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Disseminating Phallic Masculinity: Seminal Fluidity in Genet's Fiction

Genet's novels are pæans to phallic masculinity. Hailed by Philippe Sollers as 'the most beautiful pages in literature on the male body',¹ his narratives are filled with rapturous descriptions of the muscular bodies of those he calls *durs* (literally, 'hards', or toughs). Such men are represented as the very embodiment of phallic privilege in Genet's work. Stilitano, who has 'the biggest and loveliest prick in the world'² derives his authority directly from the beauty and vigour of his penis: '[a]ll his brilliance, all his power, had their source between his legs' (JV, 19/25). Genet's eroticization of the phallic body, and more specifically his rhapsodic descriptions of the penis, is an important part of his fiction because it provides what is a rare account of the corporeal and sexual specificity of this body. This is because, as men have traditionally been constructed as the subjects of desire rather than its object, there is a paucity of erotic writing on the phallic male body. Sollers argues: 'Men are, in the end, the great unknowns of the novel (. . .) Their sexuality is rarely described' (xxiii). For Sollers, this is one of the most important aspects of Genet's work — the way it represents and thus makes visible phallic corporeality and sexuality, traditionally effaced from view. Indeed, theorists of masculinity have recently argued that this invisibility is integral to the ongoing dominance of the phallic body, which determines cultural assumptions about sexuality and corporeality precisely by effacing its own specificity. This is especially true of the part of the male body that defines phallic masculinity: the penis, which obscures its physicality behind what Naomi Schor and Lawrence Schehr, amongst others, have termed a 'phallic veil' of abstraction.³ Genet's novels, on the other hand, resist this tendency by representing not only the phallic ideal but also the physical penis, in a way that makes visible the (dis)continuities between them. As Peter Lehman argues, representations of penile specificity challenge the system of phallic privilege by exposing its material specificity: 'where the penis is hidden, it is centred. To show, write, or talk about the penis creates the potential to demystify it and thus decentre it'.⁴ Genet's account of the sexual and corporeal specificity of the penis, as I will demonstrate in this article, therefore allows us to examine some widely-held assumptions about its role in the discursive construction of phallic masculinity. Genet's novels

challenge the conventional understanding of the phallus as a synecdoche of a rigidly stable and self-contained corporeality — the ‘impersonal and unchanging, always erect’ phallic ideal⁵ — by representing it as that which opens masculinity to the possibility of transformation and otherness.

The extent to which Genet’s homoeroticism re-imagines traditional assumptions about phallic masculinity remains, however, a much-neglected aspect of his work. Although critics such as James Creech have praised Genet as ‘the most out-queer writer in the French canon, the one great figure who (. . .) made literature explicitly from his own queer sexuality’,⁶ and Richard Howard extols his novels as ‘the first and perhaps the only texts to set forth for the Western imagination an explicit realisation of homosexual eros’,⁷ Genet’s representation of male homosexuality has recently undergone a reappraisal by many gay and queer critics. Christopher Robinson argues that while ‘[f]or a long time Genet was seen as the real mould-breaker in the literary treatment of homosexuality’, his novels have come to be read by a younger generation of gay French writers as ‘at best obsolete, at worst pandering to heterosexual prejudice’.⁸ One of the primary reasons for this re-evaluation of Genet’s work is its celebration of phallic masculinity, which is widely seen to reinforce the very systems of dominance that have traditionally disadvantaged gay men. Genet’s eroticisation of the phallus is often seen to naturalize and perpetuate heteronormative assumptions about masculinity, by reproducing a binary hierarchy of masculinity in which phallic masculinity is aligned with heterosexual men. It must be acknowledged that there is justification for this reading in Genet’s fiction, which frequently represents homosexual characters as worshipping the phalli of their heterosexually-identifying partners. *Our Lady of the Flowers* is full of scenes of phallic worship: ‘When I see him lying naked, I feel like saying mass on his chest’,⁹ Divine says of Mignon; while before another lover, she inter-knits her fingers in a gesture of prayer and addresses him ‘Mon Dur’, playing on the near-homonym of ‘Dur’ (Hard) and ‘Dieu’ (God) (NDF, 51).¹⁰ The text’s narrator echoes this devotional attitude, recalling of Clément: ‘I remember that live tool to which I would like to raise a temple’ (NDF, 123/142). Such images do appear to establish an erotic system in which homosexual men literally prostrate themselves before an idealized heterosexual virility, reproducing a binarized masculinity that naturalizes the power and privilege of heterosexual men.

