As his main character, Mathieu, comes to discover, "La Liberté, c'est la Terreur" (4). This is a "terrible" freedom, because it places total responsibility on the individual to find meaning amid chaos, to find his "chemin de la liberté."

Man, says Sartre, is free, self-creating and self-transcending. He is "self-creating" in the sense that what he becomes depends on what he brings about as a result of his own freely chosen actions. The individual is "self-transcending" in that by exercising his freedom he transcends the past, the "already-made." Whatever man may have done in the past, he has the power, as long as he lives, to change or alter it. Thus, as we follow the often pathetic and sordid progress of Sartre's characters through Les Chemins de la liberté, we always feel that, while they remain alive, they may still be "saved." But this "salvation" will be possible only if they recognise that they cannot evade assuming this terrible burden of freedom.

Thus, the central thought which runs through all of Sartre's work is that what an individual becomes depends entirely on free choice and positive commitment to action. However, we have yet to determine more exactly the nature and meaning of this commitment. Sartre tries to offer the atheistic "solution" to the problems of modern, "alienated" man. He speaks to those with no faith in God nor any universal, absolute moral law. Sartre's concern is with the individual thrown wholly back on himself, and who must freely commit himself to action. In a godless world, if there is to be any meaning or worth in human life, it can only be the meaning which man himself, by his freely chosen acts, creates. So he must act, without any hope of guidance from without: he is "condemned to be free."

A vital aspect of Sartre's philosophy is the concept of "angoisse", something from which all the characters in Les Chemins suffer. This anguish, or dread, is felt by the individual who is conscious of his freedom and of the huge, inescapable responsibility it places on him. "Angoisse" results from the individual's awareness that, no matter how "authentically" he exerts his freedom through positive action, there can be no guarantee that his action will in any way better his lot or that of his fellow men in general. What he freely resolves at a given moment does not determine the future, because "nothing", or "le néant", intervenes between the present and the future. Hence the anguish the individual feels when he becomes aware that any action he takes may ultimately be futile, no matter how well-intentioned or courageous. Sartre's philosophy of commitment is an austere, demanding one, to an excessive degree in the opinion of some commentators. For example, F.H. Heinemann writes:

> "He is right in stressing the responsibility for others even in solitary decisions, but he is wrong in making men responsible for actions they did not do and for situations they did not bring about, and for overloading them with total responsibility. He condemns them to infinite liberty which they are unable to bear." (5)

This leads on to another crucial Sartrean concept: the question of "mauvaise foi." Sartre reserves his most bitter condemnation for those for whom this "angoisse" is too much to endure and who attempt, in various ways, to flee from it and mask their freedom from themselves. Sartre is especially ruthless and uncompromising in this respect, as evidenced by his call after the War for the death penalty for those who collaborated with the Germans. Les Chemins is full of these "lâches" or "salauds" who are guilty of bad faith. There are those, like Mathieu, who try to avoid positive commitment by continually rationalising and seeking excuses for remaining inactive. Sartre also reveals his contempt for the bourgeois classes in his treatment of characters like Mathieu's brother Jacques, who hide behind the ready-made conventions and social mores of the French middle-class. Sartre tries to show that the individual cannot evade the total responsibility for choice that rests on his shoulders, even if he does try to avoid it by surrendering to bad faith, because this bad faith is itself something which he has chosen. As Sartre reveals in his novels, the task of the philosopher is to illuminate the possibilities of action, and perhaps the true meaning of freedom, with a view to promoting authentic choice or self-commitment as contrasted with simply drifting feebly into decisions under the pressure of social conformity. The individual is isolated and alone, and it is in this isolation and loneliness that he creates his values.

This emphasis on the isolated individual has led to the

criticism that Sartre is advocating withdrawal into self-centred seclusion. However, it would be wrong to suggest that, simply because his is an intensely individualistic philosophy, Sartre lacks a sense of social responsibility. Sartre is well known for his strong, though often ambiguous, social and political views, and he was active in the Resistance, even if only in the sphere of propaganda. While he says that a man's acts are his free acts and nobody else's, he is not recommending withdrawal from all personal commitment in society, nor does he advocate choosing values in isolation from society. What he does try to emphasise is the tremendous responsibility that rests on each man in the choice of values. Copleston illustrates it in this way:

> "If a man chooses, for example, the values represented by Communism and commits himself to the Communist creed, he ideally legislates for other men as well. For by adhering to Communism he declares that all should be on the Communist side." (6)

Therefore, the emphasis on individualism is not diminished in any way by the notion of choosing ideally for all men. For, according to Sartre, if choosing with a sense of social responsibility is a value, it is the individual who creates this value. In other words, no amount of acting ideally for all men will alter the fundamental individualism of Sartre's philosophy.

Sartre and many of his contemporaries, notably Camus, speak to the lonely, alienated individual who seeks an answer to the problem of how to give worth and meaning to his life. For both Sartre and Camus the answer is commitment, although their conceptions of this differ somewhat. Sartre insists on commitment and not withdrawing from social activity, yet he says we must commit ourselves with an awareness of the possible

ultimate futility of it all. It could perhaps be inferred from this that by questioning the ultimate value of human striving, Sartre is presenting a pessimistic and rather pointless philosophy. However, some people, like Henri Peyre, have seen this very pessimism as something positive:

> "the pessimism found in the French existentialists is courageous and constructive and .... their philosophical attitude is one of faith in man's freedom and in man's responsibility for changing his fate." (7)

This is another question which a closer analysis of Les Chemins may help to anser.

"La Liberté, c'est la Terreur." This apparently paradoxical statement has been made clearer by some of Sartre's observations on his own experiences during the Occupation. He has stated on a number of occasions, notably in La Confédération de la silence, that it was during the War, working in the Resistance, constantly in danger of betrayal and death, that he felt most free and alive. Colin Wilson has captured the Sartrean concept of freedom very well in his book, The Outsider:

> "Obviously, freedom is not simply being allowed to do what you like; it is intensity of will, and it appears under circumstances that limit man and arouse his will to more life." (8)

This seems to be borne out in La Mort dans l'âme when Mathieu finally brings himself to act positively only when he is in what Sartre would call an "extreme situation", one which places tremendous stress on the individual. Sartre believes that situations of crisis and adversity lead men to a fuller realisation of the nature of their freedom, and they consequently assert this in action. Wilson and others have made

the point that while Sartre makes the nature of freedom, as he sees it, very clear, he becomes ambiguous when attempting to establish the meaning of "engagement" and the form it is to take.

> "Sartre, for all his intellectual equipment, has failed to advance to a satisfying positive position. His philosophy of 'commitment'.... is only to say that, since all roads lead nowhere, it's as well to choose any of them and throw all the energy into it." (9)

Wilson's claim would appear to tie in with Sartre's own contention that, no matter how worthy the goal we commit ourselves to achieving, there always remains the strong likelihood that all our efforts will ultimately prove futile. The philosophy of Sartre contains a strong element of fatalism, in spite of the strong emphasis it places on positive commitment. As Philip Thody correctly points out:

> "it is difficult to disagree with Sartre's contention that, in the absence of God, there is no reason for things to be as they are and no guarantee that they will not suddenly change." (10)

This question of the nature and value of the individual's commitment is one of the central problems presented in Les Chemins.

In examining this particular problem, we should take into account the actual conditions of society at the time Sartre was formulating his ideas. It seems that at this stage Sartre was simply advocating commitment to opposing tyranny in the form of the threat of fascism. Thus, Colin Wilson's charge that Sartre was advocating in effect commitment to nothing is a little exaggerated, while still containing a degree of truth. Sartre seems to have given his notion of commitment a more concrete, specifically political form after his abandon-

ment of the fourth volume of Les Chemins. But for the period covered by the subject of this study, Sartre's philosophy powerfully fitted the mood of the time, and was indeed a response to it. The Occupation had forced all Frenchmen to face up to the possibility of captivity, torture, and even death. It was this "extreme" situation to which Sartre applied his ideas. The grim reality people faced, and to which Sartre tried to indicate a means of response, is well described by Thody:

> "Between 1940 and 1944.... Frenchmen had known that they might be captured and tortured by the Germans. If this happened, they would find themselves totally alone and totally responsible, confronted with the essence of human liberty: the power to create the values of courage and loyalty by saying no; the terror of betraying humanity itself by yielding to their torturers. They would, in fact, be in exactly the kind of position which existentialist philosophy depicted as being most typically human." (11)

So it is not true that Sartre is an advocate of total, irresponsible freedom of choice. He qualifies his stand by asserting the responsibility of men to choose and act for others. In doing so, a person still recognises that he has no way of knowing for sure that the course of action he chooses to follow is the right one or that it will lead to an improvement in the conditions of his fellow men. But the element of responsibility remains central. When Sartre talks of "total" freedom, he is not implying a concept of irresponsible, arbitrary choice regardless of the consequences. Our freedom is total in the sense that we are thrown wholly back upon ourselves, that no external force can, in the final analysis, come to our aid. Sartre's is not a nihilistic concept of freedom, as man must take account of the particular situation in which he finds himself before he commits himself to action: s'engager, en situation" is the essence of Sartre's position. Far

from being nihilistic, Sartre's views represent an affirmation of man and his responsibilities. He seems to echo the famous words from Goethe's Faust:

> "Wer immer strebend sich bemüht,
> Den können wir erlösen!" (12)

"L'enfer, c'est les Autres." These words, spoken by one of the characters in Sartre's play Huis clos, express one of his most important philosophical ideas. For Sartre, man until his death is in a process of "becoming." This means that while our past exists, we have the power to change the effect it has on the present by means of our freedom to choose. Thus, if a person has in the past committed a reprehensible or evil act he has the capacity, while he is still alive, to make amends for it by means of some freely chosen, authentic act. For it is only at the moment of our death that we are "judged" by "the Others", by the living. Sartre's fundamental atheism means that we are not accountable to God for what we have done during our lives, our only "hell" is that created by other people as they look at us and judge our actions. We are the sum of our acts. In other words, we are nothing until we are dead, and then we will be judged, according to our deeds, by "le regard" of those still living. Thus, even "lâches" or "salauds" such as Daniel Serono and Jacques Delarue are still free to choose a course of action which may "save" them in the eyes of the Others and rid them of their "mauvaise foi." Once they are dead "les jeux sont faits", and they will be judged by the living according to their acts. In other words, existence precedes essence, and man must create his own essence by his acts while he is living.

Some of Sartre's writings prior to Les Chemins de la liberté are worth examining briefly as the earliest literary

manifestations of his philosophical theories and as an anticipation of his later works. His first novel, La Nausée, published in 1938, is still regarded by many as one of his finest literary achievements. The novel is essentially the metaphysical journal of Antoine Roquentin, who suffers from the "angoisse" of being an alienated intellectual who finds, as so many people of Sartre's generation did, that nothing can justify his existence in an apparently meaningless, valueless world. According to R.-M. Albérès, La Nausée shows

> "un homme découvrant dans l'angoisse, que rien dans sa vie n'est motivé et justifié, et que pourtant cette gratuité ne le délivre point de sa liberté et de sa responsabilité, qu'il appartient à lui et à lui seul de créer des justifications." (13)

Roquentin is to a large extent the spokesman for the dilemmas and problems faced by Sartre at this time. For example, he feels apart and estranged from other people, and he even detests them, especially the bourgeois "salauds." He no longer believes in worldly ambitions; there only remains this hollow, inexplicable feeling of "néant." This sense of isolation and anguish leads to feelings of disgust and even nausea. Roquentin yearns for a harmonious, rational universe, but he finds the present world confusing, purposeless and literally sickening. In all this we see an early indication of the themes and preoccupation of Les Chemins.

An important factor which makes La Nausée in many ways a more successful novel than Les Chemins de la liberté is that Sartre does reach a reasonably positive and satisfying conclusion. Roquentin's moment of illumination comes quite suddenly when he hears a favourite song of his called "Some of these Days" being sung in a café. He pictures the writer of it finding a reason for living by composing this song. In

Sartrean terms, he has given meaning to his life by doing something creative. Roquentin realises that he too may be able to find some form of "salvation" by committing himself to art, and he resolves to write a novel. La Nausée is Sartre's first and only work to present an aesthetic solution to the problem of living in a meaningless, oppressive world. The novel ends with a skilful image of purification, as Roquentin anticipates the rain that will soon fall on the town of Bouville, in effect washing away the past. At this stage, Sartre's notion of "engagement" is largely a moral and metaphysical one with few of the wider social and political connotations it was later to assume. This change of emphasis is readily apparent in Les Chemins, which shows Sartre's strong conviction that during the crisis years of the 1930s and 1940s the central moral problems of the time came to be increasingly inseparable from political problems. Maurice Cranston has described the difference between the two works very well:

> "The moral of La Nausée is that everyone must find his own reason for living; but plainly Sartre himself at this stage of his life was thinking in terms of salvation through art. His attack on the uncommitted life is fully mounted in this novel; but his concept of commitment is not yet given any specific political content. La Nausée is an existentialist novel; it is nowhere recognisably the work of a socialist." (14)

Many critics claim that Sartre's plays have generally been more successful than the novels in giving literary expression to his philosophical ideas. It is worthwhile to examine this contention more closely, especially in relation to his first play Les Mouches. The fact that Les Chemins remains uncompleted makes it difficult to arrive at any satisfactory conclusion about Sartre's overall success in the work. This is not the case with his plays which form, as Francis Jeanson points out,

"la quasi-totalité des thèmes sartriens." (15) The effect of this is to make it much easier to determine from the plays the essential line of Sartre's thought. In fact, the demands and limitations placed on him by the dramatic form seem to have enabled him to present his ideas in a much more accessible, comprehensible fashion than he was able to do in the voluminous, often heavy-handed philosophical works such as L'Etre et le néant. Certainly, the need for conciseness and clarity in the dramatic medium seems to have helped Sartre avoid the aimless rambling which is occasionally one of the more negative features of Les Chemins. Jeanson points to the advantages the theatre possesses as a literary vehicle for Sartre's ideas:

> "Ce que le théâtre peut montrer de plus émouvant est un caractère en train de se faire, le moment du choix, de la libre décision qui engage une morale et toute une vie." (16)

Les Mouches, first performed in France in 1943, is one of the earliest and best examples of Sartre's "littérature engagée." This play clearly marked Sartre as one of the leading literary spokesmen for the Resistance movement. The play, ostensibly a revised version of the ancient Greek myth where Orestes avenges the murder of his father Agamemnon, is in fact a powerful allegory of the German occupation and the Resistance; it is a profoundly committed work of art. The theme is basically that of "la liberté en situation." Orestes' "chemin de la liberté" is to kill his father's murderer. This act is also designed to open the way to freedom for all the townspeople of Argos. The parallels with the situation of occupied France, and the responsibility Sartre places on each individual to act against the threat of tyranny, are quite clear here.

Sartre brings out his theme of how man is "condemned to be free": Orestes is forced to choose the course of action he is to take with no hope of any external help from the gods or any other source. Jeanson makes the compelling point that this play prefigures not just Les Chemins but all of Sartre's work, which takes the form of a

> "passage de la jeunesse à l'âge adulte, de l'état d'innocence et de chaude intimité avec le monde à l'angoissante déréliction de l'homme responsable, engagé dans le monde et cependant séparé de soi par toute l'épaisseur du monde." (17)

Mathieu and Orestes are both seen as refusing to commit themselves until they are found in an "extreme situation" which makes evasion and excuses no longer possible.

Sartre's well-known literary essay, "M. François Mauriac et la liberté", is significant both as a clarification of his conception of commitment and as an indication of his approach to the tasks of the novelist. The essay is an extremely critical attack on the novels of the French Catholic novelist, François Mauriac, and, notwithstanding its supercilious and arrogant tone, it is worth examining briefly in relation to Sartre's methods in Les Chemins de la liberté. It made Sartre and Mauriac bitter enemies, despite an apparent affinity during the Resistance years, especially in their agreement on the need to shelve religious and ideological differences for the sake of a common cause.

Sartre's fundamental argument in the essay - and his basic criticism of Mauriac - is that characters in fiction can only be successful and real if they are free, that is if the novelist allows them the same freedom which people in the real world have. This is obviously a clear reflection of his philosophical standpoint:

> "Si je soupçonne que les actions futures du héros sont fixées à l'avance par l'hérédité, les influences sociales ou quelque autre mécanisme, mon temps reflue sur moi; il ne reste plus que moi, moi qui lis, moi qui dure, en face d'un livre immobile." (18)

Mauriac's Christian notion of predestination causes him to write novels peopled by mere manipulated puppets, in Sartre's opinion. He goes on to examine the character of Thérèse in Mauriac's La Fin de la nuit and finds her to be anything but a "free" being:

> "Je n'attends rien d'elle, je sais tout. Alors ses ascensions et ses chutes ne m'émeuvent pas beaucoup plus que celles d'un cafard qui s'obstine stupidement à grimper au mur." (19)

Sartre further objects to Mauriac on the grounds that he takes the standpoint of God: he pretends to have absolute knowledge about his characters, their motives and actions. Sartre says that for him this is impossible, as he sees men as entirely free, indeterminate beings. He contends that Mauriac prefabricates his characters before putting them into his novels: they are essences, not existing human beings. Sartre sums up his view of Mauriac in a final, contemptuous sentence:

> "Dieu n'est pas un artiste; M. Mauriac non plus." (20)

It will be necessary to look more closely at Les Chemins de la liberté to evaluate Sartre's assertions and to see whether he does practise what he so confidently preaches in his polemic against Mauriac. The main points made in the essay do appear to be consistent with his philosophy as it is expressed in L'Etre et le néant. Sartre's opposition to Mauriac's methods is understandable, especially in the light of his conviction that any lterature which is not "engagée" is

worthless. He claims to be opposed to any theory which denies human freedom, and he sees this as especially important in imaginative literature. However, it remains to be seen whether Sartre's characters are entirely free, as his philosophy would have them be, or whether he is guilty of the very manipulation and excessively omniscient approach which he finds so reprehensible in Mauriac.

