

Competing Images. The Question of Anti-Semitism in the Posthumous Reception of Jean Genet

KARL ÅGERUP

University of Gothenburg

Abstract

Since the death of Jean Genet, his name and oeuvre have been the subject of heated debate. Influential critics have argued that Genet was an aristocratic anti-Semite, rather than a revolutionary poet who took sides with the outcasts. In this article, I analyze the positions, patterns, and strategies of this multifaceted debate, suggesting that provocation and marginalization constitute an integral part of Genet's aesthetics. In the act of judging Genet from historical, political, and ethical perspectives, the critics operate as executors of his literary project, confirming the paratopic position the writer presumably desired.

Keywords: ideology, paratope, aesthetics, canon, criticism

1. Introduction

When a celebrated writer dies, his or her name and image remain important factors in social discourse. What is new is the writer's inability to answer and correct the uses of this image, and its position in the collective archive. In place of the writer, critics and biographers gain agency as prioritized mediators between literature and society. Their interpretation of the writer becomes decisive and may have political implications. By putting forward a certain interpretation of the dead writer and his texts, the critics promote political views and aesthetical norms. This article analyzes the posthumous reception of French writer Jean Genet (1910–1986) in this respect. The objective is to study how competing interpretations of Genet's work express ideology and have political potential. Genet's use of the signifier "Hitler" is of particular interest as is his alleged anti-Semitic and pro-Palestinian leanings. Finally, I give my account of how this debate seems to have affected Genet's status as a canonical writer.

Canonization processes are known to be subject to contention and competition between opposing ideological camps and aesthetic norms. Literature, it seems, has substantial symbolic value in society's ongoing process of determining what standards and positions should be privileged. Building on Foucauldian theory, Dominique Maingueneau has demonstrated that literature, much like religion and science, has established "a particular relationship with the foundations of society." To support this argument, Maingueneau notes that

when a debate is organized in the mass-media about important problems, particularly ethical problems, journalists request the intervention of priests, scientists, philosophers or writers. The latter are perceived as not delivering just any message, but one authorized by their privileged acquaintance with ‘ultimate’ discourses: discourses upon which others are based (Maingueneau 1999:1).

According to Maingueneau’s theory, literature and writers are privileged partners in discussions of societal and political matters. A writer’s word, ethos, and aura play a significant role in society’s political development. There is no fixed boundary between literature and society, since every discourse establishes multifaceted connections to other discourses (Maingueneau 2002:324–326). As Marc Angenot has underscored, social discourse, i.e. the “sayable” of each time and place, is governed by underlying rules and “cognitive systems in competition” (2004:200), something that becomes particularly obvious when literary works of Genet’s caliber are discussed.

The history of criticism has been marked by an inconclusive debate on the question of who is to be considered as the main protagonist of literary communication: the writer, the reader, or some other agent or combination of agents. The way literary works are received depends on the aesthetic, political, and cultural currents of each time, and on contemporary literary canons. Hans Robert Jauss has named this set of criteria the “horizon of expectations” and designed the reader as the main protagonist of literary communication (1982:23). Wolfgang Iser provided a more dehistoricized model of the reading process, arguing that each literary text creates an “implied reader” by its “network of response-inviting structures” (1978:47). Michael Riffaterre described the encounter between the reader and the literary text as the execution of a partition: a musical performance that never sounds exactly the same (1979:9). Along similar lines, Hans Georg Gadamer viewed aesthetical reception as a kind of game or dance, adding that in the course of reading it does not matter who “leads” since the reader/dancer is absorbed by the activity (1996:121–123). The question of subjectivity is crucial when discussing literature and values. George Poulet has described the reading phenomenon as a way of “making way not only for a stream of words, images, and foreign ideas, but also for the very principle from which these ideas emanate, the principle that houses them” (1971:281, my translation). If interpretation comes naturally, as do the moves of a dancer, and if reading is about making way for principles without origin, who is to be held responsible for provocative statements and challenging values that arise during the reading process?

From the perspective of sociability, Martine Burgos (1996) pertinently reiterates that reading is not always a solitary activity: reading clubs and such form networks of social discourse around each literary work. To put it another way, Gadamer’s dance floor is no private arena even if the dancers may think so in the heat of the moment. Each reading is subjected to a certain social pressure. Norms and politics have influence over the interpretation and evaluation of

literary texts. The question is how to assess ideology in and around literature, a question that becomes particularly acute when fiction involves Nazism and anti-Semitism. What are the consequences of letting Hitler onto the dance floor, so to speak, and what does “Hitler” mean to us when appearing in a work of fiction? What is implied when “Hitler” is reduced to a mere symbol, and, on the other hand, what reasons are there to exaggerate Hitler’s presence in the writer’s imaginary world and to claim that it must be historicized? In order to examine these opposed positions – or competing images – with regards to Jean Genet, we need to take a look at his life and works.

