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## Literature and philosophy in Sartre's early writings

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**Abstract:** It has often been noticed that the philosophical analysis developed in *L'être et le néant* can be related to Sartre's literature. As a consequence, Sartre's early writings have often been criticized from two points of view. The philosophical works, it is said, are not sufficiently rigorous, and the novels, short stories, plays, are nothing but problem literature, too philosophical to arouse curiosity. Sartre's phenomenological works are not taken seriously, especially in France (the situation is quite different with Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology). The aim of this paper is to criticize the common opinion in this matter. *L'être et le néant* is a strictly composed philosophical work, according to the rules of ontological phenomenology. But the phenomenological field comes under the influence of metaphysics which, for its part, is contained in literary works like *La Nausée*, *Le mur*, *Une défaite*... From a historical point of view, Sartre's project of metaphysical literature is prior to the philosophical works, it goes back to his childhood, and becomes more and more precise as Sartre studies philosophy at the Ecole normale supérieure. This literary project does not disappear when Sartre writes his first philosophical works : *La transcendance de l'Ego*, « Une idée fondamentale de la phénoménologie de Husserl : l'intentionnalité » . In Berlin (1933-34), Sartre writes simultaneously *La Nausée* and these two articles. The novel's writing influences the articles in a way that we have to examine.

# Literature and philosophy in Sartre's early writings

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It has often been noticed that the philosophical analysis developed in *L'être et le néant* can be related to Sartre's literature<sup>1</sup>. As a consequence, Sartre's early writings have often been criticized from two points of view. The philosophical works, it is said, are not sufficiently rigorous, and the novels, short stories, plays, are nothing but problem literature, too philosophical to arouse curiosity. Sartre's phenomenological works are not taken seriously, especially in France (the situation is quite different with Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology). The aim of this paper is to criticize the common opinion in this matter. *L'être et le néant* is a strictly composed philosophical work, according to the rules of ontological phenomenology. But the phenomenological field comes under the influence of metaphysics which, for its part, is contained in literary works like *La Nausée*, *Le mur*, *Une défaite*... From a historical point of view, Sartre's project of metaphysical literature is prior to the philosophical works, it goes back to his childhood, and becomes more and more precise as Sartre studies philosophy at the Ecole normale supérieure<sup>2</sup>. This literary project does not disappear when Sartre writes his first philosophical works : *La transcendance de l'Ego*, « Une idée fondamentale de la phénoménologie de Husserl : l'intentionnalité » . In Berlin (1933-34), Sartre writes simultaneously *La Nausée* and these two articles. The novel's writing influences the articles in a way that we have to examine.

## The project of metaphysical literature

As far as Sartre's early writings are concerned, we can analyse *La Nausée* and the *Ecrits de jeunesse*. His autobiography : *Les Mots*, is also important to understand the earliest origins of the project of metaphysical literature. The latter is highly original, it's a real *literary* project, involving the creation of fictions, using every means of inventive metaphors and complex plots. But it's also a *philosophical* project, because the writer aims at revealing metaphysical truths. Meeting Sartre in 1929, Simone de Beauvoir wrote in her *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée*<sup>3</sup> :

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<sup>1</sup> G. Prince, *Métaphysique et technique dans l'oeuvre romanesque de Sartre*, Genève, Droz, 1968.

<sup>2</sup> Sartre, *Carnets de la drôle de guerre*, Paris, Gallimard, 1995. Sartre et S. de Beauvoir, *La cérémonie des adieux*, Paris, Gallimard-Folio, 1981. A. Astruc et M. Contat, *Sartre, un film*, Paris, Gallimard, 1977.

<sup>3</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée*, Paris, Gallimard- Folio, 1958, p. 479.

« Il aimait autant Stendhal que Spinoza et refusait à séparer la philosophie de la littérature ; à ses yeux, la contingence<sup>4</sup> n'était pas une notion abstraite, mais une dimension réelle du monde : il fallait utiliser toutes les ressources de l'art pour rendre sensible au coeur cette secrète faiblesse qu'il apercevait dans l'homme et dans les choses ».

The matter at stake is that in Sartre's literary works, the metaphysical experiences are never conceptually explicated : *literature comes first*. In 1974, Sartre, conversing with S. de Beauvoir about the time of his studies at the Ecole normale supérieure, said :

« A l'époque, je ne voulais pas écrire de livres de philosophie. Je ne voulais pas écrire l'équivalent de la *Critique de la raison dialectique* ou de *L'être et le néant*. Non, je voulais que la philosophie à laquelle je croyais, les vérités que j'atteindrais, s'expriment dans mon roman »<sup>5</sup>.