CHAPTER 1 NOTES

(1) Murdoch, Iris: Sartre: Romantic Rationalist (Bowes and Bowes, 1953); p.7.

(2) Albérès, R.-M: Sartre (Editions Universitaires, 1964); p.12.

(3) Copleston, Frederick: Contemporary Philosophy (Burns and Oates, 1956); p.128.

(4) Sartre, Jean-Paul: La Mort dans l'âme (Gallimard, 1949); p.193.

(5) Heinemann, F.H: Existentialism and the Modern Predicament (Adam and Charles Black, 1953); p.133.

(6) Copleston; p.194.

(7) Peyre, Henri: The Contemporary French Novel (Oxford University Press, 1955); p.219.

(8) Wilson, Colin: The Outsider (Pan, 1956); p.31.

(9) Ibid.; p.39.

(10) Thody, Philip: Sartre: a biographical introduction (Studio Vista, 1971); p.47.

(11) Ibid.; p.74.

(12) Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von: Faust (Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1968); p.346.

(13) Albérès; p.14.

(14) Cranston, Maurice: Sartre (Oliver and Boyd, 1962); p.21.

(15) Jeanson, Francis: Sartre par lui-même (Ecrivains de Toujours, 1961); p.11.

(16) Ibid.; p.11.

(17) Ibid.; p.20.

(18) Sartre, Jean-Paul: Situations I (Gallimard, 1947); p.37.

(19) Ibid.; p.50.

(20) Ibid.; p.59.

CHAPTER 2

L'Age de raison: "la vaine liberté"

The events of L'Age de raison take place in Paris in 1938, covering only a few days. The main character, and the one who is of central importance through the whole trilogy, is Mathieu Delarue, teacher and intellectual. He, more than any other character, seems to reflect most closely Sartre's own problems and dilemmas. The question of the extent to which Mathieu is an autobiographical figure (one critic refers to him as "Mathieu-Sartre") is one on which there is much disagreement and which will require further examination. Mathieu certainly embodies the main concern of Les Chemins de la liberté as a whole: the problem of human freedom and personal commitment. At the beginning of L'Age de raison, Mathieu appears to be virtually the prototype of the alienated intellectual who resorts to rational arguments and excuses to avoid the necessity of commitment to any positive, genuine action. He is aware of the need to assert his freedom, but he continually evades it. Mathieu reveals intense lucidity in his ability to analyse his situation. This, in Sartre's terms, makes his cowardly evasion even more reprehensible, even though it does give him hope of eventually seeing his way to an authentic commitment. He wants to be free and he wants to commit himself, but it is this very lucidity which in a sense paralyses him and leads only to further introspection and self-torment. He wants to wait, he says, for the "right" situation to embrace and use his freedom.

The main factors around which the action of L'Age de raison revolves are the pregnancy of Mathieu's mistress Marcelle

and his attempts to arrange an abortion for her. The lengths to which he is prepared to go to find the money for the abortion, even though Marcelle would prefer to keep the child, illustrate Mathieu's "mauvaise foi." He reasons that if he were to do the socially acceptable thing and marry Marcelle he will be renouncing his freedom and independence. In the course of Mathieu's desperate search for the means for the abortion, the other characters are introduced, most of whom reappear throughout the trilogy: Mathieu's young admirer Boris, who "amuses" himself by committing petty thefts; his shallow, impetuous sister Ivich; the homosexual Daniel Sereno; Brunet, the dedicated, dogmatic Communist; Jacques, Mathieu's smug, middle-class brother.

Before discussing critically some of the crucial episodes of L'Age de raison for the insight they give into the characters and themes of the novel, an examination of Sartre's technical approach to his tasks as a novelist is essential. Although this is a thematic study, it is impossible to appraise any of the themes of Les Chemins without an understanding of the methods Sartre uses to bring them out. As the critic Gerald Joseph Prince has correctly pointed out:

> "les problèmes toujours nouveaux de l'homme et de la société obligent le romancier engagé à élaborer des techniques nouvelles, capables de les exprimer." (1)

This statement is especially relevant to Sartre's work, as he uses within Les Chemins a wide variation of techniques. It follows therefore that the technical methods used in each of the three volumes will need to be evaluated before a complete understanding of their thematic content can be achieved.

Sartre has made it very clear in numerous essays and articles that he regards narrative techniques as extremely

important, and in this respect L'Age de raison is no exception. Technique is important in that it determines the perspective from which the reader approaches and evaluates a novel. The question of perspective or point of view, is vital to Sartre, as he is not writing the type of novel which can be approached passively as simply a means of idle entertainment. L'Age de raison contains, as do all Sartre's literary works, a strong didactic element, although he insists that he is not attempting to force his views upon the reader. In fact, he has stated explicitly on a number of occasions, notably in the essay on Mauriac, that the novelist has no right to adopt an omniscient point of view whereby, as he writes in Situations I, he can see "le dedans et le dehors, le fond des âmes et des corps, tout l'univers à la fois." (2) Such a "God-like", all-seeing approach completely negates the whole essence of Sartre's philosophy, because it impinges upon a character's liberty, making him seem dependent on some external force. The result of such a technique is that the reader always knows more than the characters and is therefore unable to identify with them. One of Sartre's main aims in novels such as L'Age de raison is to make the reader recognise and identify with the dilemmas faced by characters such as Mathieu and, hopefully, to avoid becoming guilty of the same errors of "mauvaise foi" and self-delusion.

Sartre insists very strongly that the novelist's presence should not intrude into the novel, as any such intrusion immediately places limitations on the total freedom he claims for his characters. The novelist's role, as he sees it, is not to carefully define and explain in the manner of a Balzac or a Zola, but to present actions and situations and to describe

them from varying points of view, that is, from the points of view of the persons involved in them. In other words, every event shall be transmitted to the reader through the mind of whoever sees or reflects on it. Sartre c alled this "le réalisme brut de la subjectivité sans médiation ni distance." (3) Prince aptly describes the crucial importance of this type of approach to a writer such as Sartre:

> "le lecteur coïncide avec des consciences dont le destin n'est pas connu à l'avance, déterminé une fois pour toutes, avec des consciences qui se font et se défont à chaque instant, se cherchent et hésitent et repartent - les consciences en plein devenir des personnages vivants et libres." (4)

The task now is to decide whether Sartre's theories on technique are borne out in the novel and, if so, whether they contribute to the success of the work and increase our appreciation of it.

The fundamental feature of the method of narration in L'Age de raison is its attempt to present a multiplicity of points of view, rather than the single perspective of an omniscient author or one principal character. Sartre shows a great deal of skill in this respect, with the result that he is generally successful in illustrating his contention that, in a world with no absolute moral standards or values to refer to, human judgements are basically arbitrary and relatively insignificant. L'Age de raison is divided into a number of sections, in each of which everything is described from the point of view of one character. Thus, in the opening section of the book, the perspective is that of Mathieu. We only see what he sees and we only know about Marcelle what Mathieu knows. However, in a later section we will see things from the point of view of her mind, and everything appears different. An early example of

the effectiveness of this multiple point of view occurs when Marcelle tells Mathieu she is pregnant. At this point, the perspective is that of Mathieu, and his reaction and her response to it seem perfectly uncomplicated:

> " - Alors, voilà! Tu sais ce qu'il y a, dit Marcelle. Qu'est-ce qu'on fait?
> - Eh bien on.... on le fait passer, non?
> - Bon. Eh bien, j'ai une adresse, dit Marcelle." (5)

Mathieu realises the threat Marcelle's pregnancy represents to his much-cherished independence, and he wants to "get rid" of the baby. As this scene is described to us from his point of view, it appears that Marcelle too wants the abortion. However, on the first occasion that the point of view is hers, we discover that this is not the case:

> "Et puis, tout d'un coup, elle revit le visage de Mathieu, son air naïf et convaincu, quand il avait dit: "On le fait passer, non?" et elle fut traversée d'un éclair de haine." (6)

This method allows Sartre to demonstrate his belief in the arbitrary nature of human judgements, and his contention that in a world stripped of significance and absolute values the essence of human relationships is conflict and non-communication.

In addition, the multiple perspective technique is a skilful means of developing a fuller impression of a character. We receive an initial picture of a character when events are being described from his or her perspective. This is made much more complete by the observations and comments on the character by others. For example, Mathieu shows the intellectual's ability to analyse accurately his situation and identify his own faults. This comes out on the many occasions we find Mathieu indulging in his penchant for introspective musing.

These passages clearly illustrate his rather pathetic "mauvaise foi" and continual grasping for excuses:

> "Il attendait. Et pendant ce temps-là, doucement, sournoisement, les années étaient venues, elles l'avaient saisi, par derrière; trente-quatre ans. "C'est à vingt-cinq ans qu'il aurait fallu m'engager. Comme Brunet. Oui, mais alors, on ne s'engage pas en pleine connaissance de cause. Ou est couillonné. Je ne voulais pas non plus être couillonné." Il avait songé à partir pour la Russie, à laisser tomber ses études, à apprendre un métier manuel. Mais ce qui l'avait retenu, chaque fois, au bord de ces ruptures violentes, c'est qu'il manquait de raisons pour le faire. Sans raisons, elles n'eussent été que des coups de tête. Et il avait continué à attendre...." (7)

How different is this picture we get of Mathieu feebly reflecting on "what might have been" from, for example, the almost idolising approach of Boris who "débordait de sympathie pour Mathieu." (8) Thus, besides the information we gather directly about Mathieu from his own words and thoughts, we also receive a great deal of oblique, indirect information about him from, for instance, Ivich's sharp comments, Boris' admiration or Daniel's contempt. This is a valid and important technique, fully in keeping - at least to this extent - with Sartre's theories.

Therefore, as we have seen, the story is related through the moment-to-moment consciousness of the characters, and the main ones, especially Mathieu and Daniel, spend much time in self-analysis and introspection. The principal interest of L'Age de raison lies in the characters' efforts to find sense and meaning in their lives: in Mathieu's case it takes at this stage the form of a search for a good reason to justify acting in a particular way. Iris Murdoch claims that, despite this technique of introspection, Sartre fails to create convincing, memorable characters. She believes that regardless of the fact that Mathieu's monologues occupy so many pages, we

learn very little about him. He is not, she declares, a humanly convincing character; rather, he seems to be simply Sartre's vehicle for long passages of abstract theorising: his predicament never moves us. Murdoch contends that Sartre has not successfully reconciled the roles of philosopher and novelist, that the continual analysis reduces the characters simply to the essence of the particular philosophical problem they embody and strips the novel of human interest. Whenever Mathieu begins to reflect, Murdoch points to the note of weariness and emptiness he invariably strikes, this pervading sense of "ennui." It must be conceded that at this point in the trilogy this criticism has some validity. Not once is there an occasion where genuine human warmth is exhibited. Humour has no part in Sartre's grim and austere world. Sartre would probably reply that his is an accurate picture of human relations, where the whole emphasis is on conflict and mutual distrust. However, other novelists of Sartre's time, like Camus, could deal convincingly with similarly austere subjects, yet still succeeded in showing some warmth, sympathy and respect for individual people. Final judgement on this point should perhaps be suspended until the following volumes have been studied, but Murdoch's criticism is a reasonable one at this stage. Mathieu especially strikes this note of "ennui" and lassitude:

> "Je suis là, je me déguste, je sens le vieux goût de sang et d'eau ferrugineuse, mon goût, je <u>suis</u> mon propre goût, j'existe. Exister, c'est ça: se boire sans soif. Trente-quatre ans. Trente-quatre ans que je me déguste et je suis vieux. J'ai travaillé, j'ai attendu, j'ai eu ce que je voulais: Marcelle, Paris, l'indépendance; c'est fini. Je n'attends plus rien." (9)

With Sartre's principal literary techniques established, it

is now possible to look in more detail at the main characters and their reactions to different situations. Their responses to certain situations will help determine whether, in Sartre's terms, any of them have found their "road to freedom." The most logical approach is to begin by analysing the most important character, Mathieu Delarue.

The opening scene, which is an exceptionally effective one, immediately establishes Mathieu's "mauvaise foi" as well as illustrating Sartre's skill in the use of symbolism. Mathieu is approached in the street by a man begging for money. When Mathieu gives him five francs, the man insists on giving him something in return: a Spanish stamp. The significance of this is that the beggar wanted to go to Spain to fight in the Civil War, but, as he says, "ça ne s'est pas arrangé." (10) This parallels Mathieu's situation, who also "nearly" went to Spain to fight for the Republican cause. Such an act would have been a recognition of his total freedom to choose and, in Sartrean terms, an authentic commitment. But Mathieu has rationalised himself out of making such a commitment, evading his responsibility yet again. Throughout L'Age de raison, his refusal to actively side with the Spanish fighters is a recurrent motif, symbolical of his continuing "mauvaise foi." Sartre often juxtaposes it with occasions when Mathieu is musing that he is getting older, still having failed to grasp and use his freedom. Albérès writes of Mathieu:

> "Il représente l'homme conscient de sa liberté, mais qui ne sait pas lui donner sa valeur et en interprète mal le sens: il veut la "conserver" au lieu de "l'engager." (11)

Just as Mathieu does not go to Spain, despite his professed convictions, he refused to commit himself to marrying Marcelle when he learns she is pregnant. Sartre seems to be demonstrat-

ing through Mathieu what will be the inevitable outcome of over-indulgence in abstract rationalising and self-analysis: a sterile awareness of the hazards involved in committing oneself. So he rationalises his refusal to fight with the Republicans in Spain and his avoidance of a genuine relationship with Marcelle. He does however possess what may prove to be a saving grace: his lucidity. As will be seen, this makes him superior to those such as Jacques and Brunet who have fled from their liberty into adherence to fixed or socially acceptable principles. Mathieu is at least able to diagnose the bad faith and cowardice within him, and this ability may help him finally to recognise and accept the need for commitment.

The first scene between Mathieu and Marcelle further reinforces the impression we are already forming of Mathieu as a man of "mauvaise foi." While Marcelle is depicted unsympathetically by Sartre - as indeed are virtually all his female characters - her comments nevertheless give us an insight into Mathieu's nature and his significance in terms of Sartre's philosophy. She tells him:

"tu suis ta pente; tu as le goût de t'analyser." (12)

She points out that Mathieu is trying to hide from himself in order to avoid having any responsibilities: he in fact wants to be "nothing", to be free in the sense that he owes no allegiances to anybody or anything so that there will therefore be no necessity to commit himself:

> "- N'être rien, répéta lentement Mathieu.
> Non. Ce n'est pas ça. Ecoute: je.... je voudrais ne me tenir que de moi-même.
> - Oui. Etre libre. Totalement libre. C'est ton vice."(13)

Mathieu too is well aware of this "néant" of continually

evading his freedom and its correct usage. He knows that his talk of waiting for the "right" situation to arise before committing himself is pure self-deception:

> "je me suis vidé, stérilisé pour n'être plus qu'une attente. A présent, je suis vide, c'est vrai. Mais je n'attends plus rien." (14)

Two lengthy conversations which Mathieu has, one with his brother Jacques and the other with Brunet, are important and warrant examination. A criticism which can be made of L'Age de raison, more so than of the other two volumes, is that most of the important passages are either those where a character like Mathieu is indulging in self-analysis or where there is a long conversation between characters, such as that between Mathieu and Jacques. It is perhaps significant that there is very little action in L'Age de raison, although there are some important exceptions such as the night-club incident involving Mathieu and Ivich. The conclusion to be drawn from this could be that Sartre is to a certain extent "bludgeoning" the reader with his ideas, whereas the novel would probably have far greater aesthetic worth if there were more emphasis on action, allowing the discerning reader to draw his own conclusions from this about the philosophical points the author may be trying to make. On occasions the characters seem to be mouthing convenient Sartrean catchphrases directly culled from L'Etre et le néant. Thus, in spite of his confident assurances to the contrary in writings such as the essay on Mauriac, Sartre is possibly still guilty of intruding, though in a more subtle way, into his novels. So concerned is he to ensure that the philosophical significance of the novel is understood that he tends to lessen its aesthetic effectiveness. For example, Jacques never does anything to prove Sartre's obvious

contention that he is a smug, complacent bourgeois "salaud": he simply mouths the hackneyed clichés of his particular social class. He is little more than a caricature. It is hard to reconcile this character with Sartre's insistence that all his literary creations are totally free, indeterminate beings in no way manipulated or prefabricated by himself. It is worth recalling Sartre's strong words about Mauriac's Thérèse: "Je n'attends rien d'elle, je sais tout. Alors ses ascensions et ses chutes ne m'émeuvent pas beaucoup plus que celles d'un cafard qui s'obstine stupidement à grimper au mur." The reader of L'Age de raison could be forgiven for suggesting that these words might equally well apply to Jacques Delarue.

