Jean-Paul Sartre:Existentialism and Literature through World War II

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Jean-Paul Sartre was one of the most significant and public intellectuals of the twentieth century whose work as a philosopher, novelist, playwright and political activist still holds a niche in contemporary discourse. It was often stated that Sartre was the last great writer before the war and the first after it. His early career brought him fame with such work as *Nausea* and *The Wall*, which adhered to a rather anti-humanist or individualistic style of existentialism. The second half of his career, after the war, proved to be much more forceful and innovative, reflecting a humanistic aspect with the epic trilogy *The Road to Freedom* and his numerous plays, such as *Dirty Hands* and *No Exit*, pushing for commitment. The years 1939 through 1945, including the Phony War, captivity and occupation proved to be the pivotal point for Sartre which cast himself, his philosophy, literature and political life on the path for which it is known today. These six years demonstrate how the war experience affected an intellectual, such as Sartre, through his writing and philosophical career as well as his shift in focus from individualism to collectivism. Also, as one of the few intellectuals to be able to survive the gauntlet of occupation, Sartre was able to emerge to disprove the dichotomy of resistor and collaborator. His experience alone is an example of the existence of the middle road of compromise under the Germans.

Born in Paris in June of 1905 to parents of petite bourgeoisie standing, Jean-Paul had been exposed to intellectual life from an early age, eventually using writing as a retreat of the social rejection he faced from his peers[1]. His mother, Anne-Marie, was the daughter of Carl Schweitzer and the cousin of the famous intellectual Albert Schweitzer. His father, a navel officer, died of disease shortly after Jean-Paul's birth. After his death, Jean-Paul and his mother went to live with his grandfather, who was responsible for introducing the young boy classic literature. When Sartre was three he was let loose into the family library which fascinated him so much that he continuously installed himself in front of books which he

[1] Interview in *Sartre Par Lui-Même*, dir. Alexandre Astruc, 3 hr. 11 min., Sodaperaga, 1976, videocassette.

could not yet comprehend. In his only autobiography, *The Words*, he credits his mother with his entry into writing as a form of familial ceremony. Sartre recalls:

> In order to make me fully aware of my good fortune, my mother learned and taught me the rules of prosody... I wrote in imitation, for the sake of the ceremony, in order to act like a grown-up; above all, I wrote because I was Charles Schweitzer's grandson.[2]

Another aspect to *The Words* is Sartre's realization of alienation and self-loathing. For most of his childhood, Jean-Paul donned a long mane of golden curls, suggesting that his mother would have preferred for him to have been born a girl. Fed up with this look, Carl sent him to a barber. It was this event which made Sartre realize that he was actually ugly, something which he would discuss throughout his life and work. *The Words* concludes around the same time that his mother told Sartre that she would remarry. This further alienated the young boy, shattering the notion of an indestructible bond between mother and son and left Sartre with a foul taste in his mouth regarding his childhood and steered him toward an individualistic lifestyle.

Sartre's first exposure to a standard education was at the Lycée Henri IV where he befriended Paul Nizan who was to be a great influence on Sartre, especially regarding Communism. In 1917, Anne-Marie, who was newly remarried, moved herself and Jean-Paul down to La Rochelle which brought him into lonely provincial life, to which he accredits his learning to live in solitude. Finally in 1922 Sartre found himself back in Paris at the École Normale Superieure studying philosophy. It was at this school that he made significant contacts, some of whom would later become his intellectual adversaries, such as Simone Weil, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Jean Hippolyte, and Claude Levi-Strauss. In 1929 Sartre met Simone de Beauvoir who was studying for the same exams. Their friendship grew and eventually became a relationship of lovers, a story which has since become legendary and which has produced a volume of valuable correspondence. That same year Sartre finished

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[2] Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Words*. Trans. Bernard Frechtman. (New York: George Braziller, 1964), 140-41.

first in his exam with Simone right behind him in second. At this point Sartre's teaching career would begin during which some of his most fresh and important philosophical work was published.

It is at this point in his life that one can begin to piece together Sartre's pre-war philosophical and literary career as well as his political tendencies which will eventually be contrasted to his post-1940 self. In the early 1930s, Sartre was on track teaching at Lycées around France, eventually making it to Paris with his main academic focus being philosophy. After a few years of teaching, Sartre took a year off in 1933 to go and pursue the study of a new found philosophical interest; the work of German philosopher Edmund Husserl. At the French Institute in Berlin, Sartre conducted extensive studies into the phenomenology of Husserl which eventually led him to take interest in one of his students, Martin Heidegger. Heidegger, an active member of the Nazi party, was rector of the University of Freiburg and an important figure in phenomenology and existentialism. His main opus, *Being and Time*, would lead Sartre to write *Being and Nothingness* which would become the cornerstone of modern existentialism. This version of existentialism however was more individualistic and anti-humanistic, in that the idea of fraternity had no place in this work because "human relationships are either absent or conflictual."[3] Also, the language used in *Being and Nothingness* to describe relationships was "syntactically consistent with an assumption of detachment and separation."[4] One of Sartre's biggest dilemmas once he began to follow Marxism was the fusion of this individualistic philosophy with a communal ideology.