Why are the truths revealed by literature « metaphysical truths ? » Firstly, these truths appear in the Conclusion to *L'être et le néant*, where they are called : « aperçus métaphysiques » (*metaphysical outlooks*)<sup>6</sup>. Let us give just an example of such a metaphysical hypothesis , which concerns the problem of the « upsurge » of consciousness.

« L'ontologie (*ontology*), says Sartre, nous apprend : 1° que *si l'en-soi devait se fonder, il ne pourrait même le tenter qu'en se faisant conscience... (if the in-itself were to found itself, it could attempt to do so only by making itself consciousness)* ; 2° que la conscience est *en fait* projet de se fonder (*consciousness is in fact a project of founding itself*), c'est-à-dire d'atteindre à la dignité de l'en-soi-pour-soi (*that is, of attaining the dignity of the in-itself-for-itself*) ou en-soi-cause-de-soi (*in-itself-as-a-self-cause*)... »<sup>7</sup>.

Therefore, phenomenological ontology can affirm nothing *categorically* about the « upsurge of the for-itself »<sup>8</sup>, and, as far as this problem is concerned, it must form what Sartre calls metaphysical hypotheses . Ontology, Sartre writes :

« *will limit itself to declaring that everything take place as if the in-itself gave itself the modification of the for-itself. It is to metaphysics to form the hypotheses which will allow as to conceive this process...* ». « L'ontologie se bornera donc à

<sup>4</sup> Let's notice that « contingence » is a fundamental concept of metaphysics.

<sup>5</sup> *La cérémonie des adieux*, p. 203.

<sup>6</sup> Sartre, *L'être et le néant*, Paris, Gallimard, 1973, p. 711 ; *Being and Nothingness*, translated by H. Barnes, Routledge Classics, London and New-York, 2003, p. 637.

<sup>7</sup> Sartre, *L'être et le néant*, p. 714-715. *Being and Nothingness* p. 641.

<sup>8</sup> Sartre, *Being and nothingness*, p. 641.

déclarer que *tout se passe comme si* l'en-soi, dans un projet de se fonder lui-même, se donnait la modification du pour-soi . C'est à la métaphysique de former des hypothèses qui permettront de concevoir ce processus (...)»<sup>9</sup> ».

Secondly, these truths belong to a philosophical tradition, which can be called with Heidegger : the « onto-theological » tradition. Since Baumgarten, « *metaphysics is the science which contains the primary principles of human knowledge* » ; « *metaphysica est scientia prima cognitionis humanae principia continens* »<sup>10</sup> . And metaphysics is divided into « *metaphysica specialis* » (the science of God, soul and world), and « *metaphysica generalis* » (the science of being *qua* being).

In Sartre's early writings, metaphysical truths don't form a well-defined philosophical system that could preexist to literary work. Sartre isn't in possession of a set of rigorously demonstrated statements about God, the soul, or being *qua* being. There is indeed a philosophical system in his early writings, but it is not a metaphysical one. It is the transcendental phenomenology sketched in Berlin in 1933-1934 with the two articles : *La transcendance de l'Ego*, and « Une idée fondamentale de la phénoménologie de Husserl : l'intentionnalité ».

As far as Sartrean metaphysics is concerned, it is made of unsteady and evolving convictions that can be expressed only by means of story-telling and not by means of conceptualization. If we try to summarize briefly the very complex matter of these metaphysical convictions, we can say they are four in number.

Firstly, the metaphysical experience of life, as « *brute existent* » (« l'existant brut »<sup>11</sup>) breaking down to let the for-itself appear. Let us read *L'être et le néant* :

« Le pour-soi correspond à une déstructuration décompressante (*expanding destructuring*) de l'en-soi, et l'en-soi se néantit et s'absorbe (*is nihilated and absorbed*) dans sa tentative pour se fonder »<sup>12</sup>.

In *La nausée*, Roquentin repeatedly experiences the horrible coming to life of inert things which begin to swarm and bud — and it's especially the case when he meets with *flesh* as the reluctant and gloomy birth of consciousness. Looking at his face in a mirror for example, he says :

« Ce que je vois est bien au dessous du singe, à la lisière du monde végétal, au niveau des polypes. Ça vit, je ne dis pas non ; (...) je vois de légers tressaillements, je vois une chair fade qui s'épanouit et palpète avec abandon. Les

<sup>9</sup> Sartre, *L'être et le néant*, p. 715. *Being and Nothingness*, p. 640.