Yet Sartre makes Jacques, the "salaud" who evades the "angoisse" of asserting his freedom, the spokesman for some important truths about Mathieu and the problems he embodies. In this respect - his ability to mould convincing characters by means of the multiple point of view approach - Sartre does show a great deal of ingenuity as a novelist. Mathieu goes to Jacques seeking money to pay for Marcelle's abortion, showing again how he is prepared to degrade himself to avoid any form of "engagement." At the same time, Jacques reveals the smug self-satisfaction of a successful middle-class "salaud", who has conveniently avoided the anguish of having to make moral choices:

> "Mais il me semble qu'avec tes idées, j'aurais à coeur de ne rien demander à un affreux bourgeois. Car je suis un affreux bourgeois, ajouta-t-il en riant de bon coeur." (15)

Sartre has made no secret of his feeling of revulsion at persons of this kind, but Jacques' comments nevertheless throw light on Mathieu's hypocrisy: he rejects the ways of the bourgeoisie, their insistence on maintaining family ties and behaving in a

"socially acceptable" manner, yet he is quite prepared to forsake his own declared principles to avoid making an authentic choice and acting responsibly. At times in this conversation, Jacques appears to be virtually Sartre's spokesman. He says:

> "cet enfant qui va naître est le résultat logique d'une situation où tu t'es mis volontairement et tu veux le supprimer parce que tu ne veux pas accepter toutes les conséquences de tes actes." (16)

Again, when Mathieu, trying to justify his attempts to procure an abortion for Marcelle, insists that he is doing so to retain his freedom, Jacques once more replies with a correct Sartrean analysis of Mathieu's situation:

> "-J'aurais cru moi, dit Jacques, que la liberté consistait à regarder en face les situations où l'on s'est mis de son plein gré et à accepter toutes ses responsabilités."(17)

Mathieu, says Jacques, has "missed the train": he has had his chance to make a positive commitment, but now it is too late, as he has reached "l'age de raison." Here, the ironical implications of the novel's title become evident. Mathieu's obsessive fear of getting old and missing his opportunities helps explain his desire for the company of people much younger than himself. In Ivich's exuberant yet shallow ways he seems to perceive the commitment he is continually evading: he pursues her without really understanding why. She is in fact as tempting and inaccessible as the liberty he pursues throughout the novel. This episode is important first because it is an explicit and rather heavy-handed statement of Mathieu's dilemma; and secondly because it enables Sartre to make a powerful, scathing social comment. The pompous, abject hypocrisy of Jacques' words leaves us in no doubt about the

attitude Sartre expects us to take towards him.

Brunet's plea to Mathieu to commit himself to the cause of Communism is yet another instance where Mathieu evades his responsibility and is still as far away as ever from commitment. Brunet assumes more importance towards the end of the trilogy, and in the uncompleted final fragment, but even at this stage Sartre makes it clear that the "commitment" Brunet has chosen is not the kind to be admired or emulated. Just as Jacques has fled from the anguish of free choice into the conventions of the bourgeois status quo, Brunet has avoided his responsibilities as a free individual by adhering to the deterministic principles of Marxism. Sartre does not judge Brunet's membership of the Communist Party in the same harsh terms as he does Jacques' "mauvaise foi" - Brunet is at least acting with the well-being of his fellow men in mind - but it still does not represent a valid "road to freedom" for Brunet. A fuller examination of Brunet and of Sartre's attitude to Communism will need to be made in relation to La Mort dans l'âme. Mathieu admires Brunet in that he appears to have made a positive commitment, something which Mathieu finds himself unable to do. Brunet insists that, because he is a member of the Communist Party, his life has meaning and direction. Although he is acting for others, he is - as he freely admits - renouncing his freedom. His naïve dogmatism will be severely put to the test later in the trilogy. Mathieu at this stage believes that Brunet's commitment is to be envied, but he still refuses to commit himself. He claims not to be convinced; it is still not the "right" occasion:

> "Eh bien! tu vois: je ne peux pas m'engager, je n'ai pas assez de raisons pour ça. Je râle comme vous, contre les mêmes gens, contre les mêmes choses, mais pas assez.

> Je n'y peux rien. Si je me mettais à défiler en levant le poing et en chantant L'Internationale et si je me déclarais satisfait avec ça, je me mentirais." (18)

While this discussion adds to our understanding of Mathieu and his problems, it is another instance where the novel becomes rather aimless, simply repeating the same themes without significantly increasing our understanding of the characters and their dilemmas. The criticism that Sartre simply creates characters to embody certain problems - in this case varying manifestations of "mauvaise foi" - has some validity. He never explores relationships between characters, and hence these persons never really develop to any significant extent. This factor, coupled with the general absence of action, leads to a series of abstract monologues and lengthy, static conversations. The ultimate result is that L'Age de raison, despite its several impressive qualities as a work of literature, is at best a flawed and somewhat disappointing novel. It is difficult to disagree with Iris Murdoch's contention:

> "The loss of sense in human relations is asserted rather than displayed; there is no tormenting entanglement of misunderstanding between Sartre's characters. They bump into each other in an external fashion; they are never deeply involved with each other. If not analysed they remain impenetrable." (19)

One could perhaps counter this with the argument that the lack of action is deliberate on Sartre's part and fully in accordance with his theories; for it is the very refusal of these characters to engage themselves in positive action which is the theme of the whole work. Nevertheless such an approach, if intentional, scarcely makes for interesting literature.

One episode where Sartre's theories are quite dramatically illustrated through action rather than introspective analysis

or explicit statement is that which occurs when Mathieu, Ivich, Boris and Lola are in a night-club. The main action of the scene is preceded by yet another drawn-out conversation which is notable mainly for the lack of anything intelligent being said. It does nevertheless add to our impression of characters like Boris, Ivich and Lola: they self-indulgently pursue immediate pleasure in an almost frantic effort to mask their freedom from themselves. Ivich in particular reveals a deep-seated "mauvaise foi" in virtually everything she does. She begins by making spiteful comments on the dancers, then as her drunkenness increases, she tries desperately to be noticed. The climax of the scene occurs when Ivich slashes her hand with a knife, getting the desired reaction from Mathieu. When he tries to sympathise with her, Ivich taunts him for his "weakness":

> "Elle ajouta avec un rire insultant: J'aurais dû me douter que vous trouveriez ça excessif. Ça vous scandalise qu'on puisse s'amuser avec son sang." (20)

Mathieu's response is to drive the knife into his hand, pinning it to the table. This sordid assertion of his own freedom is one of the few times Mathieu acts positively, even if in an utterly futile and pathetic manner. Whenever, as here, he does not have the time to reflect and intellectualise himself out of his predicament he acts melodramatically, almost like a latter-day Hamlet:

> "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: "Je suis un con, pensa-t-il, Brunet a bien raison de dire que je suis un vieil enfant." Mais il ne pouvait pas s'empêcher d'être content." (21)

This scene gives us a tantalising and all too brief glimpse of Sartre's true potential as a novelist. Rather than explicitly telling us what conclusions to draw by putting his own words into the mouth of a Mathieu or a Brunet, he lets the actions of the characters speak for themselves. In this way, we do feel we are reading a novel in the true sense rather than simply a slightly dressed-up philosophical treatise.

As the novel goes on, with no apparent direction or development, there are more examples of Mathieu's equivocating self-analysis. His willingness to steal money from Lola, whom he wrongly thinks to be dead, is further illustration of just how far into degradation his cowardly "mauvaise foi" has led him. The focus switches increasingly to Mathieu in the latter part of the novel, and his internal monologues become more frequent with even more explicit statements of Sartre's theories:

> "il était libre, libre pour tout, libre de faire la bête ou la machine, libre pour accepter, libre pour refuser, libre pour tergiverser; épouser, plaquer, traîner des années ce boulet à son pied: il pouvait faire ce qu'il voulait, personne n'avait le droit de le conseiller, il n'y aurait pour lui de Bien ni de Mal que s'il les inventait. Autour de lui les choses s'étaient groupés en rond, elles attendaient sans faire un signe, sans livrer la moindre indication. Il était seul, au milieu d'un monstreux silence, libre et seul, sans aide et sans excuse, condamné à décider sans recours possible, condamné pour toujours à être libre." (22)

The novel ends after Mathieu has learned that Daniel is to marry Marcelle, and his desperate search for money has been a waste of time. His first reaction is to lapse into self-pity and recriminations, and he tells Marcelle he will marry her, though by now it is too late. Again, he is able to analyse his situation quite lucidly:

> "il avait volé, il avait abandonné Marcelle enceinte, pour rien." (23)

Similarly, when he sees Ivich again, there is the same empty feeling:

> "Il la regarda avec incertitude, il sentait renaître son desir. Ce désir triste et résigné qui n'était désir de rien." (24)

Mathieu's final musing on the nature of his freedom, and his continuing refusal of commitment, show him to be at essentially the same stage as when he encountered the beggar at the beginning of the novel. He has had several opportunities to assert his freedom in action, but he has rationalised his way out of every one. He still conveys the same empty impression of "ennui" as he fancies his life slipping aimlessly away:

> "Il baîlla: il avait fini sa journée, il en avait fini avec sa jeunesse. Déjà des 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 répétait en baîllant: "C'est vrai, c'est tout de même vrai: j'ai l'âge de raison." (25)

The "age of reason" for Mathieu is not, as Francis Jeanson explains, "l'âge d'homme mais la sournoise liquidation de la jeunesse, son insaisissable glissement dans la mort vivante, dans le consentement à l'échec." (26)

Apart from Mathieu, the most important character of the whole trilogy is probably Daniel Sereno, and his significance in L'Age de raison should be briefly examined. Daniel in many ways incarnates some of Sartre's most important philosophical ideas, and he is especially relevant to the theory of consciousness advanced in L'Etre et le néant, as Maurice Cranston points

out:

> "On the one hand, he wants to deny his homosexuality, to pretend that he is merely "different." On the other hand, since he cannot escape being seen as a homosexual, that is being objectified as a homosexual by the look of the Other, Daniel yearns to be a homosexual as a material object an object; to put an end to his feelings of guilt by ending his feelings altogether." (27)

Thus, all of Daniel's acts are determined by a tormented hatred for himself and for others. He is the epitome of those Sartre refers to as "lâches." Ridden by guilt and malice, Daniel tries to punish himself and others. He too is concerned about freedom: the "freedom" to be what he is, to achieve static self-awareness as an alternative to authentic commitment. He thinks the way to this self-awareness is to punish himself, thereby continually reminding himself of just what he is. Philip Thody explains what Daniel hopes to achieve by this:

> "As long as he is suffering from being what he is, then he can think of himself as really being what he is, although he is ashamed of it." (28)

However, Daniel is unsuccessful even in this aim: his efforts at self-punishment fail because he lacks the courage to carry out his plans. The point Sartre is obviously making is that it is impossible for Daniel to be anything, as he is still alive and therefore in a process of "becoming." His first attempt to punish himself is his intention to drown his cats, of whom he is very fond. He analyses his reasons for contemplating such a sadistic act:

> "Un grand dégoût l'envahit, il pensa: "C'est un acte gratuit." Il s'était arrêté, il avait posé le panier par terre: "S'emmerder à travers le mal qu'on fait aux autres. On ne peut jamais s'atteindre directement." (29)

But he fails to carry out the act, exhibiting lucidity similar to that of Mathieu in recognising himself for what he is:

> "Un seul. Un lâche. Un type qui aimait ses chats et qui ne voulait pas les foutre à l'eau." (30)

Finding that he lacks the courage and willpower to punish himself by means of physical pain, as in the scene later in the novel where he contemplates self-castration, Daniel turns to punishing others. The fairground incident is an example of this, illustrating both Daniel's sadistic bad faith and Sartre's theory of "le regard", which provides a recurrent motif throughout Les Chemins. According to Sartre's philosophy, an individual's character or essence cannot be fully defined before his death, as until then he is in a process of "becoming." Thus, Sartre the novelist could not possibly delineate characters and rigidly define their particular nature. He overcomes this possible problem first, as we have seen, by allowing the comments and impressions of others to build up a picture of a certain character. The second method, which is obviously an extension of the first, is the motif of "le regard." This is particularly relevant to Daniel, who defines and describes himself as he thinks other people see him. He feels anguish and torment while under the gaze of the Others. He notices an elderly homosexual making a date with a young boy, to whom Daniel himself feels attracted, and he decides to punish the man by following them and impersonating a detective: he sees the man as his "victim":

> "Daniel se sentait réchauffé par une colère sèche et délicieuse." (31)

His sadistic intentions are thwarted when he is approached by

Bobby, obviously a young former lover. Daniel is now the "victim" of the old gentleman's knowing look when he sees him in the company of "cette lope":

> "Le vieux monsieur avait pris la main de son jeune ami et la gardait paternellement dans les siennes. Puis il lui dit adieu, en lui tapotant la joue, jeta un regard complice à Daniel et s'en fut à longues foulées dansantes. Daniel lui tira la langue mais déjà l'autre avait tourné le dos." (32)

Daniel receives a perverse satisfaction from his success in taking Marcelle from Mathieu, because he knows he is punishing both of them. He is also punishing himself, because he loathes women, and Marcelle is no exception:

> "Gagné. Daniel se tut. Il ne pouvait détacher les yeux de ce ventre. Chair ennemie, chair graisseuse et nourricière, garde-manger. Il pensa que Mathieu l'avait désirée et il eut une flamme brève de satisfaction: c'était comme s'il s'était déjà un peu vengé." (33)

Daniel illustrates, perhaps to an extreme degree, some of the ways in which men try to avoid accepting their total responsibility for choice and commitment.

Marcelle is important largely as an example of Sartre's general attitude towards women. Sartre's view, as propounded in L'Etre et le néant, is that the essence of human relationships, especially those between men and women, is conflict. This seems to be borne out in L'Age de raison, as not only is the relationship between Mathieu and Marcelle totally lacking in genuine mutual affection and communication, but the other relationships in L'Age de raison are also examples of what Iris Murdoch calls "hopelessly imperfect sympathies." There is little human warmth exhibited between Mathieu and Ivich or between Boris and Lola. This may be partly because Sartre is simply not interested in exploring human relationships in depth:

he looks beyond the relationships to the philosophical problems they represent. Mathieu's treatment of Marcelle is despicable, but Sartre shows little sympathy for her predicament, apart from the effect it has on Mathieu's behaviour.

Sartre's unsympathetic attitude towards Marcelle is not unusual for him, because virtually all his female characters are seen from a position of, at best, suspicion. Extreme examples of this are Inès and Estelle, the grotesque female creations in his play Huis clos. Women often have the role of hindering men from acting "as men should"; they represent another appeal to a man's "mauvaise foi." It could be argued, therefore, that Mathieu's shameful behaviour stems from Marcelle and his efforts to procure an abortion for her. Suzanne Lilar points out the function Sartre apparently intends for his female characters:

> "Elle corrompt, elle contamine, elle compromet, poussant l'homme à des démarches sordides et des complicités honteuses." (34)

Sartre's literary universe is very much a man's world, and the women in it seem to represent yet another obstacle along the male characters' "roads to freedom."

Marcelle is depicted as stupid and shallow. She is weak-willed, agreeing at first to an abortion which she does not really want, and then she is naïve enough to believe that Daniel's intentions are sincere. Sartre appears to be suggesting that women represent a temptation, leading men to deny their freedom in the pursuit of sexual pleasure. Sartre reveals great technical skill in building up an atmosphere where the flesh symbolises loss of freedom, with constant references to its abundance, flabbiness and stickiness. An

examination of the first sections of L'Age de raison shows how Marcelle is repeatedly described in sordid terms. She illustrates Sartre's concept of "le visqueux": the clinging, freedom-sapping, cloying viscosity of life itself. The very first description of Marcelle reflects this:

> "Une buée rose et qui sentait l'iris fusa hors de sa chambre et se répandit dans l'escalier. Elle avait mis sa chemise verte. Mathieu vit en transparence la courbe tendre et grasse de ses hanches." (35)

Sartre shows his outstanding craftsmanship in creating this atmosphere by the constant repetition of words relating to flabbiness and softness. In this exceptional ability to create an atmosphere of squalor and degradation, Sartre is remarkably similar to the English novelist Graham Greene, especially in works such as The Heart of the Matter and Brighton Rock. There are constant references to Marcelle's "cuisses grasses"; the colour of her skin, the room, even the air, is always "rose"; her flesh is "molle et beurreuse." In this respect, L'Age de raison is reminiscent of La Nausée, with Sartre again showing a strong facility for expressing his philosophical ideas in literary form.

In general, the greatest merit of L'Age de raison is the skill Sartre reveals in his ability to depict physical sensations and abnormality of character. He is rather less successful in his efforts to put his abstract philosophical theories into practice in fictional form. The fact that his characters are not entirely convincing as human beings may partly account for this. However, while L'Age de raison can stand on its own as a complete - if unsatisfying - novel, we should perhaps suspend our judgement until the remainder of the trilogy has been studied and Les Chemins de la liberté assessed as a whole.

Thody adequately sums up the defects in L'Age de raison and the necessity to avoid rushing into judgement on Sartre on the basis of this first volume alone:

> "In fact, the characters in The Age of Reason are not particularly alive and not particularly free. They are manipulated by their author to demonstrate certain ideas, even though the author's hand may not be as visible as it is in some of Mauriac's novels. The title of the complete novel, however, indicates that the characters in The Age of Reason are only on their way to freedom. Before judging the success of Sartre's attempt to use the novel to express the idea of liberty, we must therefore examine the next two volumes...." (36)

CHAPTER 2 NOTES

(1) Prince, Gerald Joseph: Métaphysique et Technique dans l'oeuvre romanesque de Sartre. (Librairie Droz, 1968); p.7.

(2) Sartre, Jean-Paul: Situations I (Gallimard, 1947); p.45.

(3) Sartre, Jean-Paul: Situations II (Gallimard, 1948); p.327.

(4) Prince, p.19.

(5) Sartre, Jean-Paul: L'Age de raison (Gallimard, 1945); p.19.

(6) Ibid.; p.73.

(7) Ibid.; p.56.

(8) Ibid.; p.28.

(9) Ibid.; p.53.

(10) Ibid.; p.10.