Jean Genet’s career started in the early forties when he wrote novels from prison based on his experiences as a thief and a prostitute. In the fifties and early sixties, Genet moved on to write challenging plays on racism and colonialism. Cleverly problematizing power structures and skin color, *The Blacks* became a success and played longer than any other off-Broadway play in the sixties (Bray 2007). At other times, Genet’s work was met with hostility. *The Screens*, a play that ridicules colonial oppression in a setting that reminded the public of the Algerian War, caused violent protests in Paris. In 1977, Genet’s text “Violence et brutalité”, which complimented the German terror organization the Red Army Fraction (RAF), caused a diplomatic crisis between Germany and France after it was published in *Le Monde* and *Der Spiegel* (Genet 2010d). During the seventies and eighties, Genet dedicated his life and work to revolutionary groups in the USA and in the Near East. He spent several months with the Black Panthers and the Palestinian resistance movement, and he wrote essays, speeches, and a book about their ongoing revolutions.

Given Genet’s influence on political and ethical debates during his lifetime, it is not surprising to see that he retained his influence after his death in 1986. After being respectfully and thoroughly portrayed in Edmund White’s massive biography *Genet* (1993) and in a special edition of *Magazine Littéraire* in September of 1993, Genet was further honored towards the end of the century. In October 1999, his novel *Our Lady of the Flowers* was selected as one of the top hundred books of the century in a vote organized by the newspaper *Le Monde* and the retail chain Fnac (Savigneau 1999). In 2002, Gallimard republished Genet’s collected plays in the prestigious *La Pléiade* series, whose Bible-like format with thick leather-covered volumes and thin gold-edged pages is reserved for the most revered works of literature.

Genet’s life as an orphan, juvenile delinquent, prisoner, and vagabond was easy to combine with the image of the writing genius. Not only does marginality make the writer look interesting to the public eye but, more importantly, this paradoxical belonging in the non-belonging that Maingueneau calls “the paratopic enunciation scene” functions as a useful vantage point from which the artist can feel creative and relevant. From this position, Maingueneau claims, the writer “threatens the stability of worlds that search for closure and sanity. This is the ambiguity of the writer’s paratope: he is at the same time impure and the source of all values, pariah and genius ... damned and sacred” (Maingueneau 1993:36, my

translation). As Nathalie Fredette has shown, Genet’s scatology and obsession with transgressing norms in *Funeral Rites*, i.e. depicting gay sex involving Hitler, have political meaning (Fredette 1995:98). Genet’s political gesture remains oblique and is intriguing enough to strengthen his position as an outsider. Following Maingueneau’s theories of self-constituting discourses and of the paratopic enunciation scene, it could be assumed that a marginal position promotes political agency: the writer who is seen as exterior to society paradoxically has a greater influence on that society.

Interestingly, Genet repeatedly stopped writing after being recognized by society. He did not write any more novels after his life sentence was commuted by the president of France and he was sanctified by Sartre’s 700-page essay *Saint Genet* in 1952. Also, after his success in New York City with *The Blacks*, Genet did not write any more plays (Dichy 1993:16–24). In view of Genet’s habit of abandoning prestigious positions, his leaving Europe in the seventies and making common cause with the Black Panthers and the Palestinian guerillas can be seen as an attempt to benefit from the marginalized status of these groups and regain his paratopic position and writing capacity.

2. Accusations of anti-Semitism

In *Les vérités inavouables de Jean Genet* (The Shameful Truths of Jean Genet) from 2004, French historian Ivan Jablonka counterbalanced the prestige that Genet had gained from his paratopic position and from the books written about him by Jean-Paul Sartre (1952) and Jacques Derrida (1974). Analyzing the writer from the historian’s perspective, Jablonka argued that his book gave a more truthful account of Jean Genet than did texts written by literary critics. He defended the historian’s right to intervene when solipsist critics fail to interpret literary works that deserve to be opened to the diversity of the world (Jablonka 2004:411–412). Elements of Genet’s works display important similarities with fascist thought, stated Jablonka, who believed that critics and biographers had disregarded this point. In Jablonka’s mind, favorable critics had sterilized and varnished the works of Genet and transformed him into a victimized spokesperson of the oppressed (410).

Jablonka’s view of Genet can thus be summarized as follows: despite being repeatedly sent to youth institutions and prisons, Genet was not rejected by society. Those who claim he was rejected are only trying to strengthen his position as an underdog. Moreover, Jablonka asserts that Genet was sensitive to the most retrograde aspects of Nazism: to the swastika, SS officers, and German cults. According to Jablonka, Genet had sympathy for Hitler and Nazism, but his biographers have downplayed this fascination. To deny the Nazi component of Genet’s work is to whitewash a large part of his oeuvre. Also, his conception of “true France” was essentialist, nostalgic, and anti-humanistic, Jablonka claimed, going on to say that Genet was an aristocratic protagonist of *l’art-pour-l’art*, a concept he then mixed with political interventionism (373–405).