By associating phallic privilege with the bodies of heterosexually-identifying men, Genet's fiction is widely seen to represent it as a stable, essential property of heterosexual masculinity. For Edmund White, Genet reproduces a highly polarized schema of masculinities in which virility is exclusively associated with heterosexual men: 'In Genet's world there are only older, tougher men and weaker, younger homosexual boys: active and passive'.¹¹ Other critics argue similarly that Genet sees masculinity strictly in terms of 'fucker or fucked, but both at once, that's unimaginable (. . .) And this is without doubt one of the limits of Genet (. . .) One inverts the roles, one never confounds them'.¹² Indeed Genet's fiction does frequently invoke dichotomized sex and gender roles in a way that appears to perpetuate heterocentric assumptions about them. In *Our Lady of the Flowers*, for instance, Divine's body is characterized by a yielding feminine softness directly opposed to Gorgui's phallic hardness: 'Everything about Divine is soft (. . .) Divine is she-who-is-soft. That is, whose character is soft, whose cheeks are soft, whose tongue is soft, whose tool is supple. With Gorgui, all is hard (. . .) Since hardness is equivalent to virility' (NDF, 92/143). This mapping of hardness and softness onto 'masculine' and 'feminine', or heterosexual and homosexual, bodies does seem to reinforce a conventional assumption that the presence or absence of phallic hardness marks the distinction between these categories, securing the border between them.

However, while Genet's narratives clearly do *invoke* binarized views of masculinity, I would argue that they can neither simply be seen to reinforce those binaries nor to unproblematically perpetuate heteronormative assumptions about them. Although Genet's characters do generally identify as either heterosexual or homosexual, assuming these to be inviolably separate categories of masculinity, the narratives themselves offer a representation of identity that is much more fluid and metamorphic. Divine, for instance, is repeatedly described as neither masculine nor feminine; rather, she 'ran from boy to girl' (NDF, 79/108), thereby acquiring the 'richness of a multiple personality' (NDF, 79/108). Enamoured of Our Lady, her feminine softness hardens as she becomes 'virilified': 'She felt muscles growing, and felt herself emerging from a rock carved by Michelangelo' (NDF, 79/108). If this aspect of Genet's work has never been fully recognised or critically examined, it is not simply because Genet's novels can appear so rigidly binarized but also because phallic masculinity itself, as representative of traditionally dominant masculinity, has occupied a highly problematic position within gay culture and criticism. As

Murray Healy argues, the adoption of right-wing iconography in gay subcultures — reflected in the wearing of leather, uniforms or political symbols such as the Swastika — is a source of discomfort to primarily left-leaning gay critics.¹³ This has encouraged a tendency to read highly phallicized forms of masculinity as aligned with conservative, even reactionary, political positions. Susan Bordo's reading of 'the proud, hard [male] body [a]s a metaphor for mastery and power' (49) exemplifies this view. This has led to the view that celebrations of phallic masculinity by gay men are 'self-oppressive and even fascistic in their valorisation of male power' (Healy 102), an eroticization of 'the very values of straight society that have tyrannised their own lives'.¹⁴ Texts such as Genet's, in adopting a devotional attitude to the phallus, are accordingly seen to perpetuate the very system of phallic privilege by which gay men are oppressed.

In Genet's work, however, phallic and dominant masculinity are not so inextricably interwoven. Despite the critical consensus that Genet's eroticization of phallic masculinity reinforces and stabilizes conventional forms of masculinity, Genet's novels repeatedly reveal the opposite: the extent to which the binary categories of masculinity are destabilized by the phallus. Rather than seeing the phallus as the sign of a masculinity that is impenetrably self-contained, always erect and powerful, Genet represents the phallus as that which opens masculinity to transformations, flowing across its apparently sealed borders. Phalli in Genet's novels are represented not as unvaryingly hard and self-contained, but rather as subject to, and more importantly a source of, sudden metamorphoses: in *Our Lady of the Flowers* penises are variously, and lovingly, described as quivering like horses (NDF, 73/121), discharging like cannons (NDF, 32/73), blooming like flowers (NDF, 10/49). In emphasising this metamorphic aspect of phallic masculinity — the way it trembles, quivers, responds to touch, grows erect, discharges — Genet's representations of the penis do not reproduce the traditional interpretation of the phallus as a symbol of stable and self-contained male corporeality, but rather draw attention to its inherent volatility. In *Funeral Rites*, the transformation of Erik's penis into the phallus opens the possibility of a sexual relationship in a way that precipitates a spiralling series of metamorphoses:

