

## INTRODUCTION

---



'A whole man, made of all men, worth all of them, and any one of them worth him'; this sentence closes Sartre's autobiography, *Les Mots*.

Despite being a literary, political and philosophical icon of the twentieth century, relatively little research has been done on Sartre and gender with specific reference to theories of masculinities, whilst feminists have long studied Sartre.<sup>1</sup> In looking at self-formation and masculinities, my purpose is to bring to the surface internal tensions and desires within Sartre in order to make him more contradictorily 'real' and therefore accessible. This in turn may enable us to relate to his writings and philosophy on a deeper level.

I will limit the period under study from 1905 until 1945 (chapters one to six) before looking at Sartre's relationship with Simone de Beauvoir (chapter seven – centred mostly on the war) and then with men and women, in terms of intimacy (chapter eight – spanning a wider period), tracing how Sartre's psycho-social processes and masculine subjectivities inform his interaction with others throughout his life. The systematic study is brought to a close in 1945 because by then Sartre had become Sartre.<sup>2</sup> Finally, I add a postscript covering the last seven years of Sartre's life when he is almost blind and can no longer write, starting the postscript with a fleeting glance at the period 1945–1973. It is not my intention to play down his political commitment, especially in the last two chapters where I look at Sartre's political pronouncements through the lens of a masculinity discourse, and my analysis falls short of any assessment of Sartre as a political figure.<sup>3</sup> In the postscript, I argue that Sartre changes significantly after 1973.

There is another reason for concentrating so much of my study on the Second World War period. Sartre seems to undergo a significant transformation during the war years; he changes his personal philosophy from stoicism to a search for authenticity. What does Sartre mean by being authentic? 'To be authentic is to realize fully one's being-in-situation, whatever this situation may happen to be' (1995: *WD*, 54). Sartre's transformation is underpinned by his emotional state. Being a stoic corresponds

to being emotionally detached; being authentic is a wish to be more emotionally involved. Sartre comes back from the prisoner of war camp in March 1941 and tells Beauvoir that from now on he will be engaged in politics (Beauvoir 1960: 492).

Sartre will become intellectually hegemonic in the late forties in France, and throughout much of the fifties; this has been thoroughly researched.<sup>4</sup> What has not been written about is the fact that, if on the surface Sartre goes from individualism to the collective and to committed literature, this is underpinned by profound emotional turbulences whose keys lie in his childhood and which can be witnessed in the writings he produced at the time. Effective (and affective) change is always personal as well as political.<sup>5</sup> For Sartre, someone's life forms a whole that cannot be divided up; the inner and the outer, the subjective and the objective, the personal and the political all influence each other since they belong to the same totality and one can only understand a person by treating them as a social being (1976a: 176). This is a journey towards uncovering some of the multiple, fragmented and contradictory Sartrean selves, and in turn I hope to render his accomplishments all the more remarkable. I shall not concentrate on Sartre's achievements as a major intellectual figure of the twentieth century; this would be a different project requiring a lengthier volume commenting on the *substance* of Sartre's writing. I want to try and bring to light as many layers as possible from Sartre's emotional life, so that together with all the studies of his intellectual life, it will help us to gain a better understanding of Sartre as an embodied sexual being, and possibly demonstrate a new way of connecting biography with *œuvre*.

Anyone studying Sartre faces major difficulties. First of all, there is a massive amount of Sartre's writing in different disciplines: political, philosophical, and literary. There is also a wealth of secondary literature – notwithstanding Sartre's biography (Cohen-Solal 1985).<sup>6</sup> In terms of publications, I will concentrate on the period 1936–1945. After his *Ecrits de Jeunesse* (mostly from the 1920s), Sartre wrote novels, plays and philosophical works, notably *L'Être et le néant*, war diaries and correspondence. These works will be used when they throw light on the overall argument rather than studied *per se*. *Ecrits de Jeunesse* will receive a more systematic treatment because it will be argued that Sartre buries in it some of his childhood. Sartrean scholars will no doubt find selective focus in my use of Sartre's life.

Secondly, Sartre produced an unusual quantity of autobiographical writings, starting with his autobiography, *Les Mots*, but also many other autobiographical works, including the film *Sartre par lui-même* as well as interviews. Sartre's autobiography will not be treated as the definitive statement about his life and as authoritative compared to, for example, his fiction. Sartre explained that *Les Mots* was no truer than *La Nausée* or *Les Chemins de la liberté* and that it was also a sort of novel (1976a: 146). Sartre leads the way in *L'Idiot de la famille* by studying Madame Bovary and argu-

ing that some of the hysteria displayed by Charles Bovary can only have come from Flaubert describing it from the inside (1979a: 34). Elsewhere he sums up his belief: 'You have to take into account the life of people who write: it is projected in the writing in one way or another, here in breaking it up, in suspending it' (1979b: 26). He also saw the importance of the body, stating that he would have liked to write a biography of Flaubert, by focusing on his books *as a résumé of his entire body* (Lévy 2000: 224). He even challenges critics to find his taste for coffee and his sexuality in his own books. By using an author's works and correspondence, Sartre believes that a critic should be able to find out about the author's personality (1982a: 80).