It is true that some of Genet’s early works show signs of fascination with Hitler and Nazi violence, although, as many critics have underscored, he did not express hatred towards Jews or sympathy with Nazism as a structure of ideas (Dreyer 2004:7; White 1993:559; Plunka 2003:508). Jablonka’s description of Genet as a writer who did not respect any laws other than those of pure aesthetics is precise, on the condition that aesthetics is defined broadly. The political dimension of Genet’s writing can be seen as integral to his aesthetics. In this respect, Genet’s view of violence can serve as an example. The beauty of violence, Genet said to German writer Hubert Fichte, depends on the history that precedes it (Genet 2010b:112). Even murder can be beautiful on the condition that it is in the interest of realizing a revolution that has been going on for a long time. To illustrate this idea, Genet told Fichte about a murder he had witnessed. A young Algerian man had lost at cards to a Frenchman. When the Frenchman would not give the Algerian a loan, the latter pulled out a knife and stabbed the Frenchman. This killing, said Genet, is only beautiful if one takes into account the history of Algeria as a French colony. Given Genet’s past as a thief and prisoner in France, it is hardly accidental that his example involves a poor young man and a rich Frenchman. Genet’s passion for revenge and rebellion against France is in fact a plausible explanation for his admiration for Hitler during the war and for his writing sex scenes including German soldiers in *Funeral Rites*. Nathalie Fredette highlights that the scenes in which German soldiers sodomize French characters in this novel illustrate the relationship between the *Reich* and occupied France in this era (1995:89). Genet praised the German leader for overpowering the French administration that had treated him harshly, starting from his detention in a juvenile correctional institution. According to Plunka, Genet “admired fascists as risk takers, not because of their political goals and certainly not because of their anti-Semitic sentiments” (2003:510). Similarly, Basma El Omari has pointed to the fact that Palestine, in Genet’s works, does not primarily refer to a Palestinian nation – or potential nation – but to a space capable of housing the Palestinian *being* (2001:146). I concur with Alexis Lussier that it is the exhilaration of the conflict, rather than its political goals, that seems to inspire Genet to engage with outcasts and rebels (2015:21). Genet’s interest in revolution and violence goes beyond politics. In “Quatre heures in Chatila”, Genet’s account of the Shatila massacre in Lebanon during which around a thousand Palestinians and other refugees were brutally killed, Genet focuses on the dead bodies and reflects on their appearance. Although later in the text, Genet accounts for his emerging hate towards Israel, political aspects and conclusions are left without consideration (1991h). History, in Genet’s work, has aesthetic qualities, in that it enhances the acuteness of the violence and suffering portrayed. Genet anchored his late life and works in historical fields of reference not for political reasons but rather, as Plunka asserts, because “he identifies with outcasts in revolt ... and transforms their varied cultural and political objections into his selfish interest in revolt against mainstream society” (2003:514). Genet did not write about Hitler unaware of the pragmatic implications. In this respect, the discussion on Genet’s possible

anti-Semitism was programmed by the writer himself and appears as an extension of his oeuvre.

Ivan Jablonka is often mentioned in relation to Eric Marty, who, first in an article entitled “Jean Genet à Chatila” (2003) and then in the book *Jean Genet, post-scriptum* (2006), developed a similar line of argumentation. Both the article and the book generated responses in French media from influential voices such as Jacques Derrida and Tahar Ben Jelloun. Although the article was published first, I will refer to the book, in which Marty develops his argumentation with increased sophistication. Judging from the impact of this book, Marty has affected Genet’s reputation more than anybody else in contemporary criticism – perhaps with the exception of Albert Dichy. As radio producer Laure Adler has declared, after Marty’s book it became impossible to read Genet without addressing the question of anti-Semitism (Adler 2010). What’s more, *Jean Genet, post-scriptum* appeared to validate the conclusions Jablonka had drawn in *Les vérités inavouables de Jean Genet* and the two books formed a pair that seriously threatened Genet’s position as a canonized writer.

In *Jean Genet, post-scriptum*, Marty, professor of literature and editor of the collected works of Roland Barthes, argued convincingly that essential areas of Genet’s fictional world have been disregarded due to the ideological inclinations of his critics. Marty’s book is an interesting object of study, not just because it gives an account of allegedly naive readings of Genet, but also because its very performance and modality convey insight into the dissemination of ideology in literary criticism.