Another aspect of this year in Germany that gives an insight into Sartre's mentality is his oblivion to the political climate change in the very city in which he was living at the time. 1933 saw the rise of Hitler and the Nazi party in Berlin. To most of the world, especially those living in Berlin, whether one supported this change or not, it was a major concern.

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[3] Eleanor Kuykendall, "Sartre of Violence and Fraternity." *Sartre: An Investigation of Some Major Themes.* Ed. Simon Glynn. (Hant, England: Avebury, 1986), 23.

[4] Ibid., 23.

Sartre however, seemed not to notice. Unlike his friends who took the same trip and determined that "a gigantic event was in preparation and that it was the whole of Western civilization that was going under," Sartre remarked that he had spent a "magnificent holiday there."[5] Unfortunately, all the letters which he had sent to Simone de Beauvoir from Germany in 1933-34 had been lost. Even so, it is quite apparent that for most of the decade, Sartre was either ignorant or just apathetic to the building tension in the world. It wasn't until 1938, when in a letter to Beauvoir, did he recount the events in reference to the diplomatic tension in Europe with an overly optimistic tone.[6] Previously in his letters he did not mention anything political. Even in a letter to friend Olga Kosakiewicz in the month that the Spanish Civil War broke out, there was no mention of politics.[7]

The civil war in Spain, which erupted in July of 1936, took hold of the European continent as it seemed to be overrun by fascist powers. With Hitler in Germany, Mussolini in Italy and now Franco vying for power in Spain, not to mention the iron-fisted influence of Stalin to the east, France was finding itself increasingly surrounded by threatening enemies. In his novel *The Reprieve*, written at the beginning of the War with the aid of newspapers from 1938, Sartre examines the attitude of the time through a dialogue between Mathieu and Jacques, who speaking to his brother, says, "And even if we win this infernal war, do you know who will profit by it? Stalin." Mathieu replies, "if we do nothing, Hitler will."[8] It is interesting to note that during the writing of this novel in 1941 to 1944 Sartre's main sources for the mindset of the characters as well as the opinions were from newspapers which were published during the month of September 1938.[9] How much of the political analysis or mentality of Mathieu, his alter-ego, was actually Sartre's at the time is questionable. Judging from the lack of concern in his personal and in-depth correspondence with not only Beauvoir

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[5] Bernard Henri Lévy, *Sartre: The Philosopher of the Twentieth Century*. Trans. Andrew Brown. (Cambridge: Polity, 2003), 270.

[6] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Witness to My Life*. Ed. Simone de Beauvoir. (New York: Scribner, 1992), 173-180.

[7] Ibid., 51-72.

[8] Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Reprieve*. (New York: Vintage, 1992), 209.

[9] Benjamin F. Martin, *France in 1938*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana Sate University Press, 2005), 170.

but other close acquaintances, Sartre did not seem to have much of an opinion. Sartre, in hindsight, once commented on his position in 1938 saying that, "I was torn between my individual pacifism and my anti-Nazi feelings."[10] The apparent problem here was his equating pacifism with inaction.

This growing concern of the rise of fascism during the 1930s, especially with the situation in Spain, led to a vast intensification of communist commitment in France, particularly amongst the intelligentsia. This included one of Sartre's best childhood friends and fellow Gallimard author, Paul Nizan. Nizan, along with a student and friend of Sartre's, Jacques-Laurent Bost, another staunch communist supporter, was constantly prodding at Sartre for his refusal to join the French Communist Party. According to Sartre, although he and Beauvoir, who also did not join, were sympathizers and did lend support to the Communist movement, he could not find it within himself to join, feeling that he had nothing to offer the party.[11] This attitude of his which he came to realize and discuss through his novel *The Age of Reason*, was something that plagued him throughout the war. Although it wasn't published until after the war had ended in 1945, this novel essentially begins during the summer of 1938, at the height of diplomatic tensions in Europe as well as the civil war in Spain. Mathieu, the main character and Sartre's alter-ego, is the means through which he expresses many of his own existential dilemmas. In the opening pages of the novel, Mathieu comes across a beggar who, in exchange for a five-franc piece, gives Mathieu a postcard with a stamp of Madrid, expressing his regret for not being able to go fight against the fascists. Through this beggar, Mathieu, and in essence Sartre, confronts his own regret in that like the beggar, he never engages himself in an act which carries risk and responsibility.[12] This, as one will see through the War, will be the main struggle for not only his characters but for Sartre as well.

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[10] Lévy, *Sartre: The Philosopher of the Twentieth Century*, 271.

[11] Interview in *Sartre Par Lui-Même*, dir. Alexandre Astruc, 3 hr. 11 min., Sodaperaga, 1976, videocassette.

[12] R.-M. Albérès, *Jean-Paul Sartre*. (Paris: Éditions Universitaires, 1962), 95.

