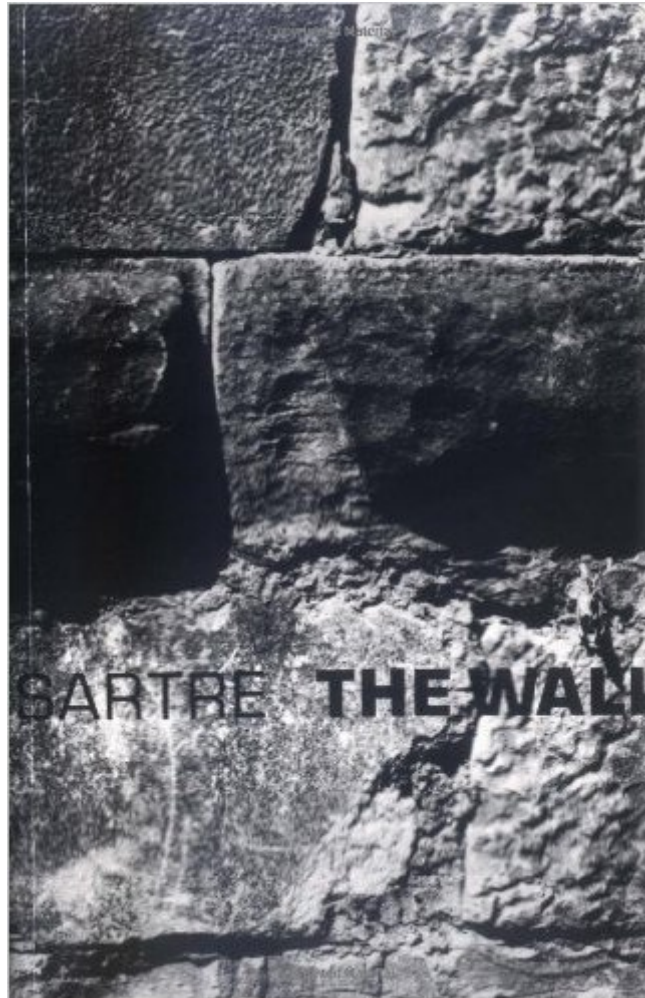


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The Wall: (Intimacy) And Other Stories (New Directions Paperbook)



Synopsis

One of Sartre's greatest existentialist works of fiction, *The Wall* contains the only five short stories he ever wrote. Set during the Spanish Civil War, the title story crystallizes the famous philosopher's existentialism. 'The Wall', the lead story in this collection, introduces three political prisoners on the night prior to their execution. Through the gaze of an impartial doctor—seemingly there for the men's solace—their mental descent is charted in exquisite, often harrowing detail. And as the morning draws inexorably closer, the men cross the psychological wall between life and death, long before the first shot rings out. This brilliant snapshot of life in anguish is the perfect introduction to a collection of stories where the neurosis of the modern world is mirrored in the lives of the people that inhabit it. This is an unexpurgated edition translated from the French by Lloyd Alexander.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"The Wall and other short stories" is a triumph in literature. Each story explores the depths of human thought and reason through an existential point of view. Each story can be interpreted differently by all readers, therefore making this a great book for discussion. "The Wall" is the first story presented. It consumes the reader because of its brilliant writing style. The story is narrated by a man named Pablo Ibbieta, who is in a jail cell with 2 others awaiting execution the following morning. Every event that transpires that particular night is analyzed almost too thoroughly thus leaving the reader

in a trance. I won't get into it too deeply, but believe me, this story is worth reading...I guarantee it will have to be read again. After finishing the story, I felt as though nothing mattered. Who cares if the dishes were not washed, who cares if I would be late for work. Believe me, this story will have a profound impact on the way you think. Don't be surprised if you have a new appreciation for life. This story enlightens the mind. Another great story from this book is called "Erostratus". Erostratus was a character who wanted to be famous, so he burned down the temple of Ephesus, which was one of the 7 wonders of the world. This is the central symbol of the story, the quest for glory. It also brings up an interesting point when the narrator asks one of his colleagues "Who built Ephesus?" and the colleague did not know, he only knew who burned it. "Erostratus" in short is one man's descent into madness because of his quest to be remembered. The ending of "Erostratus" is filled with suspense and makes your heart beat in fear.

My focus is on one of the book's five pieces - The Wall. This existentialist story has the feel of a film shot in stark black and white; the prose is as hard-boiled as it gets, told in first-person. The opening scene takes place in a large bare room with white walls where the narrator, Pablo Ibbieta, a man we can visualize with a thin, chiseled face, slick back hair and looking a bit like Albert Camus or Humphrey Bogart - a visualization in keeping with the tone of black and white film - is interrogated, and, along with two other men, sentenced to be shot dead. The condemned are taken to a cellar with benches and mats, a room shivering cold and without a trace of warmth or humanity. The story unfolds here in the cellar room that's hard and dank and ugly. Absurdity and despair, anyone? Sartre has us live through the evening and night with Pablo and the two other convicted men: Tom, who has a thick neck and is fat around the middle (Pablo imagines bullets or bayonets cutting into his flesh), and Juan, who is young and has done nothing, other than being the brother of someone wanted by the authorities. We watch as Pablo and Tom and Juan turn old and gray; we smell urine when Tom unconsciously wets his pants; we hear Tom saying how he heard men were executed by being run over by trucks to save ammunition. A doctor comes in and offers cigarettes and asks if anyone wants a priest. No one answers. Pablo falls asleep and wakes, having no thought of death or fear - what he is confronting is nameless; his reaction is physical - his cheeks burn and his head aches. Meanwhile, the doctor, referred to as the Belgian by Pablo, takes Juan's pulse and writes in his notebook. All is clinical; all is calculating. The cold penetrates - the doctor looks blue.

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