According to Marty, the left-wing readings of Genet were moralistic:

Their wish to give political utility to Genet’s writing or his attitudes, their Third-Worldist and particularly pro-Palestinian reclamation of the late Genet, their manic striving to identify emancipatory aims in an oeuvre that betrays all emancipation by its ontology of domination, cannot reasonably achieve anything other than to wrap Genet’s work in virtuous sentiment. (Marty 2006:11, my translation; original in footnote.¹)

Ever since Sartre’s book *Saint Genet*, claimed Marty, the critics have sanctified Genet to such a degree that it is fair to speak of a taboo: certain things were not allowed to be seen in his work. Because society benefitted from this taboo, Genet’s readers had no reason to violate it, hence the blind spots regarding Genet’s anti-Semitism and fascination with Hitler. But this was not Marty’s only claim. He also asserted that Genet – with help from his admirers – saved himself by casting the role of the scapegoat onto the Jew. In this line of thought, every society bears a constant amount of guilt. So if one privilege is threatened – the poet’s right to be immoral, for example – the holder of the privilege can protect it by casting guilt onto another privileged (taboo-protected) group (41).

¹ “Leur volonté de donner une utilité politique à ses écrits ou ses attitudes, leur récupération tiers-mondiste et notamment pro-palestinienne du dernier Genet, leur manie de conférer une visée émancipatrice à cette œuvre qui trahit toute émancipation par une ontologie de la domination, ne peuvent logiquement que recouvrir cette œuvre de beaux sentiments.”

In conclusion, Marty not only made social interpretations of Genet’s novels and essays, he also identified private agendas. In Marty’s mind, Genet blamed the Jews to save his own skin, and the pro-Palestinian critics turned a blind eye because they too benefitted from this scapegoating. As for Hitler, there is no room for homonymy, argued Marty. The name Hitler refers to the historical Nazi leader and no one else (75). According to Marty, Genet wrote *Funeral Rites* to reveal the secret role that Hitler and his soldiers played in his heart (89).

Rather than interpreting his literary works, Marty and Jablonka were occupied with Genet’s personal values and feelings. The core issue of the debate was that of Hitler’s place in Genet’s heart. If Genet was a Hitler-loving anti-Semite, his life and works would appear in a different light, as would his commitment to the Palestinian people. Also, if Genet’s pro-Palestinian texts were based on anti-Semitism, his apologetics would hardly be above suspicion.

As for Genet, he was not unaware of the historical charge of his texts; he made it part of his aesthetics. After 1968, only contemporary conflicts involving real violence interested him. On several occasions, Genet declared that once the Palestinians had their own country, he would no longer be on their side (Ben Jelloun 2010:119; Genet 2010c:223). What interested him was the beauty of their rebellion, a beauty that depended on the history of oppression. As a former prisoner, he identified with the Palestinians as outcasts and shared their rebellious determination. I concur with El Omari’s view that the absence of a Palestinian country was aesthetically fruitful: it forced both Genet and the Palestinians themselves to develop sophisticated imageries. Rather than recounting episodes from his travels, Genet’s writing from Palestine was about representing the imagery of the people and giving voice to their idea of a land (2001:130–131). Palestine, according to El Omari’s analysis, is an absent object that emerges through gestures and articulation (144). While it is absent from historical reality, Genet recreates Palestine in his texts and grasps its process towards rebirth (146). Literature, as Gadamer and Poulet have shown, is much about opening imaginary spaces for being and for games in which the transient actions and sceneries lack fixed subjectivity. Along similar lines, Alexis Lussier has pointed to Genet’s tendency of setting up scenes in which enemies can play out their hostility. This antagonism does not necessarily depend on some historical conflict but it is represented as an elevated form of being, and often as an encounter with erotic features (2015:27–28).

Like Jablonka, Marty aptly highlighted the occurrence of fascism in Genet’s works although he overemphasized the presence of the *Führer*. To Marty, Hitler was “always present” in Genet’s narrative (“il est tout le temps présent”, 92; “Hitler est toujours là”, 101). Marty further asserted that the Nazi leader enjoyed “extreme prestige” in all of Genet’s texts up until the final memoir *Prisoner of Love* (Marty 2006:90). Little did it matter that Hitler is sparsely mentioned in Genet’s works. Marty, a dedicated reader of Genet, must have been aware of this, but his knowledge, it seems, was filtered through the thesis of lenient progressive critics.