Since my stroking had just given Erik such a violent hard-on, he was awake, and he did not rebel. I waited wonderful seconds, and it's amazing there was not born of that waiting, from the moment that begins with the prick's awakening to happiness, the most fabulous heroes, as Chrysaor sprang from the blood of

Medusa, or new rivers, valleys, chimeras, in a leap on a bed of violets, hope itself in a white silk doublet with a feathered cap.¹⁵

The metamorphosis of the penis—from limp to hard, aroused to passive—establishes a chain of corresponding transformations in and of the world around it. The swelling of Erik's penis attests to a sexual responsiveness that crosses the border between heterosexuality and homosexuality and, in so doing, opens a space for sexual possibility embodied by the figure of 'hope itself in a white silk doublet'. This representation of a phallus that produces transformations problematizes the reading of Genet's work as reinforcing a binary hierarchy of masculinity in which the phallus is naturalized as the essence of virile heterosexuality. Instead, the phallus in Genet's fiction is more often represented as a source of mutability and metamorphosis that undermines the distinctions between such categories.

Rather than reinforcing a rigid binary of masculinity, the phallus is instrumental in problematizing the distinction between them. Genet's association of homoerotic desire with a metamorphic fluidity reimagines the phallus, not as the stable sign of dominant masculinity but the source of its dissemination, its becoming. In *The Thief's Journal*, the awakening of Genet's desire for Stilitano causes the ordinary world to dissolve into a dreamy fluidity:

What was the nature of the fluid which passed with a shock from him to me? I walked along dangerous shores, emerged into dismal plains, heard the sea. Hardly had I touched him, when the stairway changed (. . .) With the memory of those brief moments, I could describe to you walks, breathless flights, pursuits, in countries of the world where I shall never go. (JV1, 33/40)

The transformative quality that characterizes Genet's seminal eroticism is here represented as a form of liberation, as a flight out of the narrow, shut-in enclosure of the stairwell into the freedom of unhindered movement of walks, flights, pursuits. In causing relationships to form or dissipate, desire destabilizes the solidity of the everyday world and causes bodily boundaries to become permeable and unstable, reconfiguring the world as a fluid landscape in which nothing retains its fixed form.

Thus, rather than representing the phallic penis as a stabilizing construct—one which reinforces an impermeable border between dichotomized sexualities, genders and bodies—closer inspection reveals that in Genet's novels it is repeatedly exposed as a source of destabilization. For Genet, the phallus is frequently what queers the

boundaries between masculinities. Querelle's ambivalent relationship to his own penis reflects this:

Sometimes the watch-dog that kept guard between his legs reared up on its hind legs and pressed close against its master's body (...) ever on the watch and growling. Querelle knew that he went in danger of his life. He further knew that he was protected by this beast.¹⁶

In understanding the phallic penis as a 'beast', and specifically as a guard dog that 'rears up on its hind legs (...) growling', Querelle attributes to it a dual, and paradoxical, role: on the one hand, its watchfulness and surveillance serves to protect him, its growling defending him against others; on the other, its wildness renders it liable to turn against Querelle himself, attacking him. Querelle knows his phallus is not entirely under his own control, that it has a tendency to become erect or flaccid, or to respond to unanticipated desires, of its own volition. This unpredictability is clearly a source of anxiety for Querelle, leading him to view the phallus as threatening masculinity even as it protects it. Rather than reinforcing an unproblematically stable masculinity, the phallic penis is here seen to constitute and 'deconstitute' masculinity simultaneously, destabilizing the masculinity it also defines.