(11) Albérès, R.-M.: Sartre (Editions Universitaires, 1964); p.77.

(12) L'Age de raison; p.17.

(13) Ibid.; p.18.

(14) Ibid.; p.56.

(15) Ibid.; p.105.

(16) Ibid.; p.110.

(17) Ibid.; p.112.

(18) Ibid.; p.126.

(19) Murdoch, Iris: Sartre: Romantic Rationalist (Bowes and Bowes, 1953); p.24.

(20) L'Age de raison; p.200.

(21) Ibid.; p.200.

(22) Ibid.; p.249.

(23) Ibid.; p.288.

(24) Ibid.; p.291.

(25) Ibid.; p.309.

(26) Jeanson, Francis: Sartre par lui-même (Ecrivains de Toujours, 1961); p.21.

(27) Cranston, Maurice: Sartre (Oliver and Boyd, 1962); p.73.

(28) Thody, Philip: Jean-Paul Sartre: A Literary and Political Study. (Hamish Hamilton, 1964); p.48.

(29) L'Age de raison; p.93.

(30) Ibid.; p.96.

(31) Ibid.; p.136.

(32) Ibid.; p.137.

(33) Ibid.; p.163.

(34) Lilar, Suzanne: A Propos de Sartre et de l'amour (Editions Bernard Grasset, 1967); p.176.

(35) L'Age de raison; p.11.

(36) Thody; p.53.

CHAPTER 3

LE SURSIS: "LA LIBERTE, EN SITUATION"

The second volume of Les Chemins de la liberté, while following on chronologically in time from L'Age de raison, differs in several important ways. These differences in approach must be examined in some depth, as they are the main factors which add to our understanding and appreciation of the themes introduced in L'Age de raison. Although the events of the first volume take place over a short, quite clearly defined period of time, Le Sursis is set in an even more specific historical context. The novel embraces the so-called "Munich week" of September 1938, which preceded the ill-fated "peace" agreement made by Chamberlain and Daladier with Hitler at Munich. Sartre makes it very clear that he regarded the Munich agreement as a surrender on the part of the British and French, and that the much-heralded "peace in our time" was a complete illusion. Thus, the first and most obvious difference in Sartre's approach is that the novel now takes on wider social and political implications.

Le Sursis shows no deviation from Sartre's insistence that his characters are free individuals, but this volume provides much more explicit illustration of Sartre's concept of "la liberté en situation." He shows with immense skill how the all-pervading threat of war affects every individual. He demonstrates that the sum of the choices and actions of all people will determine whether there is to be peace or war. All human destinies are interdependent, and it is impossible to act in isolation from society. This too contrasts with L'Age de raison, where the specific historical background is much less

evident and plays a less important role. In Le Sursis, every action must be seen in the context of the inexorable approach of war. Many of the characters try in various ways to avoid "engagement", vainly hoping for something to occur which will at least postpone the inevitable. As the title suggests, they long desperately for a reprieve. In L'Age de raison, world events and politics are only on the fringe of the action, whereas in Le Sursis politics, in the form of impending war, dominates the lives and actions of everybody.

Two vital points of difference between the first and second volumes of Les Chemins de la liberté are first characterisation and secondly narrative technique. Both of these aspects must be examined in some detail. L'Age de raison involves only a small number of characters, and although most of them reappear in Le Sursis, they represent only a small proportion of a myriad of about fifty characters, both fictional and actual historical figures such as Hitler, Daladier and Chamberlain. Sartre juxtaposes these characters, fictional and real, to illustrate his contention that every single individual bears responsibility for what occurs: it is futile to place the blame simply on the politicians, although Sartre is unsparing in his criticism of their dishonest manoeuvrings. To emphasise this, Sartre employs an effective narrative technique. Apparently based on the technique of "simultaneity" developed by the American writer John Dos Passos, this aspect of Le Sursis is one of the most important features of the whole work.

In L'Age de raison, Mathieu - in particular his refusal of commitment - is unquestionably the central point of interest. While he still plays a vital role in Le Sursis, we now see him from a new perspective. Le Sursis represents a virtual reply

to Mathieu's constant rationalising and evasiveness. Sartre shows that Mathieu's life, and what he makes of it, hinges on how he responds to a specific situation, and that he cannot act in isolation from the society of which he is a part. The war is each person's responsibility, one from which nobody can stand aside. In the past, Mathieu could use his undoubted intellectual powers to excuse himself from commitment, but, faced with this threat, he will find it much more difficult to refuse action and succumb to "mauvaise foi." He is still free - totally free - but in a precise situation. His freedom now lives in the response he will choose to make to this situation: whether he will fight, or run away, or perhaps find a "way out" by simply killing himself:

> "Il est libre, mais libre par rapport à une question qu'il ne peut éluder." (1)

This does not mean, as some critics claim, that Sartre has retreated from his earlier insistence on the total and absolute nature of our freedom. The fact that we are free "en situation" does not make our freedom any less total, because the individual is still totally alone and wholly thrown back on himself in choosing the action he will take in the face of this unavoidable situation.

Sartre's narrative technique in Le Sursis makes a remarkable contrast with L'Age de Raison. The themes and essential purposes remain the same, but Sartre attempts to illustrate them by totally different methods. It is perhaps paradoxical that the fundamental basis of the method of narration in Le Sursis is not original, and Sartre has never claimed that this is so. His main inspiration seems to be the American writer John Dos Passos, who wrote several novels, notably Manhattan

Transfer in 1925 and the U.S.A. trilogy (1930-35), in which he adopted a technique of "simultaneity." Sartre has on occasions expressed his admiration for the work of Dos Passos, even to the extent of imitating aspects of his technique in Le Sursis. However, the fact that the method of narration in Le Sursis is not entirely Sartre's own invention does not detract from the great skill with which he uses it. Indeed, if any aspect of Les Chemins de la liberté were to be singled out ahead of others, Sartre's technical approach to Le Sursis must rank very highly. Not only does it further demonstrate Sartre's technical competence; it powerfully advances the themes and purposes of the work as a whole.

The technique of simultaneity is successful in evoking the atmosphere of both the immediacy and universality of this "Munich week." Sartre builds up a sort of "montage" of different persons' reactions to this single crisis. He cuts with often bewildering rapidity - sometimes in mid-sentence - from the words and thoughts of one person to those of another, from fictional characters to real political figures directly involved in the crisis. In evoking this atmosphere of universal terror, Sartre effectively presents the individual minds which are all fearfully conscious of the all-pervading threat of war. He powerfully reproduces the confusion and alienation of a godless, valueless world. Philip Thody explains the effectiveness of this approach in relation to the over-all themes of the work:

> "In the description of the reactions of these minds, it can be shown that man is always controlled by the circumstances of his life, and is yet free to adopt whatever attitude he pleases towards them." (2)

The opening sentences of Le Sursis establish the atmosphere

of immediacy and universality, where all over Europe - which is in the throes of a heatwave - people are depicted as anxiously waiting and hoping that the politicians, in this case Chamberlain, will somehow avert the approaching disaster:

> "Seize heures trente à Berlin, quinze heures trente à Londres. L'hôtel s'ennuyait sur sa colline, désert et solennel, avec un vieillard dedans. A Angoulême, à Marseille, à Gand, à Douvres, ils pensaient: "Que fait-il? Il est plus de trois heures, pourquoi ne descend-il pas?" (3)

Sartre uses short, clipped sentences, switching quickly from one scene to another, skilfully repeating key words and phrases to establish the atmosphere of universal fear. Thus, while Sartre's use of the method of simultaneity is relatively innovating, he is not loath to employ the more traditional devices of the novelist such as, in this case, repetition:

> "Une chaleur rousse, crépitante, pailletée, s'était affalée sur l'Europe; les gens avaient de la chaleur sur les mains, au fond des yeux, dans les bronches; ils attendaient, écoeurés de chaleur, de poussière et d'angoisse. Dans le hall de l'hôtel, les journalistes attendaient, immobiles au volant de leurs autos; de l'autre côté du Rhin, immobiles dans le hall de l'Hôtel Dreesen, de longs Prussiens vêtus de noir attendaient." (4)

Sartre's originality is also shown in his ability to tie in factual material with his themes. During this fateful week Europe was in the middle of a heatwave, and Sartre makes constant references to the heat, especially its oppressive, stifling effects. Sartre is immensely impressive in depicting such physical sensations and linking them with the themes of his work. The heat symbolises the impending threat of fascist tyranny. So urgent and awesome is it that it is depicted as a physical entity, threatening almost literally to choke and stifle the freedom of every individual.

The technique of simultaneity shows characters such as

Mathieu, Daniel and Boris in a completely different light from L'Age de raison, which depicted the separate histories of each of these individuals. Now they are, as Gerald Joseph Prince points out, "enfoncés dans l'histoire, parce qu'ils vivent un moment historique." (5) Instead of describing events from the point of view of only one character at any one time, the varying effects of one event on many people at the same time can be described:

> "un instant, Mathieu mangeait, Marcelle mangeait, Daniel mangeait, Boris mangeait, Brunet mangeait, ils avaient des âmes instantanées qu'emplissaient jusqu'aux bords de pâteuses petites voluptés, un instant et elle entrerait, bardée d'acier, redoutée par Pierre, acceptée par Boris, désirée par Daniel, la guerre, la grande guerre des Debout, la folle guerre des blancs." (6)

Thus, from preoccupation with a small number of characters in L'Age de raison, Sartre now introduces about fifty in several different milieux. Each person has a narrow, usually confused view of the event, the linking factor.

Some of Sartre's technical devices seem to be deliberately designed to disconcert and confuse the reader. For example, he often uses the pronouns "il" or "elle" instead of a character's name, with the result that the reader, at least temporarily, is uncertain to whom the author is alluding. This tends at times to have an irritating and disorientating effect, but it appears to be exactly Sartre's intention. He is eager to ensure that we are obliged to participate actively in the novel, rather than simply observing its action in a dispassionate and passive manner. Sartre wants to disturb and involve the reader. This deliberate ambiguity is an original and skilful means of achieving such an effect. The importance of this particular device goes even further: it allows Sartre to emphasise that the

identity of the particular individual he is alluding to is relatively insignificant, because the single dominating factor - the threat of war - exerts its power and influence over every person. Sartre thereby illustrates his contention that all human destinies are linked by this one catalysing influence and that individual human beings - and human judgements - are relatively arbitrary and insignificant. In terms of the over-all purposes of Les Chemins de la liberté, such a technique powerfully illustrates the theme of "la liberté, en situation" and the awesome burden of total, inescapable responsibility it places on each person.

As has been shown, one of the most important effects of this technical method is to emphasise the universality of the situation. It enables Sartre to show that it is not simply Hitler, Daladier and Chamberlain who are responsible for the situation: it is the responsibility of all. In this way, Sartre demonstrates the importance for each individual to commit himself freely to opposing tyranny, despite the awareness that any such commitment could well prove futile. For it is the sum of the acts of all individuals which will decide between peace and war. Le Sursis shows that the "mauvaise foi", cowardice and refusal of commitment exhibted by so many people makes war inevitable. Sartre uses his technical prowess to show that wars do not simply "happen": they are the responsibility of all men, as the critic Albérès points out:

> "Un phénomène collectif comme la guerre n'est pas une entité, il est la juxtaposition des consciences et des responsabilités de millions d'individus." (7)

No particular person will decide what course the war will take; it is "la responsabilité généralisée", as Sartre puts it. A skilful method Sartre uses to convey this is to juxtapose scenes

involving real and fictional characters. An effective instance of this occurs when Hitler is making a typically demagogic speech attacking Bénès, the Czech leader. Sartre juxtaposes this with the furious reactions of Milan Hlinka, a stolidly courageous Czech worker, as he listens to a radio broadcast of Hitler's speech. By rapidly switching between the two scenes, Sartre evokes this atmosphere of immediacy and universal responsibility and reinforces the impression that nobody can remain unaffected by the war. By alternating between the words of an actual historical figure and the reactions to them of a relatively minor fictional character, Sartre powerfully establishes an atmosphere of intense realism and tension:

> "-Nous sommes deux hommes de genre différent. Lorsque M. Bénès au temps de la grande lutte des peuples, allait et venait dans le monde, se tenant à l'écart du danger, j'ai, en tant que loyal soldat allemand, accompli mon devoir. Et aujourd'hui, me voici debout en face de cet homme comme soldat de mon peuple.
>
> Ils applaudirent de nouveau. Anna se leva et posa la main sur le bras de Milan: son biceps était contracté, tout son corps était de pierre. "Il va tomber", pensa-t-elle. Il dit en bégayant:
> - Salaud!
>
> Elle lui serra le bras de toutes ses forces mais il la repoussa. Il avait du sang dans les yeux." (8)

Another feature of the technique of simultaneity which also appears to stem from Sartre's admiration for Dos Passos is the "camera eye" device. This has some affinity with the more traditional "stream of consciousness" method associated in particular with the novels of James Joyce. In Le Sursis, it takes the form of an interior monologue by a person whose identity is not immediately obvious. In this way, Sartre is able to convey in greater depth the reactions of one particular person to the wider political events. At the same time, such passages are often juxtaposed with the simultaneity of the rest

of the narration, thus providing the more immediate and spontaneous reactions of a number of people. The result of this is to enable Sartre to retain the all-important sense of urgency, immediacy and universality, and yet at the same time to explore the situation in greater depth, allowing him to elucidate more fully and explicitly his philosophical ideas. For example, he still provides ample evidence of Mathieu's penchant for introspective musing, and these passages in Le Sursis are the most obviously "philosophical." But in marked contrast to L'Age de raison, we are thankfully spared the lengthy, rambling passages which are among the more negative features of that work. The outcome is that by not overdoing such sections, Sartre gives them far more impact. The episode where Mathieu ponders on his freedom and contemplates suicide on the Port-Neuf is one of the most significant climaxes of the entire trilogy. It impressively illustrates Sartre's talent as a writer of prose:

> "Prendrai-je le train? Aucune importance. Partir, rester, fuir: ce n'étaient pas ces actes-là qui mettraient en jeu sa liberté. Et pourtant il fallait la risquer. Il s'aggrippa des deux mains à la pierre et se pencha au-dessus, de l'eau. Il suffirait d'un plongeon, l'eau le dévorerait, sa liberté deviendrait eau. Le repos. Pourquoi pas? Ce suicide obscur ce serait aussi un absolu. Toute une loi, tout un choix, toute une morale." (9)

Whereas in L'Age de raison this musing goes on and on, often submerging any effectiveness it might have under the sheer weight of words, Sartre here never allows it to detract from the dominating atmosphere of urgency and universal fear. One of the main weaknesses of L'Age de raison is that the general lack of action reduces its literary value and makes it rather ponderous and too heavily philosophical; it is difficult to criticise Le Sursis on the same count.

Dos Passos used his original technique to express his criticisms of the corruption and decadence of American big business. Sartre adapts it to show that nobody can hope to opt out of the modern world. As Thody puts it:

> "In both Dos Passos and Sartre the attempt is to see history through the eyes of those on whom it exercises its effect. Both authors try to put themselves in the position of those who did not fully understand what was happening to them, and they both abandoned the normally privileged optic which enables the novelist to make definite moral judgements or presume the meaning of the action." (10)

Thody is referring here to Sartre's contention - which does not always appear to be borne out in practice - that it is impossible to write a novel from a god-like point of view, in the manner of Mauriac. Sartre;s concurrence with Nietszhe's position that "God is dead" means that it is impossible to attain the coherence which could have come from looking at things from an omniscient point of view. Coherence and order are the very things Sartre wants to avoid, because the world as he sees it completely lacks these qualities. Thus, a writer looking at this world in a coherent, orderly fashion is giving, according to Sartre, an inaccurate, distorted and dishonest impression. The technique Sartre employs aptly conveys the confusion and chaos of the pre-war world. However, it would be wrong to suggest that because he avoids an omniscient approach, Sartre is simply reproducing the state of European society during Munich week and is not seeking to say anything significant. In fact, he uses his technique to make moral judgements in an oblique way on his characters and to express his political views. There is some truth in this claim of Thody, one which runs through all his work on Sartre:

"It may be that his presence is less obvious than that of

> Mauriac is in his novels, but it is nevertheless constantly there. The liberty which his characters enjoy is very much something which his philosophical and political opinions allows them." (11)

Thody's contention appears to be valid to the extent that Sartre allows his characters to condemn or vindicate themselves by their own words and deeds. He obviously has much more sympathy, for example, for Milan Hlinka's determined refusal to submit to his oppressors than for the simpering pseudo-pacifism of Philippe and Pierre. Sartre is also skilful in using his technique to discredit people for purely political reasons. It is obviously not by accident that he juxtaposes the ecstatic welcome accorded to Chamberlain on his return to London with the sudden attack of diarrhoea suffered by the invalid Charles. Apart from being obvious political comment, such passages are fully in accordance with Sartre's wider aims in the novel: he is scathing in his indictment of these men of "mauvaise foi" who deluded themselves, and thousands of others, into believing that war could be avoided, and were prepared even to betray their Czech "allies" to give themselves a further reprieve.

Another important technical device of Le Sursis - the motif of "le regard" - is one which appears in L'Age de raison, but it now assumes greater significance. We have already seen how "le regard" is an effective means of illustrating important philosophical ideas. Sartre refuses to rigidly delineate characters in his novels, as this would be in direct opposition to his firm belief that men, while still alive, are in a process of "becoming", and their true nature, or essence, cannot be established until they are dead, when they will be judged, according to their acts, by the "look" of other people. Sartre succeeds, through the "regard" motif, in building up an

impression of a character without contradicting his own beliefs. There are numerous instances throughout Le Sursis where a character suffers anguish and torment as he finds himself struggling like a trapped fly under the piercing gaze of another person. The "angoisse" stems from the character's feelings of guilt and bad faith, as he imagines the other person looking into him and seeing his faults, his avoidance of commitment.

