

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF
THE CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT OF
JEAN-PAUL SARTRE TOWARD
HIS COMING TO EXISTENTIALISM
AS SEEN IN HIS AUTOBIOGRAPHY
THE WORDS

A Thesis

Presented as a Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
to Obtain the *Sarjana Sastra* Degree in English Letters



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2003

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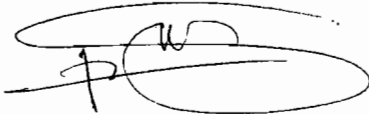
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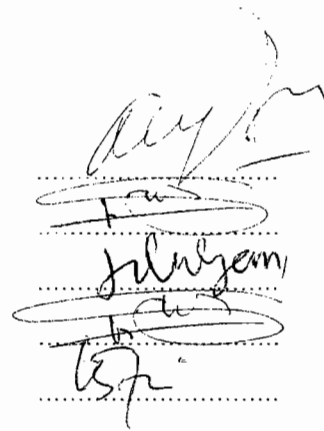
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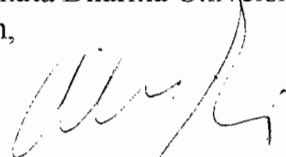
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It began in the mid of 2001 when I looked back to a shelf in Gramedia bookstore. The book entitled *Kata-kata* (Indonesian version of *The Words*) lay down there, a bit dusty since not many persons might look at it with interest. Jean-Paul Sartre, its author, was not a new name for me. Yet, I have no idea about his philosophy. Pushed by my astonishment and curiosity, I took the book, bought it, and then read it over. At first, I did not really know what the book said until I read another book of Sartre and some other books on his philosophy. The books said that Sartre's existentialism is pessimistic in tone. His view on human existence is somehow interesting and has made me think over my own existence in a depth I have never involved before. This thesis is just one of my efforts to understand my existence.

This simple and humble thesis is nothing without the sincerity of several good and positive souls who firmly encircle me with love, care, support, criticisms, and help.

In my effort to write this thesis, I owe support and criticisms to Drs. F.X. Siswadi, M.A., my sponsor. Not only material support and time that were given to me, but also mental encouragement. I shall not deny my commitment stating that I would finish it in the right time.

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My biggest thanks go to my Creator, Jesus Christ. I learn something denying your existence, but it has surprisingly made me believe more in you. There is plenty of evidence of your existence and loving care.

Yogyakarta, March 2003

ABSTRACT

F.X. DONO SUNARDI (2003): *The Significance of the Character Development of Jean-Paul Sartre toward his Coming to Existentialism as Seen in his Autobiography The Words*. Yogyakarta: Faculty of Letters, Sanata Dharma University.

This thesis discusses Jean-Paul Sartre's autobiography entitled *The Words* (1964). Jean-Paul Sartre is a prominent figure in philosophy as well as in literature. His philosophy, labeled as existentialism, has greatly influenced the way modern man views his life; meanwhile his writings are great contributions to the world's literature. His honest and frank view on the existence of human being was undeniably the result of his own experiences during his lifetime, particularly his childhood as told in *The Words*. This thesis tries to find the significance of Sartre's character development as seen in *The Words* toward his coming to the idea of existentialism.

In order to find that significance, there are two problem formulations that have been set up. They are: (1) how does Jean-Paul Sartre present the development of his character in *The Words*?; and (2) what is the significance of the character development of Jean-Paul Sartre as presented in *The Words* toward his coming to existentialism? The answers to the problems will be the essence and the goal of this thesis.

Acquiring answers to the problems means acquiring a deeper and better understanding on how the character development of an autobiography, in this case of Jean-Paul Sartre, leads him hold a certain philosophy or system of thought, labeled as existentialism.

The method applied in making this thesis is mainly library research method, which provides abundant resources and information on Sartre, existentialism, and his contemporary. Despite the great numbers of resources, most of them are dealing with Sartre's philosophy and only a small numbers of them concerns with the way Sartre came to the existentialism. Since *The Words* is an autobiography, the approach to it entails going beyond the text. As autobiography, it presents Sartre's self-totalization seen from his then present with its symbolic truth. It also contains fact and fiction. In order to get the truth of Sartre, the reference to another writings on the life of Sartre is needed.

This thesis concludes that the character development of Jean-Paul Sartre did influence his coming to existentialism. It was his experiences, particularly the early death of his father, the figure of his grandfather, and his deep involvement in the world of literature, which led him to hold such a view on human existence that is classified as existentialism. The pessimistic and absurd tone of Sartre's existentialism rooted in his experiences.

ABSTRAK

F.X. DONO SUNARDI (2003): *The Significance of the Character Development of Jean-Paul Sartre toward his Coming to Existentialism as Seen in his Autobiography The Words*. Yogyakarta: Fakultas Sastra, Universitas Sanata Dharma.

Skripsi ini membahas karya otobiografi Jean-Paul Sartre yang berjudul *The Words* (1964). Jean-Paul Sartre merupakan seorang tokoh filsafat sekaligus kesusasteraan yang terkemuka. Filsafatnya yang disebut eksistensialisme telah memberi pengaruh yang besar terhadap cara manusia modern memahami eksistensi hidupnya; sementara tulisan-tulisannya juga merupakan sumbangan yang besar bagi dunia sastra. Pandangannya terhadap eksistensi manusia yang jujur dan terus-terang tidak dapat dibantah lagi adalah bentukan dari seluruh pengalaman hidupnya, terutama pengalaman masa kecilnya sebagaimana dikisahkan dalam *The Words*. Skripsi ini berusaha menelaah arti penting perkembangan karakter Jean-Paul Sartre seperti dituturkan dalam *The Words* bagi eksistensialismenya.

Untuk menemukan arti penting tersebut, telah disusun dua buah rumusan masalah, yaitu: (1) bagaimana Jean-Paul Sartre menuturkan perkembangan karakter dirinya dalam *The Words*?; dan (2) apa arti penting dari perkembangan karakter Jean-Paul Sartre tersebut bagi eksistensialisme? Jawaban atas permasalahan tersebut merupakan esensi dan tujuan penulisan skripsi ini.

Dengan mendapatkan jawaban tersebut berarti diperoleh pemahaman yang lebih baik dan mendalam tentang pengaruh perkembangan karakter dalam suatu otobiografi, dalam hal ini perkembangan karakter Sartre, yang mendorongnya menganut suatu paham filsafat eksistensialisme.

Metode utama yang digunakan dalam penulisan skripsi ini adalah metode studi pustaka. Studi pustaka menyediakan sumber informasi dalam jumlah yang cukup seputar Sartre, eksistensialisme, dan tokoh-tokoh sezamannya. Namun demikian, sebagian terbesar dari sumber tersebut hanya membahas filsafat Sartre. Hanya terdapat sedikit tulisan yang menelaah bagaimana Sartre dapat sampai pada eksistensialisme. Mengingat *The Words* adalah suatu otobiografi, pendekatannya bersifat lintas atau keluar teks. *The Words* merupakan totalisasi-pribadi yang dilakukan dengan kacamata Sartre pada kurun waktu tertentu yang menampilkan kebenaran secara simbolis. Karya ini mengandung di dalamnya kandungan fiksi dan fakta sehingga untuk mendapatkan kebenaran informasi tentang Sartre, diperlukan sumber-sumber eksternal lain.

Analisis dalam skripsi ini membuktikan bahwa perkembangan karakter Jean-Paul Sartre memang berpengaruh terhadap eksistensialismenya. Pengalaman masa lalu, terutama kematian ayahnya ketika ia masih kecil, sosok kakeknya, dan kegemarannya akan sastra, mendorongnya untuk memiliki pandangan terhadap eksistensi yang sangat khas. Nada pesimis dan absurd dalam eksistensialisme Sartre memang berakar pada pengalamannya.

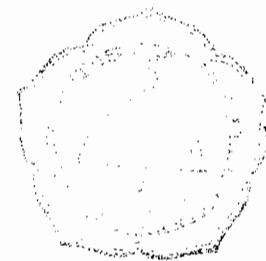


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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the Study

Human beings have been becoming an interesting object of study since the beginning of ages. As intellectual beings, they have curiosity and ability to explore as well as to disclose many major problems of life. However, they have been not only the subjects of studies because at the same time they can be the objects. Many aspects of human beings are open to be explored. From early Greek period, human beings represented by scholars of each of time have been trying to find the meaning of their lives, their existences, and their finite-point. There may be shifts and different emphases on the aspects being examined, yet the focus remains the same: “Human beings, who are you, where are you from and where will you go from here?” It could be seen that throughout history, man tries to examine his being. Indeed, it is true what Aristotle once said, “An unexamined life is not worth living.”

Different from the religious who seek the answer of such a fundamental question in the idea of Supreme Being called God, philosophers have been trying to find the answer to their never ending questions on human beings and life through their struggles to capture the movements of their minds. They have been *homonos intellectualis* who used their brains and ratios to think and acquire knowledge and

understandings on the subjects they were dealing with. The philosopher's first job, therefore, is to convert the mysteries of his subject (in this case, human lives) into problems and his second is, as far as maybe, to find answers to the problems (Hawkins, 1951: 3).