While Genet's characters do eroticize the erect penis to the point of worship, then, their adoration does not simply or unproblematically reproduce heterocentric assumptions about phallic masculinity. This is reflected in the way the penis revered by his characters is not that of the indefatigable pornographic ideal, but rather the physical penis described in all its corporeal specificity: its hair and fleshiness, its throbbing veins and fluctuations in heat and size. Thus, while for Divine, 'Darling's penis is in itself all of Darling', his virility is also seen to be disseminated throughout his physicality as a whole:

If Divine is willing to see in her man anything other than a hot, purplish member, it is because she can follow its stiffness, which extends to the anus, and can sense that it goes farther into his body, that it is this very body of Darling erect and terminating in a pale, tired face, a face of eyes, nose, mouth, flat cheeks, curly hair, beads of sweat. (NDF, 45/88)

This description of Mignon's (Darling's) penis extends the representation of his idealized phallic masculinity into an account of penile specificity that incorporates characteristics problematic to that ideal. Although Mignon is represented as the embodiment of phallic stiffness, his hardness is also diffused into the drooping facial muscles that

mark the weary limits of potency, the drops of sweat whose fluidity problematizes the self-containment of the phallic body and attests to the usually-effaced exertion of maintaining the phallic masculinity generally presumed to be natural. While Mignon's body is an entirely phallicized one, it is not its indefatigable hardness but on the contrary the point at which this dissolves into a languorous fluidity that is the erotic focus here.

Indeed, as Genet's narratives repeatedly emphasise, it is this dissemination of the phallic ideal, rather than its perpetuation, that enables erotic possibility. Accordingly, while he fantasizes that Stilitano has 'a solid member, like a blackjack' (JV, 24/23), a phallus solid and unchanging as a dildo, Stilitano's actual penis is exciting precisely in its fleshiness and its mutability: 'Sculpted in oak, beneath my fingers I felt its full veins, its palpitations, its heat, its pinkness, and at times the racing pulsation of the sperm' (JV1, 51/43; translation modified). Despite the perpetual rigidity suggested by this description of Stilitano's erection as 'sculpted in oak', as solid and invulnerable as statuary, the emphasis here is nonetheless on the fluidity and mutability that quivers beneath its hard exterior. In the discovery of its fleshy materiality, Genet feels the responsive trembling of Stilitano's penis, the variations in its warmth and colour, the sperm racing through its vas. Far from an image of steely inflexibility, Genet's representation of the phallic penis reveals precisely the opposite: the fluidity that pulses within its externally rigid form. What is eroticized here is not the penis's unchanging stiffness, but on the contrary its tendency towards transformation, its metamorphosis from flaccid to tumescent, and erect to satiated.

The centrality of a metamorphic phallic masculinity to Genet's homoeroticism is nowhere more apparent than in his representations of the aspect of penile specificity which simultaneously fulfils the promise of potency and power symbolized by the phallus's erection, but which also problematically transforms it into the smaller and softer penis: the act of ejaculation. While ejaculation attests to the virility signified by the phallus's erection, in crossing the borders of the male body, seminal flows also draw attention to the fissures that undermine phallic masculinity's (self-)representation as sealed and self-enclosed. The fluidity coursing within the phallus problematizes its stability and rigidity, disseminating it. It is this potential for becoming that Genet's work focuses on. His narratives represent the volatility of the ejaculating penis as establishing a metamorphic dynamic that also transforms the world around it. As we have seen above, this is often

represented as a liberating moment in Genet's work, representing the opening of possibility, the body, spatial borders. The seminal flows which transform the hard phallus into the passive penis produce a parallel dissolution of the stable world, a metamorphic fluidity. As he writes in *Our Lady of the Flowers*:

Their warm sperm, spurting high, maps out on the sky a milky way where other constellations I can read inscribe themselves: the constellations of the Sailor, the Boxer, the Cyclist, the Fiddle, the Spahi, the Dagger. Thus a new map of the heavens is outlined on the wall of the garret where Divine, after each masturbation, splatters her semen. (NDF, 40/75; translation modified)

The ejaculation which opens the borders of the phallic body, the sign of its fertility, is here represented as the birth of a new homoerotic universe, signifying a different order of masculinity and male corporeality. It is ejaculation which enables this reordering: seminal flows enable the inscription of a homoerotic virility markedly different to traditional representations of heterosexual virility as stable and conventional. The homoerotic cosmos comprised of idealized virile masculinities like the Sailor, the Boxer, and the Cyclist, represents these not as stable entities but as the congealed traces of splattered fluids.