The character who most clearly illustrates this concept is undoubtedly Daniel, who manifests his "mauvaise foi" by wanting to be something in the eyes of other people. In this way, he will be a finite object rather than a living, free, indeterminate person. He will be able to deny his freedom and avoid his responsibility to act. As an utterly unauthentic person, Daniel feels the need of others as witnesses to his homosexuality and "lâcheté"; he wants to cease to exist in the normal sense:

> "Etre ce que je suis, être un pédéraste, un méchant, un lâche, être enfin cette immondice qui n'arrive même pas à exister." (12)

Rather than attempt to change the image of himself as seen by other people, Daniel wants to be solidified in their look, so that he will be what he knows himself to be, and so that as an object he will no longer have to endure feelings of torment and guilt. Thus, he will exempt himself from the unavoidable lot of men as free, responsible beings: he will not have to assume the terrible burden of liberty:

> "Ne plus me soucier de l'air que j'ai, ne plus me regarder, surtout, si je me regarde je suis deux. Etre. Dans le noir, à l'aveuglette. Etre pédéraste, comme le chêne est chêne." (13)

Daniel is even prepared to use God for this purpose, reasoning that the "regard" of God will mean that he will no longer need to worry about what he is, because "un Autre" sees and, in a sense, "makes" him. As a rather extreme manifestation of "mauvaise foi", Daniel reflects in a very dramatic way many of Sartre's most important philosophical theories. Some of the most powerful passages of Le Sursis are those where Daniel grasps in cowardly, desperate fashion for refuge and "repos" in traditional religious values:

> "Mais je sais sous ton oeil que je ne peux plus me fuir. J'entrerai, je me dresserai debout, au milieu de ces femmes à genoux, comme un monument d'iniquité. Je dirai: "Je suis Caïn. Eh bien? C'est toi qui m'as fait, porte-moi." Le regard de Marcelle, le regard de Mathieu, le regard de Bobby, le regard de mes chats: ils s'arrêtaient toujours à ma peau. Mathieu, je suis pédéraste. Je suis, je suis, je suis pédéraste, mon Dieu." (14)

Philippe, who tries to use pacifism as an excuse for his cowardice, is another clear example of the "lâche" or "salaud", continually tormented by the looks of others. He wonders whether they see through the veneer of pacifism to his real motives. Philippe feels that not only is he being observed, he is also pursued by the looks of other people. He continually tries to justify himself to other people, but invariably contrives only to make himself appear even more pathetic, as in his encounter with Gros-Louis:

> "Ses larmes jaillirent sur le palier du troisième, il avait oublié d'emporter un mouchoir, il s'essuya les yeux avec sa manche, il renifla une fois ou deux, je ne suis pas un lâche. Le vieux manant là-haut le prenait pour un lâche, son mépris le poursuivait comme un regard. Ils me regardent." (15)

Philippe deludes himself to such a degree that he fancies his pathetic outbursts against the war will somehow make him a

martyr in other people's eyes, and his existence will thereby be justified.

Mathieu's encounter with Irène brings an added dimension to the "regard" motif. As in this case, there may be a dramatic struggle between the "regards" of two characters, reminiscent of Racinian tragedy.

> "il la voyait. Un regard. Un regard immense, un ciel vide: elle se débattait dans ce regard, comme un insecte dans la lumière d'un phare." (16)

This scene provides clear illustration of the power Sartre instils into a person's look; it is an active, living thing. As Mathieu and Irène make love, he begins to feel immobilised and externalised in her eyes:

> "Elle m'a fait entrer dans ces yeux; j'existe dans cette nuit: un homme nu. Je la quitterai dans quelques heures et cependant je resterai en elle pour toujours." (17)

Edith Kern has made an analysis of Sartre's use of "le regard", and she describes its function in this way:

> "The Look, which has the power to interfere with the Other's freedom by solidifying him, thus also has that of confirming his existence." (18)

The motif is therefore extremely important for Sartre in that it enables him to provide greater insight into his characters without contradicting his own philosophical and literary principles. The individual, never rigidly defined by the author, still emerges as seen by other people.

The discussion of Le Sursis has so far been centred mainly on the novel's all-important technical aspects. However, the characters and their relation to the themes of Les Chemins de la liberté should not be overlooked. The criticism has been made of Le Sursis that no character is revealed in any great

depth, that Sartre simply presents a conglomeration of various "types", none of whom ever really comes alive. However, the author's over-all approach to Le Sursis should be taken into account: to spend a great deal of time exploring deeply the motives and thoughts of each character would negate the vital sense of urgency and immediacy Sartre wants to convey. The brief glimpses of a large number of different people are deliberately designed to communicate the idea that all people, regardless of their particular station in life, are confronted with the all-pervading threat of war. All must face up to it and decide what action to take. By including a large number of characters, representing a wide cross-section of society, Sartre can thus show first how nobody can be untouched by the war, and secondly he can illustrate his own theories of commitment and freedom by depicting a wide variety of responses to the war. These range from the determined urge to stand and fight of Gomez, Maurice and Milan to the cowardly evasion of Jacques, Philippe and Pierre. Thus, the lack of deep characterisation is certainly not a fault in Le Sursis; on the contrary, it is an apt method of conveying Sartre's themes and illuminating the various possibilities of action open to men.

Of the characters who appeared in L'Age de raison, most show some development and, in some cases, considerable progress along their "chemins de la liberté." Mathieu for a large part of Le Sursis appears to be making no progress from his original state of "ennui", continual self-analysis, and refusal to act positively. The difference now is that it is much more difficult for him to find acceptable excuses for remaining inactive, because he is confronted with a concrete situation which demands a response. The first glimpses of Mathieu reveal him still indulging in this sterile self-analysis. He wonders

what would have happened had he just once committed himself to a free act, but he immediately excuses himself, exhibiting at the same time his lucidity in being able to analyse his situation correctly:

> "Si j'avais fait ce que je voulais, si j'avais pu, une fois, une seule fois, être libre, eh bien ça serait tout de même une sale duperie, puisque j'aurais été libre pour la paix, dans cette paix trompeuse...." (19)

Mathieu's moment of illumination comes quite suddenly in the memorable scene on the Pont-Neuf, as he ponders yet again on his freedom and contemplates suicide. He realises in anguish that the apparently elusive freedom he was pursuing is not something which descends upon men: it has been at hand all the time, existing within himself:

> "Au milieu du Pont-Neuf, il s'arrêta, il se mit à rire: cette liberté, je l'ai cherchée bien loin; elle était si proche que je ne pouvais pas la voir, que je ne peux pas la toucher, elle n'était que moi. Je suis ma liberté." (20)

He goes on to articulate quite explicitly one of Sartre's most crucial philosophical tenets: "la liberté c'est l'exil et je suis condamné à être libre." (21) Mathieu, having recognised the existence of his freedom, wonders what he should do with it. He realises that he is free "pour rien" and contemplates making a choice at last to throw himself into the Seine and, as he says, "il se serait choisi pour l'éternité." (22) He now fully recognises the terrible burden of responsibility this freedom represents, "l'horrible, horrible liberté." (23) But at the last moment he decides not to kill himself; he will wait for another occasion. Mathieu has shown this refusal to act before, but now he is aware of the nature of his freedom and the demands it makes on him. He decides to enlist, and as

the train full of soldiers moves off, we sense that Mathieu is perhaps on the verge of an authentic commitment:

> "Mathieu eut un sursaut de joie: c'était fini. Demain, Nancy, la guerre, la peur, la mort peut-être, la liberté. Nous allons voir, dit-il. Nous allons voir." (24)

The reprieve of Munich delays any further development in Mathieu, but the reader is projected forward to the next volume to observe his actions in a situation of intense crisis.

Of the other characters, Daniel's religious "conversion" has already been discussed, and we still see him exhibiting his consuming urge to punish both others and himself. While the other characters fear the outset of war, Daniel looks forward to it with sadistic eagerness. He wants to witness the suffering of the Others, under whose relentless gaze he endures such torment:

> "il pensa: "Mon Dieu, pourvu qu'il y ait la guerre!".... Ce ciel pur, ils vont la déchirer de leurs propres mains. Comme ils vont se haïr! Comme ils vont avoir peur! Et moi, comme je frétillerai dans cette mer de haine." (25)

Boris is depicted rather more sympathetically in Le Sursis. He refuses to blind himself to the threat of war, and resigns himself quite cheerfully to going away to fight. While he has only a shallow conception of what is involved, he has at least developed from the idle immaturity of L'Age de raison. Jacques is still the hypocritical, pompous, bourgeois "salaud", trying to conceal his cowardice behind a facade of utterances about his faith in "democracy" and the ability of nations to settle their differences peacefully.

The women characters in Le Sursis exhibit characteristics,

similar to those they showed in L'Age de raison, but in a more extreme manner. Almost without exception, the women in Le Sursis are portrayed as tempting men away from their "duty" to fight. They clearly illustrate Sartre's curiously unbalanced and unfavourable opinion of women at this stage of his development. It is difficult to find a single instance where women are shown in a favourable light. Characters such as Lola, Odette, Zézette, Maud and Flossie have the function of being virtual leeches, tempting men with the pleasures of the flesh and leading them into "mauvaise foi" and self-degradation. The examples are numerous. Sartre often uses his technique of juxtaposition to great effect with his women characters. Near the end of the novel, he switches repeatedly from a sordid scene, where Ivich is being forcibly obliged to "yield" to a lover, to the scene, which in Sartre's opinion represents a surrender to tyranny, where Chamberlain and Daladier are informing their Dzech "allies" of the deal they have concluded with Hitler. As history reveals, this effectively sold out Czechoslovakia to the Nazis. In another instance, Sartre juxtaposes the scene, where Flossie attempts to seduce the self-styled martyr Philippe, with one where Zézette is being urged by another woman to sign a petition against the war. Zézette urges Maurice not to go off to fight, just as Lola exerts similar pressure on Boris.

Suzanne Lilar sums up Sartre's attitude to women by writing, in reference to Les Chemins de la liberté, "la femme est essentiellement quelqu'un qui cède." (26) Besides representing a hindrance to commitment in the form of an appeal to men's sexual instincts, many of the women characters display a strong element of pacifism. Notable in this respect is Sarah, who declares to Gomez that a man should not be labelled a

coward simply because he refuses to fight:

> "Il n'y a rien qui vaille la peine que je me retrouve un jour sur une route avec ma maison en morceaux à côté de moi et mon petit écrasé dans mes bras." (27)

Not surprisingly, Lilar takes issue with the unsympathetic attitude of Sartre towards women in his philosophical theories and novels. Referring specifically to Mathieu's violent final act in La Mort dans l'âme, she writes:

> "pas une fois, le romancier ne semble avoir envisagé qu'il y a du mérite aussi à dire non à la guerre, comme Sarah dont le pacifisme généreux et militant vaut bien la fureur négatrice et terroriste de Mathieu." (28)

Sartre's inclusion of a large number of minor characters in Le Sursis is valid in terms of his own theories and aims. While such an approach effectively helps convey the intended atmosphere of immediacy and universality, there is nevertheless some validity in the criticism that, by never deeply exploring his characters, Sartre leaves the reader a little unsatisfied. Many of the characters of Le Sursis, especially the solid, resolute working class types, like Milan Hlinka, Gomez and Maurice, show that there is, after all, a human side to Sartre. The main characters of L'Age de raison, who also feature in Le Sursis, are never really humanly recognisable: they are little more than embodiments of certain philosophical problems. This is reinforced by the fact that right throughout Les Chemins de la liberté we never really discover what a character looks like. So concerned is Sartre with relatively abstract problems that he never tries to bring his characters to life by describing their physical characteristics. The only time we get any such physical description is to emphasise a philosophical point, for example the constant references in L'Age de raison to

Marcelle's abundant, fertile flesh. But characters such as Milan *are* recognisable: they are not in any way exceptional or abnormal. Sartre has been quite vocal in his admiration for the role played during the Occupation by the ordinary working-class people in courageously resisting their Nazi oppressors. But we are permitted only tantalising glimpses of such persons; yet when they do appear they are depicted with impressive vigour and humanity. Sartre is so obsessed with philosophical problems that his novels fail to convey the patience and sympathy with the common man that he himself expressed on many occasions. The result is that his novels to a considerable extent exhibit a sterility and lack of human warmth which detracts from their over-all literary impact. *Le Sursis* in particular gives us an all too brief glimpse of the success Sartre could have achieved by writing more about people and less simply about problems.

Nevertheless, *Le Sursis* impresses as a more satisfying novel than *L'Age de raison*. Technically, it is an outstanding achievement, and Sartre succeeds to a far greater extent in effectively reconciling technique with thematic content. *Le Sursis* is much less static than the first volume, in which the characters show little perceptible development. In *Le Sursis*, Mathieu especially undergoes important changes, although full self-realisation and commitment are still some way off. In addition, the novel reflects Sartre's increasing preoccupation with commitment in a more specifically political sense, and this will be a vital consideration in the third volume.

CHAPTER 3 NOTES

(1) Albérès, R.-M: Sartre (Editions Universitaires, 1964); p.85.

(2) Thody, Philip: Sartre: A biographical introduction (Studio Vista, 1971); p.86.

(3) Sartre, Jean-Paul: Le Sursis (Gallimard, 1945); p.7.

(4) Ibid.; p.7.

(5) Prince, Gerald Joseph: Métaphysique et Technique dans l'oeuvre romanesque de Sartre (Librairie Droz, 1968); p.25.

(6) Le Sursis; p.59.

(7) Albérès; p.82.

(8) Le Sursis; pp.260-261.

(9) Ibid.; p.286.

(10) Thody, Philip: Jean-Paul Sartre: A Literary and Political Study (Hamish Hamilton, 1964); p.54.

(11) Ibid.; p.56.

(12) Le Sursis; p.107.

(13) Ibid.; p.107.

(14) Ibid.; p.158.

(15) Ibid.; p.138.

(16) Ibid.; p.298.

(17) Ibid.; p.305.

(18) Kern, Edith: Existential Thought and Fictional Technique: Kierkegaard. Sartre. Beckett. (Yale University Press, 1970); p.147.

(19) Le Sursis; p.72.

(20) Ibid.; p.285.

(21) Ibid.; p.286.

(22) Ibid.; p.286.

(23) Ibid.; p.286.

(24) Ibid.; p.315.

(25) Ibid.; p.41.

(26) Lilar, Suzanne: A Propos de Sartre et de l'amour (Editions Bernard Grasset, 1967); p.177.

(27) Le Sursis; p.84.

(28) Lilar; p.179.

CHAPTER 4

LA MORT DANS L'AME: "LA LIBERTE, C'EST LA TERREUR"

The third and last completed volume of Les Chemins de la liberté is similar to Le Sursis in that it takes place in a specific historical context. At the end of Le Sursis, the Munich conference had provided a brief reprieve, a "false peace." La Mort dans l'âme takes place shortly after the inevitable has occurred: France has fallen to the Germans, and the country is gripped by chaos and despair. This novel is even more concentrated in time than Le Sursis, as Sartre traces the hour by hour reactions of people to the defeat. We now have a clear illustration of what Sartre terms an "extreme situation", one in which men find themselves being under conditions of great stress and adversity. La Mort dans l'âme shows a wide variety of responses to this situation: some Frenchmen try to conceal their shame in drinking or in the pursuit of sexual pleasure; some - notably Daniel Sereno - welcome the Germans; while others show courage in refusing to passively accept defeat.

Technically, the novel is more conventional and closer to L'Age de raison than to Le Sursis. Sartre returns to following the fortunes of a relatively small number of characters. Again it is Mathieu who occupies the centre of interest, at least until the violent climax on the churchtower. Unlike the previous two volumes, the technique is relatively straightforward, and most attention can be focussed on the characters and their relationship to the themes of the work as a whole. However, there is one significant technical feature: after

Mathieu's final stand on the churchtower, there is a complete break, and we are suddenly confronted again by Brunet, who hardly rated a mention in Le Sursis. Some critics see La Mort dans l'âme as virtually two separate novels, and they regard this sharp division as a serious weakness. This is an important question which will need to be examined.

Boris is one of the few characters who appear in each of the three completed volumes to show any significant development and towards whom Sartre appears sympathetically inclined. This failure on the author's part to create rounded, humanly convincing characters - with only a few minor exceptions - is a serious flaw in the work. However, Boris has advanced some way from the idle, bored young man of L'Age de raison. He still lacks Mathieu's lucidity in analysing his condition and recognising the importance of asserting his freedom. But he has recognised and rejected the pointlessness of his former existence and seen the need for a positive response to the war; hence, he has no hesitation in enlisting to fight. He is now a determined fighter, which is quite an achievement in view of the efforts in Le Sursis of his ageing mistress, Lola, to force him to abrogate his responsibility to act. He contrasts markedly with his sister Ivich, who visits him when he is convalescing after being wounded in action. She shows herself to be as shallow and immature as ever, and her petulant behaviour highlights - by contrast - the progress Boris has made towards asserting his freedom. The scene where she castigates a waiter on the standard of the coffee he has served emphasises her childish preoccupation with trivial matters at a time when France is in the throes of one of the most serious crises in its history. The waiter's reply underlines Sartre's contempt for the "mauvaise foi" of people of Ivich's type:

> "- C'est pas le jour où les Boches sont entrés à Paris que j'irais me plaindre pour un café, grommela le garçon, dépité." (1)

It is worth noting that the very fact that we can often refer to Sartre's characters as "types" - in this case, Ivich - is further indictment of his general lack of success in creating convincing characters. Boris is to some extent an exception to this, as his reaction to Ivich's conduct shows:

> "Il soupira: voilà qu'elle recommence, pensa-t-il avec ennui. Ce n'est plus de son âge." (2)

The critic Marie-Denise Boros aptly describes Boris and Ivich as "des passionnés de la liberté." (3) They both seek (though Boris does make some progress as the trilogy develops) to carry out some gratuitous action in a futile attempt to prove to themselves that they have total freedom. This explains Boris' kleptomania and some of Ivich's actions, such as the knife incident in L'Age de raison. Her life is a continual struggle to prove that she has absolute independence and freedom. But Boros points out the utter futility of such behaviour:

> "Mais sa liberté tourne à vide. Elle est pour rien. Elle n'a jamais rien fait, elle ne fait rien. Elle passe son temps à conserver intacte sa liberté absolue, mais pour rien." (4)

In other words, it is not enough - as Mathieu discovers - to simply know that we have this total freedom: the important thing is the use we make of it.