To add to the difficulties, Sartre seems to narrate his life in his autobiography and other interviews with a great deal of irony and detachment. An ironic stance sometimes precludes any connection with one's world of feelings and emotions: 'men in particular learn to distance ourselves from our own experience through humour, cynicism and irony, so that we never risk ourselves' (Seidler 1989: 104).<sup>7</sup> There is a danger of a parallel process and the danger is that the critic responds by being detached. It would be very tempting to mirror Sartre's own tone, but this would be perpetuating the denial of his pain. I have therefore made a conscious effort to empathise with the young Poulou.<sup>8</sup> I have tried to avoid perpetuating Sartre's detachment by acknowledging some of the emotions that his story caused me to experience, whilst at times he keeps his under lock and key. I wanted to show that Sartre had a 'fine life', a concept he defines as follows: 'a fine life was simply one that dampens the reader's eyes when it's recounted by a feeling biographer' (Sartre 1995: *WD*, 81).

Thirdly, Sartre developed his own concept of existential psychoanalysis, with his work on Baudelaire, Flaubert and Genet. Inspired by Marxism, it is based on the progressive-regressive method, involving internalisation and reexternalisation, and also looking for the original choice and project(s) of individuals. At the root of this concept is the fact that objects of study have to be seen to be *individual subjects* exercising their own freedom.<sup>9</sup>

Finally, Sartre was a chameleon. Most biographers of Sartre and people I have spoken to who knew him have reported that Sartre was a different person to different people. If two people who knew Sartre spoke together, they could have the impression of speaking about two strangers. According to Perrin, a priest who was a prisoner of war with Sartre, Sartre was a steamroller who also had 'the milk of human kindness' (1980: 144). According to Cau, his secretary from 1946 until 1957, the milk of human kindness was not only undrinkable but a drink unknown to him (1985: 251).<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, there were also some common traits that people would recognise readily. For instance, most people who knew Sartre would agree that he was generous.<sup>11</sup>

In spite of all the aforementioned sources, a study of Sartre 'from the inside out' seems useful. He is an extremely complicated human being, which in turn makes him very stimulating to analyse. How to understand

the child who was the apple of his mother's eye and ended up being bullied as a teenager, or the bourgeois writer seen haranguing a crowd of workers, perched on a barrel, on a damp afternoon in 1970?

In view of all the difficulties highlighted above, which methods have I chosen to study Sartre? I have been attracted to particular theories because of their purchase on Sartre's life and writing. These are masculinities, views about the sel(f)(ves) and some general theories about self-formation. These theories criss-cross each other in my analysis.

Masculinities are multiple, rather than singular, and created by specific historical practices within relations of power.<sup>12</sup> Masculine subjectivity is 'a process involving constant negotiation of multiple subjectivities, or fragments thereof, in which men have unequal investments' (Pease 2000: 35). Men (and women!) actively construct masculinities in many different ways, some of these constrained by society, from intellectual competitiveness to body-building (both aspects applying to Sartre, both practices being individual rather than collective). Masculine subjectivities also betray internal tensions: there are no homogeneous patterns but rather contradictory desires and shifting boundaries. Masculinities are not fixed but can be renegotiated and unsettled.<sup>13</sup> Despite appearing to embody traditional hegemonic masculinities, Sartre is also a very good example of the internal tensions that betray a shifting sense of masculine self, being forced to exclude and expel versions of himself that are not accepted by the dominant order.

An important aspect of the political meaning of writing about masculinity is the question of power. There is a crucial division between hegemonic masculinity and various subordinated masculinities. Hegemony signifies 'a position of power and cultural authority' (Connell et al. 1998: 59) and it is centrally connected with the institutionalisation of men's dominance over women (Carrigan, Connell and Lee 2002: 113). Hegemonic masculinity establishes itself partly by its claim to embody the power of reason (Connell 1995: 144). It emphasises being in control and that means controlling one's emotions (Connell et al. 1998: 60). The very identification of masculinity with reason has tended to blind men to their masculinity as something socially and historically sustained (Seidler 1989: 17). Though the concept of hegemonic masculinities has been criticised by some feminist writers for neglecting gender relations at the expense of masculinity, I believe that it is a useful theoretical tool for my project. Some masculinities are more honoured than others – for example archetypes such as the paratrooper or the sportsman – and some are dishonoured as in homosexual masculinities in society, or marginalised as in masculinities of some ethnic minorities. Hegemonic masculinity is not always the most common form but it is highly visible and, whether we like it or not, at some point or other all men are 'measured' against it, even if it does *not* reflect the varied nature of men.

