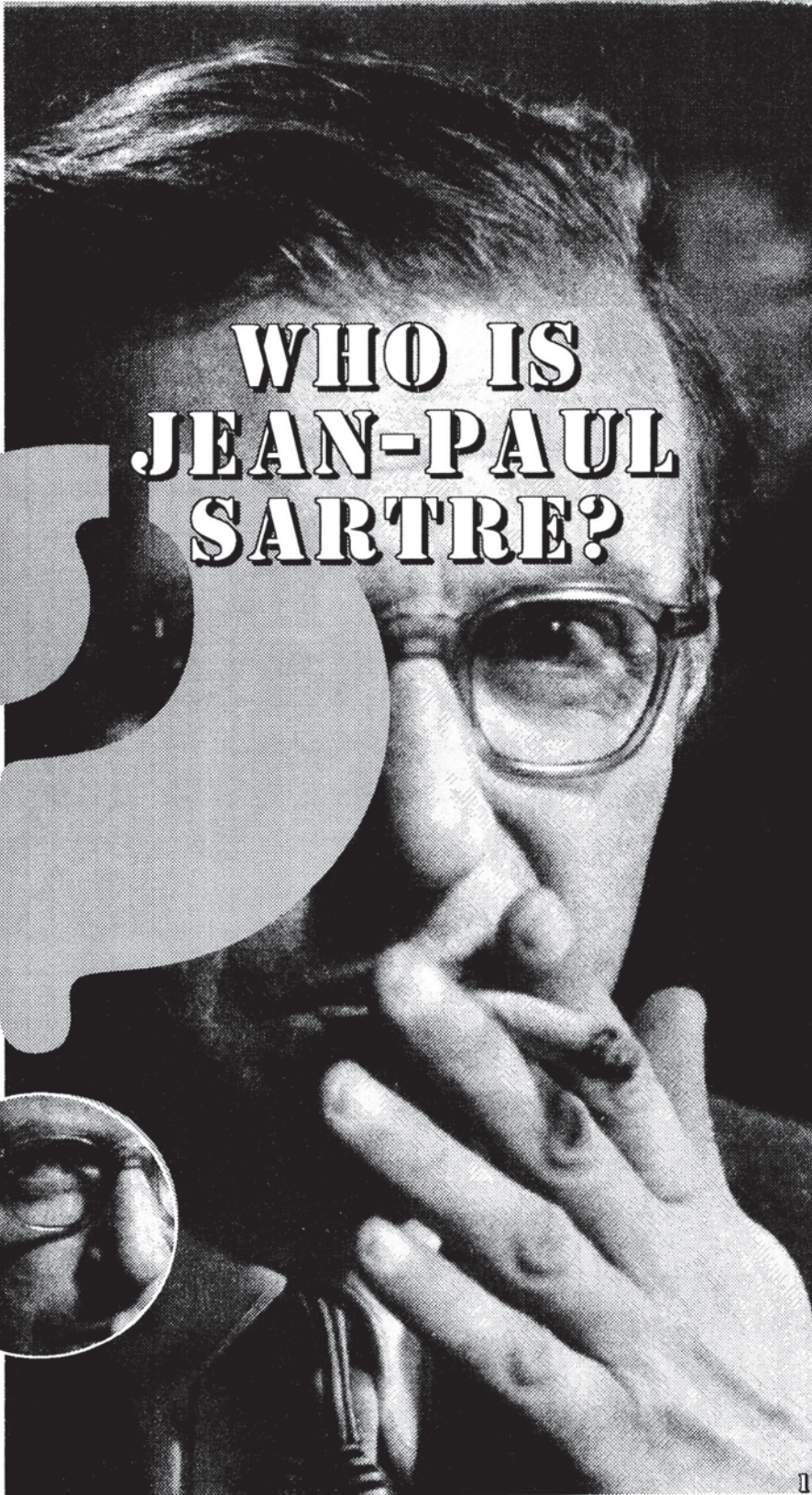


**WHO IS  
JEAN-PAUL  
SARTRE?**





# Jean-Paul Sartre

(1905-1980)  
virtually held  
court over French  
intellectual life for  
twenty years. He  
influenced writers,  
artists, social  
scientists, and  
political activists  
around the world.

