La Nausée-Jean-Paul Sartre

This is a novel in the form of a diary; the style is perhaps excessively philosophical. The central character, Antoine Roquentin, has toured Europe, North Africa and the Far East, but has decided to return to a mundane France, to the town of Bouville. Similar to Sartre, he seems to prefer to spend his time in a library or café. He is rather fitfully researching a historical figure, the Marquis of Rollebon.

Again and again, the narrative is peppered- or maybe hindered- by philosophical considerations- such as the irreversibility of time, the problematic nature of existence, and, of course, the notorious chestnut tree, the 'marronier', whose dark root drives Roquentin into agonies of contemplation.

There is the inevitable element of subversion. Touring through the local museum, Roquentin views the Bouville bourgeoisie, depicted in solemn vain portraits, and, in the last word of the passage, dismisses them as 'salauds'-bastards.

Roquentin is afflicted by a spiritual nausea- a sort of depression. His girl-friend, Anny, rejects him eventually. His friend, the 'autodidact', claims to be socialist, and ends up trying to molest a boy in the accursed library.

The nausea is really philosophical; it is an existentialist shriek, welling up from the bleak absurdity of destiny. The book concludes that existence has to be an unbearable nightmare for anyone who can claim to have sensitivity and insight.

By Ibrahimi Zekira (winner)