Apart from Mathieu, Daniel's reaction to the fall of France is probably the most important illustration of Sartre's philosophical ideas. In the previous two volumes, we have observed his consuming self-torment and his sadistic urge to punish "les Autres", who he fancies ruthlessly observing and

condemning him. But his moment of rejoicing and triumph has now arrived as the German armies march into Paris. Seeing the hated "others" running in panic, Daniel is beside himself with joy. The people who had condemned him as a pervert are in full flight, and Daniel feels that a great weight has been lifted from his shoulders. As Maurice Cranston puts it, "The Others have been routed." (5) The passages dealing with Daniel as he welcomes his Nazi "brothers" show the great power with which Sartre sometimes invests his prose. Sartre leaves us under no illusions about his contempt for people whose "mauvaise foi" leads them into such self-degradation. Daniel is an obvious parallel with those Frenchmen who refused to resist their oppressors and who in many cases, even at the highest political levels, collaborated with them. After the Liberation, Sartre, in his characteristically uncompromising way, advocated the death penalty for collaborators. Daniel personifies all Sartre's hatred for such people. By making Daniel a homosexual, Sartre seems to be creating further justification for revulsion at the coward and collaborator.

Ironically, Daniel for the first time feels that he is free - although in Sartre's terms it is a mockery of freedom - as the Germans march through Paris:

> "Il sentait en lui une liberté immense et vaine." (6)

This scene provides Sartre with the opportunity to produce some highly evocative writing, as Daniel gleefully observes the rout of his former tormentors:

> "ils courent, ils courent, ils n'ont pas fini de courir. Il avait levé la tête et tourné son sourire vers le ciel, il respirait largement: un procès en cours depuis vingt ans, des espions jusque sous son lit; chaque passant, c'était un témoin à charge ou un juge ou les deux; tout ce qu'il disait pouvait être retenu contre lui. Et puis,

> d'un seul coup, la débandade. Ils courent, les témoins, les juges, les hommes de bien, ils courent sous le soleil et l'azur pond des avions sur leurs têtes." (7)

Daniel even refers to the German soldiers as "anges." Sartre allows him to state quite explicitly the significance of this scene:

> "c'était la victoire du mépris, de la violence et de la mauvaise foi, c'était la victoire de la Terre." (8)

Daniel is a remarkable creation, the epitome of all that Sartre considers evil and despicable in men. Mathieu may more closely reflect and express Sartre's ideas about liberty and commitment, but Daniel remains the most memorable and intriguing character.

Daniel's final scene is his meeting with Philippe, the unhappy young pacifist who exhibits many similar qualities of bad faith and cowardice. Having failed to impress himself upon people as a martyr for the cause of peace, Philippe proposes to commit suicide - a "way out" contemplated by a number of Sartre's characters, including Mathieu, when they find the need to assert their freedom a burden too heavy to bear. With other people, who had previously tormented him, in full flight, Daniel for the first time feels confident and relaxed. He now feels a sense of power and superiority, and all feelings of guilt have vanished. He resolves to "save" this young man to whom he feels strongly attracted. Daniel uses the old seduction techniques, but without any of the previous anguish and perverted hatred. In Philippe, Daniel gleefully sees the opportunity to invest another person with his own "mauvaise foi" and evil intentions:

> "Il était beau comme un ange. Je t'aiderai, pensa Daniel avec passion, je t'aiderai. Il voulait sauver Philippe, en faire un homme, je te donnerai tout ce que j'ai, tu sauras tout ce que je sais." (9)

Daniel says he will teach Philippe to be free, but we know that any "liberté" Philippe may acquire from this source will be a complete mockery and the antithesis of Sartre's own ideas. Sartre in fact allows Daniel to explain what such a concept of freedom entails: a nihilistic, empty and valueless freedom:

> "-Il faudra, dit-il avec une excitation joyeuse, commencer par liquider toutes les valeurs." (10)

This is the last we see of Daniel and Philippe. In Daniel, however, Sartre has left us with an impressive, if somewhat unreal, personification of much that he considers to be abhorrent and detestable in humanity. Daniel is scarcely a recognisably human character, although many of his individual traits are. His importance lies in the striking and original manner in which he illustrates some of Sartre's most crucial philosophical beliefs. As a picture of a "lâche", a man of intense bad faith, the character of Daniel is one of the most memorable aspects of Les Chemins de la liberté.

Part of La Mort dans l'âme is therefore concerned with presenting a final view of some of the characters who first appeared in L'Age de raison. However, the first section of La Mort dans l'âme is most vitally concerned with Mathieu. Sartre here provides further illustration of both his talents and limitations as a novelist. One by one, he eliminates the relatively minor characters, until our attention is focussed almost solely on Mathieu. Thus, we can finally attempt to form some conclusions about Mathieu's progress along his "chemin de la liberté" and consequently about Sartre's wider aims in the novel. This first part of La Mort dans l'âme describes the succession of events after Mathieu, having finally resolved to

fight, has joined his regiment. While Mathieu has taken a positive step by enlisting, Sartre obviously sees this as merely the beginning for him. Mathieu may indeed have decided to act, but he has yet to take the further, crucial step of manifesting this decision in concrete, authentic action. But his continuing evolution along the road to positive "engagement" is clearly traced in La Mort dans l'âme.

In this volume, Sartre tailors the actual historical situation to his own philosophical and social views. His insistence on the need for all men to freely choose and commit themselves is naturally more relevant in an "extreme situation", such as that in which all Frenchmen found themselves in the grim days of 1940. For Sartre, there are times when men simply must choose and act, when there is no rational or moral judgement involved to complicate matters or confuse the issue. He bitterly denounces those who refused to commit themselves to the fight against fascism. It was their cowardly passiveness, he says, which in fact aided the rise of fascism. The critic Albérès explains Sartre's attitude, implicit in the character of Mathieu:

> "L'homme est lié au destin de son époque, et par son existence même il y joue un rôle. Ses actes individuels se répercutent sur tous, et s'il évite d'agir, son absence d'action se répercute aussi sur tous." (11)

Mathieu fails to fully comprehend the truth of this until the defeat of 1940. He realises, with a sudden feeling of anger and impotence, that total detachment from social and political life is impossible:

> "Mais, bon Dieu! je n'en voulais pas, moi, de cette guerre, ni de cette défaite; par quel truquage m'oblige-t-on à les assumer? Il sentit monter en lui une colère de bête prise au piège et, levant la tête, il vit briller cette même colère dans leurs yeux. Crier vers le ciel tous ensemble: "Nous n'avons rien

> à faire avec ces histoires! Nous sommes innocents!" Son élan retomba: bien sûr l'innocence rayonnait dans le soleil matinal, on pouvait la toucher sur les feuilles d'herbe. Mais elle mentait: le vrai, c'était cette faute insaisissable et commune, notre faute." (12)

Sartre insists that, in such a situation of crisis, man can no longer be an isolated, innocent individual: whether he likes it or not, he is part of society and must commit himself to its betterment. Les Chemins de la liberté traces the successive stages in the "prise de conscience" of a man who at first desperately avoids his responsibility to act, then comes to a realisation of the nature of his freedom and consequently asserts it in action.

The meaning of defeat and the devastating effect it had on Frenchmen generally is powerfully illustrated by the picture Sartre presents of the demoralised, dispirited, French soldiers. Sartre shows little sympathy for those who give up, simply accepting defeat and awaiting capture by their new "masters". Some of his most compelling prose is revealed in the reactions dealing with the men of Mathieu's regiment and their pathetic efforts to conceal the humiliation of defeat. In this description of a small group of men, Sartre conveys the shame and despair of a whole nation. Some of the soldiers try to "make up" for the humiliation of failure in the pursuit of immediate sexual gratification or in wild drinking bouts. In this situation of degradation Mathieu wants to affirm himself, he feels an urge to act. At first he tries to achieve a sense of solidarity with his fellows by joining in their desperate revelry, but he quickly realises the futility of this. He is beginning to achieve a fuller awareness of the nature of his freedom. He also understands that simply having this knowledge is insufficient: the important factor is the use he makes of

his freedom. Albérès points this out, ephasising at the same time the progress Mathieu has made from L'Age de raison:

> "Il a découvert que la liberté ne vaut que l'usage qu'on en fait, qu'elle exige un engagement et une responsabilité, ainsi qu'une action précise dans une situation donnée, alors que dans L'Age de raison elle ne lui semblait que l'occasion de se ménager." (13)

Sartre also allows Mathieu to articulate one of his most essential theories: that of "la responsabilité généralisée." Sartre insists on the crucial importance of total responsibility and authentic commitment. At the same time he contends that if a person refuses to act, this very refusal is itself an act, a choice, although a reprehensible and unauthentic one. Mathieu fully realises the guilt he now bears for refusing to commit himself against the threat of tyranny:

> "Mon Dieu, j'ai lu, j'ai baîllé, j'agitais le grelot de mes problèmes, je ne me décidais pas à choisir, et pour de vrai j'avais déjà choisi, j'avais choisi cette guerre, cette défaite et j'étais attendu au coeur de cette journée." (14)

Mathieu is able to recognise the guilt he bears in helping bring about the events which have led to the fall of France, and he is moving towards a choice and an act which may wash away this guilt. However, his army comrades lack this lucidity and willingness to acknowledge their guilt.

Through the conversation of the soldiers, Sartre demonstrates again his skill in the use of dialogue. This section is one of the most impressive of the whole trilogy, simply because the author allows these men to condemn themselves with their own words, achieving a bitterly ironical effect. They articulate - usually unwittingly - many of the factors which, in Sartre's view, were responsible for the fall of France. He reveals the "mauvaise foi" and cowardice of men who, seeing

the approach of tyranny, pretended that it never existed and sought evasions and reprieves. Sartre is clearly saying that if men had possessed the courage to resist evil when it first threatened, the subsequent catastrophe might have been prevented. This technique of immediacy, used even more intensively in Le Sursis, is infinitely more effective than the long passages of introspective, abstract theorising which often detract from the literary worth of Les Chemins de la liberté. Sartre is far more impressive when he allows his ideas to emerge from the words and deeds of his characters. Heavy-handed philosophising, thinly disguised as fiction, makes less impact as literature. Sartre's skill here in the use of dialogue gives weight to the claim of some critics that his plays are generally more successful as expositions of his philosophical theories and as works of literature.

A few examples of the dialogue among the French soldiers illustrate the effectiveness of Sartre's use of this technique. Apart from Mathieu, the one among them who shows some real anger and determination not simply to sit back and await capture is Pinette. Significantly, he is of working-class background, and this too ties in with Sartre's contention that such people were generally at the forefront of what resistance the French did offer. Pinette reacts angrily to Pierné's feeble efforts to exonerate himself of any blame for the defeat. Pierné adopts a smug, "I-told-you-so" attitude, until Pinette reveals him to be as guilty as the rest:

> "Les lèvres de Pinette se mirent à trembler.
> - Alors? demanda-t-il d'une voix entrecoupée. Tout va bien? Tu es content?
> - Content?
> - Tu l'as eue, ta défaite!
> - Ma défaite? Dis donc, elle est à toi autant qu'à moi.
> - Tu l'espérais: elle est à toi. Nous qu'on l'espérait pas, on ne voudrait pas t'en priver." (15)

Another soldier, Charlot, exhibits "mauvaise foi" of a different kind as he rushes to pacify Pinette:

> "Charlot courut à Pinette et lui mit son bras autour du cou.
> - Ne vous disputez donc pas, dit-il avec bonté. A quoi ça sert, de se disputer? On a perdu, c'est la faute de personne, personne a rien à se reprocher. On a eu du malheur, c'est tout." (16)

Mathieu listens to these feeble excuses for a while, and his eventual angry outburst underlines the progress he has made towards a genuine commitment:

> "Chacun d'eux, hâtivement, s'était composé l'attitude qui lui permettait de vivre. Il se redressa brusquement et dit d'une voix forte:
> - Vous me dégoûtez." (17)

Thus, the others in the regiment, apart from Mathieu and Pinette, are resigned to the fact of defeat and simply await the formality of capture. Mathieu refuses to countenance such abject submissiveness, and he finds a stolid ally in Pinette. Both are determined to fight, although they are at first unable to decide what form this will take. Sartre clearly admires such bravery, and the way in which he relates the concepts of freedom and terror is now more evident. In such conditions of adversity, the meaning of freedom is demonstrated: when there is no real threat to the individual or to society at large it is much easier for men to deny their freedom, to mask it from themselves. The situation Mathieu is now in demands a response: some respond with cowardly evasiveness, others resolve to stand and fight, despite the strong likelihood of death and the knowledge that there is no guarantee that they will change anything for the better. Sartre traces the gradual evolution in Mathieu. He has rejected the rational, intellectual approach, but he is still unsure as to how he should act:

> "S'enfoncer dans un acte inconnu comme dans une forêt. Un acte qui engage et qu'on ne comprend jamais tout à fait. Il dit passionnément:
> - S'il y avait quelque chose à faire..." (18)

Even after he and Pinette have decided to join the crack regiment of "chasseurs", whose soldierly qualities Mathieu admires, in a final, inevitably futile stand on the church-tower, he is tormented by doubts. He hesitates at first, and for a brief time he emerges again as the rationalising bourgeois intellectual. He asks himself whether his action will be to any good purpose. Pinette urges him to take up a rifle, but Mathieu hesitates:

> "Se fendre la main d'un coup de couteau, jeter son anneau de mariage, tirailler sur les Fridolins: et puis après? Casser, détériorer, ça n'est pas la liberté. Si seulement je pouvais être modeste." (19)

Pinette has no such doubts: as far as he is concerned, it will have been worthwhile if he can kill a few Germans before being killed himself. Sartre clearly admires such stoic courage, although he still depicts Pinette as a rather simple person, not really knowing why he is committing himself in this manner: he just knows that he must act. But the irony implicit in Pinette's scathing denunciation of Mathieu's hesitation is clear:

> "- Me fais pas chier! cria Pinette. J'en ai marre de tes enculages de mouche. Si c'est tout ce que ça donne, l'instruction, je me consolerai de ne pas en avoir." (20)

However, Mathieu's procrastination is only momentary, and he picks up a rifle, without clearly understanding why he is doing so. He simply knows that the time has come to act. The final climax on the churchtower, where Mathieu resists the advancing Germans to the last and meets a violent end, raises several

questions about Sartre's own theories and purposes, especially the problem of whether in fact Mathieu's final commitment is, in Sartre's eyes, a positive, authentic one. Has Mathieu, in Sartre's terms, been "saved"? Has he come to a full knowledge of what freedom really means, and is the manner in which he uses his freedom the type of action which conforms to Sartre's ideas on "engagement"? Has Mathieu, who has been ineffectual all his life, really acted authentically, positively, "for others"?

Mathieu has certainly acquired the ability to hate, as he shows by his dispassionate attitude when he shoots a German soldier. The fact that he can kill a man, a total stranger, with no feeling of remorse, suggests perhaps that Mathieu has genuinely committed himself to a cause, one for which he is prepared to destroy others if need be. On the other hand it has been suggested that this is merely gratuitous, mindless violence, with Mathieu simply thumbing his nose at the world in which he never found success or fulfilment. His reaction at this point is somewhat chilling:

> "Mathieu regardait son mort et riait. 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 gâchette et, pour une fois, quelque chose avait arrivé. Quelque chose de définitif, pensa-t-il en riant de plus belle." (21)

It does appear that, at least at this stage, Mathieu is simply congratulating himself on having finally achieved something concrete in life, even though that achievement is the death of a man he never knew. It is difficult to see any degree of authenticity or responsibility - crucial Sartrean concepts - in this act. Iris Murdoch sees nothing noble or exemplary in Mathieu's actions. Mathieu has, she says, seen the essential

absurdity of his act, and he cannot see it having any more real worth than seeking safety in the cellar with his comrades. This action, and his final bloody demise, are simply acts of gratuitous violence:

> "his final achievement lies in sheer violence, and what he achieves is simply the density and completeness of action which excludes reflexion." (22)

So for her, Mathieu has in no sense struck a blow for humanity by valiantly sacrificing his life in resisting tyranny, as some critics contend. Murdoch emphasises the fundamental individualism of Sartrean philosophy: for Sartre, she believes, human beings are "irreducibly valuable, without any notion of why or how they are valuable or how the value can be defended." (23) Hence, the individual is totally alone, totally and terribly free, confronted with a meaningless, oppressive universe. The only answer Sartre provides, says Murdoch, is to urge men to rebel, however vain or futile this may be. A closer examination of Mathieu's final act many help determine the degree of accuracy in her criticism.