From ages to ages, emerged persons who seriously tried to light up the dark side of human beings' existence. Many philosophical thoughts and streams came and went away and became popular to the people of their ages and the latter generations. Newer systems of thought revised and succeeded the older ones. Here, Hegellian dialectics with its idea of cycles of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis does take place.

One of the contemporary systems of thought is what we understand now as existentialism. Despite tense disputes that around it, existentialism is becoming more and more prominent and has been enjoying many privileges amongst its followers and admirers. It is hard to decide when this system (an effort to list it as system itself has been debatable) began and who actually pioneered it. As a "mood" of thought, existentialism can be found elsewhere in the book of Ecclesiastes (300 BC.) and St. August's *Confession* (400 AD.) (John K., 1995: 295). Seen as a system of thought, we can recommend some names in the list of existentialism thinkers such as Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Karl Jaspers, Gabriel Marcel, Byedaev, Albert Camus, and Jean Paul Sartre (Barret, 1958: 21).

Among those thinkers considered as existentialists, Sartre and his works have been becoming interesting objects of study. Sartre was not only a great contemporary existentialist but also a highly respected man of literature (Lanur, 2000: ix). His

winning Nobel in the field of literature in 1964, which he purposefully and eventually turned down, shows that he was considered as a great man of literature. He wrote and ‘translated’ his thoughts in the form of novels and plays. For students of literature who consequently put hope and deep concern on human beings’ existence, Sartre’s works of art are good sources of knowledge and understandings. His autobiography entitled *The Words* is particularly interesting to me since it, as this thesis will try to discover, provides us with a description of how Sartre came to his understandings and thoughts through his history of life. There is no better place to learn how a person could get to such a deep understanding and thinking on human beings’ existence more than from his own life. *The Words* tells us Sartre’s childhood and implicitly the way and reasons why he himself became an existentialist. From the point of view of literature, this work is also considered valuable and good. Its intrinsic elements are almost conventional yet fascinating and full of cynical tone toward life and human beings – a typical of existentialists’ writings that share common features of uncheerfulness (Hawkins, 1951: 4).

B. Problem Formulation

In order to make this thesis better organized, some questions that will be answered throughout this thesis have been set up. The answers provided are hopefully sufficient to give us insight on how Sartre came to his existentialism through his history of life as been suggested by *The Words*. Here they are:

1. How does Jean-Paul Sartre present the development of his own character in his autobiography, *The Words*?
2. What is the significance of the character development of Jean-Paul Sartre as presented in *The Words* toward his coming to existentialism?

C. Objectives of the Study

This thesis aims to answer the questions set up in the Problem Formulation above. The answers of it will result in a deeper and better understanding on how the character development of an autobiography will lead him hold a certain philosophy or system of thought. Since *The Words*, which is the object of this thesis, provides us with autobiographical story of its writer, Jean-Paul Sartre, the main objective of this thesis is therefore to find how Sartre presented the development of his character in his autobiographical piece and how this character development leads him to the existentialism. Regarding the nature of autobiography, as presented in Chapter II, the pattern found in Sartre's character development as written in *The Words* will be compared and contrasted with external data on his life so that a more whole picture of Jean-Paul Sartre is established and readily used to analyze his coming to the existentialism.

D. Benefits of the Study

By reading this thesis, the readers will be provided with more time and opportunity to reconsider their very beings. In this modern and instantaneous world,

the question on the meaning of life is still relevant and even gaining new significance. Human beings have been reaching massive achievements in the field of science and technology, but at the same time realizing to the fact of the vacuum of the meaning of life. As suggested by the father of logotherapy, Viktor Frankl, the will to meaning in most people is a fact, not faith (1959: 155). It means that the meaning of life is essential to man. Existentialism as brought by Jean-Paul Sartre is one of the efforts to come to the meaning of life, even when this effort ends in the recognition of the absurdity of life.

This thesis is also a one little step forward to advance in the pathway of philosophy as well as in the field of literature. Reading this thesis, the readers are able to grasp the relation between philosophy and literature after reading this thesis.

As *The Words* is an autobiography, it is becoming a breakthrough for analyzing this kind of genre in literature. An autobiography needs a particular approach of analysis since its nature of bringing both facts – or totalization of remembered experiences – and fiction with one bunch (Stone, 1981: 3). It, therefore, will not fit with analyses or approaches that we frequently use either in common fictive or factual pieces of writing. Besides the data and information of the life of the autobiographer that can be found in the autobiography, the external data are required. An autobiography needs a “go beyond text” analysis.

Personally, writing thesis is for me a rare, yet important, opportunity to enhance in the way of understanding of human being. This thesis tries to dig and represent human beings’ long unanswered question: “Human being, who are you and

where will you go from here?” By daring to scrutinize human beings’ lives, life is worthy to live – as once said by Aristotle.

E. Definition of Terms

Before continuing the discussion, let us define some terms greatly used in this thesis so that we might have one and agreed upon understanding on them.

First, one agreed upon understanding on the definition of *existentialism* is required. Frankly speaking, it is always difficult when we come to the definition of existentialism. Kaufmann (1956:11) states that existentialism is not a philosophy but a label for several widely different revolts against traditional philosophy. In accordance with this opinion, many scholars described existentialism as more of a “mood” or “attitude” than a doctrine or fixed-system of thought, with common features of freedom, choice, responsibility, suffering, and commitment (William, 1951: 33). Meanwhile, *International Encyclopedia of Ethics* defines existentialism as an approach to ethics that emphasizes individual subjectivity, freedom, and responsibility, and the irrational as primary feature of human condition (John K., 1995: 295). It is indeed true the opinion saying that each existentialist also defines existentialism in their own ways and therefore any attempts to make generalization on it seems futile and uncongenial. However, since we are discussing on Sartre, we will try to maintain our focus on existentialism as being understood and promoted by Sartre. Sartre is renowned for his statement that becomes his existentialism trademark: “Existence precedes essence”. To put it briefly, existentialism in Sartre’s

term is that human being is searching for his meaning of life through his freedom and actions.

Upon the word *autobiography*, *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* defines it as story of a person's life written by that person (1989: 68). *The Words* is an autobiography since it is based on the life of Sartre and wrote by Sartre himself. Therefore, it tells the way Sartre lived his life and how he interacted and affected his society and vice versa. In *The Words*, Sartre acts as both actor and author (Stone, 1981: 2). As the actor, Sartre acts as the main character of the book that is involved physically, emotionally, and mentally in the flowing of the story. Yet, as the author, he acts as an eye-holder that sees what is going and then retells them to the audience.

CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A. Review of the Related Studies

The Words (1964) wins for Sartre Nobel Prize in the field of literature. This fact shows that *The Words* stands as a prominent piece amongst other pieces of writing of Sartre as well as proves that it is widely appreciated and honored. Sartre's rejection to receive the Prize does not mean that he underestimated the value of his *The Words* or felt that he was not worthy to receive it. He did it purposefully to show his reluctance of being considered as a bourgeoisie or capitalist (Lanur, 2000: xii). According to *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (1967: 288), Sartre was at that time in his third stage of his life where he had deeply correlated his thought of existentialism to his study of Marxism, in term that both encourage action rather than quietism or inaction. Besides, Sartre considered that any awards would only freeze his writing activity (Lanur, 2000: xii) whereas writing particularly and literature in its wider scope is his "vocation" of life where he would find his "meaning" of life (Sartre, 1964:154, 158, 163).

Despite having such important position, *The Words* is less subjected to criticisms compared to other major works of Sartre. Most of the criticisms on Sartre

and his existentialism are thus based on those Sartre's considered-major works, such as *Nausea* (1938), *Being and Nothingness* (1943), *No Exit* (1944), *Existentialism is a Humanism* (1946), *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (1960), *Saint Genet: The Family Idiot* (1972), and his series of *Situation Volume I X* (1948-1976). The paper written by Robert Champigny entitled "Sartre on Sartre" (published in 1981 as a part of the series or anthology of *The Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre*, edited by Paul Arthur Schilpp), for example, is one of few examples of writings that tries to analyze why Sartre wrote his autobiography, *The Words*. There are even less numbers of criticisms or writings that try to analyze the significance of the history of life of Jean-Paul Sartre as being written in *The Words* toward his coming to existentialism – this topic is exactly what this thesis would like to cover.

For traditional readers, the reason why Sartre's *The Words* is less criticized probably lies in its being hard to understand and lack of organization of ideas. Instead of telling his history of life chronologically as any other autobiographies (cf. Gandhi's autobiography), in writing his autobiography Sartre did not follow any ordinary patterns. *The Words*, as will be discussed in Chapter IV, is divided into two bulky parts named "Reading" and "Writing", subsequently, which consequently each of them brings on very big themes. The question is why Sartre wrote his autobiography, *The Words*, that way? Are there any hidden plots in *The Words*?