3. Defensive patterns

After Marty's and Jablonka's books, which seriously threatened Genet's standing, several critics wrote articles and books in Genet's defense. A closer look at the stream of reactions to Marty's and Jablonka's criticism indicates that the defensive discourse followed four major patterns. First, some of Genet's advocates met Jablonka's and Marty's arguments quotation by quotation and presented alternative interpretations of allegedly anti-Semitic comments from Genet. For example, René de Ceccatty discussed Genet's alleged absolution of Hitler in *Prisoner of Love*. In this book, Genet stated that “Hitler est sauf d'avoir brûlé ou fait brûler des juifs et caressé un berger allemand” (Genet 1986:386). While Marty and Jablonka used this quotation to accuse Genet of pardoning Hitler, de Ceccatty attributed a different meaning to it. According to de Ceccatty, it is obvious that the sentence is not about absolution – Genet never appeared as any kind of religious judge. Instead, de Ceccatty claimed, it is about memory and forgetting. The central question is how to understand Genet's use of the word “sauf”. When in adjectival position, “sauf” means “safe” or “intact”. However, when it functions as a preposition it takes on a completely different meaning, signifying “except” or “unless”. When translating the book, Barbara Bray opted for the following solution: “What do we know about Hitler, except that he burned Jews or caused them to be burned and that he stroke a wolfhound?” (Genet 2003:271). De Ceccatty correspondingly claimed that in context the sentence means that Hitler's crimes will not be forgotten: “Il écrit, il suffit de lire les phrases précédents, que Hitler est sauf de l'oubli, échappe à l'oubli” (de Ceccatty 2006). Interestingly, if the adjective “sauf” is transformed into a preposition, Genet's potentially anti-Semite standpoint turns into an innocent reflection on knowledge and memory: “What do we know about Hitler, except...” The interpretation of a single word thus becomes a central matter of dispute; the ideological profile of the writer depends on semantics.²

Secondly, Genet's partisans reinforced the idea of a political turn, a pivotal moment at the end of the sixties when Genet abandoned literature. For example, Sylvain Dreyer characterized the 1968–1986 period as “une période politique” (Dreyer 2004:2). While the younger Genet wrote novels on the question of evil with explicit references to Hitler, declared Dreyer, the later works cast doubt on earlier aristocratic tendencies. Dreyer emphasized that Genet himself drew a line between the reveries of his early career and the real world of action of his later

² The sentence in context: “Du mendiant dans la main de qui j'ai laissé tombé deux dirhams vous ne saurez rien, ni son nom, ni son passé, ni son futur. Du Cid nous ne savons que le baiser au Lépreux – exceptons une tragédie immortelle pendant quelques siècles... et sauf – c'est le mot, ici –, sauf cela, quoi ? Hitler est sauf d'avoir brûlé ou fait brûler des juifs et caressé un berger allemand. J'ai tout oublié de ce mendiant de ce matin sauf deux dirhams, et que vient faire ici un berger allemand mordant les mollets d'un pâtre grec ? Évidemment sous mon récit un autre pousse et voudrait venir au monde.” (Genet 1986, p. 386).

years. Dreyer argued against Marty’s thesis of a synthesized metaphysics, stressing that the politics Genet expressed after 1968 was completely redefined: “This is the reason why it is dangerous to look at the texts of the eighties wearing glasses from the forties” (Dreyer 2004:3, my translation). In 2010, Moroccan novelist Tahar Ben Jelloun published *Jean Genet, menteur sublime*, a book that reproduced this notion of the turn. When Genet stopped writing fiction in the sixties, Ben Jelloun said, the man rose in the place of the writer (75). Due to its function as a watershed, the idea of the political turn protects the late Genet from contamination by ideas and meanings established during his early period.

The third pattern of rehabilitation was the omission of particularly extreme texts when Genet’s selected interviews and articles were reissued in the paperback *Textes et entretiens choisis* (Genet 2010a). For example, a blasphemously brutal text on dead soldiers in Vietnam was omitted. In this text, Genet addressed himself to American homeowners who had lost their sons in Vietnam, and who each put a star in the window to commemorate them: “The death of your child is an excuse to decorate your home. And as there is nothing more scintillating than the stars, in heaven and on earth, I gather you wish for many more dead sons in Vietnam” (1991g:321, my translation; original in footnote).³ Also, Genet’s publisher Gallimard and editor Albert Dichy did not include the interview published in *Playboy Magazine* in which Genet declared his solidarity with Lee Harvey Oswald (Genet 1991a). Gallimard and Dichy also dropped Genet’s angriest texts on the situation of the African-Americans, in which he threatened all whites with death (Genet 1991c). Furthermore, they ignored an interview for the *Nouvel observateur* in which Genet said that what initially made him feel close to the Black Panthers was “the hatred they feel for the white world, their will to destroy a society” (Genet 1991b:55–56, my translation; original in footnote).⁴ Moreover, they omitted a text in which Genet claimed that the only way to resist white administration is to fight or betray it (Genet 1991d) and excluded the transcription of a TV interview in which Genet said he was happy that Hitler gave France a sound thrashing (“quand Hitler a fichu une raclée aux Français, eh bien oui ! j’ai été heureux”) (Genet 1991e). Finally, Dichy and Gallimard omitted a text originally published in *Esquire* in which Genet wished that America “would be destroyed and reduced to powder” (Genet 1991f:318, my translation; original in footnote).⁵

It should be added that a few omitted texts were not particularly aggressive and that the highly provocative text on the RAF that I mentioned earlier remained in the new edition. Since Dichy himself has described the RAF text as Genet’s most

³ “La mort de votre enfant est un prétexte pour décorer votre maison. Et, comme il n’y a rien de plus scintillant que les étoiles, dans le ciel et sur terre, j’imagine que vous espérez la mort de beaucoup de vos fils, au Vietnam.”