Rather than reinforcing the traditional image of phallic masculinity as rigid and unyielding—symbolic of that sex which *is one*—Genet re-imagines phallic masculinity as inherently fluid and transformative. The dissemination of seminal fluidity opens the self-contained phallic body, so that virility is no longer seen as something (heterosexual) men essentially embody but rather as something which flows between them. Just as the dissemination of phallic stability into seminal fluidity opens the body's borders to homoerotic possibility, so does it challenge the idea that virility is the stable, essential property of individual men. In the homosocial worlds described in Genet's novels, phallic privilege is a quality which does not belong, in a stable or essential way, to any one man, but rather flows between them, linking them together. As the narrator of *Miracle of the Rose* reflects: 'Bulkaen was my virility, as Harcamone was that of someone else'.¹⁷ Phallic privilege is represented as a circulating economy in which men are virilified by sex with other, more phallic men. When penetrated by Villeroy, Genet feels the power of the entire system of masculinity concentrated in his body: 'it was the weight of the world's virility that I bore on my strained back when Villeroy went down on me' (MR, 265/213).¹⁹ Virility is not represented as the stable essence of Villeroy's masculinity

but as something that flows in a seminal economy from him and into Genet. Rather than an image of stability and singularity, in Genet's narratives phallic masculinity is rethought as a circuit along which virility passes like a charge or current. In one fantasized scene:

Males with rippling muscles leaned against each other's bare shoulders familiarly. Some of them had their arms around the other's necks or waists. They formed an unbroken circle of hard, bulging flesh through which passed a current powerful enough to blast anyone so imprudent as to dare let his fingertip touch one of the clamps of muscle. (MR, 206/166)

Here we can see how completely the binary model of masculinity has been reimaged: not a stable hierarchy but an 'unbroken circle' or seminal economy that links men together across the differences commonly seen to distinguish them. Rather than stabilizing the categories of heterosexuality and homosexuality, active and passive, penetrator and penetrated, as though these were stable, essential properties of particular bodies, virility here flows across and between such differences, queering the boundaries between them. This seminal economy of masculinity disseminates traditional ideas about phallic masculinity even as it invokes them, destabilizing the binary it is often seen to uphold. That is, just as ejaculation transforms the hard phallus into the mutable penis, here the flow of virility disseminates the stable binary hierarchy of masculinity into a fluid economy. As Mairéad Hanrahan argues in *Lire Genet*, Genet reconfigures the apparent binary of masculine and feminine into an interlinked chain (95), representing masculinity as 'a garland of muscular and twisted or stiff and thorny flowers' (MR, 264/213). This reconceptualization of masculinity has an important consequence, as Hanrahan recognises: although Genet's work does invoke hierarchized understandings of masculinity, his work also 'abolishes this hierarchy even as he establishes it' (*Lire Genet*, 95).

This is one of the most important, and yet much overlooked, aspects of Genet's work, and has profound consequences for a rereading of the role of the phallic body in the homoeroticism his novels describe. As Hanrahan argues, while Genet's narratives do invoke traditional ideas about masculinity, they do so *precisely in order to problematize them*. Analysis of this aspect of Genet's homoeroticism provides another, radically different, way to read his worshipful celebration of the phallus: not as reconfirming conventional assumptions about it, but as mobilizing these and making them visible, in order to expose the paradox that destabilizes them from within. This is most clearly

elucidated by his representations of the men most privileged by the system of phallic masculinity, those priapic characters most closely approximating the phallic ideal. In a scene censored from the later French editions of *The Thief's Journal*, although retained in the English edition, Armand boasts he is sufficiently well-endowed to 'lift a heavy man on the end of his cock' (JV1, 157/135):

'My cock,' he once said, 'is worth its weight in gold.'

'It's not heavy,' said a seaman.

'Heavier than that beer mug you've got in your hand!'

'I doubt it.'

'You want to weigh them?'

'OK.'

Bets were quickly laid, and Armand, who was already unbuttoned and had a stiff hard-on, put his prick on the seaman's flat palm. (JV1, 157/135)

Armand's penis, like the beer mug, is here represented as a vessel of intoxication, disordering the productive, everyday world. In the heady atmosphere of this bar—a space already removed from that of the orderly world outside—the exposure of Armand's phallic penis shifts the scene towards the carnivalesque: Armand's attempt to prove his phallic power leads him to instigate sexual contact with another man in a way that deheterosexualizes his virility. In Genet's homosocial worlds, virility is, if not directly contrary to the heterosexual imperative, then at least indifferent to it. While male dominance and phallic privilege are here seen as interchangeable, Armand's characterization can hardly be seen to reinforce a heteronormative model of phallic masculinity. Although the system of phallic privilege represented here is in many ways a conventional one, conforming to the phallic logic for which bigger is always better, Armand's behaviour goes too far. His actions do not oppose the conventions of phallic masculinity but, on the contrary, conform to them too whole-heartedly, transforming conventionality itself into a form of excess. Armand, like all Genet's dominant men, conforms to, *but does not confirm*, traditional assumptions about phallic masculinity.