According to Champigny, some characters in Sartre's novels and dramas reveal his self-portraits and, in some ways, serve as a means to gain his self-definition (1981: 86). This opinion is in accordance with what Sartre himself expressed in *Saint*

Genet (1972: 132) when he says that understanding men is his passion or in *Being and Nothingness* (1943) with “human reality”. In this light, *The Words* as an autobiography is also written as a means of the author to understand human reality that exists in himself. The concept of Sartre’s human reality can be seen in his introduction to the huge philosophical biography of Flaubert (1971: 7):

”What can be known of a man today? What do we know, for instance, of Gustave Flaubert? This amounts to *totalizing* the information at our disposal. There is no proof, at the start, that this totalization is *possible* and that the truth of a person is not plural; the pieces of information are quite different in nature.... Do we not run the risk of being left with the heterogeneous and irreducible strata of meaning? This book attempts to prove that irreducibility is only apparent, and that each piece of information put in its place becomes a portion of a whole which does not cease to make itself. Thus each part reveals its deep homogeneity with all other parts.

For a man is never an individual; it would be better to call him a *singular universal*; totalized, hence universalized, by his time, he retotalizes it by reproducing himself in it as a singularity.” (Champigny, 2000: 87)

Human reality, therefore, cannot be understood merely as a situation of a man in certain fragment or period of time. What makes or constitutes human reality is the whole process of his being. Thus, what is meant by the human reality of Flaubert is all the process of living of Flaubert from his childhood to his then situation when the life of him was reviewed. Human reality is always historical but, according to Sartre, seen and understood from the present situation with the possible renewed goals (Champigny, 1981: 88). Furthermore, regarding the statement saying that the characters of the pieces of writing made by Sartre reveal his self-portrait or the effort of finding self-definition, it is assumable that when Sartre tries to totalize Flaubert explicitly, he must be trying to totalize himself implicitly. Thus, the question “What

do we know of Flaubert?” would at the same time become “How is Sartre going to totalize himself at this stage of his life through writing about Flaubert?” In case of *The Words*, we should be dealing with a straightforward self-totalization, conducted by the man responsible for the doctrine.

Many sentences in *The Words* refer to the present. It proves that the whole human reality of Sartre, which spans from his early childhood to the time when he wrote *The Words*, is seen and understood from the eyes of the then Sartre’s present. In other words, what is written about a child is not written by a child. To restate Sartre’s principles, the way he pictures his childhood should reveal the way he tries to totalize himself at the moment he is writing (Champigny, 1981: 88).

By writing *The Words*, Sartre was doing his process of self-totalization. And, in that process, he finds that he was so deep engaged to the world of literature and writing. For him, becoming a man of literature who writes was a kind of fulfilling his vocation of life (although in another part of his later writing he states a seemingly contrary statement that human has no predetermination which means that everything depends on human freedom and responsibility). “Each thing humbly requested a name, it (the activity of writing) was both to create and to capture it (the human reality)” (Sartre, 1964: 53-54). So much important is writing for Sartre that he can create and understand (his) human reality by it. In another place of the autobiography, Sartre wrote, “It (writing) is my job” (1964: 212) to endorse the answer of Jean Prevost, a foremost writer in 1930s, which is put in his other book entitled *What is Literature?* (1947). The question is why Sartre thought that writing was very

important to his life. According to Champigny, Sartre's early literary vocation manifests his taste for totalization. It is meant to involve the whole person, to collect the *personnae* (2000: 105).

Writing is Sartre's means of finding the meaning of his life and recollecting his whole understanding on human reality. It is a way to fight for his *singular universal*. "For a long time, I took my pen for a sword" (Sartre, 1964: 105). The whole parts of *The Worlds* thus reflect his efforts and findings of his human reality. Yet, what he finds through his writing or his being a writer is somehow shocking as he comes to the absurdity of life. This absurdity of life is actually one of the aspect of his existentialism as said in "The more absurd the life, the less bearable the death" (Sartre, 1964: 97). Here, Sartre finds that writing and literary do not help human to overcome the absurdity of life. "I know my impotence" (Sartre, 1964: 105) shows Sartre's recognition that "his sword" is merely his imagination, as were his imaginary heroes in his childhood's books.

"The world can do very well without literature. But it can do without man even better" is another quote of Sartre from *Situation II* that is taken by Champigny (1981: 107) to show Sartre's conception on the absurdity of life and inability of writing and literature to cope with that. *The Words* is a mean of telling that absurdity of life and at the same time the powerlessness (Champigny, 1981: 108) of Sartre to change it. In *The Words*, the human reality being found is that we are all living in absurdity where everything is irrational and does not follow certain pattern and, therefore, any attempts to understand it rationally will only result in vain

(Champigny, 1981: 108). As *The Words* is the totalization of Sartre's life, it is also a totalization of the absurdity of life.

What is lack from Champigny's study is that in making his conclusion he does not much infer to *The Words* itself, and consequently stands outside from Sartre's totalization of his history of life. How Sartre came to such conception of the absurdity of life is also not well explained, particularly how Sartre's life leads him to such a coming or finding? Moreover, the absurdity of life is only one facet of Sartre's existentialism, which has its core in the famous remark, "existence precedes essence".

This thesis, however, is an attempt to capture the way Sartre presented his character, and by that the pattern of his development or self-totalization, in *The Words* and how that pattern of character development led him to such a distinctive existentialism. It tries to dig information about Sartre more from his autobiography. External information plays an important role in comparing and contrasting those information found in *The Words*. If Champigny's ends up in Sartre's concept of the absurdity of life, this thesis will not fall into the same conclusion. Sartre's existentialism is much broader than just the absurdity since it brings about the subjectivity, freedom, responsibility, and atheistic views altogether. Sartre's existentialism is also deep-rooted in his life, particularly his childhood. This fact is important but less scrutinized by most of Sartre's critics.

B. Review of Related Theories

Jean-Paul Sartre was born in Paris on June 21, 1905 and died on April 15, 1980 in a Paris hospital while in a coma. He is the only child of a French Navy officer, Jean-Baptiste Sartre – who happened to die young when Sartre was only two years old – and Anne-Marie Schweitzer, a daughter of Charles Schweitzer who is a Deutsche language and literature teacher. Since very early phase of his life, his grandfather had introduced Sartre to the world of literary, a world that impressed him so much and so deep that he once considered it as his religion (Sartre, 1964: 59).

What is interesting about Sartre's works or writings is that he made use of his ability and capability as artist and man of literature to convey his existentialism. Not many people of literature are at the same time an intense philosopher and vice versa as Sartre was. It is interesting to question why it is that way since both of the two "worlds" are actually closely linked, particularly because both are dealing with human beings' mental and thoughts. There was perhaps a concept saying that literature is more mundane while philosophy from its early borne was a serious and sophisticated science. Sartre, at least, is one of some who did not confirm this concept, for sure (Sartre, 1949: 39). His love to literature had, somehow, led him to existentialism and he never put literature in lower place than philosophy. Instead, he used literary to present his thought and analysis in human life with the eyeglasses of existentialism.

The Words explains to us how the history of Sartre's life had deeply influenced his thoughts. It is quite unimaginable to understand Sartre's existentialism

without understanding first what kind of life he headed, especially how his childhood made him a figure or man with such distinctive thought and idea. Therefore, analyzing the life of Sartre, particularly in his early “being”, as written in *The Words*, is somehow essential.

1. Theory on Autobiography

Autobiography as a type of writing has been widely accepted in the field of literature. However, many scholars still debate upon its classification, whether to put it as a factual or fictive work. Mansell, for instance, is one of them who persists that autobiography should be considered as a factual work, at least, since it is the author himself who intends it to be. An author of autobiography, he continues, will try to prove that what he writes are what he actually and factually once experienced (1981: 68). The weakness of this opinion is obvious, as been regarded by many other scholars, that it does not calculate the existing probability that the author made exaggeration or reduction in the fact for some reasons.

There is no really opposite to the above-mentioned argument because the other existing argument says that autobiography is simultaneously fact and fiction. This side argues that the language of autobiography points both *outward* to the world of remembered experience and *inward* to a reflective consciousness. Dealing with experience, it is fact, but with reflective consciousness it can be fiction since it may not be felt at the same time with the occurrence of the experience (Stone, 1981: 7).

The autobiographer in writing his or her autobiography aims at re-creating the self-in-its-world, not by literal production of remembered facts (as it will be a tiring and impossible achievement) but by patterning the past into a present symbolic truth. Autobiography, therefore, is understood as simultaneously historical record and literary artifact, psychological case history and spiritual confession, didactic essay and ideological statement. In short, the autobiographer acts as both actor and author of his work (Stone, 1981: 2).

As an autobiography, *The Words* is also an effort of the author (Sartre) to understand his actor's life (who is himself as well). Analyzing Sartre's piece of writing is a means to know the historical Sartre and at the same time see it as a product of literary art where imaginary has its own place. *The Words* is undeniably useful in displaying the autobiographer's psychological cases as well as his coming to his particular philosophical ideas.