<sup>10</sup> Baumgarten, *Metaphysica*, 1739 .

<sup>11</sup> Sartre, *L'être et le néant*, p. 568. *Being and Nothingness*, p. 509.

<sup>12</sup> Sartre, *L'être et le néant*, p. 127. *Being and Nothingness*, p. 108.

yeux, surtout, de si près, sont horribles. C'est vitreux, mou, bordé de rouge, on dirait des écailles de poisson<sup>13</sup> ».

When the book on Rollebons' history proves to be a failure, Roquentin is overwhelmed by a violent crisis of nausea in which he sinks in the repulsive living matter of things.

*Second metaphysical experience : the desire of human-reality for being God, that is to say, ens causa sui.* Let's refer again to *L'être et le néant*, when Sartre analyses the for-itself as « lack » (« manque »<sup>14</sup>).

« La réalité-humaine est dépassement perpétuel vers une coïncidence avec soi ».  
« *Human reality is a perpetual surpassing towards a coincidence with itself which is never given* <sup>15</sup> ».

In *Les Mots*, which relates the birth of the writer's vocation, this metaphysical experience is figured in a plot — as P. Ricoeur would say : elle est « mise en intrigue »<sup>16</sup>. At the end of the book, Charles Schweitzer's grandson throws himself into writing to stifle and hide his feeling of deep anguish in front of his absolute freedom understood as « gratuity » of every of his choices<sup>17</sup>.

« On écrit pour ses voisins ou pour Dieu. Je pris le parti d'écrire pour Dieu en vue de sauver mes voisins <sup>18</sup> ».

Upset by his discovery of writing the little Poulou, catches a glimpse of possible eternization of his life by literature. He begins to scribble fantastic tales, adventure novels inspired by J. Verne, M. Zevaco, and finally mystical fictions. The latter are written under the threefold influence of Charles' religion of humanities, of readings like « Griselidis » (a tale of Ch. Perrault), « Chantecler » (a drama of E. Rostand), and finally of a Platonic idealism formed in the grandfather's library. The little child's mysticism is a key to understand most of the early writings of Sartre, where the topic of salvation by art occurs repeatedly.

*Une défaite*, an unpublished novel written in 1927 and inspired by the relationships between Wagner, Nietzsche and Cosima, relates the troubled situation which binds Frédéric, an ambitious young normalien, Organte, an ageing musician unable to create, and Cosima, the bright and beautiful wife of Organte. Frederic's life is a pitiful failure — Cosima spurns his advances, Organte

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<sup>13</sup> Sartre, *Oeuvres romanesques*, Paris, Gallimard-Pléiade, 1981, p. 23.

<sup>14</sup> Sartre, *L'être et le néant*, p. 129. *Being and Nothingness*, p. 110.

<sup>15</sup> Sartre, *L'être et le néant*, p. 133. *Being and Nothingness*, p. 113.

<sup>16</sup> P. Ricoeur, *Temps et récit*, t. 1, Paris, Seuil, 1983.

<sup>17</sup> Sartre, *L'être et le néant*, p. 559. *Being and Nothingness*, p. 501.

<sup>18</sup> Sartre, *Les Mots*, Paris, Gallimard-Folio, 1964, p. 153.

stifles him, and prevents him from writing —, but finally he manages to finish his inspired *Empedocle* and all the hardships are therefore redeemed. The last lines of the of the novel are :

« Nous pouvons laisser [Frédéric] sur cette défaite, sur cette fructueuse défaite. Il est humilié et désespéré. Il va longtemps douter de lui, il pensera perdre sa force. Il est tout seul ( ... ). Mais le temps approche où il ne connaîtra plus que des victoires <sup>19</sup> ».

*The third metaphysical experience is intimately correlated to the second one. It is the intuition of absolute freedom.* In *L'être et le néant*, Sartre asserts :

« L'homme est entièrement libre ». (« *Man is wholly free* »<sup>20</sup>).

He adds farther :

« Nous ne nous saisissons jamais que comme choix en train de se faire. Mais la liberté est seulement le fait que ce choix est toujours inconditionné ». (« *We shall never apprehend ourselves except as a choice in the making. But freedom is simply the fact that this choice is always unconditioned*<sup>21</sup> ».)

Sartre doesn't hesitate to go back apparently on his theory of « *facticity* » (« *facticité* ») and « *finitude* » (« *finitude* ») of the for-itself as *ipse* (second part of *L'être et le néant*). He writes :

« La liberté est totale et infinie (« *freedom is total and infinite* ») , ce qui ne veut pas dire qu'elle n'ait pas de limites, mais qu'elle ne les rencontre jamais<sup>22</sup> ».