One justification for Sartre's apparent indifference in involving himself politically in world affairs could have been the distraction caused by his budding literary career. In 1937, after having taught at provincial schools for seven years, Sartre finally obtained a teaching position in Paris, allowing him to live and work within a sphere of like-minded intelligentsia. From this time on, Sartre, Beauvoir and their entourage would install themselves at the Café de Flore or Le Dôme where they would discuss and work. This move to Paris also brought him in close contact with Gallimard, the leading French publishing house. That same year, after having worked and solicited his manuscript entitled *Melancholia* for eight years, Sartre finally got acceptance from Gallimard with a publication date for the following year under the title *Nausea*. Shortly after a collection of short stories, *The Wall*, was to be published as well. In this context, as he wrote to Beauvoir, "I walk the streets like an author (I'm ignoring the pebble in my right shoe),"[13] Sartre was more absorbed with his new found success than in engaging himself in anything, especially politically.

With the decade coming to a close and tensions rising amongst neighboring nations, the threat of war was finally becoming a reality. After the Munich Pact in 1938, the subsequent takeover of Czechoslovakia and finally the invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939, the world was at war. On September 2nd France called for general mobilization, throwing hundreds of thousands of reservists into active duty including Sartre who described this mobilization as a "Kafkaesque journey" through which, with his issued uniform, he "became an unclassifiable phantom."[14] This period, from September 2nd until the German invasion of France in May 1940, was known as the "phony war" and would become the start of Sartre's turning-point. His role in the Meteorological Corps in the Alsace region of France just behind the front, consisted of himself and three others doing a minimal amount of work, maybe about two hours a day. Sartre's initial experience of the war allowed him an almost infinite amount of time to write and lounge about, calling it a "slightly restricted country

[13] Sartre, *Witness to My Life*, 119.
[14] Ibid., 228.

vacation, but a country vacation nonetheless."[15] It was during this time, spending days and nights in cafés, barns and basements that he would write extensive letters everyday to Beauvoir and others as well as a majority of the work of the first installment of a trilogy of novels, *The Road to Freedom*. Also, with the aide of Beauvoir who would constantly send him supplies, Sartre kept a war diary which filled fourteen notebooks, five of which still exist today, that give a unique insight into the development of Sartre into his post-war self via this experience of war.

Sartre's leisure time during the phony war produced an abundant array of work which reflected the continuous transformation of his psyche caused by the war. Many of these thoughts were expressed in letters composed for Simone de Beauvoir, to whom he disclosed "it's actually odd how many different mental attitudes the war can demand," and that "as far as the war is concerned, many observations are no longer valid."[16] Sartre's work, *The Age of Reason*, and the *War Diaries*, both written between 1938 and 1941 make an apparent attempt to analyze and contemplate his own relationship to the war and became the foundation of the new Sartre. Using Mathieu, the main character of *The Age of Reason*, as a departure point one will be able to envision a pre-war Sartre during the last half of 1938 and piece together the mentality that kept him from a committed lifestyle like so many of his peers.

Mathieu, as previously mentioned, is Sartre's alter-ego. As a philosophy professor who is in search for money to pay for an abortion for his mistress while still trying to retain his freedom, Mathieu confronts his brother Jacques to ask for help. Jacques however, lays out not only Mathieu's but Sartre's flaws and contradictions as well:

> You condemn capitalist society, and yet you are an official in that society; you display an abstract sympathy with Communists, but you take care not to commit yourself, you have never voted. You despise the bourgeois class, and yet you are a bourgeois, son and brother of a bourgeois, and you live like a bourgeois.[17]

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[15] Sartre, *Witness to My Life*, 234.

[16] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Quiet Moments in a War*. Ed. Simone de Beauvoir. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1993) 188, 219.

[17] Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Age of Reason*. Trans. Eric Sutton. (New York: Vintage, 1993), 138.

Through Mathieu, Sartre is able to re-explore his past and attempt to comprehend his character, while allowing the reader a glimpse of himself before the outbreak of war. This initial view of Mathieu and Sartre communicates the obvious difficulties they both had with completely engaging themselves in a belief.

Commitment to communism was another problem faced by Sartre, one which was taken head on after the war had ended. Brunet, a character in Sartre's novel based on Paul Nizan, is a communist leader who is constantly trying to recruit Mathieu. Mirroring reality, Mathieu is unable to bring himself to commit. When Mathieu refuses Brunet's solicitation, offering the excuse of not being entirely convinced, Brunet replies, "if you're counting on inner inspiration to make up your mind you may have to wait a long time... A conviction has to be created."[18] It is dialogue such as this that represents the self image Sartre has of himself before the war as an "ineffective intellectual who views the absurdity of life and shrugs his shoulders," refusing to have any opinion.[19] It is also an indication of the transformation of Sartre's philosophy to that of active engagement whether political or not, and that a person creates and is responsible for oneself. In essence, it is during this time period where he begins to directly advocate self-responsibility, in that one is responsible for one's self, including choice, rejecting all outside sources as having absolute control of one's will.