In Genet's novels, the closer we move to the idealized phallic centre of masculinity, the more that ideal appears exorbitant, or ex-centric, to it. His narratives repeatedly represent even the most privileged men—in fact, often especially the most privileged men—as contradicting heteronormative expectations about phallic masculinity. It is the conventions of masculinity themselves, Genet's work reveals, which come to propel men beyond the conventionally-accepted

limits of that masculinity. The system assumed to distinguish heterosexual from homosexual men actually forms a point of continuity between them. Armand's priapic size and potency reveals something wild and uncontrollable at the heart of phallic masculinity that, as Querelle recognised, simultaneously defines and destabilizes traditional assumptions about virility, and cannot be contained within the sanctioned spaces of heterocentrism. In this way, Genet's novels posit a model of phallic masculinity and male corporeality in contradistinction to its traditional image as stable and self-contained. Genet's work rethinks the phallus, not as a rigidly stable construct but, on the contrary, as a source of destabilization and metamorphosis. This, in turn, problematizes the traditional assumptions about the meaning of the phallus outlined at the start of this paper: that it is aligned with heterocentrism; that it reinforces a stable, unchanging model of masculinity; that it reproduces inherently conservative assumptions about it. By representing the seminal flows within phallic masculinity, Genet rethinks its conventional representations, disseminating these into an ejaculatory phallic masculinity, a becoming masculinity opened to the potentiality of its own mutability and metamorphosis—one that is precipitated by the often-obscured seminal fluidity coursing within the phallus itself, a source of volatile (self-)transformation that erupts from within the stable male body and opens it to homoerotic possibility.

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NOTES

- 1 See his introduction, 'Physique de Genet,' to Jean Genet, *Journal du voleur, Querelle de Brest, Pompes funèbres* (Paris, Gallimard, Biblos, 1993), xxiii. Where not otherwise indicated, translations are mine.
- 2 Jean Genet, *Journal du voleur* (Paris, Gallimard, 1949), 51. Although the line appears only in this first subscription-edition of the French text, it is retained in Bernard Frechtman's English translation, *The Thief's Journal* (New York, Grove Press, 1964), 43. Hereafter references to these texts will be in the text, preceded by JV for the Biblos edition, JV1 for the 1949 edition. In all cases the second figure refers to the English translation.
- 3 See Naomi Schor, *Bad Objects: Essays Popular and Unpopular* (Durham, N.C., Duke University Press, 1995), 112; and Lawrence Schehr, *Parts of an Andrology: On Representations of Men's Bodies* (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1997), 5. See also Mira Schor, 'Representations of the Penis' in *Wet:*

On Painting, Feminism and Art Culture (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997), 20; Susan Bordo, *The Male Body: A New Look at Men in Public and in Private* (New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999), 85; and Laura Grindstaff and Martha McCaughey, 'Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and (Male) Hysteria Over John Bobbitt's Missing Manhood' in *Men and Masculinities* 1:2 (1998), 173-192, 186. The relationship between the terms 'penis' and 'phallus' has been the subject of extensive debate, especially within the context of Lacanian psychoanalysis. Lacan famously redefined the phallus as an abstract system of power, arguing that: 'the phallus is not (...) an object (...) It is even less the organ, penis or clitoris, that it symbolises (...) For the phallus is a signifier (...) intended to designate as a whole the effects of the signified' (Jacques Lacan, 'The Signification of the Phallus' in *Écrits: A Selection*, translated by Alan Sheridan (London, Routledge, 1995), 285). Feminist critics, however, have widely critiqued this reconceptualization of the phallus. As Gallop succinctly argues: 'Lacanian might wish to polarise the two terms into neat opposition, but it's hard to polarise synonyms. Such attempts to remake language to one's own theoretical needs, as if language were merely a tool one could use, bespeaks a very un-Lacanian use of language' (Jane Gallop, *Thinking Through the Body* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1988), 126; original emphasis). Traditionally and etymologically, the word phallus refers to the erect or sexually aroused penis. Lacan's disavowal of this relationship between the phallus and the (male) body can be seen, in this way, to replay a tendency to universalize phallic privilege by erasing penile specificity.

