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Call for Papers "Studi Sartriani" 2022 SARTRE AND PSYCHOBIOGRAPHIES THE WRITING OF EXISTENCE

Jean-Paul Sartre devoted a substantial part of his philosophical experience to biographical writing. From the first application of the principles of existential psychoanalysis, enunciated in *Being and Nothingness*, to Charles Baudelaire in 1947, through the Jean Genet "case", with the preface to his complete works dated 1952, we arrive at the monumental masterpiece dedicated to Gustave Flaubert, published in three volumes between 1971 and 1972 (a fourth volume, written in 1974, has never seen the light of day). There are also other lesser-known but no less important biographical works, published posthumously and dedicated to Mallarmé and Tintoretto, which deserve more critical attention, so that their contents can be rediscovered and the style and themes of Sartre's biographies can be reconsidered with a different slant. Although these studies were neglected by Sartre during his lifetime, their presence attests to his need to develop a method capable of revealing the man behind the artist, of understanding a subject who, starting from an alienating condition, finds a way of freely exercising his praxis. In this sense, the screenplay on Freud, composed for director John Huston between 1958 and 1960, in which Sartre intends to show the human, rather than intellectual, parable that led the father of psychoanalysis to formulate his theories, is also fundamental. It is with this retrospective gaze that Sartre also turns to his own childhood, giving us, in 1964, his autobiography, *The Words*, in which he intends to give a precise account of his plan to become a writer, in order to understand himself as a man who has made a choice determined by his family and socio-cultural environment.

The new issue of *Studi Sartriani* therefore aims to shed new light on these texts, which have not always been adequately appreciated by critics. Their centrality in the evolution of Sartre's reflection on man as a designing subject is in fact indisputable. Sartre himself, in an interview in 1971 (*On The Idiot of the Family*), maintains that one can "arrive at a perfect understanding of a man, if we have the necessary elements". The collection of the basic data of

an existence, such as the class to which one belongs, the names and occupations of the parents, the place of birth, the era, the dominant culture and so on, is what characterizes the work of the biographer. However, it is not only these notions that Sartre wants to refer to. The 'necessary elements' for understanding a man concern his personal way of relating to these data. Particular importance is given to his relationship with his parents, to the values they transmitted, to the way these were used: it is to this dimension that Sartre's biographies refer in the first instance. Every existence is nothing other than its own writing, its own shaping, always in progress, never given, never really finished. It is in these small deviations of the individual from his original context that the originality of existence lies. It is to these that Sartre turns his attention in a profound, meticulous, surgical manner.

Nao Sawada has rightly pointed out how Sartre, in his biographies, presents existence 'as a series of metamorphoses'. (*Biographie malgré lui. L'Idiot de la famille dans le miroir des Mots*). For Jean-François Louette, this is because he wanted to construct his biographical writing through a dialectical methodology, which operated by proposing the form of the spiral (like history in *Critique of Dialectical Reason*) in order to be able to account for the incessant movement, never synthesized and finite, that presides over the existence of a man (*La dialectique dans la biographie*). Louette also shows another fundamental axis of Sartre's biographies, which concerns the possibility of investigating the existential choices of writers, or rather of individuals who "turn to the imaginary" to overcome their condition of original alienation within the family (Introduction, in J.-P. SARTRE, *Les Mots et autres écrits autobiographiques*). Thus, if on the one hand the dimension of the future is a keystone of Sartre's biographical writing, since it refers to individual planning, on the other hand the literary imaginary presents itself as the most proper sphere of the processes of liberation from the real alienation experienced in childhood. The impulse of the individual is then placed by Sartre both in the desire to actualize a free future and in the possibility of taking refuge in an imagined world. Both of these choices, as is well known, are symptomatic not only of the struggle for one's own liberation from parental constraints, but also, and above all, of the intrinsic freedom that every act of conscience (be it planning or imagining) represents. The task of biography, then, is to trace back, through these symptoms, to the initial moment in which biography, as the writing of one's own existence, is set in motion. Such a moment is called by Sartre the 'primary scene' (*The Idiot of the Family. Gustave Flaubert from 1821 to 1857*). The risk of incurring an 'easy psychologism', as Vincent De Coorebyter puts it (*Le miroir aux origines*), is typical of this backward movement. However, it is Sartre himself who suggests a positive method. Indeed, in the

aforementioned 1971 interview on *The Idiot of the Family*, he argues that 'to understand a man, the necessary attitude is that of empathy', i.e. the biographer must not interpret his existence, but must 'understand, that is, study his conduct from his ends and consider them as responses to lived situations' (*The Idiot of the Family*). In other words, the biography must never be the result of a judgement, nor a mere description of the way in which certain events have been linked together but must be the result of an existential research into a man, in his possibilities.

In *Being and Nothingness*, we read that the aim of existential psychoanalysis is to 'discover a choice, not a state', i.e. to reveal the process by which an individual has been able to overcome a situation in view of his own ends. Similarly, biography is also able to keep alive the Critic's interest in the family sphere, understood as "the point of intersection of man in his class", that is, as "mediation between the universal class and the individual" (*The Search for Method*), thus as the original context in which every possible choice could be determined. It is only at this level of complexity that biography, in the Sartrean sense, can find its meaning and function.

Having said this, all works that intend to propose an original reflection starting from these suggestions will be considered of interest. A number of research axes around which to develop the theme in question are also proposed:

- the study, investigation and debate around the biographies dedicated to Mallarmé and Tintoretto;
- the relationship between the biographies and Sartre's autobiography, especially in relation to the themes and structures they share;
- the origin, development and theoretical aims of biographical writing in Sartrean thought; its positioning in the literary and cultural context of the 20th century; the history and discussion of philosophical and literary criticism around Sartrean biographies;
- the points of contact and differences between Sartrean biographies, in particular their methodological, thematic and aesthetic differentiation;
- the moral implications of Sartrean biographies and the ethics of freedom they propose;
- the characterization of the psycho-biographies in a reading key that intends to situate them in relation to Sartre's production and, in general, in relation to contemporary philosophy and literature, not only in the French area.

Contributions should be sent no later than 15 June 2022 to russo.maria@hsr.it. All articles will be subject to double blind peer review.

Notification of acceptance or non-acceptance of your article, with any major or minor changes, will be sent by 31 July 2022. Submissions will then be published by the end of 2022.

The maximum length of each article, including spaces and notes, is 50,000 characters.

Contributions in Italian, English and French will be accepted.

Two files must be sent

- a .doc file in anonymous form with the unsigned essay. The text must be preceded by an abstract of maximum 300 words in English, five keywords, and a translation of the title in English;

- a second .doc file with the author's data: name, surname, academic affiliation and email address (preferably institutional).