Now let's go back to *Les Mots*, at the moment when, as a child, Sartre dreams about his « false birth », as he says :

« Quand je revois ma vie de six à neuf ans, je suis frappé par la continuité de mes exercices spirituels [...]. Le programme ne varia pas : j'avais fait une fausse entrée, je me retirais derrière un paravent et je recommençais ma naissance à point nommé, dans la minute même où l'univers me réclamait silencieusement<sup>23</sup> ».

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<sup>19</sup> Sartre, *Ecrits de jeunesse*, Paris, Gallimard, 1990, p. 286.

<sup>20</sup> Sartre, *L'être et le néant*, p. 518. *Being and Nothingness*, p. 464.

<sup>21</sup> Sartre, *L'être et le néant*, p. 558. *Being and Nothingness*, p. 501.

<sup>22</sup> Sartre, *L'être et le néant*, p. 614-615. *Being and Nothingness*, p. 552.

<sup>23</sup> Sartre, *Les Mots*, p. 97-98.

We clearly have here a phantasm of self-recreation, in which Sartre expresses his metaphysical intuition of the « *creatio ex nihilo* » that Descartes attributed to God and that, for his part, he attributes to human consciousness. Self recreation *ex nihilo*, that is to say absolute freedom, is experienced in *Les Mots*, by the little child, in a deep anguish :

« Personne, à commencer par moi, ne savait ce que j'étais venu foutre sur terre [...]. Un père m'eût lesté de quelques obstinations durables ; faisant de ses humeurs mes principes, de son ignorance mon savoir, de ses rancœurs mon orgueil, de ses manies ma loi, il m'eût habité ; ce respectable locataire m'eût donné du respect sur moi-même. Sur le respect, j'eusse fondé mon droit de vivre. Mon géniteur eût décidé de mon avenir (...).<sup>24</sup> »

But Jean-Baptiste Sartre was dead a long time ago, and the little child was compelled to grow up without any paternal law to interiorize, in a feeling of total gratuitousness.

*Fourth metaphysical experience : the contingency of every real entity* — real thing or human-reality. In *L'être et le néant*, Sartre claims : L'être en-soi « ne peut être ni dérivé du possible ni ramené au nécessaire [...]. C'est ce que nous appelons la *contingence* de l'être en-soi » . Being-in-itself « *can neither be derived from the possible, nor reduced to the necessary. ( ... ). This is what we call the contingency of being-in-itself*<sup>25</sup> ».

In the famous scene of the public garden in *La Nausée*, Roquentin stops in contemplation before the black, gnarled root of the tree, and experiences the unintelligible fact that *this* root lies in front of *him* at *this* place and at *this* time, without any reason why it appears precisely at *this* time, at *this* place, with its specific qualities and to *him*, Roquentin.

This concrete intuition of contingency underlies the whole narrative of *Jésus la Chouette, professeur de province*, a novel partly published in 1923. In this book, Sartre describes a small provincial town as a symbol of hell on earth : everywhere manners mask violence, cowardice, cynicism, cruelty, cupidity...

## Influence of metaphysics on the early phenomenological works

Written in Berlin, *La transcendance de l'Ego* and « Une idée fondamentale de la phénoménologie de Husserl... », are two proper philosophical works, using the rigorous Husserlian method of « transcendental reduction » (*Ausschaltung, epoché*). The issue is to display a transcendental phenomenology *inspired* by Husserl, but simultaneously *criticizing* the *Logische*

<sup>24</sup> Sartre, *Les Mots*, p. 76.

<sup>25</sup> Sartre, *L'être et le néant*, p. 34. *Being and Nothingness*, p. 22.

*Untersuchungen*, the *Ideen... I*, and the *Cartesianische Meditationen*. But *the way Sartre works in Berlin* is very interesting.

In a film shot in 1972 by A. Astruc and M. Contat<sup>26</sup>, Sartre explains that when he was in Berlin he worked at his philosophical works in the morning ; and that in the afternoon, he settled down to his literary task, that is to say : he tried to rewrite his « factum about contingency » which was published only in 1938 under the title : *La Nausée*.