With this philosophical transformation surfacing, one can see the emergence of the struggle with freedom and individuality in Sartre's work and life because of the war, both directly and indirectly. The most evident example of this developing philosophical process is Sartre's *War Diaries*. Written during his duty during the phony war from 1939 to 1940, these notebooks present not only trifling personal anecdotes but also incredibly thought-out and structured philosophical concepts. Heidegger, to whose work Sartre was introduced to during his stay in Germany, is often contemplated within the entries. These reflections eventually

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[18] Sartre, *The Age of Reason*, 156.
[19] Brian Masters, *Sartre: A Study*. (London: Heinemann, 1974), 10.

became an initial draft for his 1943 publication of *Being and Nothingness*. [20] In regards to himself as a subject, Sartre's exploration of free will and individuality in these diaries paints a raw autobiographical portrait in which he realizes his own isolation as an individual. It is over the duration of the time in which he kept these diaries that he began his transformation into the social world. The next episode during this experience in the military would hurl Sartre into a situation which would accelerate this change.

In May 1940, France and Germany went to war and within seven weeks the French Army had been defeated, ending the war and beginning the occupation. During these weeks in which the French fought hard along the German border, Sartre was writing to Beauvoir as usual but this time with a more pessimistic tone. Although his day still consisted of taking a few meteorological readings and writing, discussions turned to those of Hitler being the "first beast of the Apocalypse" and of news coming in about friends.[21] Bost, his former student was badly wounded at the front and his best childhood friend, Paul Nizan, was shot and killed by a German bullet on May 23 at the Battle of Dunkirk. Sartre, who was in Alsace, about three-hundred meters from the front, was taken prisoner and sent to a German prison camp near Trier where again he found himself with plenty of leisure time to work.

Sartre's time as a prisoner of war in Germany is the period which can, in effect, be called the pivotal point of his life and career. During his stay here, forced to live within close quarters to thousands of others, Sartre became aware of the social and communal aspect of life. In prison he lived in the barracks which housed those whose purpose it was to entertain the rest of the camp, and during Christmas of 1940, Sartre and a troupe of actors performed a play which would alter his mentality forever. *Bariona* was a Christmas play, staged in 1940, which dealt with occupation and resistance, somewhat of a touchy subject especially in a German prison camp. Although it took place during the Roman occupation of Judea at the

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[20] Quintin Hoare, Introduction. *War Diaries: Notebooks From a Phoney War1939-40*. By Jean Paul Sartre. Trans. Quintin Hoare. (New York: Verso, 1999), xii.

[21] Sartre, *Quiet Moments in a War*, 206.

time of Christ's birth, its target was quite clear. Its Nazi counterparts were made fun of and the occupied were portrayed as heroes. It was this play, as previously mentioned, that is the "real turning-point of Sartre's life and work," the birth of a "second Sartre: optimistic, committed in a new sense and suddenly turning his back on the haughtily pessimistic metaphysics which had been like a safe conduct, a vaccine, against political confusion."[22] This move from pessimism to optimism, both philosophically and in literature, led to a sense of the social or the communal, which would also begin to seep into his work.

Bariona was also responsible for bringing a humanistic tone to Sartre's literary career and his philosophical work through personal experience. It was his fellow prisoners in the Stalag with whom he shared a common bond and goal in regards to France under Germany and it was this experience of communal living that "provided Sartre with the idea of a united audience."[23] Before the war, as a writer of philosophy and novelist, Sartre was very capable of avoiding the task of uniting a group of people for a certain cause. The only people he would really have to deal with were his students and his publishers. Now, being a prisoner whose task it was to entertain, he became a playwright who would not only amuse his comrades but also try and evoke a common emotion in all of them. It was here that Sartre would discover his first real public and expression of activism.[24] The audience was made up of different backgrounds; businessmen, factory workers, politicians and even intellectuals. Sartre recalled this situation as being quite a challenge, stating that the playwright "must create his audience, fuse all these disparate elements into a single unity by evoking what concerns everybody at a certain time in a given community."[25] From this point on, Sartre's life, in all aspects, would no longer revolve around himself only, but in the context of the entire human race.

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[22] Lévy, *Sartre: The Philosopher of the Twentieth Century*, 274.

[23] Robert Champigny. *Sartre and Drama.* (Birmingham, Alabama: French Literature Publication Co., 1982), 36.

[24] Ronald Aronson and Adrian van den Hoven, Introduction. *Sartre Alive.* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991), 18.

[25] Champigny, *Sartre and Drama*, 36-37.