⁴ “[C]e qui m’a fait me sentir proche d’eux immédiatement, c’est la haine qu’ils portent au monde blanc, c’est leur souci de détruire une société, de la casser.”

⁵ “[C]e serait une bonne chose, pour l’Amérique et pour le monde, qu’elle soit détruite, qu’elle soit réduite en poudre fine.”

famous political text (Dichy 2010:275), it would have raised questions had it been left out. On the whole, the later edition clearly projects a more reasonable and moderate Genet than the first one.

The fourth rehabilitation strategy was to recast Genet as a victim and a do-gooder. Tahar Ben Jelloun had already practiced this method in an article he wrote for *Le Monde* after the RAF scandal (Ben Jelloun 1977). Ben Jelloun pursued this defense technique in a book released after Jablonka’s and Marty’s criticism. In *Jean Genet, menteur sublime*, Ben Jelloun described Genet as an abandoned person who developed throat cancer shortly after the attacks he endured after the publication of the above-mentioned “Violence et brutalité”. Ben Jelloun reminded the public that Genet had always fought for the disinherited (2010:146ff). Dichy helped in this process, stressing on French radio the fact that Genet had written the scandalous novel *Funeral Rites* after losing his best friend in the war (Adler 2010). In his commentary on the RAF text, Dichy, like Ben Jelloun, emphasized the aggressiveness of the responses to “Violence et brutalité” and claimed that the primary underlying cause of the turmoil was not Genet’s text but the kidnapping of German industrialist Hermann Mayer, an event that happened to occur at the same time (Dichy 2010:277). In conclusion, the accusations of anti-Semitism were met with determination and force. It seems reasonable to assume that Genet’s apologists were consciously or unconsciously fighting two battles at the same time, defending Genet’s honor and their own. Let me reiterate that Marty started his argumentation by identifying lenient progressive critics. If Genet’s support for the Palestinian people had anti-Semitic grounds, the same accusations could be made to his supporters. The latter benefitted from the fact that Genet was dead. To speak for someone under attack who has lost his voice is a heroic and rhetorically advantageous position. Also, it meant that Genet’s image – as a writer and as a political symbol – was safe from one of its most harmful agents: Genet himself. Without risking to see Genet’s support for the Palestinians being compromised by his comments on the Arabs’ erotic appeal (Genet 2010b:108), and without risking him to appear intoxicated on television throwing accusations left and right, the critics now enjoyed the privilege of forming Genet’s remembrance without his interference. In competition with Marty’s and Jablonka’s image of an elitist anti-Semite writer, they marketed Genet as an altruistic loner. Although they are both powerful agents in the critical discourse around Genet, none of them can silence the subjectivities of Genet’s books and plays that entertain continuing dialogues with readers and spectators all over the world.

4. Conclusion

In Jablonka’s and Marty’s books the notion of Genet’s anti-Semitism was extracted from his literary works and proposed as historical knowledge. Genet’s partisan critics responded accordingly. However, this approach disregards the complex status of the sender in literary discourse. While in a polemical text irony

can be used to make a point at a precise moment, in literature irony can undo or radically modify the meaning of a text altogether, at any time (De Man 1996: 179–182). In a literary reading mode, neither ideas nor aims are linearly deducible from the writer; they transcend, in principle, his social interests and personal agendas. Since the speaking position is unstable, so are the abstractions to politics and ideology. For this reason, defining the ideological profile of a writer – as Stewart and McGregor (1993) tried to do in *Jean Genet: From Fascism to Nihilism* – is a delicate and problematic process. This is not to say that literary texts do not express ideology, only that ideas expressed in literature should be organized using methods that respect the specific conditions of literary discourse.

In this line of thought, and according to the theories of Gadamer and Poulet that I described earlier, morally challenging novels like *Funeral Rites* lack fixed subjectivity; it is up to the reader to momentarily, tentatively, and without responsibility, fill the empty subject position of the narrative. Marty and Jablonka, however, see the ideas expressed in Genet’s texts as representative of the writer’s mind. The notion of subjectivity is not seriously problematized in their accounts but the writer is more or less identified with the narrator. Judging from the aggressive tone of the debate, the stakes are high. It is impossible to judge whether this is because of the link to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; there are probably other underlying reasons. Suffice it to say that something in or around Genet’s works makes criticism gravitate towards historical reading modes and political actuality.