As the small band of men prepare for the last stand against the Nazis, Mathieu's only goal appears to be a determination to hold out for fifteen minutes. Sartre apparently makes no attempt to instil any element of heroism into Mathieu's actions. Mathieu never considers any wider implications his action may have. In spite of Sartre's frequent assertions about the need to fight tyranny and act for the good of mankind in general, Mathieu seems utterly unaware of any such noble intentions. Yet he remains calm and rational, fully conscious that what he is about to do can surely have no effect other than, hopefully, to kill a few Germans before they kill him. To hold out for fifteen minutes is his only aim. He has cer-

tainly made his decision to act, once and for all, but he harbours no illusions about what he will achieve:

> "Dans la rue vide, quatre morts; un peu plus loin, deux autres: tout ce que nous avons pu faire. A présent il fallait finir la besogne: se faire tuer. Et pour eux, qu'est-ce que c'est? Dix minutes de retard sur l'horaire prévu." (24)

The final paragraph is a spectacular climax to Mathieu's story, and regardless of its effectiveness in illuminating Sartre's purposes in the novel, it is a powerful piece of prose. The passage seems to suggest that Mathieu is not acting "for others", in the name of humanity, but out of motives of pure revenge: in fact, he appears to be directing his anger - and his bullets - against humanity. In those final, violent moments, his past flashes by: he wants to wash it away in a torrent of blood. He is undoubtedly acting positively and rejecting his shameful past:

> "C'était une énorme revanche; chaque coup de feu le vengeait d'un ancien scrupule. Un coup sur Lola que je n'ai pas osé voler, un coup sur Marcelle que j'aurais dû plaquer, un coup sur Odette que je n'ai pas voulu baiser." (25)

Mathieu's thoughts during the final scene further reinforce the arguments of critics such as Iris Murdoch and Philip Thody. Far from representing a courageous defence of his invaded country - though courageous his stand undoubtedly is - Mathieu's motives are simply to prove to himself how wrong he has been till now, that it is deeds, not sterile procrastination, that count. As Albérès puts it, Mathieu's final gesture is perhaps futile, but it is one "par lequel il renie toutes les douillettes précautions de sa vie, et affirme que pour vivre il faut risquer." (26) Albérès is less convincing in asserting that Mathieu has come to a realisation of the need

not only to act, but to act with the welfare of mankind generally in mind:

> "Il a compris que la propre de la condition humaine entièrement assumée est d'introduire des changements et des modifications dans le sens du monde, d'agir." (27)

Mathieu has certainly recognised the need to act - and as far as it goes this is praiseworthy - but there is no evidence to suggest that he is doing so for humanity as a whole. On the contrary, he sees himself acting against the society in which he was a failure, and in particular against those people in society with whom his relationship was one of constant conflict:

> "Il tirait, les lois volaient en l'air, tu aimerais ton prochain comme toi-même, pan dans cette gueule de con, tu ne tueras point, pan sur le faux jeton d'en face. Il tirait sur l'homme, sur la Vertu, sur le Monde: la Liberté, c'est la Terreur; ..." (28)

It seems then that Mathieu, in Sartre's own terms, has not come to a full realisation of the meaning of freedom and commitment. For Mathieu, only in the act itself does freedom have any meaning; the freedom and advancement of society at large play no part in his thoughts. Thody sees Mathieu as the incarnation of Hegel's concept of "terrorist liberty." He dies thinking he is free at last, but freedom surely means more than mindless violence, however courageous. The fact that Mathieu does finally act when adversity has reached a peak certainly reflects the way Sartre equates freedom and terror. Yet Mathieu, who has brooded and tormented himself for so long about freedom, has died bravely, but without having discovered the real meaning of human freedom and how it should be used. Mathieu's act lacks the vital elements of authenticity and responsibility: he does not see himself as acting for other

people. Hegel's "terrorist liberty" adequately sums up Mathieu's actions, and Sartre's final sentences bear a bitter irony:

> "La beauté fit un plongeon obscène et Mathieu tira encore. Il tira: il était pur, il était tout - puissant, il était libre.
> Quinze minutes." (29)

So Mathieu's final actions have a slightly tragic element in that he has failed to fully grasp the true meaning of freedom. However, the author's attitude to Mathieu, implicit in this scene, should not be seen as totally critical. Obviously, Mathieu has failed to achieve that full lucidity and awareness which may have instilled an element of heroism into his actions. But at the same time, he has advanced a long way from the feeble, evasive intellectual of L'Age de raison, and this in itself is a notable achievement. Again, although Mathieu fails to see anything noble in his stand, it contrasts sharply with the cowardly "mauvaise foi" of most of the characters of Les Chemins de la liberté. As such, Sartre does not intend us to condemn Mathieu's actions as mere gratuitous violence. In addition, while it is evident that Mathieu's actions are relatively ineffectual, they still represent - in the Sartrean scheme of things - a positive stand against tyranny and a display of great individual valour. The fact that Mathieu is not consciously and knowingly striking a blow for freedom does not greatly detract from the obvious admiration Sartre feels. Mathieu has acted positively to rid himself of his self-constricting "mauvaise foi" and, in the eyes of "the Others", he is "saved." This single courageous act at the end of his life will thus constitute his essence. According to Sartre's philosophy, Mathieu has ceased "becoming"; he is,

as seen by other people, a brave man who stood and fought, unlike so many of his countrymen who simply ran.

Mathieu therefore fails to achieve full self-realisation in terms of Sartre's philosophical ideas, although he makes significant progress towards it. There seems to be some truth in the claim of a number of critics that this is yet another flaw in Les Chemins de la liberté, one which detracts significantly from its over-all effectiveness. It does appear to be true that, while Mathieu's final spectacular demise represents a powerful climax in the novel, its very suddenness is disconcerting and unsatisfying. Sartre has quite skilfully traced Mathieu's development, the successive stages in his "prise de conscience." He reaches a stage where he appears to be on the point of recognising the real significance of his freedom: it exists within himself, not as some vague, abstract, external entity. He seems to be about to assert this freedom in a positive, authentic action which will bring some of Sartre's most crucial philosophical tenets dramatically to life. Instead, his author hurls him to an apparently senseless destruction. As we have seen, Sartre has, in writing Les Chemins de la liberté, very clearly defined purposes in mind. He wants the novel to be an illustration of his theories about freedom and commitment. What better way to achieve this than to trace the fortunes of his central character who fights his way through crippling "mauvaise foi" and despair to a full, active awareness of the meaning of human freedom? Instead, Mathieu, having made such significant progress along the "chemin de la liberté, suddenly disappears in an orgy of nihilism and bloodshed.

The only apparent conclusion to be drawn is that this unsatisfactory end to the history of Mathieu stems from Sartre's

own failings as a novelist, and it possibly also reflects the beginnings of doubts about the validity of his own theories. It seems that he has found it increasingly difficult to express his ideas on commitment through the novel form. Further evidence of this is provided by the way in which he suddenly divides La Mort dans l'âme into what are virtually two different novels. The sudden end on the churchtower, though dramatic and powerful prose, represents possibly an impatience on Sartre's part with the direction his novel has been taking. He may have decided that Mathieu is not the vehicle through which to make his final, definitive statement, and he therefore cuts his history abruptly short. Now, quite without warning, we are confronted again by Brunet, who in his previous appearances has been no more than an interesting but essentially secondary character. Yet he is now the major, almost the only, centre of interest. Such a complete reversal is a serious weakness in the novel. The explanation appears to lie in the evolution of Sartre's own theories. At this stage, his concept of commitment seems to have developed from an almost abstract idea to a more specifically political one. Sartre showed an increased interest in politics and political systems around this time. Reflecting this, the second part of La Mort dans l'âme, and the unfinished fragment which follows, indicate a clear move away from the fundamental individualism of the preceding sections to a concern with politics, and in particular to an examination of Communism. It is also possible that Sartre may have found his own theories wanting when put to the test in his novel. A further contributing factor may be Sartre's realisation that the novel is not a wholly satisfactory vehicle for the expression of his ideas.

The impression we have formed of Brunet so far is of a

stolidly dogmatic man, unswervingly and uncritically loyal to "the Party." He is, as Thody puts it, "an enthusiastic robot." (30) We have seen that Sartre's attitude to people such as Brunet is a somewhat ambivalent one. On the one hand, he admires their qualities of courage and single-minded determination; on the other, he is obviously critical of their willingness to submit to the ready-made values of an organisation such as the Communist Party and thus escape the anguish the individual feels when he is forced to make choices with no such "props" to support him. Until now, we have seen Brunet as an interesting enough character, playing a minor but worthwhile role in the novel. He provides a useful comparison with Mathieu. However, Brunet's sudden rise to prominence is a surprising switch in direction by Sartre, and it raises a number of important questions. As we have seen, he has firstly brought Mathieu's story to an unsatisfactory, if spectacular, end. If in fact the novel had ended at this point, Sartre would at least have left us with a powerful climax. Mathieu has been the central unifying factor in the trilogy, and his abrupt removal is hard to justify, especially in terms of Sartre's broad aims. But if Sartre insists on destroying Mathieu in this way, it would surely be logical to end the whole work at this stage and concede failure to resolve adequately the problems raised in Les Chemins de la liberté. To switch unaccountably back to the relatively insignificant Brunet seems to be mere clutching at straws on Sartre's part, and a refusal to admit his failure to bring the novel to a satisfactory conclusion.

The evolution in Sartre's own ideas from 1945, when L'Age de raison was published, to 1949, the year of publication of La Mort dans l'âme, provides the strongest clue to the change

of direction and emphasis in the novel. The intensely individualistic focus of L'Etre et le néant, reflected in Les Chemins de la liberté up till now, begins to give way to a more general orientation. Sartre has apparently failed to resolve a fundamental contradiction in his philosophy, one which Mathieu clearly illustrates. Sartre has confidently asserted the total, absolute freedom of each individual, yet he has at the same time stressed the element of responsibility to act for mankind generally, which this freedom involves. As Mathieu proves, this is virtually impossible for the individual person, totally and terribly alone, and confronted with a crushing, oppressive universe. Sartre fails to resolve this dilemma in his characterisation of Mathieu, and he simply allows him to die in what Thody calls "an exultation of terrorist liberty" (31), having in no conscious way committed himself to defending or advancing the freedom of others. So Sartre's switch to a more general plane is partly the result of his limitations as a novelist, and partly an indication of his own philosophical and political despair. Thus, he presents Brunet, a man committed to a particular political creed. This seems to be a final, rather desperate attempt to use the novel form successfully to illustrate and validate his philosophical ideas. He has largely failed on an individual level. Therefore, he will look at a different approach to the problems of commitment and freedom: adherence to a rigidly defined political system. He will try to determine whether this is more valid than the former emphasis on individual freedom of choice.

From this point, until the early abandonment of the fourth volume, Brunet is totally dominant. In fact, he is even more dominant than Mathieu has been in the preceding sections. The point of view is always his, and the only other character of

real significance is Schneider. The historical background remains a crucial factor. During the years of the anti-fascist United Front, all goes well for Brunet. He feels no tormenting self-doubts about the particular political creed he follows, because it appears at this point to be a logical reaction to the Nazi threat. However, after the fall of France matters are complicated by the formation of the Nazi-Soviet Pact. The leaders in Moscow, whose line Brunet's Party slavishly follows, have now become the allies of the hated enemy. At first, Brunet continues to follow his leaders uncritically. However, we learn, especially in La Derinère chance, that such blind devotion has been a serious mistake. The part of La Mort dans l'âme involving Brunet deals with his efforts to organise his fellow-Communists in opposition to the Germans, and to arouse anti-Nazi spirit among the prisoners generally.

Sartre makes it quite plain that he rejects Brunet's dogmatic, deterministic approach, seeing it as a negation of individual freedom. Brunet displays the Communist's ultra-utilitarian approach to people; he judges them according to how useful they will be for his purposes. We find evidence of this in his reaction to the people in whose house he takes refuge from the Germans. They are naturally fearful of the consequences should the Germans discover that they have been sheltering a French soldier, but Brunet feels only contempt at what he sees as their cowardice:

> "il regarde avec dégoût ce gros mollasson qui s'obstine à vivre, qui vivra sous tous les régimes, humble, mystifié, coriace, qui vivra pour rien." (32)

Once captured, Brunet immediately begins his "work" of seeking out Party comrades and possible supporters among his

fellow prisoners:

> "Brunet les écoute, il regarde leurs nuques, il pense qu'il y aura beaucoup de travail à faire." (33)

He continues to be unquestioning and undeviating in carrying out his duty. Sartre is obviously critical of what he sees as this blind political faith and refusal to assume the "terrible" burden of freedom which every individual must bear. Brunet quickly forms a low opinion of the "material" he must work with. He abhors their lack of respect for "authority" and ignorance of the need for discipline. As he says, "ça ne sera pas commode de travailler là-dessus." (34) However, it is possible to discern here a minor example of the double standards sometimes displayed by Sartre himself. There is at times a gap between what he claims should be the case in a novel and what results in reality. He is critical of those such as Brunet who see people as mere objects to be manipulated rather than free individuals. Yet Sartre demonstrates several times in Les Chemins de la liberté a severe lack of sympathy for individual human beings and their plight. His treatment of his women characters is one of the most obvious examples of this. Thus, Brunet's contemptuous comments on his fellows are a little ironical if one considers the possibility that they may not necessarily represent a great departure from the opinions of Sartre himself:

> "ils se bousculent, ils rient, ils crient, scandaleux et provocants comme des tapettes; leurs bouches se fendent en plaies hilares au-dessous de leurs yeux de chiens battus." (35)

Brunet even hopes that the Germans will maltreat these men in order that this may arouse some spirit and defiance in them.

The appearance of Schneider marks an important turning-

point in Brunet's development, leading to anguish and serious doubts - for the first time in his life - about the validity of his own particular form of "engagement." Schneider becomes the spokesman for Sartre's contention that the determinism of Communism is a form of "mauvaise foi", by means of which some people - such as Brunet - try to evade their responsibilities. Through Schneider, Sartre demonstrates that Brunet fails because he has too little desire for freedom and is too convinced of the correctness of the Party line. Schneider quickly reveals that he is different from the other prisoners in that he seems to know all about Communism. He uses the fact of the Russo-German rapprochement to support his opinions. He also shows himself to be a man of courage and humanity, and this makes it doubly difficult for the increasingly tormented Brunet to reject his arguments:

> "Le Parti ne nous abandonnera pas, pense Brunet. Le Parti ne peut pas nous abandonner." (36)

In spite of himself, Brunet comes to develop a liking for Schneider, although he finds it progressively more difficult to defend the Soviet Union and the Party. Schneider castigates him for his blind devotion to the Party line and for the manner in which he despises his unfortunate fellow prisoners:

> "Brunet plaque sa paume contre le mur avec irritation: "Nous ne sommes pas au café du Commerce, dit-il, je ne vais pas discuter de ça avec toi: je suis un militant et je n'ai jamais perdu mon temps à faire de la haute spéculation politique: j'avais mon boulot et je le faisais. Pour le reste, je me fiais au Comité central et à l'U.R.S.S.; ce n'est pas aujourd'hui que je vais changer."
> "C'est bien ce que je disais, dit Schneider tristement, tu vis d'espoir." (37)

Schneider says Brunet is wrong to burden all Frenchmen with guilt, although Sartre was not slow to take this line himself:

> "Vous êtes tous d'accord, Pétain avec Hitler, Hitler avec Staline, vous leur expliquez tous qu'ils sont doublement coupables: coupables d'avoir fait la guerre et coupables de l'avoir perdue. Toutes les raisons qu'ils croyaient avoir de se battre, vous êtes en train de les leur ôter." (38)

Sartre is obviously not intending us to regard Brunet's approach to the problem of human freedom as the correct one. However, the irony of Brunet's words is sometimes apparent, in that they seem to echo some of Sartre's own confident claims. For example, the crucial concept of "la liberté, c'est la Terreur" is frequently articulated by Brunet. Just as Sartre asserts that only in situations of the most extreme adversity do men see the true meaning of freedom and the need to assert it in authentic action, so Brunet hopes for the Germans to inflict further suffering on the French prisoners. Only in this way, he believes, will they be stung into finding the courage to make a stand against their oppressors:

> "Il faut la souffrance, la peur et la haine, il faut la révolte et le massacre, il faut une discipline de fer. Quand ils n'auront plus rien à perdre, quand leur vie sera pire que la mort...." (39)

So to this extent, Sartre and Brunet are apparently in accord. Indeed, the final action of the novel strongly confirms this impression. The young printer is killed by the Germans while making an attempt to escape from the prison train. Immediately, the men are drawn together in a common bond of anger, forgetting their earlier fear and despair. Brunet is exultant that at last the French prisoners seem to have regained their determination to fight:

> "le wagon est plongé dans le noir, ça sent la sueur et le charbon, la colère grouille, les pieds raclent le plancher, on dirait une foule en marche. Brunet pense: "Ils n'oublieront plus. C'est gagné." (40)

At this point, the novel simply stops, quite suddenly and unexpectedly. It appears that Sartre has decided that this particular "chemin de la liberté" is a dead-end street, and that he should perhaps try a different approach in a fourth and final volume. It is also worth noting the final sentence, which projects the reader into the future, suggesting that Sartre's final statement has yet to come:

"Demain viendront les oiseaux noirs." (41)

In fact, a small fragment, significantly titled La Dernière chance, was begun, but this too was apparently abandoned without any reasonable conclusions being reached. As we have previously noted, the rise to prominence of Brunet in the second part of La Mort dans l'âme reflects Sartre's own increased preoccupation with politics. It may be that this led him to lose interest in the novel as a means of expressing himself, and that he decided to direct his energies elsewhere. Clearly, Sartre's generally unsympathetic treatment of Brunet involves a bitter political note. During the immediate postwar years, Sartre on numerous occasions attacked the powerful French Communist Party for its ruthless denunciation of anyone courageous enough to criticise it, particularly if that criticism concerned its collusion in the Nazi-Soviet pact. The Communist Party, obviously stung by Sartre's attack, even went to the extent at one stage of reviving a rumour - for which no evidence has ever been produced - that Sartre had been a Nazi spy in the Resistance movement. Thus, the role played by Brunet in La Mort dans l'âme is an obvious reflection of these real life conflicts. Perhaps too the onset of Stalinism in the late 1940s increased Sartre's own philosophical and political despair, and made it no longer possible to end Les Chemins de la

liberté on an optimistic note. These external considerations should not be overlooked; however, attempting in our concluding chapter to assess the over-all success of the work, we should also consider factors within Les Chemins de la liberté itself which may have contributed to its non-completion.