In March of 1941, after nine months as a prisoner of war, Sartre was released with civilian status and went back to Paris. His release still remains controversial and brings up the exact situation and questions that so many faced during the occupation; does one detach oneself completely from dealing with the Germans, or does one do what one can to survive, even if that means working with them? For a while, it was believed that Sartre had actually escaped from prison. This however, was untrue. Sartre would never have been able to leave the prison unless he had the support of the German administration there.[26] What is known is that he was released because he was one of many soldiers 'called up in error', meaning they would be let go due to disability. It was widely believed that he owed his release to Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, of the *Nouvelle Revue Française* and a Nazi sympathizer, who had plenty connections with the Germans and who had consequently saved the lives of many of his peers. Another story is that a fellow inmate, Father Marius Perrin, falsified his papers to say that Sartre "suffered from a strabismus causing difficulties in his sense of direction" and balance.[27] Which story is true concerning his release is still in doubt, but either way it seems as if some support was drawn by people connected with Nazism; something that would prove to plague Sartre throughout the occupation.

In the late spring of 1941, Sartre found himself back in Paris trying to start from where he left off in late 1939. Because of the short amount of time he was able to enjoy his success before the war, Sartre was worried that people would soon forget about him while he was away. Beauvoir made sure he was aware that people were not forgetting him and that they were even presenting public readings of his short story *The Wall*.[28] For Sartre, like most everyone else, living in occupied Paris was not easy. Many adjustments had to be made and people had to be careful about the image they projected of themselves, especially people who relied on public recognition for success. As an intellectual, a writer, philosopher and now

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[26] Lévy, *Sartre: The Philosopher of the Twentieth Century*, 272.

[27] Ibid., 272.

[28] Simone de Beauvoir, *Letters to Sartre*. Trans. and Ed. Quintin Hoare. (New York: Arcade, 1993), 350.

playwright, Sartre had to be extra careful not to offend the wrong people; the members of the resistance as well as the Germans. The ideal position for Sartre would have been to be a part of the resistance but just enough to be below the radar of the Germans. This however proved to be a bit more difficult in practice and Sartre found himself leaning on the shoulders of the occupying force now and then in order to survive. One will see slight compromise during Sartre's career under the occupation that will both affect his image and life as well as bring plenty of criticism on his character.

As Beauvoir had predicted, upon his return to Paris, Sartre's experiment with theater would become "a new string to [his] bow for good."[29] During this time, until the end of the War, Sartre will have published some of his most important work, the most famous of which include his plays. *The Flies*, *No Exit*, *Being and Nothingness*, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, as well as the first two volumes of *The Road to Freedom* trilogy occupied Sartre for the duration of the war. Sartre also found time during all of this to write for periodicals and journals as well as found a resistance group. This was, one could well argue, his most prolific period as a writer. Through analysis of the literature which he wrote and published, as well as the conditions in which they took place during this time, one can see the affect that war had on the subjects of free will, individuality and soon after, commitment and engagement.

A short time after his return to Paris, Sartre once again found himself in the theater with the 1943 production of *The Flies*. This modern version of the Greek Electra myth, finds the main character Orestes and his sister Electra returning home to avenge their father's murder and to rid the city of the occupying force of their mother and her new husband, the murderer. Orestes takes on the task of killing his mother and the new king and as a result of that rid the townspeople of their subjection to Zeus through Jupiter, his 'Vichy'. The people are forced to choose between obedience to Zeus, for which they will feel shame, or to live free of Zeus and feel pride for their actions. In other words, the city would have to live under this

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[29] Beauvoir, *Letters to Sartre*, 353.

imposed oppression installed by the king and queen, unless they were to rid themselves of this ideology. This play, obviously enough, is an allusion to the "masochistic discourse" of the Vichy within the framework of collaboration with the Germans.[30] How a play this evidently anti-German could make it past the censors seems to be beyond comprehension. However, the manner in which it was produced and staged could lead one to believe that the Germans were willing to alter its interpretation, ultimately making it their own.

The question of resistance versus collaboration, with nothing in between, first arises with the production of this play, *The Flies*. Sartre and Dullin, the director, had to make their way through the proper and necessary channels of the occupational and collaborationist censors in order to stage this. It is here that one can see plenty of evidence of both men compromising their image as 'pure' resistors through their compliance with the Germans. First off, not only did Sartre agree to let it be staged in the heart of Paris but in the Théâtre de la Cité which was formerly known as the Théâtre Sarah Bernhardt. The name of the theater was changed because of Sarah Bernhardt's Jewish faith. Also, this theater was deemed by the Propaganda Abteilung as "Deutschfreundlich" and worthy to "welcome the visits of German troops."[31] Furthermore, the director was obliged to submit not only the text to the censor's office, but also a list of everyone who worked on the play, including actors, along with his honor that none of them was Jewish.[32] It seems, so far, that with all of these compromises, the production of *The Flies* was in complete compliance with German regulations. However, with the previous interpretation of the play in mind, what better way to mock the German occupation than do it right under their noses? Ironically, it has been argued that the Germans had seen this play in terms of their own with Orestes as a Nietzschean superman fighting against the repressive Jews.[33] This move by Sartre, perhaps his first real act of defiance in the

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[30] Lévy, *Sartre: The Philosopher of the Twentieth Century*, 278.
[31] Ibid., 277.
[32] Ibid., 277.
[33] Julian Jackson, *France: The Dark Years 1940-1944* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 315.

face of oppression, is in complete accordance with his dry and subtle wit. This apparent compliance was in fact a cunning jab.