With *The Words*, Sartre brings his history of life to literature where imaginary and his then present symbolical truth judged his remembered experiences. *The Words*, therefore, brings with it fact and fiction in one bucket.

2. Theory on the Meaning of Life

One of the oldest things of a human being lies in the quest of a meaning of his life. Throughout all ages, man has been undergoing this big project. There might be different ways and interpretations presented to answer it, but the focus remains the

same. This fact proves that without the (effort of seeking) meaning of life, human life is really unworthy to live.

One of the contemporary views on the meaning of life that attracts our attention is the movement called logotherapy, which was pioneered and developed by an ex Nazi camp prisoner, Viktor Frankl. Logotherapy itself is a school of thought that believes that the striving to find a meaning in one's life is the primary motivational force in man and not a "secondary rationalization" of his instinctual drive (1959: 154). What is important in logotherapy is, therefore, the "will to meaning" – in contrast to the pleasure principle on which Freudian psychoanalysis is centered as well as in contrast to the "will to power" stressed by Adlerian psychology. The "will to meaning" is not defense mechanisms, reaction formations, and sublimation because according to logotherapy the meaning of life is unique and specific for every man that it must and can be fulfilled by him alone. By showing the result of a poll conducted in France and Vienna where 89% of the respondents admitted that man needs "something" or "someone" for the sake of which to live and to die, logotherapy got its stance to say that the "will to meaning" in most people is *fact*, not faith (Frankl, 1959: 155). Man is able to live and even to die for the sake of this meaning of life where his ideals and values lie.

Logotherapy encourages man to search for a concrete meaning of life, in which he cannot be replaced, nor can his life be repeated. Everyone has a task or vocation of life that is unique and specific that demands fulfillment (Frankl, 1959:

172). The logotherapy presents two big ways to discover this meaning of life. The first includes three below listed things to do:

- (1) by doing a deed;
- (2) by experiencing a value;
- (3) by suffering.

The second way of finding a meaning in life is by experiencing something, such as a work of nature or culture, and also by experiencing someone, i.e. by love (Frankl, 1959: 176). From here, we can see that the meaning of life is inherent in the life of human being in that it needs to be detected and not to be invented.

What is common between Frankl's logotherapy and Sartre's existentialism is that both strive to find the meaning of man's life. If logotherapy explicitly states the meaning of life, the existentialism terms it as the existence of human. Sartre, as we will see in the analysis of his autobiographical work – *The Words*, also tried to find his meaning of life, or put in his term his meaning of his existence. But, if logotherapy states that the meaning of man's life is inherent to his life and just need to be detected, Sartre believes that it needs to be created. According to Sartre man at the beginning is nothing – he is only what he makes of himself afterward. Man's freedom to make his own life is the starting point of Sartre's existentialism. Sartre, therefore, disbelieves to the existing of the vocation of life as believed by logotherapy.

Sartre once might believe what logotherapy said about the vocation of life – or in his term his mandate of life. His deep engagement in literature and his activity

of writing were considered his vocation. Yet, following his being atheist, in which all objectivity runs out its validity and what remains is only subjectivity, he began to believe that man is everything what he makes of himself. From here, comes his famous existentialism remark, "Existence precedes essence". Man, according to Sartre, invents himself, he designs his own "essence" (his essentially is, including what he should be, or ought to become) (Frankl, 1959: 157).

Sartre's existentialism as conveyed in his autobiography, *The Words*, is an effort of the author and the actor of it to find and gain the meaning of his life. By doing such a totalization of remembered facts and imaginary, Sartre came to the conclusion that man should by himself create and make his own meaning of life. No external factor should limit his making his meaning of life.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

A. Object of the Study

Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980) remains to this day as a distinguished thinker as well as a well-established writer and man of letters. He stands a prominent philosopher among the twentieth century existentialists. Sartre who read literature since he was a little child, thanks to his grandfather's way of bringing him up, was very fond of it and made it his true companion. During his life, Sartre wrote fictional works such as novels and plays, as well as non-fictional writings such as criticisms and philosophical essays. Since he is French by originality, all of his writings are also written in French. Most of them, however, have been translated into English and other languages.

Librairie Gallimard of Paris firstly published *Les Mots*, the original French title of *The Words*, in 1964. French's *Les Mots* has no subtitle of autobiography, which in contrary exists in its English translation by Bernard Frechtman that is added with a subtitle of *The Autobiography of Jean-Paul Sartre*. For practical reason of avoiding the using of long phrases, this subtitle is not mentioned in most of the putting of the title of the book in this thesis.

Just with one glance to its English version, this piece, therefore, is also well known among many readers of Sartre as an autobiography. *The Words* won for Sartre a Nobel Prize in the same year this work was published. Yet, as been mentioned earlier, Sartre refused to receive the prize (and the honor as well), as it is for him a manifestation of capitalism – an ism he fought against.

This thesis, however, does not use *Les Mots* in its mother tongue. We are going to use its English version, entitled *The Words – The Autobiography of Jean-Paul Sartre* that is translated by Bernard Frechtman and published by Vintage Books of New York in 1981.

Today, *The Words* as above-mentioned has been translated into many more other languages. Its Indonesian version was published by Penerbit Gramedia of Jakarta (2000) under the title of *Kata-kata*. This piece is translated directly from French by Jean Couteau. This proves that *The Words* has been read by many more people who would like to share the same discourse on the life and the thoughts of Jean-Paul Sartre.

The Words is made of 255 pages. Its French original, *Les Mots*, is thinner with 214 pages; while the Bahasa Indonesia's *Kata-kata* is, in the other hands, much thicker with its 344 pages. Those three versions, however, were all published in handy-size. The difference in number of page is due to the nature of the languages, where French is more effective than English, and English is at the same time more effective than Bahasa Indonesia. The matter of the effectiveness of languages will not, somehow, be discussed in this thesis.

B. The Approach

This thesis deals with the development of the character of Jean-Paul Sartre in his *The Words* that is very influential toward his building up as well as his coming to his existentialism. In order to get some important points of his development as well as to understand his stages of development, this thesis applies psychological approach. Freud's psychoanalysis, although widely and publicly criticized, is proved sufficient to analyze Sartre's childhood experiences.

The primary approach applied here is of course the philosophical one. This approach is applied to understand the thoughts that are contained in the work. With the approach, the analysis toward Sartre's effort to probe his meaning and the essence of his existence is possible to undergo. This philosophical approach will, somehow, be narrowed to a certain degree that it will deal with existentialism.

C. The Methods of The Study

In the process of collecting information related with the object of the study, I use library research method. By using this method, I tried to collect as many as possible information related to Sartre, his philosophy, and *The Words* itself. In this phase, I have not classified and categorized them into some good ordered patterns of information. What I was doing here was just collecting information. Besides the library research method, in order to collect more information, I browsed Internet sites that provided me with abundance information on Sartre and *The Words*.

The following step I underwent was reading all those information, especially the work itself. Reading it once would not be enough. I, therefore, reread it for the second and the third time in order to better grasp the message of it. All information I gathered in the previous phase proved to be helpful in my effort to understand *The Words*. They also enabled me to create some abstractions that then I put into the problem formulation.

The problem formulation will be the guideline to follow throughout this thesis. It will become the focus of the thesis as well. All the answer I found relevant with the problem formulation is put in the Chapter IV: Analysis.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS

Jean-Paul Sartre's *The Words* (1964) is divided into two bulky parts. Those parts are bulky because for such a thick book the division into two parts will result in long narration for each. Besides, each part stands alone, meaning that they are not subdivided anymore. The first part, "Reading", for instance, in its English version covers 135 first pages of the book; while the rest (120 pages) is dedicated for the second part, "Writing". This approximately half division of pages is also applied in *Lire and Ecrire of Les Mots* (1964) and *Membaca and Menulis of Kata-kata* (2000). Added with long, redundant, and sometimes confusing sentences of typical Sartrean writings, this fact creates much difficulty for (amateur) readers of philosophy or literature to easily understand the matter being discussed.

What makes the matter more complicated is the way Sartre tells his history of life. Despite the fact of being a well-known philosopher and established "rational" thinker, Sartre is more a man of full of imagination – to avoid the exaggeration on his being too imaginative and abstract (a state of mind which cannot be separated from his early experience and acquaintance with literature). In telling his history of life in *The Words*, Sartre did not follow a chronological pattern. On the contrary, he jumped from one experience to others without paying too much attention to the confusion that might result from it. Indeed, he began *The Words* with his "family tree", but then he flowed from one subject or one time of life to the others arbitrarily. Sartre also

reproduced his personal statements and philosophical views elsewhere in the book, which of course do not happen in his experience of any certain time of life but from his then perspective or reflective thought. Therefore, it is applicable here the view that says that autobiography is simultaneously fact and fiction (Stone, 1981: 7) as well as Sartre's opinion that self-totalization is done from the point of view of present (the then situation). This reality can be found particularly in the second part, "Writing."