This situation is very significant : it would be misleading to claim that Sartre *mixes* his two activities. For him the ways of writing philosophy and literature are *essentially* different, as he clearly explains it at M. Contat, in 1975 (« Autoportrait à soixante-dix ans ») :

« En philosophie, chaque phrase ne doit avoir qu'un sens. [...] En littérature, qui a toujours, d'une certaine façon, affaire au *vécu*, rien de ce que je dis n'est totalement exprimé par ce que je dis. Une même réalité peut s'exprimer d'un nombre de façons pratiquement infini. »<sup>27</sup>

That's the main reason why there is a sharp contrast between the philosophical and the literary manuscripts, which can be easily seen if you visit the current Sartre exhibition at the « Bibliothèque Nationale de France » : all the philosophical manuscripts were written in one go, on the other hand the literary manuscripts are scratched out, erased, rewritten at many times.

Still the fact remains that there *is* a connection between philosophy and literature in the early works of Sartre, especially in the works of the mid thirties. To sum up, I would say that for example through Roquentin's adventures, the « factum about contingency » expresses two metaphysical convictions which are not *assumed as such* by the phenomenologist — because they are in principle reduced (« *aussgeschaltet* », Husserl would say) —, but which nevertheless *influence* the phenomenological analysis. Firstly, the conviction that all real existent is contingent. Secondly, the conviction that consciousness is an absolute spontaneity.

Let us begin with contingency. If we report to *La Nausée*, we clearly see, a sequence of significant events in the life of Roquentin, each one tallying with the other. Heart-breaking discovery that « il n'y a pas d'aventures »<sup>28</sup> — nothing in the real life begins and ends like a hero's adventure in a novel. Then comes the famous visit to the museum in Bouville where Roquentin becomes aware that the quiet happiness of the bourgeois is nothing but cowardice and nastiness. A few days later, meeting the docteur Rogé at the restaurant « Chez Camille », Roquentin mocks him as a « professionnel de l'expérience » — the truth is that it's a complete illusion to think that

<sup>26</sup> M. Contat, A. Astruc, *Sartre, un film*, p. 44.

<sup>27</sup> Sartre, *Politique et autobiographie, Situations X*, Paris, Gallimard, 1976, p. 137-138.

<sup>28</sup> Sartre, *La Nausée, Oeuvres romanesques*, p. 177.



any life improves by « experience », to live is to decline in an irresistible decay. A little further in the novel, we attend to the death of the project of writing the scholarly book on the « marquis de Rollebon ». Finally comes the lunch with the Autodidact, a repulsive caricature of genuine culture, the embodiment of disgusting humanism.

« Le visage de l'Autodidacte est tout contre le mien. Il sourit d'un air fat, tout contre mon visage, comme dans les cauchemards. Les hommes. Il faut aimer les hommes. Les hommes sont admirables. J'ai envie de vomir — et tout à coup ça y est : la nausée <sup>29</sup> ».

This crisis introduces the sequence of the public garden, with the discovery of the contingency of the tree's root and of all the real things existing in the world. Afterwards, the definite death of the love for Anny — « nous n'avons plus rien à nous dire »<sup>30</sup>— concludes on the conviction that in every real life everybody loses the game — Toute vie « est une partie perdue »<sup>31</sup>. *In all this sequence of events, the metaphysical experience of contingency is expressed in a plot and figured in metaphors. As a consequence, the phenomenological article on intentionality rejects the most idealistic implications of the husserlian phenomenology.*

Indeed, as far as intentionality is concerned, it is considered by Sartre as a « burst » (« un éclatement ») of consciousness in the midst of the world —and not as a « constitution » of the world in the « transcendental Ego », as Husserl keeps repeating in the *Ideen... I*, and the *Cartesiansche Meditationen*. Let us read a few lines from the Sartrean article trying to describe the intentionality of consciousness with the help of an image : « l'éclatement » (« *bursting out* »).

To have consciousness of things, Sartre says, is :

« "s'éclater vers", s'arracher à la moite intimité gastrique pour filer, là-bas, par delà- soi, vers ce qui n'est pas soi, là-bas, près de l'arbre, et cependant hors de lui, car il m'échappe et me repousse et je ne peux pas plus me perdre en lui qu'il ne peut se diluer en moi »<sup>32</sup>.

Sartre thinks — which is wrong, but that is not the point here — that his reinterpretation or the Husserlian intentionality as « bursting out of consciousness », is proximate to the interpretation of the « Dasein », in *Sein und Zeit*, as « being-in-the world » and « transcendence ».

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<sup>29</sup> Sartre, *La Nausée, Oeuvres romanesques*, p. 144.

<sup>30</sup> Sartre, *La Nausée, Oeuvres romanesques*, p. 181.