In sum, the posthumous debate on Genet illustrates how literary works generate ideological discourse. Rather than assessing individual texts or even the complete works of his lifetime, the critics focus on the author as a person in social, historical, and moral contexts. Since Genet is dead, there is no room for improvement but each judgment has a conclusive tone. Posthumous criticism, in this case, comes down to ultimately assessing the writer, to expressing his obituary. Then again, some kind of autobiographical reception pattern is only natural, given Genet’s provocative and self-marginalizing writing, along with his tendency to make extreme statements when he was interviewed. In the process of judging Genet, the critics operate as executors of his project and confirm his paratopic position. Taking into consideration the satirical and subversive character of Genet’s works, it seems reasonable to suspect that he deliberately confused the readers by inventing ambiguous sentences like the one on Hitler and memory – or pardon – that was quoted earlier.

While most accusations have been constructive of the writer’s image and helped build his outsider aesthetics, the partisan critics, who are indirectly affected by these accusations, do not enjoy this privilege. Since they do not operate within literary discourse, the critics must take alternative actions, and modify the public image of the oeuvre that is at the center of the debate. Determined by the conditions of journalistic discourse, the critics get caught up in a dialectic of competing historical facts, none of which satisfactorily reflects Genet’s poetics. So while the political side of Genet’s works remains a subject of

infected debate, the poet lives on quite untouched, still enjoying the marginalized position that his resting place in a small Moroccan graveyard so accurately reflects.

References

- Adler, Laure (2010), ”Genet était-il ou pas antisémite ? Laure Adler s'y entretient avec Albert Dichy, Eric Marty, et Arthur Nauzyciel”, *France Culture*, 24 Nov. 2010, radiofrance.fr. Accessed 22 Sep. 2015.
- Angenot, Marc (2004), “Social Discourse Analysis: Outlines of a Research Project”, *The Yale Journal of Criticism*, 17(2):199–215.
- Ben Jelloun, Tahar (1977), “Pour Jean Genet.” *Le Monde*, 24 Sep. 1977, <http://lemonde.fr/archives>. Accessed 10 Oct. 2015.
- Ben Jelloun, Tahar (2010), *Jean Genet, menteur sublime*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Bray, Elisa (2007), “‘The Blacks’: Genet’s contentious play returns.” *The Independent*, 17 Oct. 2007, <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/features/the-blacks-genets-contentious-play-returns-394981.html>. Accessed 14 Dec. 2016.
- Burgos, Martine et al. (1996), *Sociabilités du livre et communautés de lecteurs: Trois études sur la sociabilité du livre*. Paris : Éditions de la Bibliothèque publique d’information, <http://books.openedition.org/bibpompidou/1802>, Accessed 20 Jun. 2017.
- De Ceccatty, René (2006), ”Pourquoi caricaturier la pensée de Jean Genet?” *Humanité*, 1 Jul. 2006, <http://www.humanite.fr/node/352864>. Accessed 4 May 2017.
- De Man, Paul (1996), *Aesthetic Ideology*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Derrida, Jacques (1974), *Glas*. Paris: Gallilée.
- Dichy, Albert (1993), “Chronologie.” *Magazine Littéraire*, 313 (Sep. 1993).
- Dichy, Albert (2010), “Violence et brutalité: Notice”, Jean Genet, *L’ennemi déclaré. Textes et entretiens choisis 1970–1986*. Edited by Albert Dichy, Paris: Gallimard.
- Dreyer, Sylvain (2004), ”Jean Genet, l’antisémitisme en question”, *Esprit*, Dec. 2004, jeangenet.pbworks.com/f/articleGenetantis_mite4.doc. Accessed 4 Dec. 2016.
- El Omari, Basma (2001), “‘La dernière image du monde’ ou l’écriture de Jean Genet sur les Palestiniens.” *Études françaises*, 37(3):129–146.
- Fredette, Nathalie (1995), ”Jean Genet: les pouvoirs de l’imposture.” *Études françaises*, 31(3):87–101.
- Gadamer, Hans Georg (1996), *Vérité et méthode : les grandes lignes d'une herméneutique philosophique*, Paris: Seuil.
- Genet, Jean (1969), *Funeral Rites*. Translated by Bernard Frechtman, New York: Grove Press, 1969.

