

Reconsidering Sartre

by Samuel Hux (October 2018)



Jean-Paul Sartre, Gérard Fromanger, 1976

It will soon be four decades since Jean-Paul Sartre died (1980, hard to believe!) so it's a bit too late for an obituary—but not too soon for a reconsideration, I don't think, for a novelist-playwright-critic who was, *for a while*, a great philosopher . . . before committing intellectual suicide. Calling an essay a *reconsideration* usually suggests a

kind of positive re-appraisal paying respect to the subject but I confess I am in fact focused almost as much on myself since a significant part of my intellectual life was spent on consideration of Sartre.

I was blown away by his work when I was an undergraduate double-majoring in literature and philosophy. My introduction was his 1946 essay "Existentialism is a Humanism," which I found in Walter Kaufmann's great and influential anthology *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre* (1956), which inspired me to read his fiction such as *Nausea* (1938), "The Wall" (1939), and *The Age of Reason* (1945), his plays such as *The Flies* (1943) and *No Exit* (1944), and his philosophical texts such as *The Transcendence of the Ego* (1937) and of course the most important *Being and Nothingness* (1943)—which body of work is what I dare say most general readers have had in mind when they thought of Sartre. *Literature engagée*