<sup>31</sup> Sartre, *La Nausée, Oeuvres romanesques*, p. 185.

<sup>32</sup> Sartre, « Une idée fondamentale de la phénoménologie de Husserl : l'intentionnalité », *Situations I*, Paris, Gallimard, 1984, p. 30.

If now we ask : *why* does Sartre, forsaking Husserl's transcendental idealism, move to a kind of realism in which transcendent things always overflow my consciousness ? *Sartre's motivation lies in his metaphysical literature*. If we consider for example the famous episode of the public garden in *La Nausée*, we see that Roquentin experiences in sickness that the repulsive black root, in its raw indeterminable existence, is beyond all that he can think in a definite way. Expressed in a novel's episode, the metaphysical truth doesn't give rise to a *philosophical and conceptual account*, but *it forms a conviction that influences the arguments of the article* on Husserl's intentionality.

Now a few words about the spontaneity of consciousness. In *La transcendance de l'Ego*, Sartre deeply alters the Husserlian conception of the transcendental consciousness. He states that this consciousness is not a reflective *Ego*, but an anonymous non reflective consciousness, which he names : « spontanéité » (a term rarely use in the *Ideen... I*, because it clearly reminds of the metaphysical concept of *causa sui*). For example, with regard to the transcendental prereflexive consciousness, Sartre asserts that it is « absolute » :

« Cette sphère transcendantale est une sphère d'existence absolue, c'est-à-dire de pures spontanéités qui ne sont jamais objets, et qui se déterminent à exister<sup>33</sup> ».

Sartre says that consciousness lives its spontaneity in *anguish*, which can be strictly correlated with a novel's episode. The day after the meeting with « doctor Roger », Roquentin writes in his diary : « Il ne faut pas avoir peur »<sup>34</sup>.

Dense fog is hanging over Bouville, the familiar objects disappear, at the « Café Mably » a frosty darkness welcomes Roquentin, who suddenly gets into a panic : the owner could be dead...

« Une véritable panique s'empara de moi, ; je ne savais plus où j'allais. Je courus le long des docks, je tournai dans les rues désertes(...). Les maisons me regardaient fuir de leurs yeux mornes. Je me répétais avec angoisse : où aller, *tout peut arriver* »<sup>35</sup>. *Everything can happen*, that is to say I am an absolute freedom, *nothing can prevent me from committing the most horrible crime*.

So the literary works like *La Nausée*, *Er l'Arménien* (with its reminding of the Platonic myth about the original choice of existence), can be considered as the origin of the fundamental metaphysical concept of « spontaneity ». Spontaneity is a way of living one's life for a consciousness that doesn't feel at all the weight of all the circumstances (family, social class, language, moral rules, and so on...). For example in *Les Mots*, Sartre writes :

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<sup>33</sup> Sartre, *La transcendance de l'Ego*, Paris, Vrin, 1965, p. 77.

<sup>34</sup> Sartre, *La Nausée*, *Oeuvres romanesques*, p. 85.

<sup>35</sup> Sartre, *La Nausée*, *Oeuvres romanesques*, p. 94.

« Les jours de bonne humeur, tout venait de moi, je m'étais tiré du néant par mes propres forces pour apporter aux hommes les lectures qu'ils aimaient »<sup>36</sup>.

## Conclusion : The influence of metaphysical literature on *L'être et le néant*

In theory, *L'être et le néant* is entirely written in accordance to the rules of ontological phenomenology. But, as we have seen, metaphysics is not totally absent from the book. In the conclusion, Sartre explains that the phenomenological investigation *leads to* the metaphysical question of the origin of the for-itself : *why and how the for-itself emerges from the in-itself* ? Ontological phenomenology gives two indications here : firstly, that every process of self-foundation breaks the in-itself's identity ; secondly, that the for-itself *really is* the failure or a project of self-foundation. But the point is that the ontological phenomenology *cannot answer* the « metaphysical question ». *In fact, only literature can face the metaphysical problem of the origin of the for-itself*, not with the help of concepts and arguments, but by means of metaphors and plots. A detailed analysis of *La Nausée* and of all the texts published in the *Ecrits de jeunesse* could confirm this assumption.

But, if literature faces the metaphysical problem of the origin of the for-itself, it is a key to understand all the passages in *L'être et le néant* in which ontological phenomenology approaches metaphysics in sketching a theory of « facticity », of « freedom », of « body », and of « being-for others ».

(Sartre centenary conference 2005)

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<sup>36</sup> Sartre, *Les Mots*, p. 146.