Masculinity is constantly constructed within the history of an evolving social structure, a structure of sexual power relations. This construction is

a social struggle that goes on in a complex ideological and political field in which there is a continuing process of mobilisation, marginalisation, contestation, resistance, and subordination (Carrigan, Connell and Lee 2002: 110–11). Violence is important, not only as an expression of subjective values or of a type of masculinity, but also as a ‘constitutive practice that helps to make all kinds of masculinity ... much of this violence comes from the state’ (Carrigan, Connell and Lee 2002: 106). The latter see social definitions of masculinity embedded in institutions as much as in the personality of individuals; ‘collective masculinities’ such as in the military and/or as in Sartre’s case at the Ecole Normale.<sup>14</sup> Masculinity also takes multiple forms interacting with other identities, so that it become impossible to discuss masculinity as such without taking into account its relationship to race, class, national, and sexual identifications. Finally, masculinity is a shifting concept over time as society changes in response to economic and cultural developments.

How do I relate these theories more specifically to Sartre? Sartre was first and foremost a writer. Writing cuts two ways. It is socially and politically useful, and also a way of accomplishing masculinities and other subjectivities – of ‘doing’ masculinities as we ‘do’ gender, that is we actively construct it by our acts.<sup>15</sup> The writer can engage in power, domination and seduction which in turn makes him/her part of the intellectual elite and therefore of the ruling order. It would not make sense to argue that writing is synonymous with masculine subjectivity, as it would mean that all writers – male or female – are actively fashioning masculinity! But it is *one of the many ways* of accessing the ruling order, a practice that Sartre favours.

Seidler demonstrates how men learn to crush their feeling of need, dependency, and emotionality to achieve a masculine identity: ‘It is not simply that these feelings and emotions threaten the sense of masculine identity, but that the denial of these feelings and desires *establishes* the very sense of male identity. Masculinity has to be constantly reasserted in the continuous denial of “femininity” or “feminine qualities”’ (1991: 98–99). Kimmel points out that the notion of anti-femininity is at the heart of conceptions of manhood; masculinity is defined more by what one is not rather than by whom one is (1994a: 126). I shall use masculinity and femininity as embodied terms but I do not wish to create rigid categories: these two concepts are fluid; they are both social constructs. A man engages in practices that could be labelled ‘femininity’ and a woman engages in practices that could be labelled ‘masculinity’.<sup>16</sup> Relating this debate back to Sartre, Schehr remarks that Sartre has an intricate approach and relation to masculinity and femininity – and also homosexuality and heterosexuality (1995: 70). Sartre himself said in an interview in 1965: ‘But when the day comes, of course, the special qualities of [sensitivity] for which I prefer the company of women will be due purely to chance; sometimes a woman will have them, sometimes a man. They’ll cease being a feminine prerogative’ (Gobeil 1967: 178). As unsatisfactory as they are, I shall use the concepts of

masculine and feminine when I speak about gender practices since, as Connell points out, if we get rid of those terms, we would have to invent other gender concepts performing the same tasks (2000: 17).

As Sartre argued above about Flaubert, writing comes from the body and I shall engage with Sartre's various bodies. His physical body was small and square, some American friends used to call him 'Mr Five by Five' (Contat and Rybalka 1970: 419). In recent studies, the body has become a site of cultural, social and political studies: 'Bodies cannot be understood as a neutral medium of social practice. Their materiality matters' (Connell 1995: 58). Bodies are engaged with social and cultural processes. Flannigan-Saint-Aubin argues: 'Trapped within patriarchal logos, masculinity ultimately may be unknowable, but it can be broached or inferred from the symbolic secret code of the male body' (1994: 242).