Leaving those difficulties behind, the division of *The Words* into two parts, "Reading" and "Writing" itself is an interesting subject to be explored. The reason why Sartre divided *The Words* to "Reading" and "Writing" cannot be separated from his being deeply involved in the world of literature, whose main activities are reading and writing. Besides, as will be seen later, the division explains the contents of each part. Following the suggestion of Stone written in his introduction note to the book he edited, *The American Autobiography*, (i.e. an autobiography is an effort to re-create the self-in-its-world, not by literal reproduction of remembered facts, but by patterning the past into a present symbolic truth (1981: 6)), that kind of division must reveal something. Regarding Sartre's prominent figure in the philosophy as well as in literature, it is fair to assume that Sartre divided his *The Words* into "Reading" and "Writing" purposefully. To find the "symbolic" truth of the division is one of matters this thesis would like to cover.

There have been abundant reviews, studies, and researches on Sartre, his works, and his existentialism – including his *The Words*. Yet, none is – as long as I



know – trying to relate the division of *The Words* and his acquiring of existentialism. This thesis is a humble effort to raise question about that and set up possible and rational answer for it. The following analysis follows the guideline bringing about in the problem formulation.

A. The Presentation of the Character Development of Jean-Paul Sartre in his Autobiography, *The Words*

As already mentioned, Sartre's *The Words* is divided up into two bulky parts namely "Reading" and "Writing". However, regarding the nature of the way Sartre tells his history of life where he arbitrarily and un-chronologically jumps from one scene of life to the others, it is almost impossible to make a comprehensive summary of *The Words*. As a result of this, Sartre's character development as written in *The Words* cannot also be seen in chronological pattern. Finding this pattern is identical with finding the plot of the autobiography.

Stating that *The Words* was not written chronologically does not mean that Sartre randomly and "carelessly" wrote the work. It is much too naïve to conclude that way. In other words, there must be pattern or purpose Sartre intentionally followed. This pattern or purpose is what I am going to analyze here before continuing the discussion of its significance toward the development of Sartre.

By a thorough reading, the first part, "Reading", at least brings four main themes; they are family, literature, philosophy, and imagination, subsequently. These themes are not delivered or told in a linear manner but they are more extracts or red

lines of the part. The finding of these themes proves that Sartre did have some things in his mind when he wrote *The Words*.

The first theme, namely family, tells about the family of Sartre, both maternal and paternal (with bigger portion on his maternal side since it is with this side that Sartre spent most of his childhood period). This theme lets us know the family background of Sartre and how he interacted with his mother, grandfather, grandmother, the friends of the family, and, of course, with his late father at the early stage of his life. Sartre was born from the short marriage of Jean-Baptiste Sartre and Anne Marie Schweitzer. The bold figure of Charles Schweitzer as Sartre's grandfather and the "early" death of Jean-Babtiste Sartre (which compelled his mother's returning to her parents house) are probably the most significant events here. Charles was a very intelligent man who was proud of himself ("Louis is the most pious, Auguste the richest, and I the most intelligent", page 10). His being a Deutsche language and letter teacher made him a respected and prominent figure among his contemporary. In the little Sartre's eyes, Charles was a lovely but compelling and stern grandfather. The lack of father's figure has made Sartre thought Charles his father. In the effort to win Charles' attention, Sartre just needed to act childishly and sweetly, a thing that, later he admitted, torn him apart. In the next stage or period of his life, Sartre became aware of his being rejected – that he has never been able to act as himself just in order to get his grandfather's attention and affection.

The death of his father set him free from any Oedipus complex syndrome (“It (the death of my father) sent my mother back to her chains (to her family) and gave me freedom (from superego)”, page 18). Sartre saved his mother’s love for him alone. When talking such a freedom from superego, it is related with Freud’s - the father of psychoanalyst – definition on the three layers of human’s personality namely id, ego, and superego. While id and ego discuss the internal aspects of one’s personality, superego deals with the external facet that determines how one should act in conformity with objective values (Prasetyo, 1995: 21). Sartre’s being free from superego will be seen in his objection to any objective and predetermined values and in his idea of freedom and subjectivity. Yet, the death of his father also left him a scar. Sartre felt that he was left behind in this world without any mandate – his father irresponsibly and simply abandoned him. He had no place to turn to – a place where he could ask for things and a place where the authoritative laid. In short, Sartre did not have a person who became his model and who told him what to do. This fact would certainly bring deep impact on Sartre’s idea of freedom and being.

By delivering the theme of family, Sartre would like to give information on his early introduction to freedom and subjectivity. The absence of the father’s figure, on one hand, and his living with the spoiling grandfather, on the other hands, set him free from any authorities. Implicitly, by saying his being fatherless, Sartre would like to state also his being atheist. As Sartre began *The Words* with the story of his family, it is his existentialism with freedom and subjectivity which become its starting point.

The second theme, literature, covers the story of Sartre's introduction to the world of literature. Actually, literature has become Sartre's world since then. His love to literature could not be separated from the role of his grandfather, Charles Schweitzer. As a respected teacher, Charles got a great number of books in his room. Sartre often saw his grandfather opened the books and came to the right pages he needed. In desperate need of love and "mandate", and also to win his grandfather's affection, Sartre began to explore the books. Finding the eagerness of Sartre to read but at the same time his illiteracy, both the grandfather and the mother taught him reading and writing. As time went by with mostly no friend around, Sartre was becoming more and more absorbed in his reading. He was not like any other children who spent their childhood in 'wilderness': "I did not gather herbs and throw stones at birds. But books were my birds and my nests, my household pets, my barn and my countryside" (page 49). "Book is my religion" (page 59) is the expression saying his deep involvement in his act of reading books. Another reason why he was so absorbed in his act of reading and having no friend that, of course, was not mentioned in *The Words* is appointed by Copleston, i.e. "his small body and fragile health hampered him to freely associated with his peers." (1948: 15). [The not mentioning this fact in the autobiography reminds us of the weakness of the argument that says that an autobiography is a mere fact (Stone, Ed., 1981: 67).] When Sartre was sent to school, he could not befriend with his mates for the same reason. In *The Words*, however, Sartre mentioned that the reasons why he left public school were his inability to spell words correctly and his stinky teacher (page 76). Yet, the core of the

motive for doing reading in such an intensive manner is the same, the rejection he felt from his environment. It was truly a bad experience for him that will remain all his life long, as it is written in his other work, *Huis-clos* (1945): hell is other people (Copleston, 1948: 16-17).

The third theme of the first part or “Reading” of Sartre’s *The Words* is philosophy. What meant by philosophy here is not yet any systematical or well-organized pattern of thoughts. As written in narration, it is naturally presupposed that the delivering of the philosophy is not accomplished and done in a very systematical way as hoped in discourse writings. Instead, what we meet are reflective thoughts of Jean-Paul Sartre in facing or dealing with his particular experience that for those who learn existentialism will not fail in pronouncing his distinctive existentialism. By these reflective thoughts, *The Words* fulfills the nature of autobiography as a piece of writing simultaneously telling fact and fiction (Stone, 1981: 2).

It is in this theme that the phrase remarking Sartre’s existentialism, “Existence precedes essence”, explicitly pronounced (page 86). Sartre did not fail in expressing his other major thoughts, such as anguish (pages 83-84), forlornness (page 94), despair (page 92), atheist (pages 98-99), and absurdity of life and death (page 97). One of the major feature or characteristic of Sartre’s existentialism is its pessimistic and cheerless tone. What is interesting is the underlying cause of Sartre’s holding such a pessimistic and cheerless views on human life, i.e. his condition which lacks of mandate and role in bearing his own life. If we track deeper, this lack-ness sources in his experience of having no father and rejections. It is always external factors that

play role in determining his holding such views. “I was led to disbelief not by the conflict of dogmas, but by my grandparents’ indifference” (page 102).

The fourth theme of the “Reading” of *The Words* is imagination. As the last theme, it follows up the previous three themes, both in idea as well as in action. It is begun with the story of Anne-Marie brought seven years old Sartre to watch a movie (page 120). Movie, with its imaginative heroes, had attracted Sartre in such a way that he was pushed to create his own self-imagination as an awaited hero. Sartre created in his mind his imaginative mandate – a thing that he did not have in his real life. He made himself hero for the whole world. In 1912-1913, when he was just seven or eight years old, Sartre wrote his first book entitled *Michael Strogoff*, a book telling his being imaginary hero. Interestingly, in *The Words*, Sartre says that he had lost his early works, including this book (page 153). Perhaps he would like to destroy all possible sources that may lead into the probing of his personal weakness. In the term of psychology, this action of imagining is termed as compensation – an effort to replace or compensate real (personal) weakness or lack-ness with exaggerative imagining action (Prasetyo, 1995: 144). Sartre who was rejected in the real world found compensation in his imaginative world where he could be anyone he wanted to be. He closed the first bulky part of his *The Words* with acknowledgement of his living two lives: “publicly as the grandson of Charles and alone, sank into imaginary moping of his characters – both were untrue”.