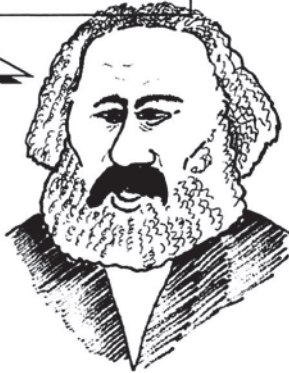


**(NOT TO MENTION THE  
THOUSANDS OF UNIVERSITY  
STUDENTS AND DROP-OUTS IN  
SCORES OF COUNTRIES WHO  
SAT AROUND IN COFFEE  
HOUSES, DRESSED IN BLACK,  
THINKING MELANCHOLY  
THOUGHTS IN HIS NAME.)**

**H**e was one of the most famous philosophers of his century, as well as an influential novelist, playwright and political activist; yet he was never satisfied with his own intellectual views.

He put the name  
**"existentialism"**  
on the philosophical map,  
only to abandon existentialism for  
**Marxism.**

**THEN, FINALLY, HE ABANDONED  
MARXISM TOO.**



A thorn in the side of the French government, he was so popular that, at his death, 50,000 people followed his funeral cortege through the streets of Paris.



**WHO WAS THIS  
MAN?**



**J**ean-Paul Sartre was born in Paris on June 21, 1905. His mother's family was from Alsace-Lorraine, the section of eastern France whose natives speak both French and German, and over whose borders France and Germany had been quarreling for years.

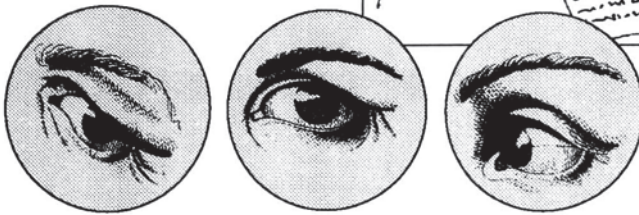


Jean-Paul's mother was a first cousin of **Albert Schweitzer** (1875-1965), the German theologian, missionary, and musicologist.

Jean-Paul's father died when Sartre was only a year old. His mother sought solace in her little son and concentrated all her attention on him. She moved back to her parent's home, where Jean-Paul's grandfather became a stern influence on him. When he was twelve years old his mother remarried. The spoiled "Poulou," as she had nicknamed him, experienced her marriage as a loss and a betrayal.



**I**mmediately afterward he decided that God did not exist—though his grandfather and his stepfather definitely did exist. (Sartre spent the next 63 years rebelling against them.)



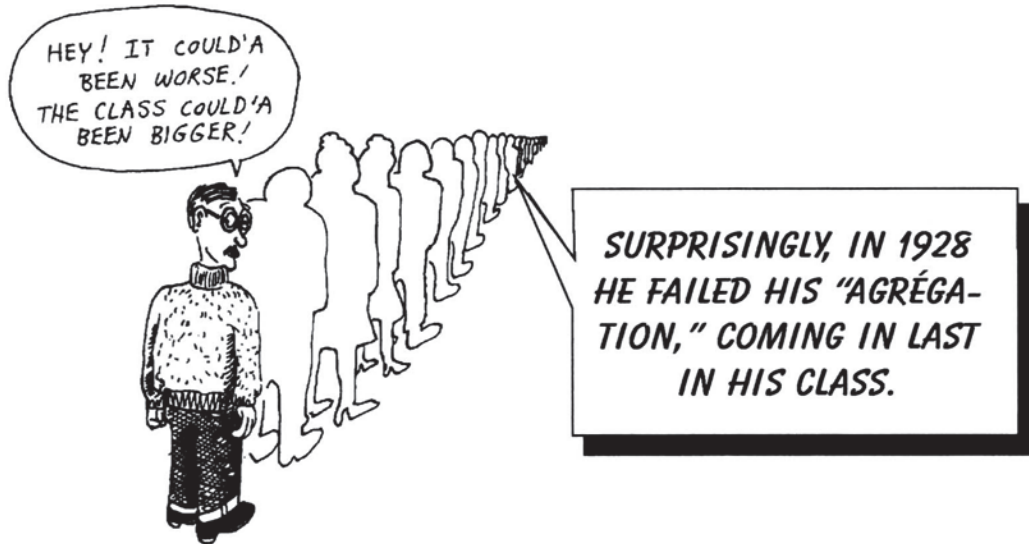
Unfortunately he was not a very good-looking kid. He was pimply, had a strabismus (a wandering eye) due to an illness when he was four years old,



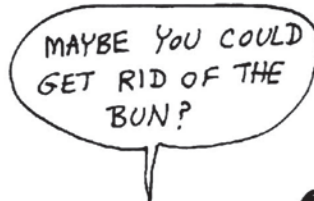
**and** he was short—5 feet 3 inches tall. (Nevertheless, that made him a half-inch taller than his father had been.)