Sartre's next play, *No Exit*, was staged in 1944 only a few days before the allied landing in Normandy. Its themes were a bit more difficult to grasp because of their philosophical nature, but the general message made it through to the audience. In it, three people, Garcin, Estelle and Inès, find themselves in hell, which on stage consisted of one set with 'no exit'. It is from this play that the phrase "hell is others" came from. The characters in No Exit all represent different problems with society, especially in regards to image within a social structure. Garcin is a coward, Estelle is a lesbian shunned by the world, and the very set reflects a hell on earth situation.[34] For the duration of the play, all three characters or aspects of society are quarreling and an image of real life, of Sartre's life, begins to emerge. One could see the concept of 'hell on earth' as the war, which it is often referred to. The passage of time in the play is completely off; time seems to go by so slowly. Garcin, at one point says that his wife "died just now...about two months ago."[35] This could well reflect the lag of correspondence during the war. One would receive word weeks or months after something had happened. Furthermore, the characters in the play portray a problem that Sartre has often discussed; that of in authenticity, where the characters "appear as comedians, as being only capable of playing the roles of character."[36] In his war-time letters to Beauvoir, Sartre often referred to his fellow soldiers as characters, all acting out parts in a play. Finally, one last piece of evidence to show that *No Exit* is indeed an analogy of Sartre's experience in the war is that the setting is that of a drawing-room; not a torture chamber or dungeon. Sartre's perception of the war took place mostly from drawing-rooms, cafés or other bourgeois backdrops, until his capture by the Germans.

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[34] Lévy, *Sartre: The Philosopher of the Twentieth Century*, 280.
[35] Jean-Paul Sartre, *No Exit*. (New York: Vintage, 1989), 38.
[36] Champigny, *Sartre and Drama*, 51.

Finally, the last pieces of literature to explore during this time are the first two volumes of *The Road to Freedom*: *The Age of Reason* and *The Reprieve*, both of which were published simultaneously in 1945, but written from 1939 to 1944. *The Age of Reason*, which was discussed earlier, dealt with the time leading up to the 1938 Munich Agreement which essentially set off the preparations for war. The novel, which was basically a loose autobiography, concerned itself with the struggle for freedom and responsibility in the context of a collective movement towards war. In taking a different look at this novel, one that is parallel to Sartre's own life, one can see the setting as a microcosm of what was happening internationally on a diplomatic scale in 1938. Sartre saw Mathieu as going through exactly what France was going through the same year. Mathieu's mistress, Marcelle, was pregnant and wanted to keep the baby; he wanted to abort it as means to retain his freedom. To resolve his problem he would go to all his friends and enemies for help in rectifying this problem so that he could be kept from the shackles of marriage. At the same time, France was pleading with Germany and England to try and resolve their differences so that France may live in peace and in freedom. An expansion of German fascism in Europe would leave France surrounded, essentially shackled and at risk of invasion itself. Like France, Mathieu who is looking to defend his freedom, has "importuned those he despises and alienated those he loves."[37] Many people, including Sartre, saw the French policy at this time alienate helpless allies like Czechoslovakia, which one sees in *The Reprieve*, and eventually their own people.

The second installment, *The Reprieve*, sees a definite transformation in not only Sartre's writing style but more importantly in his attitude regarding the war. The time period during which this was written, 1941 to 1944, includes not only his time in prison but his time under occupation as well. *The Reprieve* shows us the new side of Sartre; the one concerned with the collective. The story is set in the eight days before the signing of the Munich Pact in September 1938 and follows most of the same characters with a cast of new ones. The most

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[37] Martin, *France in 1938*, 126.

striking difference in this book is its style. As one character is about to open their mouth to speak, another answers, intertwining multiple scenes and characters who are separated by geography, time and even class. Hitler's dialogue overlaps with that of a Czech proletarian, then to Mathieu. This intertwining of characters conveys the interdependence of the human destiny and opens up an opportunity to individual liberty.[38] This aspect of Sartre's philosophy was developed in his *War Diaries* and questions the idea of an 'entity' or 'collective'. A collective phenomenon such as the war, Sartre believes, is not an 'entity' but rather the juxtaposition of the consciences and responsibilities of millions of individuals.[39] For every person, this war was *their* war. Even if they refuse responsibility it, by the mere act of acknowledging it, they make it theirs.