The “Reading” presents the condition of Sartre’s hard childhood with the rejection he felt: his having no father, which led him to turn to the figure of his

grandfather to win love and affection, his running-away from the reality in the pile of books, his compensation in his imaginative story, and his deep despair after understanding that he was simply abandoned in an absurd world without real mandate of life. It is all factual and deeply impact his views on human life and existence as seen in existentialism.

The second part of *The Words*, “Writing” or *Ecrire* or *Menulis*, is not less bulky compared with the “Reading” or *Lire* or *Membaca*. In its English version alone, this part consists of 116 pages (spread from page 139 to 255). It is quite harder to find the theme(s) of this part than the first part because what is told here is actually intended to give more explanations and emphasis to the previous part. However, after a thorough reading, the “Writing” brings one theme: effort to gain essence from the already existing existence.

This part cannot be understood separately from the previous part. It follows up what have been pondered throughout the first part. This part deals with efforts to face the condition depicted in the “Reading” or to give plausible meaning to those situations. In Sartrean existentialism term, it would be finding essence for the preceding existence. No matter if the efforts are successful or fail, they do not lose their meanings as efforts of pronouncing human beings’ situations.

Facing problems of his very existence in this world, Sartre had no other choice but to keep alive and strife. “Dying is not easy... I too applied myself to dying of enteritis and perhaps of resentment... but I got better” (page 15-16) shows how Sartre

chose life rather than death. His choosing of life is somehow absurd, regarding the “hard” childhood and rejection he experienced.

What is told in the “Writing” is how Sartre tried to fight his meaning (essence) of existence by being a writer. As (been) mentioned earlier, Sartre began to write when he was seven or eight years old. At that time, he just retold the story of movies he saw and replaced the heroes with himself (page 142-143). In his story, Sartre imagined himself as an awaited and longed for hero. He found his “role” and his “mandate” in his created world that he believed that “to exist was to have an official title somewhere on the Infinite Table of the Word; (and) to write was to engrave new beings upon them...” (page 182). So important was the action of writing for Sartre that he dared to proclaim that he was born writer – it was his vocation of life. In short, Sartre found his existence and his meaning of life in his becoming writer. He could not imagine of being someone else, for instance becoming a teacher as softly but sternly suggested by Charles.

One thing that shook Sartre’s conviction on his vocation as writer was his consciousness that the main reason of his action of writing was so far also his grandfather, Charles, or at least his being his grandson (page 141 and 163). He might do it to manipulate his grandfather who in turn would love him and pour him with more affection and attention if he became a good writer. However, the more substantial reason of this doubt lay on the fact that his action of writing was not sprung out of his very existence – he was not created to be a writer the way a paper cutter designed to cut. Not once did Sartre feel dubious about his being a writer (page

165-166). This feeling of doubt was so disturbing that it created more anguish, forlornness, and despair in the life of young Sartre. He felt so much frustrated that he was willing to die (page 196-199). Vocation of a writer was faked, since there is no vocation in the lives of human beings. This could be one of the best insights Sartre learnt from his hasty declaration of being a writer.

Experiencing the death of his classmate probably became Sartre's new striking line (page 227) since it brought him to another consciousness that life headed to nowhere but death. No matter what one achieved in this world, all will certainly pass away. Sartre grew to be a more somber person that he wrote, "I aspired to like nothing else... I watched my life through my death and saw only a closed memory..." (page 233). Yet, at the same time, he also grew to be a soberer person. As death is a certainty, it should be seen as energy that is moving one to do better. And as human lives have no pre-design or "pre-determinism", it is human beings freedom and personal responsibility to direct their own lives. Here we come to one of the core of existentialism. Yet, in using freedom, Sartre suggested that human being direct it for a better quality of life. "It is no longer enough to do well, I had to do better every hour of the day" (page 236).

Reading Jean-Paul Sartre's *The Words* textually and thoroughly, we have come to much better standpoint in order to understand his character and psychological development. His initial situation or condition was very important in determining his next stages of life. Sartre, whose father died when he was only two years old, certainly lacks of the figure of father. This lack-ness had led him to twofold

consequences. On one side, he had to “beg” for love and affection from his “highly-respected” grandfather with all possible ways, including by acting childishly and sweetly all the time. On the other side, he felt down with his having no mandate or meaning of life. This was worsened by the fact that he was not very welcomed by his peers due to his physical frailty. His grandfather and his situation encouraged him to love books and absorbed in the activity of reading and daydreaming. Up to this point, we see that it was the situation that preconditioned Sartre to hold such pessimistic and somber views on human beings’ lives.

Sartre found that he might be called to be a writer. In the story he wrote, Sartre made himself a hero and found role and, to some extent, mandate. His consciousness led him to scrutinize “his vocation” and this brought him to a conclusion that no determinism is made in advance of human life. It is man’s freedom to direct his life. Yet, his suggestion is that one deliberately makes better things every time.

The division of *The Words* into two parts, “Reading” and “Writing” when understood in light of the nature of autobiography and Sartre’s development result in new blinking meaning. As put forward by Albert E. Stone that the aim of autobiography is to “re-create the self-in-its-world, not by literal reproduction of remembered facts, but by patterning the past into a present symbolic truth” (1981: 6), that division must also reveal (a) present symbolic truth(s).

The first part, “Reading”, as the definition suggests, convey the efforts made by Sartre to retract his humanly situation, particularly his childhood situation. It is

true altogether that it was the first time Sartre learnt how to read books and literature, which in turn would open up his eyes to his condition. However, in a broader sense, it was showing his then efforts to consciously acquire a better understanding on his situation of life – as action of reading aims at acquiring a better understanding on certain subject. There are some other parallels can be made to connect the action of reading and Sartre's development. It was indeed by the action of reading his life, particularly his childhood experience, that Sartre understood what kind of life he forwarded and headed.

Understanding his situation of life, Sartre put another question: what to do afterward? Sartre did not stop at the understanding because his being free compelled him to do something to react toward his situation. Sartre came to the point where he must create – as when one has a material, he is supposed to “write” it down. The second part, “Writing” is where Sartre actively materialized his understanding of his situation of life. In short, the “Writing” is the logical consequence of the “Reading”. As personal development always goes forward, it does with the two parts. They reveal the character development of Jean-Paul Sartre.

B. The Significance of the Character Development of Jean-Paul Sartre as Presented in *The Words* toward his Coming to Existentialism

The Words has successfully served as a means of its autobiographer to express his self-totalization (Champigny, 1981: 88). Dealing with such a self-totalization, it involves Sartre's psychological case history or development as well as his

philosophical views or statements (Stone, 1981: 2). The previous section of this chapter shows that the division of *The Words* into two bulky parts named “Reading” and “Writing” is done intentionally. They show the way Sartre understood his standing of life and then the way he dealt with it as well as show his character development. In this section, the discussion will proceed to how Jean-Paul Sartre’s character development leads him to his coming to his system of thought labeled as existentialism. The discussion on this matter at first requires an analysis on what kind of existentialism Sartre holds since existentialism has been understood in great divergences among its practitioners or thinkers as well as among its readers and critics. Only after finding Sartre’s existentialism, the discussion on how his character development as seen in his autobiography entitled *The Words* influence or relate with his existentialism may go on logically. The deductive method is going to be applied for the following analysis.

To understand Sartre’s existentialism, it needs a knowledge on the moods of thought that greatly influenced him both in his early intellectual as well as his life long. Sartre’s existentialism as in the case of the idea of freedom of his contemporary, Albert Camus, is not a static system of thought. In fact, it developed as the life of Sartre went on and on. Both Murdoch (1953) and *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Edwards. Ed., 1967) agree that Sartre stood full in three post-Hegellian moods of thought:

1. Phenomenological psychology, which undisputedly influenced Sartre's early existentialism as seen in his *The Transcendence of the Ego* (1936), *Esquisse d'une Theorie des Emotions* (1946), and *The Imagination* (1940).
2. Ontology on human existence, as seen in *Being and Nothingness* (1943), *Existentialism is a Humanism* (1946), and *Saint Genet: The Comedian and Martyr* (1952).
3. Marxism. Sartre claimed that his existentialism shares a common feature with Marxism in term that both encourage action of human beings to choose and use their freedom. His book entitled *The Critique of the Dialectical Reason* (1960) is an example of his work that has been influenced by the idea of Marxism.

It is also in the third "phase" of life or third mood of thought of Sartre that *The Words* was written. It is assumable then that Sartre's self-totalization as written in *The Words* includes the three moods of thought altogether but with different portion. Those three moods show continuity in Sartre's existentialism rather than discontinuity. In other words, it reveals an on-going process rather than a distorted one.