We have established that Sartre was a different person to different people and that masculinities are multiple. Applying this to the self, one has multiple selves which are all contingent. We present different selves to different people; hence there is always an interaction between our selves and others: 'Subjects are dynamic and multiple, always positioned in relation to particular discourses and practices and produced by these – the condition of being subject' (Henriques et al. 1984: 204). Two notions are particularly useful in my analysis of Sartre; a compromised sense of self, and a more inclusive sense of self. I understand the former concept in terms of recognition, or mis-recognition, where significant others only recognise you in particular shapes and you have to cut or stretch yourself to fit this version, or some other compensatory version. In Sartre's case, he plays the child prodigy and narrows his range of selves to a writing self. Conforming to this exclusive version of self denies plurality and heterogeneity and often involves violence to oneself. 'A more inclusive sense of self' encompasses other subjectivities like excluded and/or subordinated selves. In Sartre's case, one of the excluded selves would be his 'femininity'. Having explained these basic theories, I can reveal that in the postscript I argue that during the last seven years of his life, Sartre accesses a more inclusive sense of self, which is why I trace his psycho-social development to its conclusion.

In terms of theories about self-formation, I will use the concept of narcissism but do not wish to pathologise Jean-Paul Sartre. 'Narcissus' is a *myth* and psychoanalysis is a power/knowledge relation. However, these theories seem to throw light on Sartre's psychic dynamics and troubled life. There are a variety of meanings to the concept, depending on theoretical orientations.<sup>17</sup> I am not using the concept in its general sense, equating narcissism with self-love. This is the definition I use; the narcissist is someone who has buried his self-expression in response to early injuries and replaced it with a highly developed, compensatory sense of self in response to his/her environment needing the individual to be something substantially different from what he or she is. The young Sartre fell prey to what he calls in his autobiography the 'family comedy'. It appears that

both his grandfather and his mother wanted him to be a precocious genius. Hence Sartre acted and performed for other people rather than for himself. He promulgated a narrow sense of self over the expression of a more inclusive sense of self where other selves are not developed. Narcissism is often linked to grandiosity, also called omnipotence or magnificence. This concept could be defined as a self-construction (but often imposed from the outside) within a narrative of heroism in relation to others and to oneself. There is a disproportionate investment in a singular aspect of the self. In Sartre the adult, it manifests itself by intellectual omnipotence; Johnson defines it as a sense of self that has intense feelings of power and personal effectiveness (1994: 297). 'Grandiosity' is often an attempt to counter great emptiness/loss of self, humiliation and shame and feelings of worthlessness.

Narcissism is considered a normal developmental stage at a very young age. However, it may present problems in self-representation and object-relations when there are difficulties in the rapprochement sub-phase of separation-individuation with the mother (or mother-figure). In 'normal' contact, there are various stages for a sense of self to develop. According to Mahler et al., the overall developmental process of children includes differentiation, practising,<sup>18</sup> rapprochement, and separation/individuation. Rapprochement is the *third* sub-phase of separation-individuation lasting from fifteen to twenty-four months where the mother is perceived more as separate and outside. If this phase is well adjusted, the child has a growing realisation of separateness/individuation and with it of his/her own vulnerability. It is at this point that the grandiosity or magnificence gets integrated with vulnerability. I will argue in chapter one that Sartre experiences difficulties in these processes and that his grandiosity remained out of proportion since it was not integrated with vulnerability. The concept of self-object will also be used. It signifies 'the experience of another person as part of the self in which that other person provides necessary functions for self-cohesion' (Breshgold and Zahm 1992: 64).

Aside from the canonical text by Pacaly, *Sartre au miroir* (1980), heavily indebted to Freud,<sup>19</sup> Andrew Leak's book on sexuality (1989),<sup>20</sup> or individual studies of specific texts of Sartre as for example Bellemin-Noel on *Eros-trate* (1988), very few books look at the psycho-social formation in Sartre. A combination of masculinity studies and the psycho-social formation in Sartre has, to my knowledge, not been attempted before. Whilst aware of the uneasy relationship between psychoanalysis and the social sciences,<sup>21</sup> I am in agreement with Connell when he writes that 'psychoanalysis offers to modern thought on masculinity a uniquely rich method of investigation, some illuminating general principles, and an immense variety of hypotheses and insights' (1994: 33), arguing that the idea of multiple masculinities finds a precise meaning and its strongest evidence in psychoanalysis.

My first book on Sartre was published in 1992. It resulted from my interest in Sartre which began around 1980. When I left France to go and

live in England in January 1979, on the spur of the moment, I bought six of Sartre's books from a newspaper kiosk at Gare du Nord. This turned out to be highly symbolic and prophetic: I was leaving France, the country where I was born and where I had been educated up until then, but I was taking Sartre with me, as my cultural baggage and intellectual exploration. A few years later, I was to write my doctorate on him. I have always remained interested in Sartre, but journeyed with Hervé Guibert and other HIV writers. Along the way, I have discovered gender studies, and masculinity studies, as well as psychotherapy. I want to use my own psychosocial development in order to read Sartre anew, learning about myself and my own masculinities along the way. I am not claiming any monopoly whatsoever on interpretations of Sartre's life. I hope that others will be stimulated enough, including to take issue with me, so that the eventual overall process will further the understanding we have of Jean-Paul Sartre's life and work. Today, if I were standing in Gare du Nord again, knowing everything I know and feeling everything I feel, I would still choose to pick up Sartre's books to take away with me.