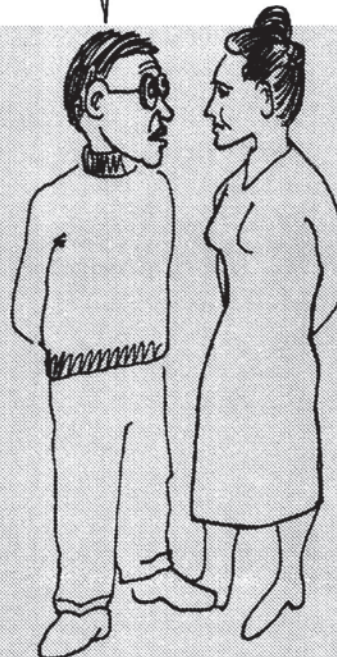
**A**t seventeen, Jean-Paul received his “baccalaureate” (an elite high school diploma) and began a six-year study at the Sorbonne for his “agrégation,” the exam that would be a ticket to an academic career in philosophy.



LAST IN HIS CLASS



Luckily, this delay in his academic career resulted in his meeting a young philosophy student named **Simone de Beauvoir**, who was smart, beautiful, nice to Sartre, and (important!) not taller than he.





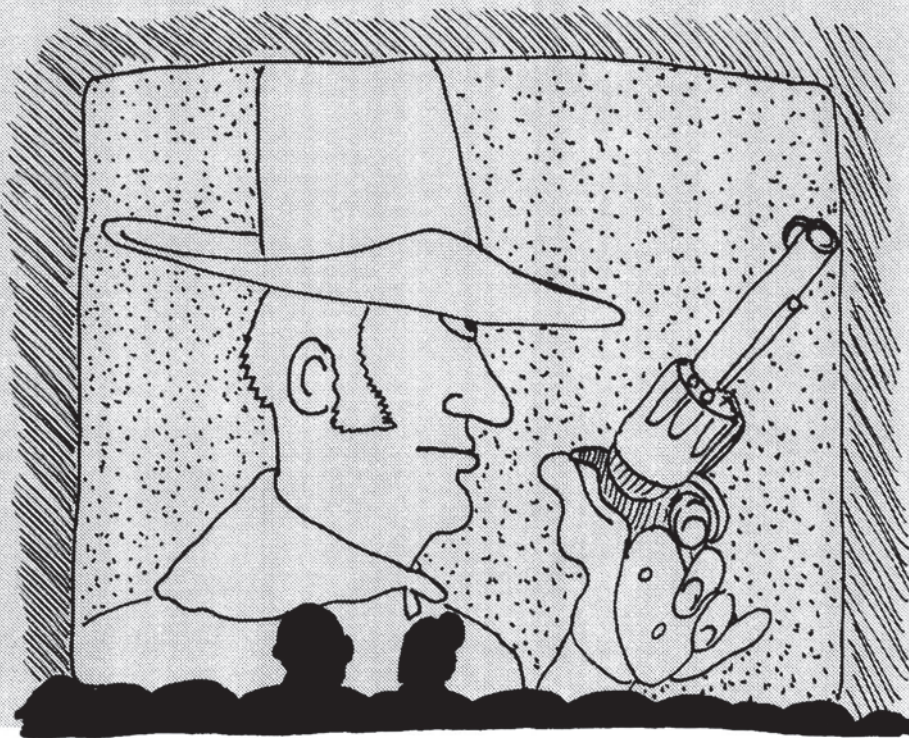
They fell in love and developed a companionship that would last until he died—even though they never married, preferred not to live



lives. They philosophized together and deeply influenced each other's work. Scholars are still sorting out who was the more original thinker.