Sartre discussed and conveyed his idea of existentialism throughout all his work, whether they are essays, dramas, novels, or autobiography. It is from there that the idea of Sartre's existentialism should be understood. Many scholars have misunderstood Sartre and his existentialism that any efforts to make such misunderstandings as basis of thought would result in other worse mistakes. Therefore, it is from Sartre's own works that the idea of his existentialism should be

dug. Of all his works, none is more pronouncing and explicit in explaining his distinctive existentialism than his work that was written in 1964 and entitled *Existentialism is a Humanism* where he defended it from criticisms of both religious and communist thinkers. In doing so, Sartre rejected the presupposition from his opponent sides by saying that his existentialism much too emphasizes on the dark side of human beings (as brought by Christian thinkers, such as Mlle. Mercier) and tends to lead human beings to quietism or inaction (as criticized by the communists). Instead, in the book Sartre declares that existentialism is a doctrine that makes human life possible and that every truth and every action implies a human setting and a human subjectivity (1946: 28).

Sartre admitted that existentialism has been so stretched and has taken so broad a meaning that it no longer means anything at all. The term existentialism is applied to name or mention odd and unordinary arts, as well as their artists or musicians. It is just like a genre in art namely surrealism, which gains many followers for a certain period of time and then disappear just afterward.

In the effort of bringing back the true meaning of this mood of thought, Sartre promoted a classification of existentialism, where Christian existentialism stands in one side and atheistic existentialism in another one side (1946: 29). He classified himself an atheistic existentialism together with Martin Heidegger, and put Karl Jaspers and Gabriel Marcel in the side of Christian existentialists. We must see this “simplifying” classification as a means of Sartre to re-post existentialism in its proper place and not to be bothered by the dispute over the unwillingness of certain persons

to be classified this way, as in the case of Martin Heidegger. The two classes, however, share common features that both of them acknowledge human beings' freedom or subjectivity and responsibility over their own lives.

The atheistic existentialists, as Sartre was one of them, moreover reject the possibility of the existence of God and therefore of human nature or predetermination. The consequence of the non-existing God is that everything is left to human being to make and decide their lives and everything is possible. There are no objective moral values; there are no destiny to follow or complete, no mandate to accomplish, and no vocation of life to fulfill. In Sartrean term, this situation is called *the existence precedes essence*. It means that first of all man exists, turns up, appear on the scene, and only afterward he will be something, and he himself will make what he will be (1946: 36). Man is different from paper cutter, which has had preconception and predetermination of its function and style in the mind of its artisan or maker. Since God does not exist, man has no artisan or maker or creator and consequently, has no preconception and predetermination for his existence. This will be the first principle of existentialism that man is nothing else but what he makes of himself. Man is identical with his acts. Here, in this case, what is important is the "future" and the "will" of man to make himself (1946: 30-31).

Sartre's existentialism, therefore, encourages every man to be aware of what he is and to make full responsibility of his existence rest on him. Influences from outside should not be counted for man is responsible for himself. Come up to this point, it is obvious that there are several kind of contrastive ideas on human's

responsibility between what Sartre stated in his famous piece, *Existentialism is a Humanism* (1946) and his experiences as being put down in *The Words* (1964). It shall be discussed later.

In his other writing, *Freedom and Responsibility* (1947), Sartre made a definition of responsibility. It is “consciousness (of) being the incontestable author of an event or of an object” (page 112). Therefore, it is senseless to complain since nothing foreign has decided what one feels, what one lives, or what one is. By this, responsibility is not the same with resignation; instead, it is logical requirement of the consequences of man’s freedom. Further, Sartre said, “What happens to me is mine” (1947: 112).

Factually, no responsibility or choice is “totally” individual. “In choosing myself, I choose man” (1946: 31-32). Responsibility is always greater since it involves all mankind, or at least, will impact on all mankind. Not a single of one’s actions, which does not at the same time create an image of man as he or she thinks he ought to be. For instance, when one chooses to study literature, he or she assumes that it is good and that all men should do likewise. Or, his or her study on literature will certainly bring different impact(s) to the whole human race from if he or she does not study literature.

This very huge responsibility and at the same time the non-existent of God or Supreme Being where everything can be put down creates in man anguish, forlornness, and despair (1946: 32). As these typical Sartrean terms also appear

several times in *The Words*, they must be significant and their definitions should be clear. Sartre defined those terms as follows (1946: 32-40):

1. *Anguish*. The rejection or the ignorance to the existence of God (as held by atheists and agnostics) also puts an end or brings a doom to the moral and the ethics of human beings. Man then becomes the lawmaker, not only for himself but also for all mankind. He got a very huge responsibility. He cannot escape this feeling of total and deep responsibility.
2. *Forlornness*. The non-existence of God condemns man to be free. Man is said to be condemned because he did not at the first time create himself or choose to be created, but he is also free and taking full responsibility over his faith-a complied existence. In doing so, man cannot find either inside or outside himself anything to cling to.
3. *Despair*. It means that man shall confine himself to reckoning only what depends upon his will, or on the ensemble of probabilities which make his action possible. He cannot depend on others to run his action.

Many critics then hastily use these cheerless consequences of such a standing on human beings' lives to corner existentialism as well as Sartre as one of its thinkers. Existentialism is seen to be more identical with a pessimistic mood of thought rather than a realistic one.

From the above explanation, it is actually human freedom that becomes the starting point of Sartre's existentialism. In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre says, "Human reality is free, basically and completely free" (1943: 479). Without freedom,

human reality is absurd. In contrary, with freedom, man creates himself as he will be to be and takes full responsibility over himself and others. The inability to cope with and use the freedom and its responsibility will lead man to bad faith, as a compensation of a need of a place to cling to – where this huge responsibility can be laid down.

Sartre, however, also admitted that there are some limitations to apply human freedom in its ultimate function. Those limitations, which are termed as facticities, include physical condition, environmental settings, the past, and the death (Hassan, 1973: 108-109). Those facticities create structure that may limit one's ability to use his freedom optimally. Yet, they also bring possibilities or ambiguities, depend on how one defines them. A man is still free whether to take and use them or to simply abandon and leave them behind. It is man's freedom that will give meaning(s) to those facticities, and not vice versa. Freedom still stands in its highest post.

Upon the facticity of death, Sartre thought it as something absurd. Death is not something that can be waited for: when it will come, just like in the case when we are waiting for a train which brings our friend from other town. The coming of the train can be considered as having ambiguity or bringing possibility in term whether it will come or not, or if it does come, will it be on time or not, or whether our friend is in that train or in the next one. The coming of death, on the other hands, brings no possibility or ambiguity. It certainly will come since death is a certainty. Sartre admitted that death is a facticity that limits man's freedom, yet it lies outside man's existence. Therefore, death has no meaning at all related with man's existence as a

conscious manifestation. Death freezes existence into essence and by that the freedom is gone.

The next distinctive feature of Sartre's existentialism is its emphasis on human beings' actions. In *Existentialism is a Humanism* (1946: 38), Sartre explicitly says that his existentialism is a philosophy of action. Existentialism stands in the opposite side of quietism because it states "There is no reality except in action" (1946: 39). Man makes plan, man fulfills it through his actions. Man's existence lies in and measured by his actions.

The question is now back: how Sartre's character development as we found in *The Words* influences or relate with his coming to his existentialism whose meaning and features have just been discussed. How did Sartre's childhood prepared him to hold and have such a thought?

There are at least five points from Sartre's childhood as being written in *The Words* that are crucial in determining the process of young Sartre to come to his existentialism. It is obvious that there are also several missing "points" in *The Words*, which undeniably play important role to Sartre's coming to his existentialism. For instance, Sartre's formal education which is very little informed in *The Words* cannot tell anything about how Sartre learnt the phenomenology of Husserl. The information on teenage Sartre is also not available in *The Words*. These are due more to the way Sartre told his history of life. As been mentioned earlier, *The Words*, despite its classification of being an autobiography is not written chronologically. Sartre jumped

from one event of his life to others, which are mostly from his childhood (up to age of ten years old), arbitrarily.

The first of the five points is the event of the death of Sartre's father when he was only two years old. Commenting on his father's death, Sartre says in *The Words*:

"The death of Jean-Baptiste was the big event of my life: it sent my mother back to her chain and gave me freedom.... There is no good father, that's the rule. Don't blame on men but on the bond of paternity, which is rotten. Had my father lived, he would have lain on me at full length and would have crushed me. As luck had it, he died young. Was it a good thing or bad? I don't know. But I readily subscribe to the verdict of an eminent psychoanalyst: I have no Superego" (pp. 18-19).

The word "freedom" in the above excerpt, when seen with the point of view of existentialism, refers to Sartre's existentialism's "freedom" of man when God does not exist. The absence of the figure of father set him free from his superego as the rejection or the ignorance to the existence of God from any objective moral and ethical values. Sartre's being fatherless is identical with his being atheist. Sartre had his total freedom where no figure of father or God would bind him. Freedom is elsewhere the prominent feature of existentialism as well as of humanism (1946: 39).