## Notes

1. For example Lilar, 1967 and recently Lacoste, 1999.
2. There is also the question of length since a detailed study from 1905 until 1980 would be more than double the length of the present volume. Indeed I could and may write a second volume spanning the period 1945–1980.
3. See for instance Birchall 2004 and also Drake 2002. I do not want to be part of revisionist tendencies (symbolised by Robert Faurisson), seeking to rewrite history in order to suit right-wing ideologies.  
Sartre was subjected to an attack about his role during the Occupation (Gilbert 1991).
4. See for instance Boschetti, 1985 or Galster, 2001.
5. 'The politics of theory, personal politics and the politics of social change are inextricably entwined' (Henriques et al. 1984: 118).
6. Whilst I needed to take into account key secondary texts, I have not wanted my own creativity to be stifled by interpretations peripheral to my approach.
7. Seidler (1989) generalises about men. He was later criticised, especially by Australian theorists, but in the late eighties it was probably necessary to generalise as a mobilisation strategy. It was certainly salubrious that Seidler used 'we' and did not hide behind academic 'objectivity'.
8. This was Sartre's nickname as a child. A nickname his mother will carry on using throughout his adult life. It is quite surprising that, as late as 1970, in a pact of reconciliation Sartre signs with Siegel, one of his lovers, he writes: 'We, the undersigned, Jean-Paul Sartre known as Poulou ...' (Siegel 1988: 79)!
9. The regressive method looks at character structure and the progressive method at the particular family situation of individuals within their historical context, looking for their project (see Sartre 1960c: 119–230). On reading my manuscript, a friend and Sartrean scholar suggested that I had in fact gone some way towards producing an existential biography of Sartre since I do look at Sartre's character structure and also at his

- family situation as well as his project. I do not think I explain why Sartre wrote the works he did but I would agree that I am trying to unearth and preserve the individual.
10. I will be using Cau quite extensively throughout. One may object that Cau is not very reliable with his move to the right but he produced a moving, sensitive portrait of Sartre where he did not try to settle scores.
  11. Beauvoir notes that Sartre's generosity impresses all his friends; he gives generously his time, his money, and himself (Contat and Rybalka 1970: 419).
  12. See Connell 1995.
  13. 'Men's gender identities and practices ... are likely to be internally complex and are often internally divided' (Connell et al. 1998: 60).
  14. Part of the French system of 'Grandes Ecoles', it is a very prestigious institution in Paris, entered by competition, preparing teachers for higher education.
  15. The expression 'doing' masculinity is now commonly used as in Connell et al. 1998: 58.
  16. Butler makes the point that homophobia often operates through *abject* gender, 'calling gay men "feminine" or calling lesbians "masculine"' (1993: 238). In an article inspired by Homi Bhabha, Krishnaswamy shows that effeminacy (or rather 'femininity in masculinity') is a production of hybridity, a form of resistance (2002: 295, 304, 306).  
For further reading on this issue, see *The Masculinity Studies Reader* where a whole section is devoted to 'Borders', demarcating 'the insecure divisions between male and female, femininity and masculinity, heterosexual and homosexual. In each case, the category of masculinity, which aspires to permanence and universality, is destabilized by attention to its fraying borders' (Adams and Savran 2002: 337). In affirming a homosexual identity, many gay liberationists embraced the label of effeminacy (Carrigan, Connell and Lee 2002: 109). Another border zone in particular is female masculinity. Judith Halberstam wonders whether masculinity belongs first and foremost to men and coins the phrase 'female masculinity' (2002: 355). She usefully points to masculinity dividing its power into complicated differentials of class, race, sexuality, and gender (356) and concludes that masculinity should not remain the property of male bodies.
  17. Primary narcissism, secondary narcissism and narcissistic personality disorder.
  18. Practising is the second sub-phase of separation-individuation, lasting from about nine to fourteen months; the infant is able to move away from his mother and return to her (Johnson 1994: 300).
  19. The text concentrates on Sartre's biographies, referring throughout to Sartre's anal fixation and to his castration complex.
  20. This text does discuss masculinity and femininity in chapter one and is closest to some of the preoccupations of my own essay. Leak is presently writing a book on 'Sartre and Authenticity'.
  21. See Connell 2000, especially chapter one: 'Debates about men, new research on masculinities', 3–14.