- 4 Peter Lehman, *Running Scared: Masculinity and the Representation of the Male Body* (Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1993), 28.
- 5 Charles Bernheimer, 'Penile Reference in Phallic Theory' in *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 4:1 (1992), 116-32; 120.
- 6 James Creech, 'Outing Jean Genet' in *Genet: In The Language of the Enemy*, *Yale French Studies* 91 (1997), 117-40; 117.
- 7 Richard Howard, 'Genet's Glory' in *The New Republic* 3:722 (1986), 41-2; 41.
- 8 Christopher Robinson, 'Looking on the Black Side' in *Scandal in the Ink: Male and Female Homosexuality in Twentieth-Century French Literature* (London, Cassell, 1995), 57-8. See also Paul Robinson, 'Journal du voleur' in *Homosexual Autobiography from J.A Symonds to Paul Monette* (Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 1999), 223-9; and Alan Sinfield, 'How Transgressive Do We Want To Be? What About Genet?' in *Gay and After* (London, Serpent's Tail, 1998), 129-45.
- 9 Jean Genet, *Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs* (Décines, L'Arbalète, 1948), 36; *Our Lady of the Flowers*, translated by Bernard Frechtman (London, Faber and Faber, 1973), 71. Henceforward references to these texts will be in the text, preceded by NDF.

- 10 This short scene is cut from both the *Œuvres complètes* and English versions of the text.
- 11 Edmund White, *Genet* (London, Chatto and Windus, 1993), 92.
- 12 Dominique Cochart and Anne Pigache, 'Impasse, Pair et Manque. Ou, Quand le Roi est Plus Fort que la Dame' in *Jean Genet Aujourd'hui* (La Maison de la Culture d'Amiens, Décembre 1976), 51.
- 13 Murray Healy, *Gay Skins: Class, Masculinity and Queer Appropriation* (London, Cassell, 1996), 100.
- 14 Gregg Blachford, 'Male Dominance and the Gay World' in *The Making of the Modern Homosexual*, edited by Kenneth Plummer (London, Hutchinson, 1981), 184-210; 203.
- 15 Jean Genet, *Pompes funèbres* in *Journal du voleur, Querelle de Brest, Pompes funèbres*, 675; *Funeral Rites*, translated by Bernard Frechtman (London, Granada, 1990), 112.
- 16 Jean Genet, *Querelle de Brest* in *Journal du voleur, Querelle de Brest, Pompes funèbres*, 393; *Querelle of Brest*, translated by Gregory Streatam (London, Faber and Faber, 1990), 144. Henceforward references to these texts will be in the text, preceded by QB.
- 17 Jean Genet, *Miracle de la rose* (Décines, L'Arbalète, 1946), 286; *Miracle of the Rose*, translated by Bernard Frechtman (London, Penguin, 1971), 213. Henceforward references to these texts will be in the text, preceded by MR. This aspect of Genet's work is further elucidated by his representation of masculinity as a chain of images with no originating object, in which men themselves are the reflections. When Mignon sees himself in the mirror of a shop window, 'he saw a Darling (...) wearing a Prince of Wales suit, a felt hat over one eye, his shoulders stiff, and when he walks he holds them like that so as to resemble Sebastopol Pete, and Pete holds them like that so as to resemble Pauley the Rat, and Pauley to resemble Teewee, and so on; a procession of pure, irreproachable pimps' (*NDF*, 34/70; translation modified). This chain of imitative masculinities, a series of copies without an original term, establishes what Mairéad Hanrahan calls a 'chain of desire' in Genet's work in which, far from reinforcing a traditional phallic hierarchy, each term substitutes for the other in a fluid economy of masculinities (Mairéad Hanrahan, *Lire Genet: Une Poétique de la différence* (Montréal, Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal/Lyons, Presses Universitaires de Lyon, 1997), 93-9).
- 18 In Genet's novels, men who have sex with other men are frequently seen to have successfully exerted their dominance over them in a way that increases, rather than undermines, their phallic privilege: 'I'm a man', shouts Gil in *Querelle de Brest*, 'I shove it up men' (QB, 242/97). For Mignon, similarly: 'A male that fucks another male is a double male' (*NDF*, 180/190). Genet's characters frequently see their masculinity as concentrated and purified by sex with other men.