The death of his father, as has been discussed in the previous section of this chapter, also left Sartre with scar. Sartre himself admitted that this event was a big event, which he did not know for sure if it was good or bad (see above excerpt). The good effect of it is that it had given him freedom. The opposite effect of it, on the other hands, was that Sartre left without knowing his mandate, "Whom should I obey?" and in page 26 "Against whom, against what, would I have rebelled?" The

absence of his father has caused him having no mandate of life or feeling lack of role as well as the rejection or ignorance to the existence of God has led him to the disbelief of determinism of human beings.

The lack of the figure of father and therefore of love and of mandate of life had compelled Sartre to turn to his bold grandfather (page 30). This is *the second* point of the significance of the character development of Sartre toward his coming to his existentialism. Rather comically did Sartre describe his grandfather as we could see in *The Words*:

“He so resembled God the Father that he was often taken for Him. One day he entered a church by way of the vestry. The priest was threatening the infirm of the purpose with the lightning of the heaven: “God is here! He sees you!” Suddenly the faithful perceived beneath the pulpit a tall, bearded old man who was looking at them. They fled. At other times, my grandfather would say that they had flung themselves at his knees. He developed a taste for apparitions. In September 1914, he appeared in a movie-house in Arcachon: my mother and I were in the balcony when he asked for light; other gentlemen were playing angel around him and crying, “Victory! Victory!” (p.22)

His grandfather is where little Sartre found love, affection, and affection – although is not taken for granted. At many times, Sartre had to act sweetly and childishly to win his grandfather’s love. The excerpt below shows how too mechanical was Sartre’s action on his grandfather’s coming from out of town.

“I would stop moving, I would lean forward, I was the runner getting set, the little birdy about to spring from the camera. We would remain for a few moments face to face, a pretty chinaware group; then I would dash forward, laden with fruits and flowers, with my grandfather’s happiness, I would go hurtling against his knees, pretending to be out of breath. He would lift me up from the ground, raise me to the skies, at arm’s length, bring me down upon his heart, murmuring: “My precious!” (p. 25)

It was for a very long time that Sartre depended on his grandfather's compliments. He admitted that his grandfather became the motive for most of his actions. Even his activity of writing was done because of his being the grandson of Charles Schweitzer (page 9). Only after Sartre's being aware of this fact, that he stopped manipulating himself and his grandfather. He decided to write for the action of writing itself, not for gaining pleasure nor for fulfilling what he once considered as his vocation of life (page 182).

One thing that can be learnt from the relationship between Sartre and his grandfather, Charles Schweitzer, is that the freedom resulted by the absence of the figure of father, or in existentialism's term, of God, brings feelings of anguish, forlorn, and despair to man. Freedom always comes hand in hand with responsibility. Man is free to do what he wants to do, but he also brings with him the responsibility – not only to himself but also to the whole mankind.

Sartre's turning to his grandfather shows his inability to stay in his state of freedom. [Sometimes it is hard when everything is up to us, although we may dream of it.] The inability to cope and use his freedom – or to some extent to keep struggling with his feelings of anguish, forlorn, and despair – causes him to run to bad faith, i.e. believe that there is a Personage who can solve the problems of life or a place to cling to.

The first two points above have given a quite strong basis for Sartre's being existentialist. Yet, Sartre's coming up to the consciousness of his self and of his taking full responsibility of himself and the whole mankind did not come at once or in

one nice-wrapped package. The consciousness of his self is the first step, while the taking up the responsibility of it is the next. In the process of coming to the consciousness of his self, *the third point* of *The Words* plays a very significant role. The third point is related with Sartre's being deep engaged with literature, particularly his activity of reading books.

Although at first the motivation of the little Sartre to read books was to win his grandfather's love and attention ("I have no duties, only one mandate: to please; everything for show", page 32), his activity of reading has deniable been a way to open up his mind to his situation, of his self. There is no exact information of what kind of books he read during those periods of time. *The Words* tells that Sartre picked up some children stories from his grandfather's library and read them over. He was much fond of heroic stories where he could identify himself with them, a thing that he could never get in the reality.

Although there is no explicit information on what Sartre got from his activity of reading as a result of the above-mentioned fact, a strong and logical understanding of what Sartre would be if he did not read can easily be taken. It is quite unimaginable how Sartre could be a prominent figure in existentialism if he did not read. His activity of reading has somehow and in certain ways opened up his mind to the reality and to his self, which in turn would be re-expressed to his readers. Moreover, it is his choice or his way to apply his freedom: "I did not gather herbs and throw stones at birds. But books were my birds and my nests, my household pets, my barn, and my countryside" (page 48). Sartre, somehow, had chosen book as his

religion (page 59), a mean to gain knowledge and understanding of his situation of life and of his self.

As Sartre chose to be lost in the jungle of words and made them his world, another consequence was waiting for him. Added or worsened with the fragility of his body, Sartre had to face rejections from his friends. The inability of Sartre to befriend with his mates, therefore, becomes our *fourth* point.

Sartre's situation of being deeply engaged in the activity of reading had become his facticity that hampered him from making good relationship with friends. Even today, it can be seen that many persons who like to read books so much tend to face difficulty when they have to make relationship with others. This could be more a psychological matter. This was also in the case of Sartre.

Sartre's being introvert as a result of that deep engagement in the reading activity and of bad experience caused by his fault in making friends can be tracked in his existentialism, which put subjectivity as its starting point. Here, Sartre emphasized on the personal freedom and responsibility over himself. Moreover, Sartre put that when making a choice one should be free from any outside's influences. One of his famous remarks on this can be found in *Being and Nothingness* (1943), "Hell is other people". This shows Sartre's rejection on any communal or objective values. It is each person who should make his own life and be responsible for that.

The Words depicts Sartre's personal efforts to be aware or conscious of his self. He found that he was also still be bounded with influences from outside when he

was making choices. His initial activities of reading and writing did not spring from his subjectivity, but merely from his grandfather's compliments. His going to school was done to please his mother. Not until he was aware of it, that he might to change and made use of his freedom and his subjectivity to do something.

The fifth or the last point to be discussed here is related with Sartre's writing. Writing becomes Sartre's action where he creates himself the way he wanted to be. His first book, *Michael Strogoff*, which was written when he was seven or eight years old projected Sartre's willingness to be awaited hero of the world. In existentialism's term, the action of writing has become Sartre's mean to project his plan and his future. It is there that Sartre wanted himself to be.



CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Sartre, from our analysis, was successful in presenting his character development along with his abstraction, idea, and experiences of life through his autobiography, *The Words*. His ability to utilize literature to convey his philosophical views on human beings' existence makes him a crystal clear philosopher and a genius man of literature at the same time. Through his works, particularly through his work being discussed here, i.e. *The Words*, he opened himself for a discussion on how he come to such philosophy of life.

Sartre's *The Words* is divided into two parts, "Reading" and "Writing". This division is not a mere accident since it is done purposely. The first part, "Reading" contains the story of Sartre's early experiences when he was left behind by his father's death, which gave him "freedom", how he turned to his grandfather to win love and affection he desperately needed, how he felt rejection from his environment, and how he introduced to the activity of reading literatures. His environment, especially the push from his grandfather, has played big role here. Up to his age of ten, Sartre lived in his own world – he was a separated boy who drowned in his absorption in the pile of books. Sartre read and read – that's all he did and that was his only interest. "Reading" has been Sartre's first way to acquire the knowledge of life. The action of "Reading" itself is symbolic. It is a very personal action where

people try to make a link between themselves and the material written. Yet, no one would resist that in reading, we merely accept and acquire things. Seldom do we put critical thinking over it.

The second part of the book is "Writing". It is the part where Sartre began to explore his mind. Seen from the developmental process angle, it is advancement from the "Reading" phase. In here, Sartre dared to speak out his mind, his fantasies, his idea, and in short, his imagination. Sartre was now here becoming the agent of action. He was not only the theme. The part of "Writing" symbolizes the character of Sartre that grows and holds a view.

The Words is very important in explaining Sartre's standpoint, particularly when it is dealing with his philosophy. Sartre is an existentialist. He is famously known with his remark "Existence precedes essence." Through the character of Polou, Sartre depicted and explained that remark. The character of Polou had to acquire and to learn many things before he find (yet, too bad that it is not clear whether at last he find it or not) his being. Sartre would not be a distinctive existentialist if he had not experienced being fatherless, rejected, deeply involved in reading and writing books. All those experiences have made Sartre. Human is very different from animals which their existence comes together in one pack with their essence. Human, according to Sartre, is condemned to be free. It is wholly in the human's hand whether he would try to find his or essence or not.

In one hand, Sartre is a pessimistic existentialist. Yet, on the other hands, he always tried to prove and defend that his view on human beings' lives and existence

as extracted in his existentialism is a realistic one through his writing, including his autobiography, *The Words*. As a pessimist thinker, he said that man would never find his essence. *The Words* depicts that, i.e. everything is dull and useless. Yet, in all of his writings, he emphasizes that human being is (condemned to be) free. With this freedom, man should create himself and make his life valuable.

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