- Genet, Jean (1960), *The Blacks. A Clown Show*. Translated by Bernard Frechtman, New York: Grove Press.
- Genet, Jean (1961), *The Screens*. Translated by Bernard Frechtman, New York: Grove Press.
- Genet, Jean (1986), *Un captif amoureux*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Genet, Jean (1991a). ”Entretien avec Madeleine Gobeil.” *L’ennemi déclaré. Textes et entretiens*. Edited by Albert Dichy, Paris: Gallimard, 14–15.
- Genet, Jean (1991b). ”Jean Genet chez les Panthères noires.” *L’ennemi déclaré. Textes et entretiens*. Edited by Albert Dichy, Paris: Gallimard, 55–56.
- Genet, Jean (1991c). ”Pour George Jackson.” *L’ennemi déclaré. Textes et entretiens*. Edited by Albert Dichy, Paris: Gallimard, 83–87.
- Genet, Jean (1991d), ”Après l’assassinat.” *L’ennemi déclaré. Textes et entretiens*. Edited by Albert Dichy, Paris: Gallimard, 105–108.
- Genet, Jean (1991e), ”Entretien avec Antoine Bourseiller.” *L’ennemi déclaré. Textes et entretiens*. Edited by Albert Dichy, Paris: Gallimard, 233.
- Genet, Jean (1991f), ”Les membres de l’assemblée.” *L’ennemi déclaré. Textes et entretiens*. Edited by Albert Dichy, Paris: Gallimard, 318.
- Genet, Jean (1991g), ”Un salut aux cent mille étoiles.” *L’ennemi déclaré. Œuvres complètes 6*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Genet, Jean (1991h), ”Quatre heures à Chatila.” *L’ennemi déclaré. Œuvres complètes 6*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Genet, Jean (2003), *Prisoner of Love*. Translated by Barbara Bray, New York: The New York Review of Books.
- Genet, Jean (2010a), *L’ennemi déclaré. Textes et entretiens choisis 1970–1983*. Edited by Albert Dichy, Paris: Gallimard.
- Genet, Jean (2010b), ”Entretien avec Hubert Fichte”, *L’ennemi déclaré. Textes et entretiens choisis 1970–1986*. Edited by Albert Dichy, Paris: Gallimard, 87–135.
- Genet, Jean (2010c), ”Entretien avec Rüdiger Wischenbart et Layla Shahid Barrada”, *L’ennemi déclaré. Textes et entretiens choisis 1970–1986*. Edited by Albert Dichy, Paris: Gallimard, 205–241.
- Genet, Jean (2010d), ”Violence et brutalité”, *L’ennemi déclaré. Textes et entretiens choisis 1970–1986*. Edited by Albert Dichy, Paris: Gallimard, 157–167.
- Iser, Wolfgang (1978), *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP.
- Jablonka, Ivan (2004), *Les vérités inavouables de Jean Genet*. Paris: Seuil.
- Jauss, Hans Robert (1982), *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*. Sussex: Harvester press.
- Lussier, Alexis (2015), ”Jean Genet à Chicago: de la vision du même à l’autre regard.” *Études françaises*, 51(1):15–28.
- Maingueneau, Dominique (1993), *Le contexte de l’œuvre littéraire. Énonciation, écrivain, société*, Paris: Dunod.

- Maingueneau, Dominique (1999), “Self-constituting discourses.”
<http://dominique.maingueneau.pagesperso-orange.fr/pdf/Self-constituting-discourses.pdf>. Accessed 29 Nov. 2016.
- Maingueneau, Dominique (2002), ”Interdiscours.” *Dictionnaire d’analyse du discours*. Edited by Patrick Charaudeau and Dominique Maingueneau, Seuil.
- Maingueneau, Dominique (2004), *Le discours littéraire. Paratopie et scène d’énonciation*. Paris: Armand Collin.
- Marty, Eric (2003), “Jean Genet à Chatila”, *Les Temps Modernes*, 2003/1(622):2–72.
- Marty, Eric (2006), *Jean Genet, post-scriptum*. Lagrasse: Verdier.
- Plunka, Gene A (1992), *The Rites of Passage of Jean Genet. The Art and Aesthetics of Risk Taking*. New Jersey: Fairleigh Dickinson UP.
- Plunka, Gene A (2003), ”Jean Genet’s Anti-Semitism: Fact or Fiction?” *The French Review*, vol. 76, no. 3, Feb. 2003, 507-519.
- Poulet, George (1971), *La conscience critique*. Paris: José Corti.
- Riffaterre, Michael (1979), *La production du texte*. Paris: Seuil.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul (1952), *Saint Genet, comédien et martyr*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Savigneau, Josyane (1999), ”Écrivains et choix sentimentaux”, *Le Monde*, 15 Oct 1999.
- Stewart, Harry E. & Rob Roy McGregor (1993), *Jean Genet. From Fascism to Nihilism*. Bern: Peter Lang.
- White, Edmund (1993), *Genet: A Biography*. New York: Vintage.