Aside from the style based off of his philosophy, Sartre also began to infuse political aspects into his writing. Associated with this new idea or fascination with the 'collective', characters such as Maurice and Brunet, from *The Age of Reason*, play more important roles, signaling Sartre's move to communism. In the opening pages of the novel, as war is looming, Maurice Gounod turns to his girlfriend and says that if war comes "we guys'll do the job. But when we come back, we'll keep our rifles...The bourgeoisie doesn't want war... They are afraid of victory, because it would mean the victory of the proletariat."[40] Like the previous novel, Mathieu is still looking to retain his freedom while constantly being bombarded with the solicitations of joining the communist party. This time, however, he experiences commitment, even though it's forced, through being called up to join his unit. Again we find both Sartre's and Mathieu's dilemma of retaining their freedom and individuality while being a part of a bigger concept: the war.

This problem of being an individual and trying to function as such, greatly perturbed Sartre in regards to his role in the resistance. The resistance was, in theory, a collective of like

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[38] Albérès, *Jean-Paul Sartre*, 102.
[39] Ibid., 102.
[40] Sartre, *The Reprieve*, 14-15.

minded individuals whose aim it was to make the occupation as difficult as possible for the Germans. Any sort of collaboration was taboo, as it would aid the Germans rather than hinder them. Sartre's participation in the resistance is often brought into question, as it is suggested by some that during the occupation he really didn't do all too much to combat the Nazis.[41] Again, as was the case with the production of *The Flies*, Sartre is seen to have been a little more in-the-middle than many of his peers would have liked as he was looking out more for himself rather than the whole. One of these cases brought against Sartre during this time were his participation in questionable periodicals.

The case in question regarding Sartre's tendencies under the occupation is his participation in certain periodicals and newspapers, the most prominent being the *Nouvelle Revue Française* (*NRF*) and *Comoedia*. Like most writers, especially those who are rather new, Sartre had to constantly write and publish in order to keep his voice heard. With many of the publications under strict control of the occupying forces, this was rather difficult. Simone de Beauvoir once said that "the first rule of Resistance intellectuals was 'no writing for the Occupied Zone papers'."[42] This rule was broken by Sartre when he published an article on Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* in *Comoedia*, a collaborationist newspaper. Although this newspaper could be viewed as 'soft' collaboration, many of Sartre's peers were shocked to find that he had published along side their enemies. The second issue was one with the *NRF*, which was a part of Gallimard but ran by Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, the Nazi sympathizer who may have been the one to help Sartre leave the prison camp in Germany. Drieu's political affiliations were no secret and this caused a great problem amongst the left-wing intellectuals who wrote for Gallimard. To these writers, it was completely unacceptable to write for the *NRF*.[43] Those who wrote for the *NRF* found themselves guilty by association, risking not only their reputations, but eventually their lives as well once the occupation had ended. Although,

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[41] Aronson, *Sartre Alive*, 15.
[42] Jackson, *France: The Dark Years 1940-1944*, 303.
[43] Ibid., 316.

Sartre did not contribute to the *NRF* during its collaborationist years, his previous affiliation with it as well as his current relationship to Gallimard, kept him in suspicious eyes.

The four year occupation of France did not create a black and white scenario for a majority of the French population. People now had to share the same living space and cultural life with a hated occupying force which slowly, and to the dismay of many, began to integrate itself into the permanent landscape of Paris. Sartre's own encounter with the Germans in Paris gives a good indication of the general experience that most everyone shared. Sartre wrote that "occupation was part of daily life" and that even though at first they were an offensive site they began to take on an "institutional appearance" becoming more like furniture than men.[44] With this perception of the Germans taking on the role of furniture, perhaps a clumsy and ugly presence but one you deal with just the same, it could be understandable that the French would do just that; deal with them just the same. Perhaps the most important statement that Sartre made concerning the relationship between the German occupiers and the French was that "the concept of an enemy is only clear and fixed if the enemy is separated from us by the barrier of gunfire."[45]

With the end of the occupation in August 1944, many of the hard-line resistors began to crack down on those who had collaborated, resulting in many trials and even executions. Many intellectuals were greatly affected by this hunt, including Drieu La Rochelle who killed himself before he could be publicly accused of any collaborative activities. Sartre, however, was luckily never seriously considered as having acted in compliance with the Germans. He did however take up the cause of defining a collaborator in his essay "What is a Collaborator?" published in 1945. Using Drieu as a model, Sartre depicted a collaborator as a "mixture of masochism and homosexuality," and that he "transposed on to France the weakness of [his] character."[46] One can also see this image of a collaborator in *Troubled*

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[44] Jackson, *France: The Dark Years 1940-1944*, 284.
[45] Jean-Paul Sartre, "Paris Sous l'Occupation." *Situations III.* (Paris: Gallimard, 1949), 18-21.
[46] Jackson, *France: The Dark Years 1940-1944*, 211.

Sleep where Daniel, a homosexual, is taken with the beauty of the Germans march into Paris that he was "longing to be a woman so that he could load them with flowers."[47] This essay and condemnation of collaborators also championed the resistance and acted as a springboard for Sartre into an active life of political activism.