CHAPTER 4 NOTES

(1) Sartre, Jean-Paul: La Mort dans l'âme (Gallimard, 1949); p.59.

(2) Ibid.; p.63.

(3) Boros, Marie-Denise: Un Séquestré: l'homme sartrien (Librairie A.G. Nizet; 1968); p.194.

(4) Ibid.; p.194.

(5) Cranston, Maurice: Sartre (Oliver and Boyd, 1962); p.75.

(6) La Mort dans l'âme; p.80.

(7) Ibid.; p.81.

(8) Ibid.; p.82.

(9) Ibid.; p.123.

(10) Ibid.; p.129.

(11) Albérès, R.-M.: Sartre (Editions Universitaires, 1964); p.80.

(12) La Mort dans l'âme; p.50.

(13) Albérès; p.87.

(14) La Mort dans l'âme; p.69.

(15) Ibid.; pp.70-71.

(16) Ibid.; p.71.

(17) Ibid.; p.72.

(18) Ibid.; p.77.

(19) Ibid.; p.153.

(20) Ibid.; p.154.

(21) Ibid.; p.187.

(22) Murdoch, Iris: Sartre: Romantic Rationalist (Bowes and Bowes, 1953); p.25.

(23) Ibid.; p.53.

(24) La Mort dans l'âme; p.191.

(25) Ibid.; p.193.

(26) Albérès; p.88.

(27) Ibid.; p.88.

(28) La Mort dans l'âme; p.193.

(29) Ibid.; p.193.

(30) Thody, Philip: Jean-Paul Sartre: A Literary and Political Study (Hamish Hamilton, 1964); p.61.

(31) Ibid.; p.63.

(32) La Mort dans l'âme; p.198.

(33) Ibid.; p.202.

(34) Ibid.; p.202.

(35) Ibid.; p.203.
(36) Ibid.; p.245.
(37) Ibid.; p.263.
(38) Ibid.; p.265.
(39) Ibid.; p.276.
(40) Ibid.; p.292.
(41) Ibid.; p.293.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The content of the brief fragment of the abandoned fifth volume of Les Chemins de la liberté should be briefly summarised in order that a concluding assessment of the work as a whole can be made. This short piece, La Dernière chance, represents Sartre's final attempt to resolve, through the medium of the novel, certain philosophical questions, especially those relating to the concepts of human freedom and commitment. Although La Dernière chance does not fall strictly within the limits of this study, a number of factors emerge from it which should be briefly considered.

The fragment begins with Brunet trying to keep up the morale of the other prisoners, assuring them that the U.S.S.R. will soon be joining the war against the Germans. However, a senior Communist Party member called Chalais appears and reveals that Brunet has been following the wrong line all along. Hence, his dogmatic faith in the Party has been cruelly shattered, along with his hopes of creating an effective resistance movement among his fellow prisoners. The true identity of Schneider is finally revealed: his real name is Vicarios, who has been excluded from the Communist Party because of his opposition to the Nazi-Soviet pact. Sartre's political views are particularly obvious here: Brunet suffers the anguish of knowing that Vicarios has been right and that his so-called "commitment" to the ideals of Communism has been an utter negation of freedom. The final bitter irony occurs when Vicarios and Brunet attempt to escape and are betrayed by the other Communist Party members among the prisoners. As Vicarios is dying in his arms,

the tormented Brunet realises that the years of commitment to the Communist Party have been a tragic waste. Thus, Les Chemins de la liberté comes to a puzzling and unsatisfying end. However, one aspect of La Dernière chance should be noted, especially in relation to the possible reasons for the abandonment of the work: it seems that here at last, despite Sartre's insistence that continual conflict is the essence of human relationships, is a genuinely human, sympathetically depicted friendship. It is therefore doubly irritating that the work ends here, as nowhere previously in the trilogy, with the partial exception of some of the minor characters in Le Sursis, have relationships between individuals been based on anything other than conflict and mutual antagonism. Philip Thody expresses the disappointment the reader feels at this state of affairs:

> "Just as Sartre begins to realize that there may be more to human relationships than the inevitable conflicts described in L'Etre et le néant, he gives up writing novels." (1)

Before beginning to discuss the over-all success of Les Chemins de la liberté and the possible reasons for Sartre's failure to complete it, a remarkable passage from La Force des choses, written by his lifelong companion Simone de Beauvoir, should be noted. In this short extract, written in 1963, she outlines how Sartre was apparently to have completed Les Chemins de la liberté. The first shock is to learn that if Sartre had completed the work, Mathieu was to have made a reappearance. Even allowing that the occasional appeal to the reader to suspend willingly his disbelief is a valid technique in a work of fiction, this is surely taking things too far. Our last glimpse of Mathieu showed what could only have been literally his last stand against the advancing Germans. There is absolutely no

evidence to suggest, as de Beauvoir claims, that he was merely captured. However, while we must judge the novel on the evidence suggested by its content, and not on a "version" suggested some fourteen years later - thereby pronouncing Mathieu well and truly dead - de Beauvoir's comments do throw some light on the reasons for abandoning the work. In the fourth volume, Mathieu was to be depicted as a man finally freed of his previous "mauvaise foi" and inertia. Simone de Beauvoir puts it this way:

> "Rescapé, Mathieu, fatigué d'être depuis sa naissance libre "pour rien", s'était enfin et allégrement décidé à l'action." (2)

Apparently, Brunet was to be shown fighting his way through despair eventually to join Mathieu in a similar "engagement", with the result that "Brunet et Mathieu, incarnaient tous deux l'authentique homme d'action." (3) The most important part of this passage is de Beauvoir's explanation of why Sartre failed to go on with the fourth volume in order to end at this remarkably edifying conclusion. Significantly, Sartre too has offered similar reasons. This volume was to have covered the period of the Resistance. Sartre's concerns were, as we have seen, with a number of complex human problems which made tremendous, perhaps unreasonable, demands on each individual. But during the Resistance the problem was much less complex: in Sartre's view, each Frenchman knew (though some evaded it) how he should act. There was no question of the anguish and despair, this burden of "terrible" freedom which is the cornerstone of Sartre's philosophy. De Beauvoir explains Sartre's position:

> "la résistance, il n'avait rien à en dire parce qu'il envisageait le roman comme une mise en question et que, sons l'occupation, on avait su sans équivoque comment se conduire." (4)

Sartre has himself defended in similar terms his decision to abandon the work. Maurice Cranston quotes an interview Sartre had with Kenneth Tynan in 1961, in which he states that for him the fourth volume's intended subject - the Resistance - was artistically unsuitable:

> "The situation was too simple. I don't mean that it is simple to be courageous and risk one's life; what I mean is that the choice was too simple. One's allegiances were obvious. Since then things have become much more complicated, and more romantic in the literary sense of the term. There are many more intrigues and cross-currents. To write a novel whose hero dies in the Resistance, committed to the idea of liberty, would be much too easy." (5)

This is a plausible assertion, but it does not alter the fact hat Sartre has abandoned a long and major work, leaving most of its original dilemmas unresolved. Even if we accept Sartre's claim that the subject for the final volume had become unsuitable, the unsatisfactory and apparently arbitrary means of concluding the work raises doubts about his abilities as a writer of prose fiction, as well as about the validity of his philosophical theories. Thus, Sartre's apparent philosophical and political despair is one vital factor to consider. At the same time, we should attempt to determine whether any limitations on Sartre's part as a novelist contributed to his failure to finish Les Chemins de la liberté.

The first point to consider is the contention of Philip Thody - and others - that the novel is a failure partly because Sartre does not observe some of his own rules about novel-writing. In the essay attacking Mauriac, Sartre claims that the author must allow his characters total freedom, that he must not manoeuvre or manipulate them. It soon becomes very obvious that such manipulation of characters is a strong characteristic of Les Chemins de la liberté. The point here seems to be that

this is not an invalid approach by the novelist, even by one who places as much emphasis on the importance of human freedom as Sartre; rather, it is the original idea which is faulty. It is difficult to conceive of the possibility of writing a novel where no authorial manipulation of characters takes place. In writing a work of fiction, the novelist generally includes in it characters of his own creation: whatever these characters do in the novel can only be what their author allows them to do. They are therefore manipulated by their creator, the novelist. A novel whose characters were totally free in every literal sense of the word could only result in purposeless chaos. One must concur with Thody when he says:

> "To speak about the "liberty" of characters in a novel is simply a metaphorical way of saying that the author has been particularly well inspired in creating the illusion that they have an autonomous existence." (6)

Sartre's treatment of Mathieu's brother Jacques clearly contradicts his own theories and his virulent criticisms of Mauriac. Jacques is manipulated in the most blatant way, so that he becomes a mere caricature of the bourgeois "salaud" so despised by Sartre. It is unfortunate that Sartre insists on this total "freedom" for the characters of a novel and is then found wanting himself in this respect, because Jacques is otherwise an impressively drawn personification of all Sartre's contempt for the cowardice and "mauvaise foi" of the French bourgeoisie. Jacques is obviously not a free agent in the Sartrean sense, but he is still an effective means of making an important point. While Jacques may be the most obvious example of authorical manipulation, he is really only a more extreme instance of Sartre's approach to all his characters. They are all being <u>used</u> in order to exemplify certain ideas, and none of them are "free" in Sartre's concept of the term. The

rules Sartre laid down in criticising Mauriac are for the most part a gross overstatement. It would be difficult, for example, to make a case for saying that Jacques is any more "free" than Mauriac's Thérèse. While Sartre's manoeuvrings of his characters are not on the same level as, for example, the obvious and direct interventions of a Balzac, they still bear little relation to his professed theories. By his failure to relate practice to theory, Sartre emphasises how difficult it is for an author to decide in advance that his characters are going to be free. He may, by skilful manipulation and development, reach an ultimate stage where a character appears to acquire this elusive freedom. However, here too Sartre has not really succeeded in Les Chemins de la liberté.

If we accept that none of the characters in the novel find and assert their freedom as Sartre defines it in his philosophical writings, we should perhaps conclude that, ultimately, the work has failed. At the same time, we have yet to finally establish the degree of success or failure. Sartre's references to the unsuitability of the Resistance as a subject notwithstanding, several factors arise from a study of Les Chemis de la liberté itself which contribute to the relative lack of success of the work as a whole. In Mathieu and Daniel at least, Sartre appears to have two characters with the potential to come to life and demonstrate in dramatic fashion some of his most vital theories. But he does not allow them to develop their full possibilities. He uses Mathieu largely, it seems, to illustrate the idea of "terrorist liberty", Mathieu comes tantalisingly close to a full realisation and assertion of his freedom, but Sartre appears simply to lose patience with him. Similarly, in Daniel he has created an astounding character, one with the potential to bring to life many vital ideas; again, Sartre is

unwilling to persevere with him.

Thus, it is in the characterisation - or lack of it - that Les Chemins de la liberté seems to fall down most drastically. Sartre's existentialism is, as we have noted, an intensely individualistic philosophy, concerned with man and his plight, here and now; it is a totally human philosophy. Therefore, what better way to communicate it than by a thorough exploration of individual human beings in all their weaknesses and strengths? What we have instead is a series of mouthpieces, caricatures or embodiments of abstract concepts. The plight of Mathieu, Ivich, Brunet and the others never really moves us. The fact that it should do so is a damning indictment of Les Chemins de la liberté. Nelly Cormeau has touched on Sartre's biggest shortcoming:

> "M. Sartre ne se soucie pas - dans ses romans, du moins - de connaître, l'homme normal et vivant, de peindre l'individu, ses passions et ses drames." (7)

Sartre's characters are almost entirely flat and one-dimensional: they are never sufficiently sustained. Perhaps the problem is that it is not possible to write a novel which proves certain ideas and also contains living characters. However, Sartre has obviously attempted to do this, and he has not succeeded. Again, as Philip Thody points out, it was possibly Sartre's obsession with ideas which led to another error:

> "It was perhaps unfortunate that he propounded theories about what the novel ought to be before he had written one himself. He thereby gave the critic an irresistible opportunity to weigh him in his own balance and find him wanting." (8)

One of the biggest weaknesses of Les Chemins de la liberté is therefore the lack of real human interest, despite the fact that the problems of freedom and commitment are profoundly human

ones. We have only to compare Sartre with his contemporary Camus, whose novels were to some extent concerned with similar questions. Camus' La Peste, for example, is a deeply moving and convincing work, and as such it is more satisfying and successful than Les Chemins de la liberté. It involves, as does Sartre's work, the reactions of various people to what Sartre would call an "extreme situation." The difference is that Camus creates ordinary, humanly recognisable characters who react in human - though differing - ways to a situation of severe adversity. In his novel, Sartre is not particularly interested in ordinary human beings. The problems of the intellectual, the Communist or the homosexual may be real enough, but such people are not generally representative of the common run of humanity. Only in brief passages does Sartre deal with ordinary men and women. The unfortunate aspect is that these scenes are among the most successful of the whole work. In Le Sursis especially, Sartre effectively and movingly depicts the reactions of ordinary people to the war. Again, his description of the state of much of the defeated French army is an all too brief glimpse of the great power of which Sartre is capable in his prose, but which he seldom demonstrates in a sustained way. His dominating interest in abstract ideas and, increasingly, in politics led to a general excluding of everyday experience from his novels. His main concern is to attempt to solve clearly defined philosophical problems; and when he fails to do this, he is simply not sufficiently interested in his own characters to carry on with them.

Sartre's inability - or refusal - to see his characters as anything more than mere embodiments of philosophical problems seems to have resulted in a failure to find a positive way of expressing and illustrating his theories in Les Chemins de la

liberté. He has no trouble in providing numerous examples of "mauvaise foi" and inauthenticity. What he does fail to do is bring his main characters to a point where they commit themselves in a positive, authentic manner, thereby bringing the novel to a successful conclusion and effectively communicating his ideas. Anthony Manser brings out one of the fundamental failings of the work:

> "Sartre has allowed his philosophic ideas to distort a literary form, to the detriment of the latter." (9)

In conclusion, it should first be noted that within the three completed volumes of Les Chemins de la liberté are many effective examples of Sartre's skill as a writer. Among the positive achievements of the trilogy we should undoubtedly include the effective depiction of many minor characters in the novel, like Maurice, Zézette, Sarah, Gomez, and Milan Hlinka; the powerful, and at times surprisingly moving, picture Sartre paints of the people of a defeated nation, especially the soldiers; his great skill in the use of dialogue; the impressive use of the technique of "simultaneity" in Le Sursis; Sartre's considerable ability to depict an atmosphere of evil of character and decay, especially with Daniel Sereno. In these and in many other respects Sartre leaves us in no doubt why he is one of the greatest French writers - and philosophers - of the twentieth century. However, Les Chemins de la liberté must finally be judged on its overall impact and success, in terms of its author's well defined aims. For Sartre, there could be only one kind of literature: "la littérature engagée." He could not conceive of writing a novel for mere idle entertainment or light relaxation. In L'Etre et le néant he advanced a complex, demanding philosophy of human life; and for him, all

his writings, whether they be novels, plays, essays, literary criticisms or philosophical treatises, were to be geared towards elucidating, illustrating, or proving these theories. Les Chemins de la liberté is no exception, and it must therefore be judged in terms of how successfully - as a novel - it illustrates and advances Sartre's ideas, especially those concerned with "liberté" and "engagement." We can accept that at various points in the work his theories are dramatically revealed, but in the final analysis it falls considerably short of the mark. The work has been abandoned in an apparently arbitrary way, with little or nothing having been resolved. Neither Mathieu, nor Brunet, nor any of the other characters reach a stage of fully recognising and asserting their "freedom", in the specific Sartrean sense of the word. None of the characters comes to make an authentic "commitment", as Sartre defines it. In fact, nobody really achieves anything, unless Mathieu's "terrorist liberty" can be called an achievement. Therefore, we can only come to the conclusion that Sartre, having set himself clear - if ambitious - aims in Les Chemins de la liberté, has failed to achieve them.

CHAPTER 5 NOTES

(1) Thody, Philip: Sartre: a biographical introduction (Studio Vista, 1971); p.86.

(2) de Beauvoir, Simone: La Force des choses (Gallimard, 1963); p.213.

(3) Ibid.; p.213.

(4) Ibid.; p.214.

(5) The Observer; June 18, 1971.

(6) Thody, Philip: Jean-Paul Sartre: A Literary and Political Study (Hamish Hamilton, 1964); p.66.

(7) Cormeau, Nelly: Littérature Existentialiste: le roman et le théâtre de Jean-Paul Sartre (Georges Thone, 1950); p.17.

(8) Thody; p.66.

(9) Manser, Anthony: Sartre: A Philosophic Study (Athlone Press, 1967); p.56.

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