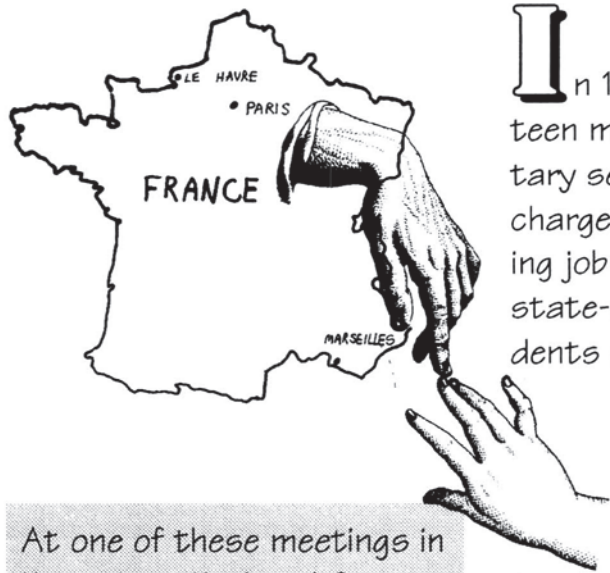
together, had other lovers, and addressed each other with the formal "vous" throughout their

Today their ashes are buried next to each other in the Montparnasse Cemetery in Paris.



Jean-Paul and Simone studied together for the "agrégation." In the evenings they would go together to see cowboy films. Sartre got first place in the exam; de Beauvoir got second place.

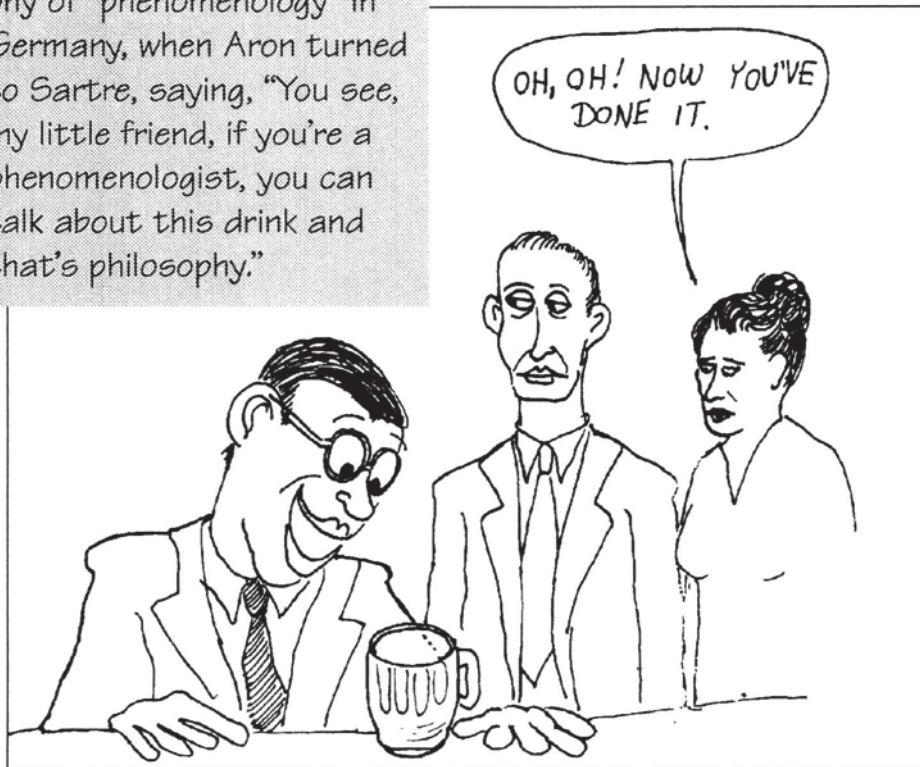




**I**n 1929, Sartre began eighteen months of obligatory military service. When he was discharged, he was offered a teaching job at a lycée (a type of state-run prep school for students selected to continue on