For Sartre, this newfound life of activism came in the form of commitment and engagement, two themes which were well prevalent in the second half of his literary career. Motivated by the commitment he witnessed by his peers during the resistance, Sartre's new philosophy took a hold of him for the remainder of his life. Although many say his efforts were a little too late, it did not deter him from infusing many of his plays, namely *Dirty Hands*, with an urging of action. This play, first staged in 1948, deals with a young idealistic intellectual who is trying to prove himself within the communist party. His life has been a sort of deterministic one in which he plays the role of himself, acting and not really living.[48] This of course goes against Sartre's existential beliefs who believes that through action, man can create himself. Perhaps the most blatant attack on traditional bourgeois inaction in *Dirty Hands* comes from the communist leader Hoederer who reprimands Hugo, again a Sartre doppelganger, for his refusal to commit:

> How afraid you are to soil your hands! All right, stay pure! What good will it do?...Purity is an idea for a yogi or a monk. You others, the intellectuals and bourgeois anarchists use it as a pretext for doing nothing...Me, I have dirty hands. Right up to the elbows. I've plunged them in shit and blood. And now? Do you think you can govern innocently?[49]

It is with this attitude, brought on from experience and observations during the occupation, that Sartre would approach the rest of his life.

Sartre's public life began to be channeled through the media via his involvement in political affairs, such as opposing foreign policies, colonialism, war and even anti-Semitism.

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[47] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Troubled Sleep*. Trans Gerard Hopkins. (New York: Vintage, 1992), 106.
[48] Francis Jeanson, *Sartre: Par Lui-même.* (Paris: Éditions Du Seuil, 1969), 36.
[49] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Les Mains Sales*. (Paris: Gallimard, 1948), 198 (my own translation).

As Beauvoir once stated in an interview, Sartre "moralized when he joined the resistance."[50] His first hand experience of oppression by the Nazis, as well as the later discovery of the atrocities that they committed, pushed him to use his celebrity status to work for justice. Along with this commitment came the idea of responsibility, especially in regards to the war. Sartre believed that everyone is responsible for themselves as well as the world and that one plays a part in everything that happens, whether or not that person is passive or active. This ideology stemmed directly from the anti-Semitism and rise of Nazism during the war. Anyone, he claims, that tolerated anti-Semitism was responsible for its consequences.[51] This idea also transfers to the situation in Algeria, racism and colonialism. By ignoring, or being passive to, a situation, one allows the injustice to continue which is just as bad as actively propagating it. It is quite possible that this attitude of Sartre is a result of his apparent passivity before the war as well as during the resistance and is, in essence, trying to redeem his active morality.

One of the final and, in regards to his work with existentialism, the most significant transformation that Sartre underwent was his shift to humanism which heavily influenced his activism. Before the war, Sartre had lacerated all forms of humanism in his first novel *Nausea*, only to adopt it after having experienced the war.[52] In his essay "The Humanism of Existentialism," published in 1945, Sartre overhauls the self-centered existentialism and introduces a philosophy that promotes community amongst the human race. In it, he liberates man, allowing for him to create himself. In regards to the rest of humanity, Sartre sees the individual and the mankind as having an equal relationship to each other. One of the most important points of the essay is that in choosing and carrying out one's actions according to one's project, man is not only creating himself but also creating an image of man such as he

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[50] Interview in *Sartre Par Lui-Même*, dir. Alexandre Astruc, 3 hr. 11 min., Sodaperaga, 1976, videocassette.

[51] Aronson, *Sartre Alive*, 30.

[52] Ibid., 21.

believes he ought to be.[53] With this in mind, Sartre is preaching that man does or should act in the interest of mankind as a whole, focusing on himself as the starting point of this 'ultimate good'. This new perspective on the relationship between the individual and the whole is, in fact, a direct reaction to the communal living arrangement and solidarity that Sartre found in the prison camp during the war, as well as a solution or response to the question of 'how?' in regards to the rise of Nazism and anti-Semitism.

The six years that Jean-Paul Sartre lived within war and occupation, from 1939 to 1945, proved to have had the greatest impact on his life on multiple levels. This great turning-point that he experienced was a change from passivity to activity, brought on by the sense of community within a prison camp and under occupation. It was his literature and theater that was responsible for bringing Sartre into reality and in touch with his fellow man with war as a backdrop. Entering 1939 as an individual, wholly concerned with the self both politically and philosophically, Sartre found himself six years later at the age of forty publishing works that championed humanity and pushed for political engagement. Adhering to this new ideology, Sartre set out to be its poster boy, traveling all over the world to bring attention to injustices. It was because of the war and everything that it included that left a wake of important work which depicts the experience and the affect that all the aspects of war had on one of the most important intellectuals of the twentieth century, including a valuable perspective on the question of resistance and collaboration. It is becoming increasingly evident, as one can see, that the war and subsequent German occupation of France was not a condition painted in black and white, but rather that most people, including Sartre, found themselves in the ever more apparent gray area of cohabitation and survival.

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[53] Jean-Paul Sartre, "The Humanism of Existentialism." *Essays in Existentialism.* Ed. Wade Baskin. (New York: Citadel, 1993), 37.

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