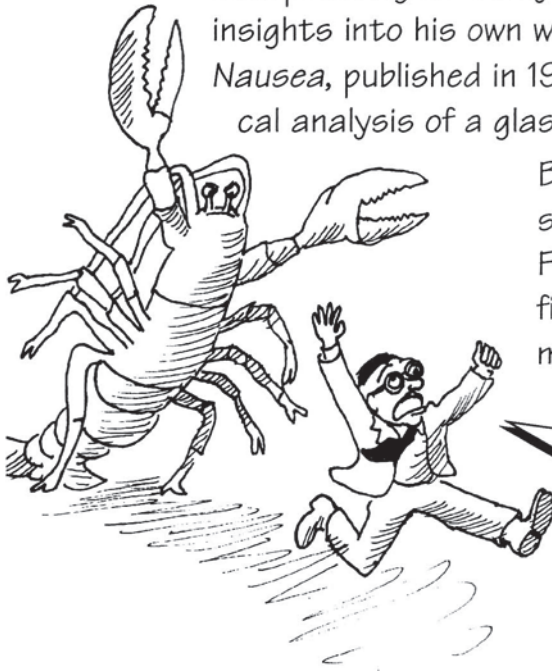
to university) in Le Havre on the northwest coast of France. De Beauvoir took a teaching job at a lycée in Marseilles on the southern coast. They managed to meet each other whenever they could.

At one of these meetings in Paris, Jean-Paul and Simone were drinking beer at a bistro with their friend, Raymond Aron, who had been studying the philosophy of "phenomenology" in Germany, when Aron turned to Sartre, saying, "You see, my little friend, if you're a phenomenologist, you can talk about this drink and that's philosophy."





**S**artre got very excited about the idea of being able to philosophize about his glass of beer, so in September of 1933 he went to Berlin to study the philosophy of Edmund Husserl, the founder of “phenomenology.” (We’ll talk about this philosophy shortly.) He returned to his teaching job the next year and began incorporating his newly-discovered phenomenological insights into his own writings. (In fact, in his novel *Nausea*, published in 1938, there is a phenomenological analysis of a glass of beer.)



But beer was not the only source of Jean-Paul’s “highs.” In February of 1935, he had his first experience with the drug mescaline.

**IT MUST HAVE BEEN A “BAD TRIP,” BECAUSE FOR THE NEXT YEAR AND A HALF I BELIEVED I WAS BEING CHASED BY A LOBSTER.**

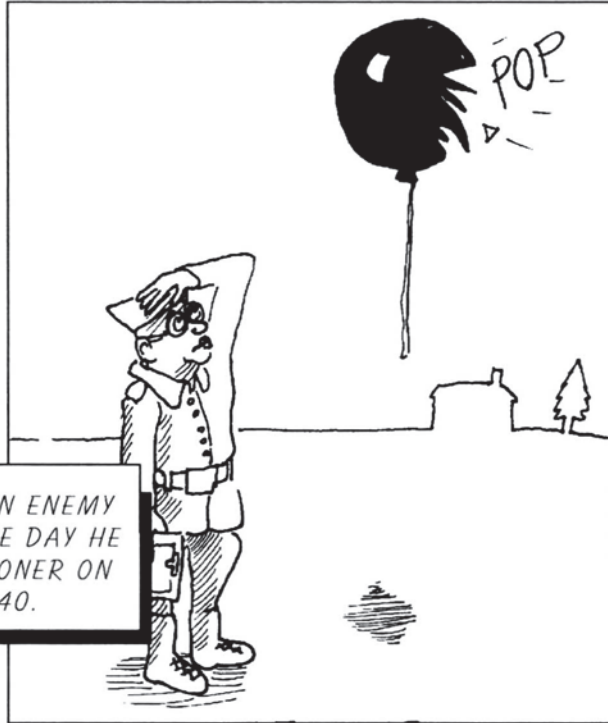
These years just before the outbreak of World War II were productive ones for Sartre. In addition to his successful novel, *Nausea*, he also wrote two philosophy books: *The Psychology of the Imagination* (1936) and *Transcendence of the Ego* (1937).

But the peace ended on September 3, 1939, when France and Britain declared war on Germany. Sartre was re-inducted into the army.

**H**is division was sent to Eastern France, where he worked in the meteorological service sending up balloons, testing the direction of the wind. However, the war interfered little with his own productivity: he began a big novel, *The Age of Reason* (published in 1945), and read the nineteenth-century Danish philosopher, Søren Kierkegaard.



HE NEVER SAW AN ENEMY SOLDIER UNTIL THE DAY HE WAS TAKEN PRISONER ON JUNE 21, 1940.



In the prisoner of war camp, he washed rarely, didn't shave, and developed a reputation for being dirty. In these conditions he began writing a major philosophical work, *Being and Nothingness* (published in 1943).